REPUBLIC OF KENYA
MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Zizi Afrique Foundation

SWAHILIPOT

GDI Global Development Incubator

Unlocking Youth Employment in Kenya’s Food and Beverage Sector: Mombasa County

2025


Standard

Contents

Foreword

The hospitality and tourism sector stands as one of Kenya's most dynamic and economically significant industries, contributing close to 10% of the nation's GDP. Beyond its fiscal value, the sector plays a central role in job creation, skills development, and entrepreneurship, particularly among youth. However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this growth trajectory, with far-reaching impacts on businesses, workers, and associated value chains.

As Kenya shifts into a post-pandemic era, rebuilding and reimagining the sector is both an opportunity and an imperative. The food and beverage sub-sector, in particular, holds untapped potential to drive youth employment and foster inclusive economic recovery. Understanding the evolving landscape of jobs and skills is therefore critical—not just for immediate workforce planning, but for informing long-term policy, investment, and education strategies.

This report presents the findings of a comprehensive three-phase study conducted in Mombasa County between September 2024 and February 2025. It explores current and emerging patterns in labor demand, recruitment practices, and skills gaps in the food and beverage sector. The research draws on rich, mixed-methods data collected from over 1,300 enterprises and provides evidence-based recommendations to align training, policy, and employment pathways with industry needs.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the participating businesses, sector stakeholders, and young people who contributed their insights to this study. Their voices and experiences have been instrumental in shaping a nuanced picture of the sector's current realities and future potential.

As we look ahead, we invite government, industry, training institutions, and development partners to engage with the findings and recommendations outlined in this report. Together, we can co-create a more inclusive, responsive, and future-ready hospitality sector—one that works for youth, businesses, and the broader economy.

Alice Gugelev
Chief Executive Officer,
Global Development Incubator Africa

John Mugo
Executive Director,
Zizi Afrique Foundation

Mahmoud Noor
Founder and Chief Mentor,
Swahilipot Hub Foundation

Partners

Born to Build – Global Development Incubator

Global Development Incubator (GDI Africa), is a non-profit organization independently incorporated in Kenya in April 2017 and legally registered under the Non-Governmental Organizations Coordination Act of Kenya. GDI Africa is governed by a 100% locally constituted 5 member Board and leadership and directly employs 42 staff and over 200 staff through partners based in Kenya. GDI is renowned for launching and operationalizing initiatives aimed at systemic and scaled change. GDI's mission is to bring together ideas, leaders, and capital to build and scale the next generation of social solutions. Key areas of implementation include youth employment, economic inclusion for the extreme poor, gender and PWD inclusion, financing for smallholder farmers, mental health, green jobs and financing, MSME development and sustainable economic development.

GDI Africa works deep in community with partners and directly with participants in all of our initiatives, building capacity and ensuring the voices and stories of communities, especially women, are incorporated in all our work.

All initiatives also focus on collaboration with private sector actors including companies, SME and financial institutions building out the investment sector to catalyze sustainable economic growth and grow jobs and markets. Government actors and institutions at both national and county levels are critical in ensuring alignment with government priorities, shifting policies and driving towards scale. Given GDI's focus on data and evidence, we work closely with academia, research companies and leverage technology to support research, co-creation of vision and outcomes metrics and data-driven decision-making.

To enable impactful, scaleable and coordinated initiatives, GDI also plays the function of a prime and fiscal management of multi-stakeholder initiatives, including managing projects, tracking results, developing workplans and budgets and building capacity throughout the consortiums.

GDI Africa's primary area of work is in Kenya, working extensively at the national level with partners and government and deeply in 8 counties and the Council of Governors to replicate successful work across the country.

Our passion for impact continues to be underpinned by our values to develop inclusion, resilience, self-determination and agency in all of our communities, participants and partners.

Swahilipot Hub Foundation

Founded in 2016 and officially registered in 2017, Swahilipot Hub Foundation (SPHF) emerged from a critical need to bridge the regional gap in technology, innovation, and youth empowerment. While Nairobi was home to multiple tech hubs, other counties remained underserved. SPH was established to create a youth-centered space that fosters creativity, innovation, and inclusivity, enabling youth aged 18- 35 years to access opportunities, develop skills, and drive positive change in their communities.

As a non-governmental organization (NGO), SPH implements programs across five thematic areas:

- **Technology & Innovation** – equipping youth with digital skills and emerging tech knowledge.
- **Creative & Arts** – nurturing talent in performing and visual arts.
- **Heritage** – preserving and promoting cultural identity.
- **Opportunity Youth** – creating pathways in health, hospitality & tourism, and the green economy.
- **Entrepreneurship & Business Support** – providing resources for startups and business growth.

Guided by its mission to enable the community develop themselves, SPHF operates on three core approaches: providing safe and trusted spaces, fostering partnerships, and promoting positive youth programming.

Zizi Afrique Foundation (ZAF)

Zizi Afrique Foundation (ZAF) is a not-for-profit company committed to improving learning outcomes for children and youth furthest behind. ZAF works at the intersection between evidence, policy, and practice, and uses research to improve the public education system. ZAF's focus areas include Values and Life Skills, Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, Parental Empowerment and Engagement, Whole Youth Development, and technical education and Vocational training.

