



MINISTRY OF  
LABOUR AND SOCIAL  
PROTECTION



Zizi Afrique  
Foundation

SWAHILIPOT



# Understanding the Demand for Jobs and Skills for Youths in Mombasa



March 2025



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# Introduction

## Background

Despite recent progress, young people globally continue to experience challenges in their pursuit of employment, including skills mismatch and access to quality jobs. The challenge is, however, disproportionate, with youths in Africa hugely impacted. According to the International Labour Organization, 65 million young people globally are unemployed, majority of whom are in Africa. It is projected that by 2050, more than half of the world's population growth will occur in Africa, making it the largest working population (*World Data Lab, 2024*) and a significant contributor to the global workforce (*World Economic Forum, 2025*).

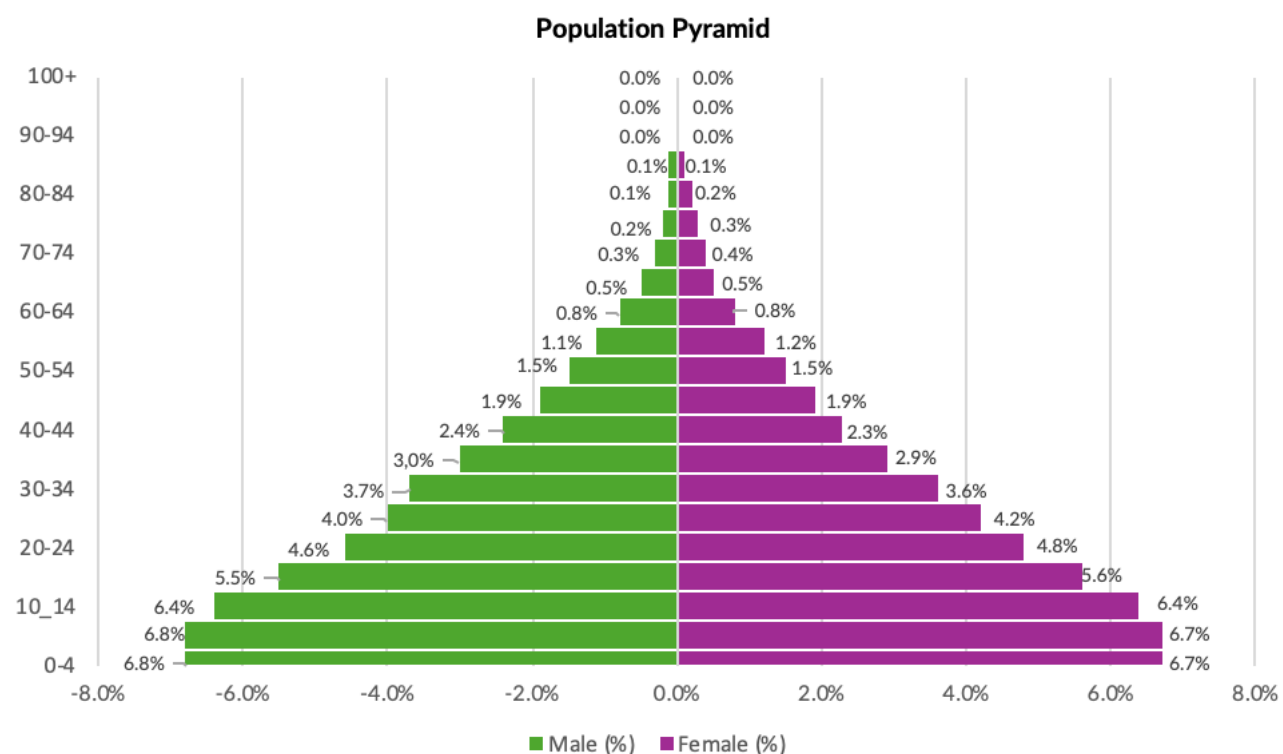


Figure 1: Population pyramid (Source: KNBS, 2019)

The population structure of Kenya depicts a huge youth demography, with persons aged 15 to 35 years accounting for over 70% of the total Kenyan Population (*World Data Lab, 2024*). To capitalize on the youth demographic dividend, investing in education and equipping youth with the skills relevant for the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution remains urgent.

The implications of the rapidly evolving demand for skills and the uncertain future of work for the Kenyan labour force, particularly the opportunity youth (15-24 years)-who account for 60% of the total labour force, remains largely unexplored. Yet, almost one million youths enter the Kenyan job market each year, without necessarily having the requisite skills for the jobs they are looking for (*Orwa et al., 2019; Abdychiev et al., 2018; Leopold, Till Ratcheva, Alexander Zahidi, 2017; Mc Kinsey, 2020*).

