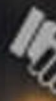


The KENYA INSTITUTE for PUBLIC
POLICY RESEARCH and ANALYSIS

Thinking Policy Together



What Works for Youth Employment in Africa: Empirical Review of Youth Employment Policies and their Impact in Kenya

Introduction



Youth unemployment is a major issue in Kenya, with over a third of the population aged 15–34 facing unemployment rates nearly double the national average.

This highlights the country's struggle with skills mismatches, rapid population growth, and an economy struggling to generate quality jobs. Initiatives like Kazi Mtaani, entrepreneurship funds, and digital skills training show promise but face challenges such as urban bias, political interference, and weak monitoring systems. Kenya's experience emphasizes the need for comprehensive solutions that integrate skills development with job creation while tackling barriers in both rural and urban job markets.

Labour force participation and youth outside the labour force (15–34 years)

| | 2005/06 | 2015/16 | 2019 | | |
|--|---------|---------|-------|-------|-------|
| | Total | Total | Total | Rural | Urban |
| Labor Force Participation rate (15-64 years) | 72.6 | 77.4 | 66.2 | 68.2 | 62.6 |
| Labor force participation rate for youth (15-34) | 54.4 | 67.4 | 54.4 | 54.7 | 54.0 |
| Youth outside the labour force, (%) | 45.6 | 32.6 | 45.6 | 45.3 | 46.0 |
| Employment to population ratio | 60.0 | 59.7 | 51.3 | 52.4 | 49.4 |
| Time related underemployment rate | 25.0 | 23.7 | 20.1 | 24.5 | 12.2 |
| Unemployment | 20.2 | 11.4 | 16.0 | 12.1 | 22.3 |
| Inactivity rate | 45.6 | 32.6 | 38.9 | 40.4 | 36.4 |

Source: KNBS (2008), KNBS (2018) and 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census Data



Key Messages



1. Youth Unemployment and Underemployment Remain High

Despite various youth employment programmes (YEPs), a significant proportion of youth in Kenya remain unemployed, underemployed, or in poor-quality informal jobs. Vulnerable employment and inactivity rates are particularly high among young women and rural youth.



2. Fragmented Interventions

Youth employment initiatives are numerous and often fragmented across different sectors and levels of government, leading to poor coordination and inefficiencies.



3. Programmes that Work Best are Comprehensive

Interventions that combine multiple components (e.g., skills training + job placement + mentoring) are more effective than a narrow focus on single dimensions like skills training or credit access, which often limits their effectiveness.



4. Awareness and Access are Key Barriers

Many rural youth are unaware of the available programmes or lack information on how to access them, limiting programme reach and impact.



5. Resource Constraints and Inadequate Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

Most youth employment programmes lack proper M&E systems. Even when such systems exist, they are poorly funded and implemented. Implementation of programmes is often hindered by inadequate financial, human, and institutional resources.



6. Political Economy Constraints

Program implementation is influenced by political considerations and weak accountability mechanisms, affecting overall outcomes. Aligning YEPs with Kenya's political realities is essential to improve ownership, funding, and implementation.



1. Promote Holistic and Integrated Programmes

Foster partnerships between government (MCDAs), development partners, civil society, and the private sector to implement integrated youth employment programmes that combine training, financial support, job placement, and mentorship.



2. Improve Programme Coordination

Streamline institutional mandates and coordination mechanisms between national and county governments to reduce duplication and enhance efficiency.



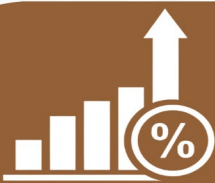
3. Target Rural Youth More Effectively

Design and implement tailored programmes that address the specific challenges of rural youth, who represent a majority (around 63%) of Kenya's youth population.



4. Enhance Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

Embed robust M&E frameworks in the design of all programmes and allocate sufficient resources for data collection, analysis, and impact evaluation.



5. Increase Resource Allocation

Provide adequate financial, human, and technical resources for youth employment programmes, including support for institutional capacity building.



6. Strengthen Data Systems and Research

Improve the availability and quality of data to inform youth employment interventions and foster more empirical evaluations to identify what works.



7. Ensure Inclusion and Equity

Pay special attention to marginalized groups including young women, persons with disabilities, and youth in informal settlements to ensure inclusive development.



8. Foster Political Will and Accountability

Build stronger accountability mechanisms to insulate program implementation from political interference and promote results-based management.