We envision a world where all children and youth learn and thrive. We contribute to the nurturing of a generation of children and youth who are well-equipped with the skills for learning, skills for living, and skills for working.

Our mission is to consolidate evidence, innovate solutions through collaborative networking, and shape policy and practice to equip children and youth with the competencies they need for life and work.

Executive Summary

The hospitality and tourism sector is a vital contributor to Kenya's economy, accounting for approximately 10% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). However, the sector was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to significant financial losses, widespread job disruptions, and adverse effects on businesses both within and around the industry. As the country moves into a post-pandemic recovery phase, it is essential to re-examine how this sector is transforming—particularly with respect to the changing demand for jobs and skills among young people aged 15 to 24. This inquiry is especially critical as we look ahead to the future of work and the sector's potential to drive inclusive employment growth.

To support this understanding, a three-phase survey was conducted between September 2024 and February 2025 in Mombasa County, focusing on the food and beverage sub-sector. The study combined both qualitative and quantitative methods, engaging over 1,300 enterprises to map current occupations, job vacancies, and skills requirements. It also explored sectoral priorities, hiring practices, and employer perspectives on the industry's future. The objective was to generate evidence that could inform better workforce development, support policy alignment, and strengthen links between education providers and employers. Each survey round had a distinct focus.

The first round involved mapping occupations and identifying current job openings, reaching 1,367 enterprises. The second round followed up with 658 of these businesses to understand how vacancies had been filled and the challenges encountered. The third round engaged 406 enterprises to explore the relevance of existing skills, the potential for employment expansion, and the role of training and investment in creating more opportunities for youth.

The findings from this study reveal several important insights. First, the greatest demand for labor is concentrated in food preparation and service roles, most of which require technical training at the TVET level. However, employers also consistently highlighted the importance of additional competencies—particularly soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving.

Recruitment practices across the sector are largely informal. Most businesses rely on referrals from current employees or social networks, with walk-in applications also playing a major role. Only a small proportion of enterprises (about 20%) recruit directly from TVET institutions. While job openings in this sub-sector are not frequent, when they do arise, they tend to be filled quickly, often during seasonal peaks. These positions are commonly short-term and offer limited job security.

Employee turnover is influenced by a range of factors, including low wages, poor working conditions, and instability in business operations. Workers often leave in search of better opportunities, while employers also terminate contracts due to restructuring, underperformance, or lack of required skills. More than half of employers reported difficulty in finding candidates with the right skills, and many do not currently offer upskilling or training programs for existing staff. This points to a growing skills gap, particularly in non-technical areas.

The workforce is predominantly composed of TVET graduates (43%), with fewer than 20% holding university degrees—suggesting that technical and vocational education is generally sufficient for most roles in the industry. However, wage levels remain low. Around 70% of employees earn no more than KES 20,000 per month, with only 1% earning between KES 41,000 and 50,000. Non-salary benefits are limited, and many workers lack basic protections such as medical coverage, paid leave, and written employment contracts.

To address these challenges and unlock the sector's potential to employ more youth, a series of recommendations emerged from the study. There is a clear need to better align human resource practices with industry needs. This includes fostering dialogue between HR professionals and employers and offering training to business owners on recruitment and employee management.

Stronger collaboration between training institutions and employers is also vital. This can be achieved through partnerships that encourage more direct recruitment from TVETs, the formation of sectoral training committees to update curricula, and a shift toward demand-driven training models that are responsive to local labor market needs.

Workplace readiness and mentorship must be integrated more intentionally into training and job placement efforts. Early exposure to industry settings, job shadowing, and structured post-placement support can improve transitions for young workers and help employers better manage workforce dynamics.

Data and technology should be leveraged to create a comprehensive job matching system. This includes building a databank of youth skills, clarifying job roles and required competencies, and offering digital skills training tailored to the sector's unique demands.

Recruitment and placement mechanisms also need innovation. Developing outsourced recruitment services that match qualified youth to available positions, supported by sustainable business models, can enhance accessibility and effectiveness. In addition, a job-matching application for micro and small enterprises could make it easier to connect youth with informal job opportunities.

Industry-integrated training models are recommended to enhance practical learning. These may include three-month rotations between training institutions and businesses, equipping youth with multi-disciplinary skills, and creating career pathways that support both employment and entrepreneurship. Finally, employers must be actively involved in preparing young people for work by dedicating time to onboarding, training, and mentorship, and by contributing to the definition of performance standards for training providers.

In conclusion, this study provides critical insights into the food and beverage sub-sector in Mombasa County, highlighting both opportunities and gaps in youth employment. To fully realize the sector's potential, stakeholders must work collaboratively to strengthen the alignment between training, recruitment, and workplace practices—creating an enabling environment where young people can thrive, and where businesses can access the talent they need to grow sustainably.