A major barrier to the growth of jobs and business transformations over the 2025-2030 period has been identified to be skill gaps (*World Economic Forum, 2025*). For Kenya particularly, evidence shows that about 6 in every 10 youths are not employed in their areas of specialization - pointing to a potential mismatch between the training and the skills demand. The Future of Jobs Report, 2025, posits that two-fifths (39%) of the existing skill sets of the current workforce will be transformed or become outdated over the 2025-2030 period. Hence the need to address the skills gaps in order to realize a reduction in unemployment rates.

Following this, Zizi Afrique Foundation, Global Development Incubator (GDI) and Swahili Port are collaborating to examine the drivers of demand for jobs and skills in the food and beverage subsector in Mombasa, a city with priceless economic significance to Kenya. Mombasa contributes over 4% of the country's GDP (GOYN, 2020). In addition, the county is diverse, and endowed with tourist assets, including sandy beaches, hotels, unique Swahili culture, stunning architecture, cultural festivals and events making it attractive to youths who are looking for employment opportunities (GDI, 2019). Despite this rosy picture, Mombasa continues to experience soaring population of youth who are largely unemployed.

## Understanding the Demand for Jobs and Skills

The Global Opportunity Youth Network has been working on initiatives to help address youth unemployment in Kenya, and Mombasa in particular. Building on the initial works by GOYN and other stakeholders on youth empowerment Initiatives, we explore the potential of the Hospitality and Tourism Sector to create sustainable employment for the youths in Mombasa. Hospitality and Tourism has been identified as one of the employment growth enhancing sectors (GOYN, 2022; World Economic Forum, 2025). But it remains unknown what drives employment -the demand for jobs and skills- in the industry. We conducted a study to examine the demand for jobs and skills for the youth in Mombasa County, taking Food and Beverage subsector as an experiment, collecting multiple rounds of data from employers between the months of September 2024 to February 2025.

This report presents the findings and discussions of the first phase-employer mapping, which will facilitate the building of a database- of the Future of Work Program by Zizi Afrique Foundation (ZAF) and partners.

## Methodology

To assess the demand for skills and jobs in the hospitality and tourism sector, with a focus on the food and beverage sub-sector, we conducted a three-round survey between September 2024 and February 2025. The survey combined qualitative and quantitative data collection to map industry employers, job vacancies, workforce composition, and required skills.

Through this survey, we identified key employers and occupations within the Food and Beverage sub-sector, mapped job vacancies alongside their skill requirements, and assessed sector priorities while forecasting future skills needs. Additionally, we examined hiring trends and recruitment challenges to support workforce development and policy alignment.

We collected primary data using online data collection tools, administered in person by interviewers. Each survey round was designed with a specific objective.

**In the first round (September-October 2024),** we scoped occupations within the sector, identifying existing roles and exploring current job openings and vacancies, providing an in-depth assessment of demand trends. We successfully reached out to 1367 enterprises.

**In the second round, (November-December 2024),** we interviewed 658 of the 1367 enterprises, following up on whether the vacancies were filled, how they were filled and the challenges encountered in filling them.

**In the third round (January-February 2025),** we followed 406 enterprises, collecting information on the previous vacancies, obsolescence and relevance of skills, potential of the industry to employ more, and the required investments to create more employment to the youth.



# Fact Sheet: Understanding the Demand for Jobs and Skills for Youths in Mombasa

## Establishments' Characteristics:

- 54% were owned by women, 46% by men.
- The majority (87%) of enterprises are micro level, with 1-9 employees; 10% are small (10-49 employees). Medium (50-99 employees) and large enterprises (100 and above) account for about 3% of the enterprises.
- Most enterprises were owned by individuals (79%). Family ownership comes second (16%).
- Most enterprises keep records of daily transactions (86%) which hints at them being financially literate.
- By line of operation, half of the enterprises have restaurants, 4 in 10 have catering services, 2 in 10 have bars and pubs and about the a similar proportion do food delivery. Other lines of operation include accommodation (27%); Coffee Caffe (31%).
- Key decision makers in the enterprises are mainly the owners (87%), followed by Managers (7%)
- Most of the respondents were senior levels (General Manager, Human Resource Manager or Line supervisors). 54% of the respondents were owners of the enterprises.

