Rwanda’s unemployment rate stood at 11.7% in the fourth quarter of 2025, with nearly 650,000 people out of work, according to the latest Labour Force Survey released by the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR).

The findings have prompted renewed calls from government leaders and business representatives for employers to prioritize hiring and training Rwandan workers, arguing that greater local participation in the labor market is key to reducing poverty and joblessness.

Authorities say that while skills gaps remain a challenge, entrepreneurs must play a central role in addressing them by giving Rwandans opportunities to gain practical experience. They warn that continued reliance on foreign labor, especially for jobs that do not require advanced skills, undermines long-term employment growth.

Kigali City Mayor Samuel Dusengiyumva said limited skills among job seekers remain a concern, but he described the situation as a cycle that can only be broken by employers’ willingness to invest in local workers. He cited a visit to an industrial site where two foreign workers produced most of the output, while five Rwandans completed a smaller share of the work.

Dusengiyumva said employers often attribute such gaps to a lack of skills or motivation among local workers, but he argued that entrepreneurs ultimately benefit more by supporting Rwandans to improve their productivity over time.

He also pointed to a mindset issue among some employers, particularly in the construction sector, where basic and repetitive tasks are frequently assigned to foreign workers despite requiring minimal technical expertise.

“In schools, people receive knowledge, but it is entrepreneurs who have the ability to turn that knowledge into income-generating skills,” Dusengiyumva said, adding that workforce development should be a shared responsibility between the private sector and public institutions.

Business owners acknowledge the challenges. Members of the Association of Construction Companies in Rwanda say they often struggle to find sufficient local workers, even as vocational schools graduate large numbers of students each year.

Sadate Munyakazi, president of the association, said stronger cooperation between the public and private sectors is essential to building a skilled workforce and

achieving sustainable economic growth.

“This country belongs to all of us, and developing it is our responsibility,” he said.

According to NISR, Rwanda’s working-age population — those aged 16 and older — reached 8.6 million in the first quarter of 2025. Unemployment was higher among women at 13%, compared with 10.5% among men. Youth unemployment stood at 14.1%, while the rate among adults was 10%.