Introduction

Background: Youth Unemployment and Skills Demand in Kenya

Despite notable progress in global youth development, young people continue to face significant barriers in their pursuit of meaningful employment. Among the most pressing challenges are skills mismatches, limited access to quality jobs, and structural inequalities in labor markets. While this is a global concern, the burden is disproportionately felt in Africa. According to the International Labour Organization, 65 million young people worldwide are unemployed—many of them based in Africa. With projections indicating that over half of the world's population growth by 2050 will occur on the continent, Africa is poised to host the world's largest workforce (World Data Lab, 2024; World Economic Forum, 2025).

Kenya exemplifies this demographic reality. The country's population structure is heavily youthful, with individuals aged 15 to 35 comprising over 70% of the total population (World Data Lab, 2024). This demographic dividend presents an immense opportunity—but only if the country invests strategically in education and skill development aligned with the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

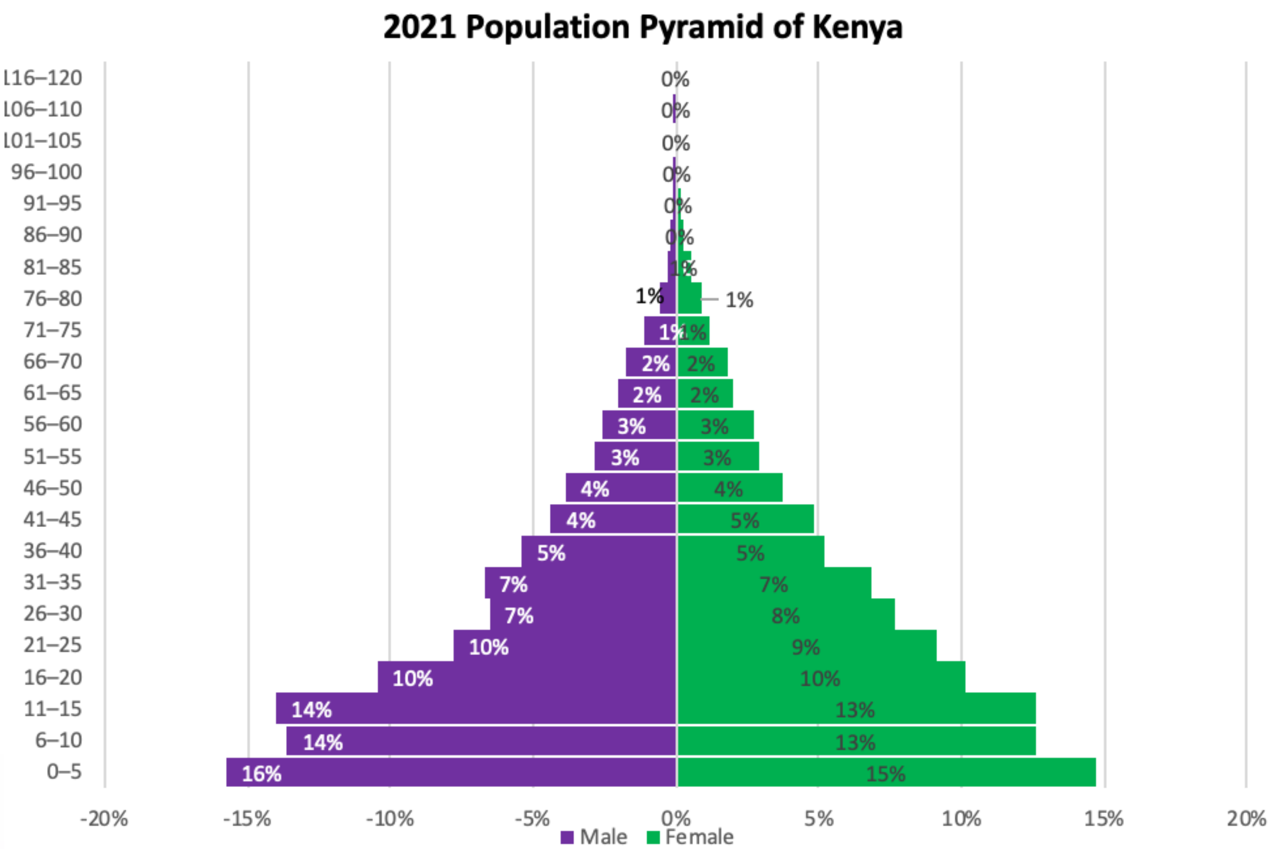

Figure 1: Population pyramid (Source: Authors' Estimation from KCHS 2021)

Yet, the mismatch between training and industry needs remains a persistent problem. Approximately one million young people enter the Kenyan labor market annually, many of them inadequately equipped with the skills needed for available jobs (*Orwa et al., 2019; Abdychev et al., 2018; Leopold et al., 2017; McKinsey, 2020). Youth aged 15–24*—the "opportunity youth"—constitute 60% of the labor force, yet their potential remains largely untapped (*Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2020*) . A key barrier to job creation and business growth in Kenya, particularly from 2025 to 2030, is the growing skills gap (*World Economic Forum, 2025*). Alarmingly, about six in every ten Kenyan youth are employed outside their area of specialization, a clear indicator of misalignment between academic training and labor market needs.