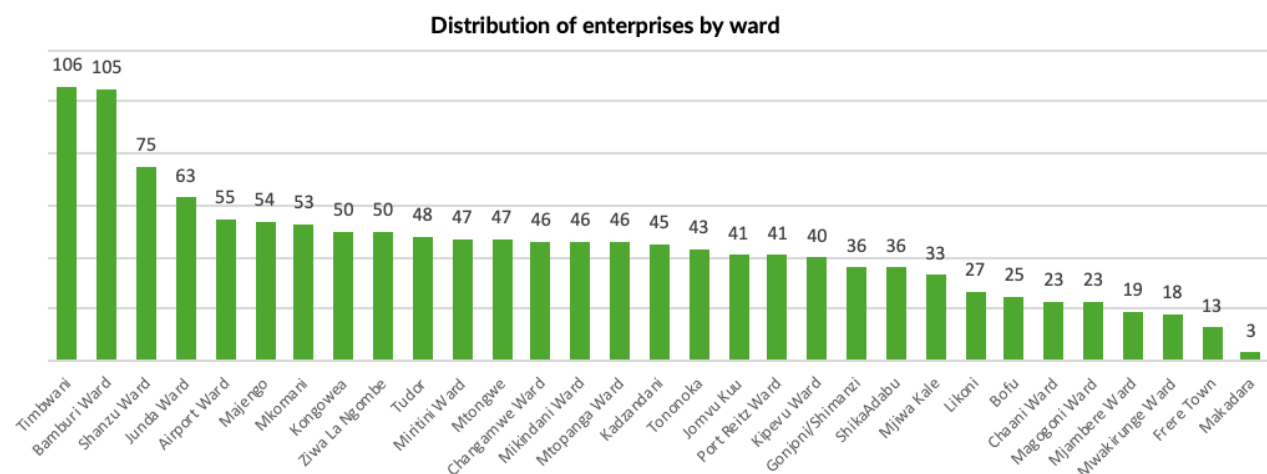


Figure 2: Distribution of enterprises by ward

## Finding 1: Occupations in the food and beverage subsector with high demand for workers are mainly in food and beverage kitchen and service.

No.	Occupation	KESCO code
1	Cooks	5120-11
2	Waiters	5131-24
3	Waitresses	5131-27
4	Cashiers	5230-25
5	Dishwasher	9412-13
6	Barista	5132-12
7	Stewards	5151-15
8	Storekeepers	4321-43
9	Delivery Riders	8321-24
10	Bar(wo)men	5132-14
11	Sommelier	5131-13
12	Wine Server	5131-26
13	Supervisors	5151-22
14	Kitchen Helper	9412-15
15	Chef	3434-14
16	Managers (Hotel)	1411-11

Table 1: Occupations with the highest demand for workers

No	Occupation	Qualification
1	Accounting/Cashier	Postgraduate degree
2	Bar(wo)men	Secondary School
3	Barista	TVET
4	Bouncers	Undergraduate degree
5	Cashiers	TVET
6	Cooks	Secondary School
7	DJs	TVET
8	Delivery Riders	Secondary School
9	Dishwasher	Secondary School
10	Electrical and Refrigeration	Secondary School

No	Occupation	Qualification
11	Executive Chefs	TVET
12	Food Safety Manager	Secondary School
13	Food and Beverage Server	TVET
14	Graphic Design	Undergraduate
15	IT Services	TVET
16	Kitchen Helper/Assistant	Primary school
17	Managers	Postgraduate
18	Market Sourcing	Secondary School

Table 2: Minimum educational qualification for selected occupations

Most of the occupations require at least TVET level of schooling as the minimum qualification. Additionally, both technical and soft skills competencies are also required for specific tasks, particularly in the food and beverage kitchen and service. These competencies are currently lacking in the workforce.

## Finding 2: Referrals by existing staff or persons within the social networks is the main means of advertisement and recruitment by the various enterprises

At least one in every two enterprises hired through referrals. And this was through existing staff and relatives. In addition, 2 in every five recruited through walk-in, and this was more prevalent among the small and individual owned (micro) enterprises. Only 2 in 10 enterprises recruit directly from TVET institutions yet 40% of enterprises need TVET qualification for the occupations in the industry.

