

Unemployment and lack of access to education devastate youth in Peru

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According to the Institute of Economics and Business Development (Iedep) of Peru, more than 1.5 million young people between the ages of 15 and 29 years are known as “*ninīs*,” because they are neither in school, nor do they have work (*ni estudian, ni trabajan*).

Among the youngest cohort, two out of every five between 15 and 19 years old “do not have job opportunities or access to education,” the Iedep study shows. This portrait of the conditions confronting Peruvian youth becomes even starker when one considers that in 2023 one in three of them was officially poor, representing an increase of 12.8 percent compared to the previous year.

Due to the continuing deceleration of the Peruvian economy these numbers remain worse than pre-COVID pandemic levels: they went from 1.3 million *ninīs* in 2019 to 2.2 million in 2020, the worst year of the pandemic, undoubtedly reflecting the fact that Peru had the highest per capita COVID mortality rate in the world. The figure dropped to 1.6 million in 2021, when the economy showed some signs of recovering, only to fall back to pre-pandemic levels, increasing by 2.4 percent by the end of 2023.

Women have made up a disproportionate percentage of *ninīs*, 72.1 percent in 2019, 57.4 percent in 2022 and 52.4 percent in 2023.

According to the head of Iedep, Óscar Chávez, there is a high risk that the number of *ninīs* will continue to increase in the near future.

This assessment is supported by Carolina Rivelli, an economist at the Institute of Peruvian Studies (IEP). Writing for the business newspaper *Gestión*, she said, “Young people who are reaching working age are having a bad time; they don’t see a promising future, and 62 percent want to leave the country, a figure 20 percent higher than the national average. This number

is alarming considering that two thirds report they do not plan to return.”

The factors behind the high emigration rate, according to IEP, are the adverse employment situation, poor economic forecasts, the lack of educational opportunities and the deterioration of democratic institutions.

Data collected by INEI (National Institute of Statistics and Information) show that in metropolitan Lima, where approximately 43 percent or 657,000 *ninīs* reside, the number of young people under 24 years of age looking for jobs fell almost 3 percent compared to last year, and 10 percent since 2019.

The so-called economic recovery from the pandemic has only marginally benefitted the youth. Polls indicate that 57 percent believe that the Peruvian economy is continuing to deteriorate, and another 37 percent believe it has not improved in the last year. As to the immediate future, 46 percent think the situation will deteriorate further.

Carolina Trivelli ties the overall impoverishment of millions of families throughout the country to the deterioration of educational institutions and teaching.

The Peruvian government has otherwise utterly failed to reduce long-term poverty, as well as informal employment. Seven out of 10 workers are not on a regular payroll, do not enjoy paid vacations or medical insurance, and do not receive the traditional two months of pay—bonuses in July for National Holidays and in December for Christmas.

It is hardly surprising that polls show that Peruvian youth overwhelmingly distrust organized institutions and political parties.

The youth played a central role in the massive protests that followed the ouster of President Pedro Castillo after his failed “self-coup” and jailing in

December 2022, and the massacres carried out under his successor and former vice president, Dina Boluarte.

Boluarte now is massively opposed. She has only a 5 percent approval rating in recent polls, the lowest figure of any president since 1980, when democracy returned after 12 years of military dictatorship under Generals Velasco Alvarado and Morales Bermudez, from 1968 to 1980. Congress is equally detested: 91 percent disapprove of the legislators' performance.

Boluarte also has been charged by Peru's attorney general with genocide in connection with the mass repression, as well as with graft and corruption.

A report released by Amnesty International last week found that Boluarte and other top officials bear criminal responsibility for the deaths of 50 protesters who were killed in what amounted to extra-judicial executions and as a result of illegitimate use of force by the police and army. Another 1,300 people were injured in the repression.

Reflecting mass disaffection with the entire political setup, 30 candidates are already running for the 2026 presidential election. The traditional parties of the Peruvian bourgeoisie, such as APRA and Acción Popular, are on the verge of collapse, and seeking new candidates from within the most right-wing and reactionary sectors.

Peru is an economic, social and political tinderbox. The prevailing conditions confronting the masses, which are shared by many regions of the planet, could quickly give rise to the kind of mass youth eruptions seen in recent weeks from Kenya to Bangladesh.

The only solution for the masses of workers and youth of Peru facing this social catastrophe is to organize themselves to take power, in alliance with the working class throughout the Americas.



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