The Future of Jobs Report (2025) predicts that nearly 40% of the skills used by today's workforce will become obsolete or transformed by 2030. In this shifting landscape, Kenya must urgently address its workforce readiness to keep pace with global trends.

The youth unemployment crisis is further intensified by technological change, climate pressures, demographic shifts, and economic volatility (*Abdychev et al., 2018; Leopold et al., 2017; McKinsey, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2025*). Globally, the World Economic Forum projects a net growth of 78 million jobs between 2025 and 2030, with 170 million new roles created and 92 million lost (*World Economic Forum, 2025*). However, this growth is threatened by widening skill gaps, particularly in roles requiring resilience, technological literacy, quality control, and operational efficiency.

Employers anticipate that 60% of the global workforce will need reskilling by 2030. Among them, 29% can be upskilled within their current roles, 19% may be redeployed within their organizations, while 11% are at risk of redundancy due to their inability to reskill. Notably, 85% of employers plan to prioritize upskilling; 70% expect to hire workers with new skill sets, and 40% foresee workforce reductions where skills become obsolete. Analytical thinking remains the most sought-after core skill, followed closely by adaptability, leadership, and curiosity (*World Economic Forum, 2025*).

Despite these global insights, data specific to Kenya's labor market—particularly at the sectoral and local levels—remains scarce. Understanding how these trends manifest in cities like Mombasa is crucial for effective policy and program design.

Spotlight on Mombasa: Opportunity and Challenge

Mombasa holds critical economic value for Kenya. It is the country's coastal economic hub, home to East Africa's largest seaport and contributing 4.7% to the national GDP (GOYN, 2020). The county also boasts a vibrant hospitality and tourism sector, contributing 4.9% to its local GDP, bolstered by rich Swahili heritage, scenic beaches, cultural landmarks, and diverse religious and cultural communities (GDI, 2019).

Despite this potential, Mombasa faces acute youth unemployment. With a population of about 1.55 Million , and an annual growth of 3.9%, the youth (15-34 years) population is 478,800. Of these, 66% (316,000) are neither in education, employment, or training (NEET). 44% of the youths in Mombasa are unemployed, nearly double the country's average, which stands at 22%. These figures underscore the urgency of targeted interventions to improve youth livelihood opportunities (GDI, 2019).

The rising youth unemployment in Mombasa may be attributed to several factors contribute to this situation, including limited access to skills development opportunities, a mismatch between education and labor market needs, and insufficient job creation in key sectors such as tourism, logistics, and manufacturing. Additionally, social and cultural norms related to childcare and housework further limit employment opportunities for youth.

Efforts to understand the dynamics of youth employment in Mombasa have been made. The Global Opportunity Youth Network (GOYN, 2022) explored employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in the hospitality sector for opportunity youth aged 16–24. Other relevant studies include USAID's labor market mapping and CAP-YEI's 2022 skills gap analysis of TVET institutions. While insightful, these studies were largely static, offering snapshots of labor market conditions without projecting future trends or systemic linkages between education and employment. We provide the most recent findings from this study.

A New Approach: Real-Time Insights into Labor Demand

To address these gaps, the Zizi Afrique Foundation (ZAF), in partnership with Global Development Incubator and Swahili Port, is leading a new initiative to map and analyze labor market dynamics in Mombasa's food, accommodation, and leisure sectors. This initiative focuses on understanding current and future drivers of job and skills demand—particularly within the hospitality industry.

Our project goes beyond descriptive snapshots. It seeks to establish a dynamic Labor Market Information System (LMIS) that can guide forecasting, inform workforce development policies, and support strategic decision-making across stakeholders. Such a system will be instrumental in matching youth to job opportunities in real time and aligning training with market needs.

This report presents findings from the first phase of the initiative—an employer survey conducted between September 2024 and February 2025. This phase aimed to build a foundational database of employers in the food and beverage subsector, laying the groundwork for more robust employer-youth matching systems and data-informed interventions.

By leveraging insights from previous youth empowerment programs and integrating new data with future-oriented projections, this project seeks to chart a more responsive and equitable path for young people in Mombasa's labor market. It builds on the pioneering work of GOYN and aims to strengthen Kenya's overall approach to youth employment through systems thinking, collaboration, and evidence-based action.

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 young people 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).


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Data and Methodology

To assess the demand for skills and jobs in the food and beverage (F&B) sub-sector, we conducted a three-round survey between September 2024 and February 2025. This survey combined both qualitative and quantitative methods to map industry employers, job vacancies, workforce composition, and the specific skills required. The survey helped identify key employers and occupations within the F&B sub-sector, map current job vacancies along with their skill requirements, and assess sector priorities. We also explored future skills needs, examined hiring trends, and analyzed recruitment challenges to support workforce development and inform policy decisions.

The data collection process involved online tools administered in person by trained interviewers. Each round of the survey was designed with specific objectives.

In the first round, conducted between September and October 2024, we scoped out the occupations within the sector, identifying existing roles and exploring current job openings. This provided an in-depth assessment of demand trends. During this round, we successfully contacted 1,367 enterprises.