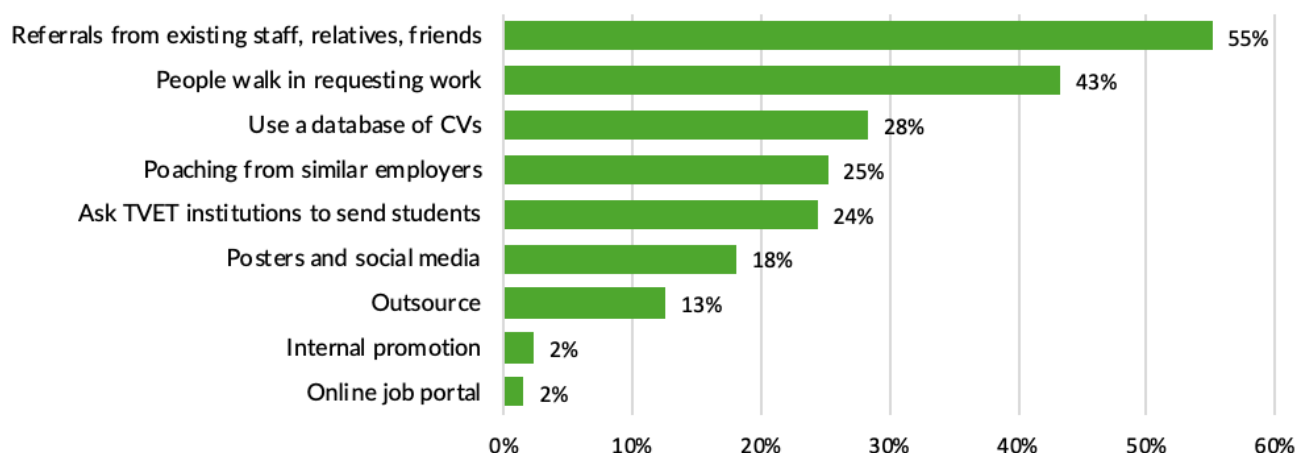


Figure 3: Main means of recruitment by enterprises

### Finding 3: While the Food and Beverage subsector does not hire more often, when there are vacancies, there is a quick turnaround in filling these positions.

Enterprises only hire during peak seasons when there is increased demand for workers to fill the gap. These hires are mainly on short term basis and usually through referrals, mainly through recommendations by existing staff.

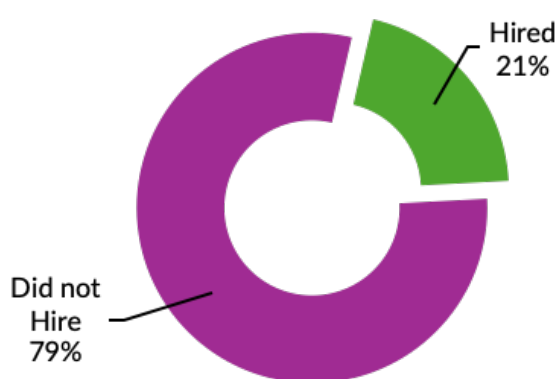


Figure 4: Status of hiring by firms in the last 3 months

- About 8 in 10 enterprises had not recruited in the last 3 months.
- About 2 in 10 enterprise reported difficulty in filling the vacant positions.
- The most difficult skill to hire was cooks at 31% followed by the waiter(ess) at 23%
- 60% of the employers reported inability to find workers with the right skills as the biggest challenge in hiring
- 46% of enterprises hire only when new positions/vacancies emerge, 35% hire more during high peak season, and 15% hire when they have realised increase in the turnover.
- 54% of the vacancies available were preferred to be filled by women. The gender proportion differs by occupation. Female employees were preferred for front-office roles while males were in the food and beverage kitchen
- About 6 in 10 employers would hire more if they had a chance, with lower operational costs (23, fewer taxes and regulations (14%).

### Finding 4: Employee transitions Influenced by Work Conditions, Pay, and Enterprise Stability

Employee transitions in the industry are primarily driven by better job opportunities (13%), inadequate compensation (11%), and the desire for work-life balance (9%)Employers cued separation with ,staff were mainly due to restructuring or downsizing (60%), failure to meet job expectations (27%), lack of necessary skills for evolving job roles (16%), misalignment with company culture (15%), and difficulties fitting in with the team (16%).