In the second round, held between November and December 2024, we followed up with 658 of the initial 1,367 enterprises. This round focused on whether the vacancies had been filled, the methods used for filling them, and the challenges encountered in the recruitment process.

In the third round, conducted between January and February 2025, we followed up with 406 enterprises to gather information on the previous vacancies, the obsolescence and relevance of skills, and the potential for further job creation in the industry. We also explored investments needed and the importance of partnerships with training institutions to generate more employment opportunities for the youth.

Establishments' Characteristics:

- 54% of the enterprises visited were owned by women, 46%, were owned 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 are owned by either individuals (79%) or family (16%).
- Most enterprises keep records of daily transactions (86%) which suggests that they are 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 a similar proportion do food delivery. Other lines of operation include accommodation (27%); Coffee Caffes (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.

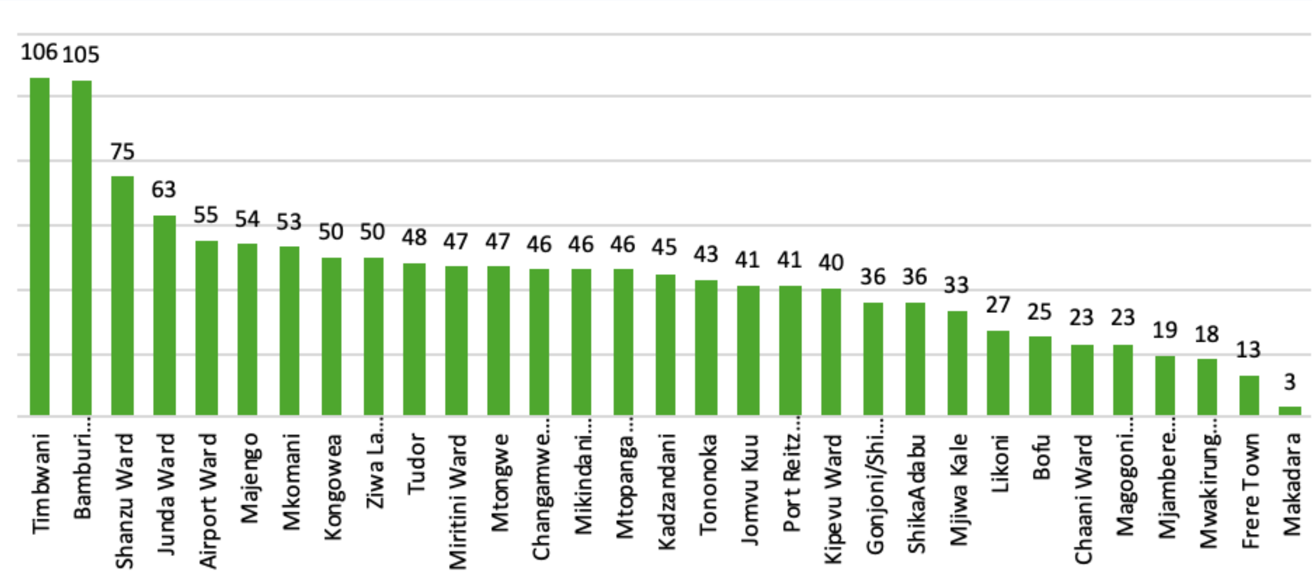

Fig 1: Distribution of enterprises by ward

What occupations are there in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry?

We unpacked the jobs in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry in the Kenyan context, while borrowing from international standards. Our classification reveals the following broad categories of occupations in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry based on common classifications used in the UK (Office for National Statistics - SOC) and the US (Standard Occupational Classification - SOC) systems. The categories reflect the full range of services across hospitality, tourism, travel, events, wellness services, and accommodation management. The occupations are also aligned with Kenya Standard Classification of Occupations (KeSCO), shown by the codes.

Occupational Category	Sample Job Titles
Food & Beverage (F&B) Service	5131-24: Waiters/Waitresses, 5132-14: Bar(wo)men, 5132-12: Barista, 5131-13: Wine Server/Sommelier, F&B Server, 5132-16: Busser, Cocktail Waiter, Food Runner, 5131-28: Head Waiter
F&B Production (Kitchen)	5120-11: Cooks, 3434-13: Executive Chefs, 3434-21 Sous Chefs, 3434-15: Pastry Chefs, 5120-17: Line Cooks, 9412-15: Kitchen Helpers, 9412-22: Dishwashers, 7511-14: Butchers, 7512-11: Bakery Staff, 3434-12: Comis Chef, Grill Cook
Hotel & Lodging Management	1140-11: General Manager, Duty Manager, 1411-11: Hotel Operations Manager, 1411-14: Food & Beverage Manager, 3341-21: Front Office Manager, 1411-12: Housekeeping Manager,3313-12: Night Auditor
Events & Entertainment	3332-14: Event Coordinator, Event Planner, 2656-18: DJs, Emcees, 5414-12: Bouncers, 5113-24: Animators,5142-15: Spa Attendants,3423-13: Fitness Instructors, 5113-24: Tour Guides, Cultural Entertainers
Logistics & Support Services	8321-12: Delivery Riders, 8322-21: Drivers, 4321-43: Warehouse/ Storekeepers, 1324-28: Procurement Officers, 432121: Inventory Controllers, Market Sourcing Staff, 9621-37: Porters
Technical & IT Services	7411-11: Electricians, HVAC Technicians,7421-36: Refrigeration Technicians, CCTV Technicians, 3512-51: IT Support, 2513-21: Web Developers, 2523-12: Wi-Fi/Network Managers
Marketing & Creative Roles	2651-21: Graphic Designers, Social Media Managers, 2641-32: Content Creators, 3431-13: Photographers, Videographers, 1221-16: Brand Managers, SEO Specialists
Front Office & Guest Services	4226-12: Receptionists, Reservationists, Switchboard Operators, 5414-13: Concierge, Guest Relations Officers,9621-14: Bellhops, 9625-12: Valet Attendants, 5245-15: Lobby Attendants
Landscaping & Facility Management	2171-13: Landscapers, 6113-15: Gardeners, Facility Managers, 6113-22: Groundskeepers, 5414-18: Security Guards, Maintenance Workers

Occupational Category	Sample Job Titles
Housekeeping & Laundry	5142-13: Room Attendants, 5151-21: Room Stewards, 9121-16: Laundry Attendants, 9121-13: Dry Cleaners, 9121-17: Pressers, 7531-37: Tailors, 9112-12: Turn Down Attendants
Room & Property Maintenance	7126-33: Plumbers, 7131-13: Painters, 9622-21: Handymen, 3115-18: AC Technicians, 7411-11: Electricians, 5153-13: Janitorial Staff
Administration & Operations	2411-11: Accountants, 1212-11: HR Managers, Payroll Officers, Compliance Officers, Training & Development Officers, 9621-36: Office Assistants, Procurement Assistants
Sales & Reservations	1411-16: Travel Agents, 8113-41: Tour Operators, 4221-15: Ticketing Officers, Online Booking Managers, 2433-12: Sales Coordinators, Travel Consultants
Wellness & Spa Services	2291-15: Massage Therapists, Aestheticians, 1431-21: Spa Managers, 5142-24/5: Nail Technicians, 5142-26: Beauty Therapists, 5142-14: Sauna Attendants
Recreation & Leisure	5415-12: Lifeguards, 5142-15: Pool Attendants; Activity Coordinators, 3423-13: Sports Instructors, Kids Club Attendants
Transportation & Travel	8331-11: Tour Bus Drivers, 8322-28: Shuttle Drivers, Airport Ground Staff, Airport Concierge, Car Rental Agents
Food Safety & Compliance	2280-13: Food Safety Officers, Quality Assurance Inspectors, 2142-26: Environmental Health Officers, HACCP Coordinators
Training & Skills Development	Hospitality Trainers, Culinary Instructors, Customer Service Trainers, Internship Coordinators
Accommodation Services	5151-12: Housekeepers, 9112-12: Room Attendants; 4224-11: Front Desk Staff, 9621-14: Bellhops, 5153-12: Concierge, 4221-12: Reservation Agents
Retail & Merchandising	Retail Assistants, 3323-14: Merchandisers, 2433-12: Sales Associates, 1324-22: Store Managers
Catering & Banqueting	1411-14: Catering Managers, Banquet Servers, Catering Assistants, Event Waitstaff
Tourism & Travel Services	5113-24: Tour Guides, 4221-32: Travel Consultants, Tour Coordinators; Cruise Directors, Travel Writers, Destination Managers
Customer Service & Client Relations	4222-22: Customer Service Representatives, Client Relationship Managers, 5223-15: Sales Support, Guest Services Coordinators

Source: Authors' Construction following US and UK Standards for occupational classification

Study Findings

Finding 1: Occupations in the food and beverage kitchen and service have the highest demand for workers throughout the seasons.

The Food and Beverage subsector consistently demands workers for kitchen and service-related roles such as chefs, cooks, stewards, waitstaff, and baristas—positions that are critical to the smooth running of operations and directly impact customer satisfaction. These occupations are in demand across small, medium, and large enterprises, with most requiring at least a TVET-level qualification. In addition to technical training, employers value soft skills like communication, teamwork, adaptability, and personal grooming, especially for customer-facing roles.

Support functions such as cleaners, cashiers, and storekeepers are also needed, though mentioned less frequently. While digital skills are not yet a core requirement, employers are beginning to acknowledge the value of basic digital literacy, especially in enterprises adopting point-of-sale and digital order systems. These evolving demands suggest a gradual shift toward blended skill profiles that combine both traditional service competencies and foundational tech skills.

Table 1: Occupations with the highest demand for workers

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 2: Minimum educational qualification for selected occupations

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
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

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

At least one in every two enterprises in the Food and Beverage sector hires through referrals, primarily from existing staff or relatives. Informal recruitment methods dominate, particularly among micro and small enterprises, where trust, familiarity, and ease of access are highly valued. Additionally, two in every five enterprises reported recruiting walk-in applicants—a practice that remains especially common among individually owned businesses with limited formal hiring structures.