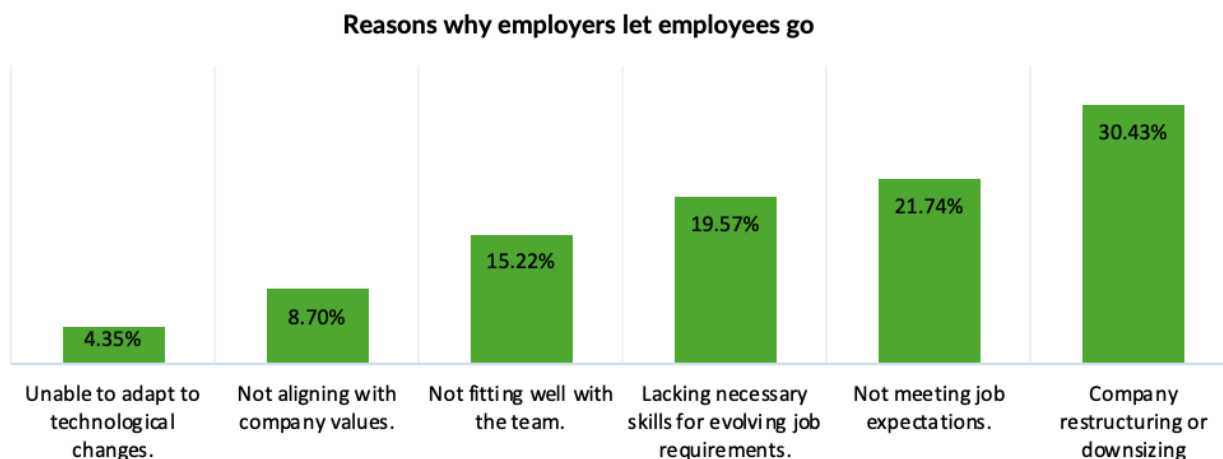


Figure 5: Reasons why employers let employees go

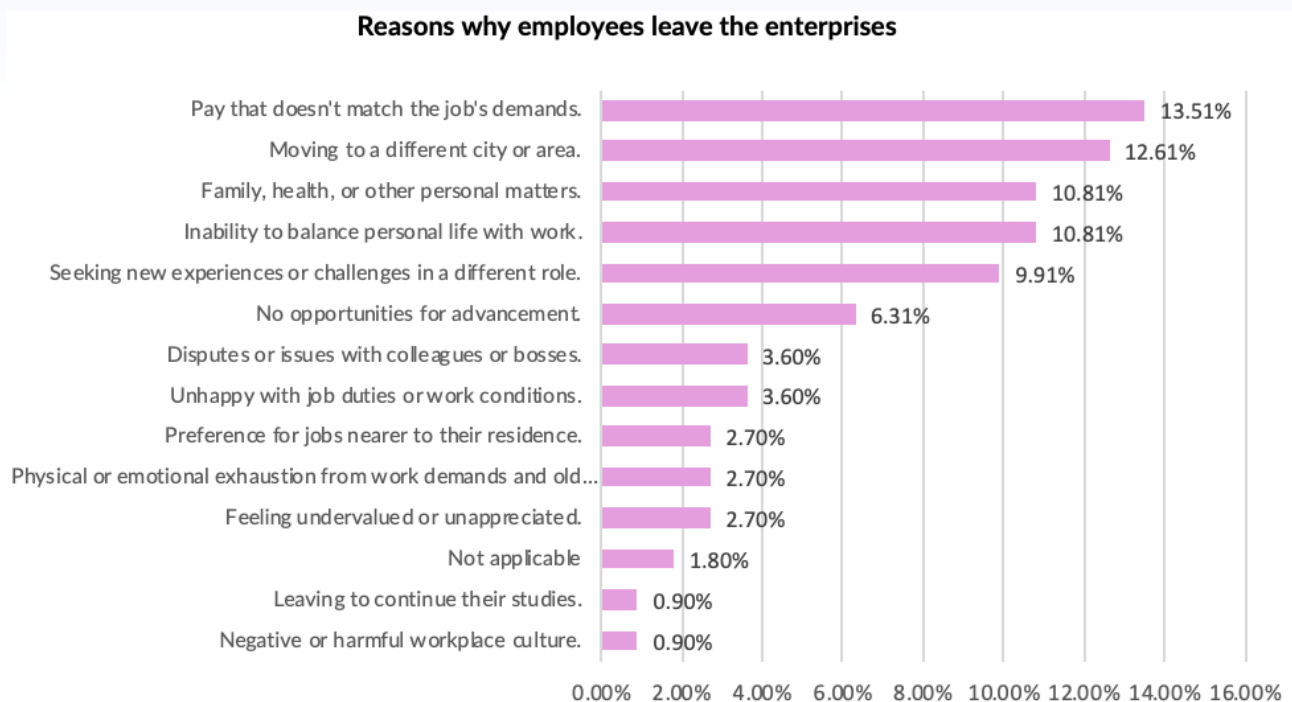


Figure 6: Reasons why employees leave the enterprises

## Finding 5: Nudging skills gap exists between what the employers want and the skills the current workforce possesses

Current workforce does not possess the requisite skills for the occupations in the industry, over 60% of employers reported they cannot find the right skills for the vacancies; 40% of the employers indicated that some vacancies had become redundant. Additionally, 40% of employers are dissatisfied with current workforce skills composition, yet they could not release them for they are not guaranteed of finding the right skills. The shortage of skills is linked to limited access to specialized training, mismatch between training and industry needs, rapidly changing trends and lack of prior practical. In addition to the technical there exists limited non-technical skills required for the employees to thrive in the roles including Inter-personal skills: communication, collaboration, problem solving.

60% of employers agree that manual booking processes and paper-based bookkeeping will become skills of the past. Other skills that will become redundant in the future include traditional marketing and outdated cooking skills. On the other hand, skills gaining importance include basic computing skills, online bookings, simple data analytics, customer service skills and social media marketing.

Experience

### Are you satisfied with current workforce skill

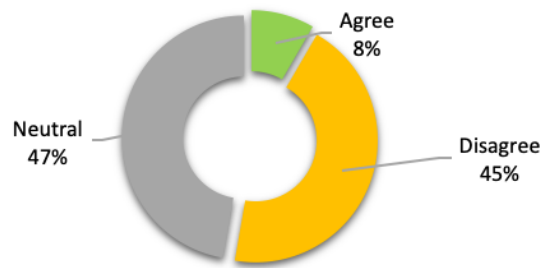


Figure 7: Most of the employees working in areas relevant to their training

## Finding 6: Skills composition, training and bridging skill gaps

While 50% of employers believe their workers have the necessary skills for their jobs, almost a similar proportion (40%) were dissatisfied with the skills composition of their workforce.