Despite 40% of enterprises requiring technical and vocational (TVET) qualifications for certain roles, only 20% actively recruit from TVET institutions. Formal recruitment methods such as job boards, posters, and social media are rarely used. Even in larger enterprises, word-of-mouth remains the most preferred and trusted hiring approach. This heavy reliance on social networks underscores a gap between employers and formal training institutions and highlights the need for stronger linkages to improve employment outcomes for trained graduates.

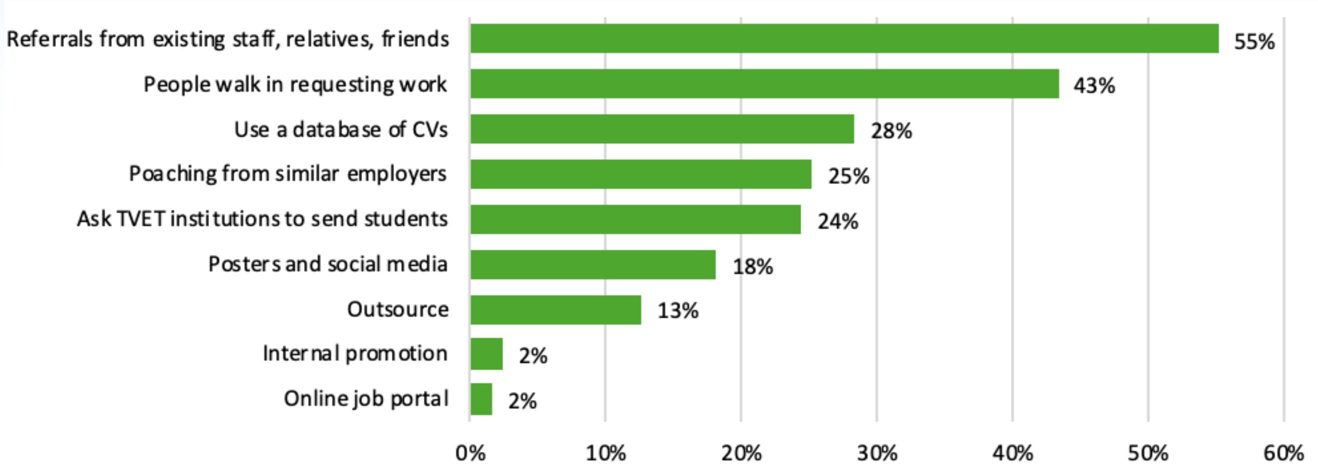

Fig 1: Main means of recruitment by enterprises

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 in the subsector do not hire frequently, with recruitment typically occurring during peak seasons when customer demand is high. These hires are mostly short-term and serve to temporarily bolster staff capacity during busy periods such as holidays or tourist seasons. Despite the irregular nature of recruitment, businesses are able to fill vacancies quickly—often within a few days to a month.

This swift turnaround is largely driven by informal hiring practices, particularly referrals from existing staff. Employers view this approach as efficient, reliable, and well-suited for the temporary nature of most openings. Additionally, the low entry barriers for many roles, combined with an abundant supply of job seekers, ensures a responsive and fluid labour market. While churn is high and many workers are rotated out once demand stabilizes, employers rarely report challenges in finding replacements, pointing to an oversupply of labour in certain occupations within the subsector.

- 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.

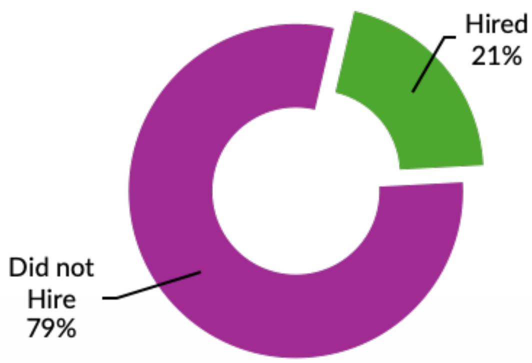

Fig 2: Whether firms hired in the last 3 months

- 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%).