### Do you agree your workers possess the skills required

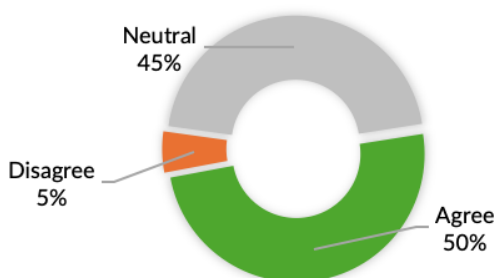


Figure 8: Workers possess the skills required

### The frequency that employers offer training

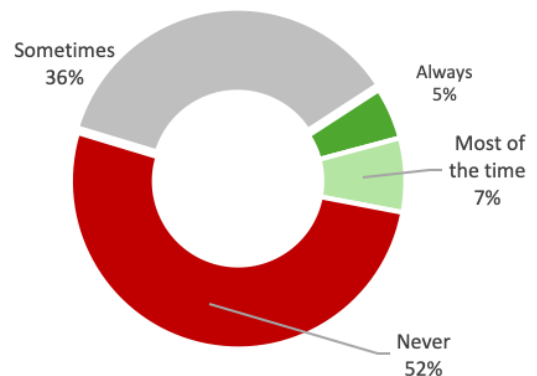


Figure 9: Frequency of employers offering training

Despite the limited skills of the employees, 52% of the employers do not have programs to upskill their employees, and for those who have, it is mostly on-the-job training (69%) through peer-to-peer learning within the enterprise. For most of the jobs, TVET level of training is said to be sufficient. The existing workforce composition comprises 43% TVET graduates, with less than 20% having at least degree qualification.

54% of the employers prefer to have female employees for the vacancies within the industry. There is a glaring preference for females for the front office roles like reception, clerk and accounts, and males for other roles as housekeeping and technologically driven roles as Wi-Fi maintenance, and cooks.

1 in 4 vacancies required at least secondary school qualification, 38% required TVET level of education. Less than 10% of the occupations with vacant positions required at least degree level of training.

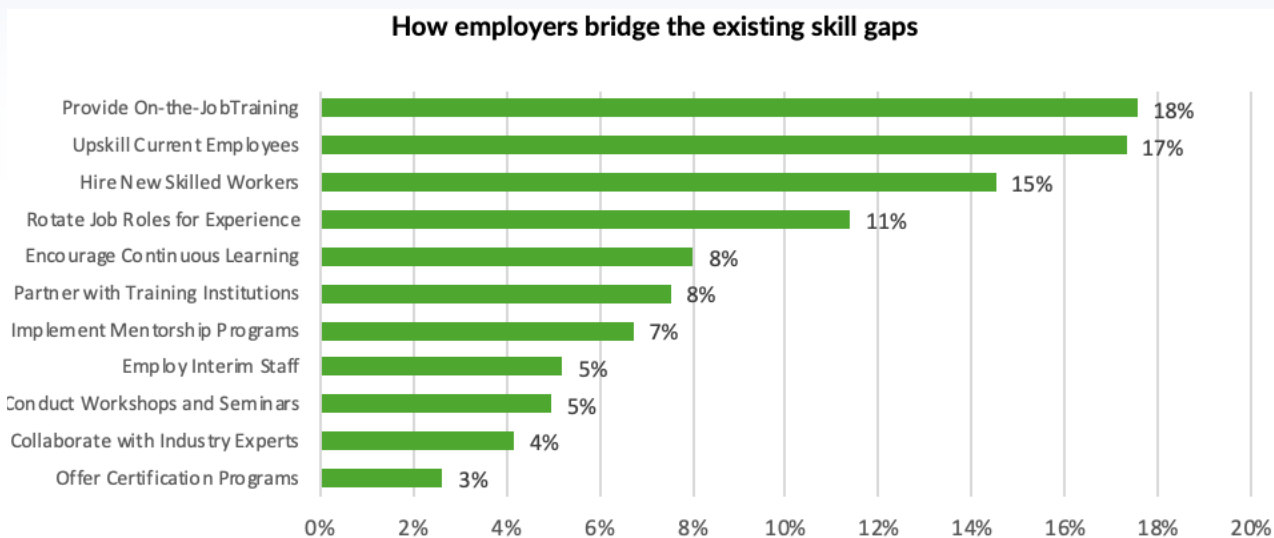


Figure 10: How employers bridge the existing skill gaps

## Finding 7: Training institutions have not equipped the youths with the relevant skills for the industry. Neither do government initiatives on youth empowerment effective to yield the intended results.

The most recommended intervention by industry players to the training institutions is offering more practical training (22%) which aligns with the CBET expectations. Teaching essential skills such as digital skills (16%), and updating curricula to match industry needs (15%) are also important areas that the training institutions should focus on.

Only 16% of employers believe that the government initiatives for youth economic empowerment very effectively address industry needs for the youth. While 32% of respondents consider the programs effective, 23% find them only somewhat effective, and 29% rate them as not very effective.

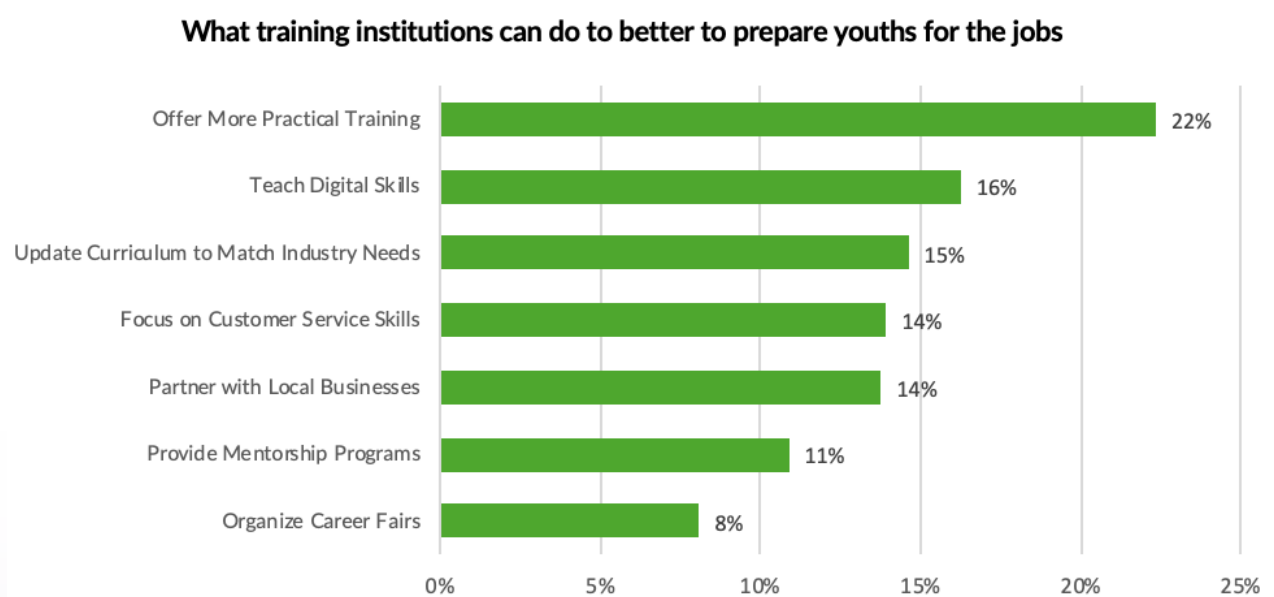


Figure 11: What training institutions can do to better to prepare youths for the jobs

### Perceptions on the effectiveness of government initiatives on youth empowerment

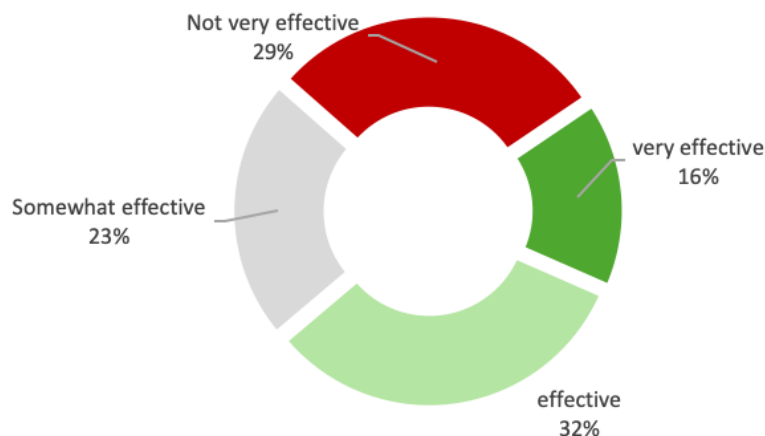
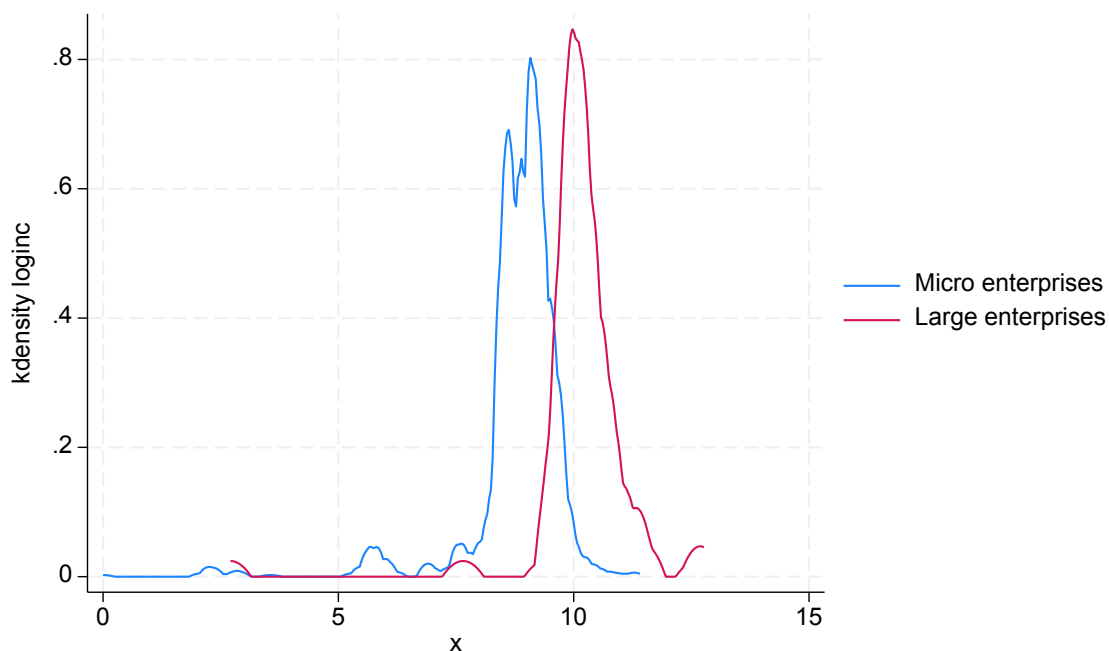


Figure 12: Effectiveness of government initiatives on youth empowerment

## Finding 8: Employee Remuneration, Benefits and Hiring Preferences

70% of the employees earn a maximum of KES 20,000 per month. The highest income earners are between KES 41,000-KES 50,000, and this accounts for 1% of the workforce.



Most of the occupations require at least TVET level of schooling as the minimum qualification. Additionally, both technical and soft skills competencies are also required for specific tasks, particularly in the food and beverage kitchen and service. These competencies are currently lacking in the workforce.



# Recommendations

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## 1. Collaboration between the training institutions and the industry

Trainers need to collaborate with the industry to reduce search and matching frictions in the job market. The collaboration allows for curriculum review and updates to train on industry-demanded skills given to fit existing skill gaps and emerging labour market dynamics.

## 2. Establishing a technologically supported communication platform that connects and provides real-time information for all labour market actors

Most vacancies are mostly filled through referrals potentially locking out viable youths without social capital. Providing real time data will help reduce the search and matching costs in the job market and connect youth to employment opportunities. The operationalization of this platform requires a multi-stakeholder (private sector, public sector, youths, trainers) engagement and participation.

## 3. Promoting Entrepreneurship

The government should invest in unlocking the entrepreneurial capacity of youths so that they are job creators rather than job seekers. Hiring patterns in the food and beverage sector displays a declining trend, particularly for the big enterprises. To accommodate the large youth demographic, is critical to strengthen the entrepreneurial capacity of the youths to be employment creators rather than job seekers. Policy considerations should be made to address the types of investments that may unlock the entrepreneurial capacity of the youths so that they are self-employed.

## 4. Enhancing Education and Skills Development

The key policy question is how to better plan to absorb the jobs that are at risk in the sector so that we equip them with the necessary skills for the 21st Century jobs. The ability to adapt to the technological advancements by employees will continue to drive their employability in the industry. This calls for robust investment in the digital economy

## 5. Policy Frameworks for Youth Employment

Our findings have shown that less than half of the employers approve of the effectiveness of government initiatives to address youth employment. It is important that these policies are relevant to and reflective of youths' lived experiences. Hence, there is a need to have every voice (employers, youths, trainers) represented in the formulation and implementation of these initiatives. Some of the initiatives that have been suggested to work include public private partnerships, entrepreneurship programs, career counselling and job placements, skills development workshops, youth grants, and the need to invest in the vocational training programmes.

# Acknowledgements

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We wish to convey our deep appreciation for the collective efforts of the teams involved whose steadfast collaboration was instrumental in the successful completion of the initial phases of this initiative:

- **Survey Participants:** We express our heartfelt gratitude to the employers who participated in this study, from both formal and informal enterprises. Without you, we wouldn't have this information. Your continued willingness to participate in the successive rounds of data collection is critical for the success of this project and cannot go unnoticed.
- **Research Assistants** Our special thanks to the team of 40 young people who understood the exercise. You moved from one enterprise to another and held a conversation with the employers. Building and sustaining this relationship and collaboration with the industry was a no mean task. You did it! You are our true heroes and heroines and your contribution to catalysing youth employment in Kenya is invaluable.
- **Funders:** We extend our special thanks to Conrad Hilton Foundation for their generous allocation of resources, which was crucial in the successful execution of this initiative. Your support has been a pillar in our endeavour to help the youth in Africa thrive in the job and to facilitate transition from school to work.

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