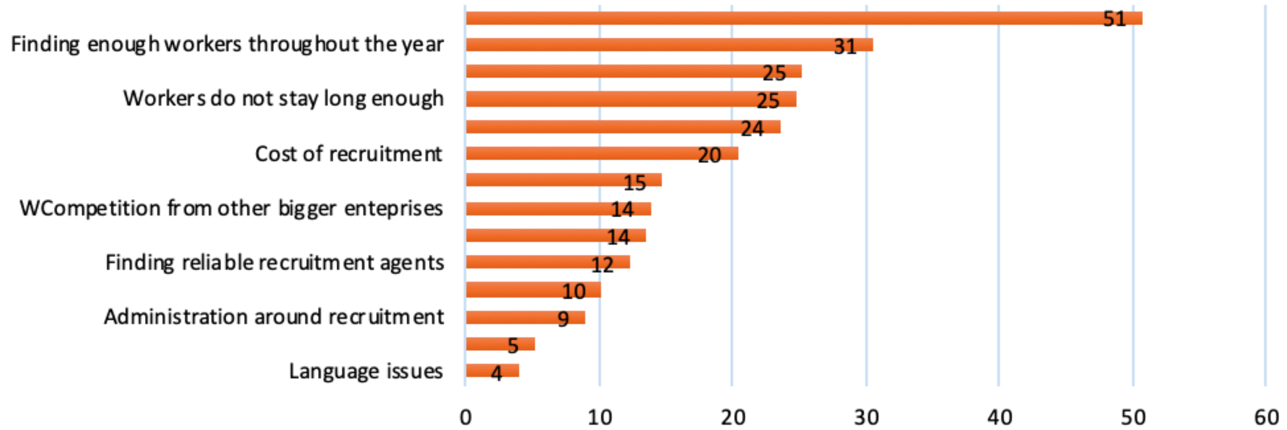

Fig 3: Challenges faced by firms in recruitment

Many firms would like to hire more if they had a chance to. However various obstacles exist as shown in figure 4 below.

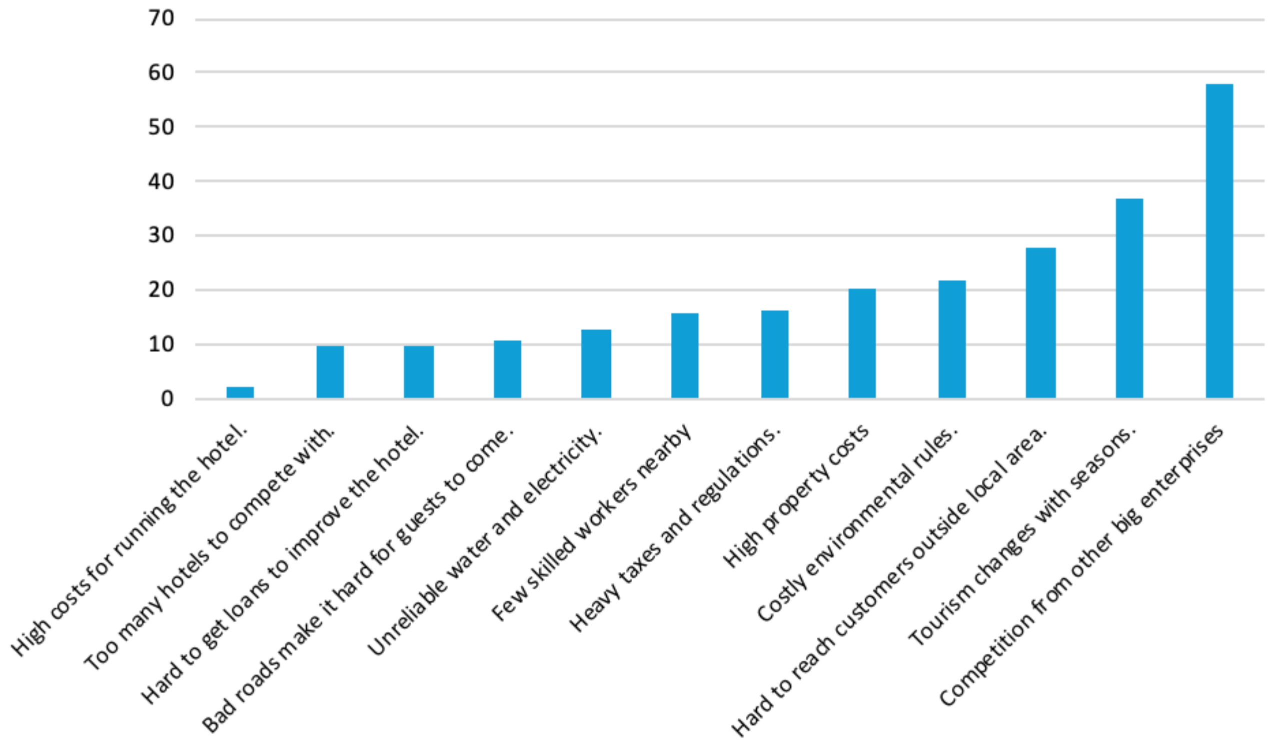

Fig 4: Obstacles to growth of firms in their quest to hire more

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

Employee turnover in the subsector is influenced by both employee-driven and employer-driven factors. Workers often leave in search of better job opportunities (13%), improved compensation (11%), or a healthier work-life balance (9%). These motivations reflect a desire for upward mobility and better working conditions. On the employer side, the most cited reason for staff separation is enterprise restructuring or downsizing (60%), typically due to financial constraints or shifts in business operations. Other reasons include underperformance (27%), lack of necessary skills to keep up with changing job roles (16%), cultural misfit (15%), and difficulty integrating with the team (16%).

These dynamics underscore the delicate balance between employee expectations and enterprise realities. The high incidence of transitions suggests that the sector experiences frequent staff movement, which can disrupt service delivery and increase the cost of recruitment and training. Enterprises, particularly those operating in a competitive or seasonal market, may find it challenging to retain staff without improving compensation, working conditions, or providing clearer pathways for career progression.

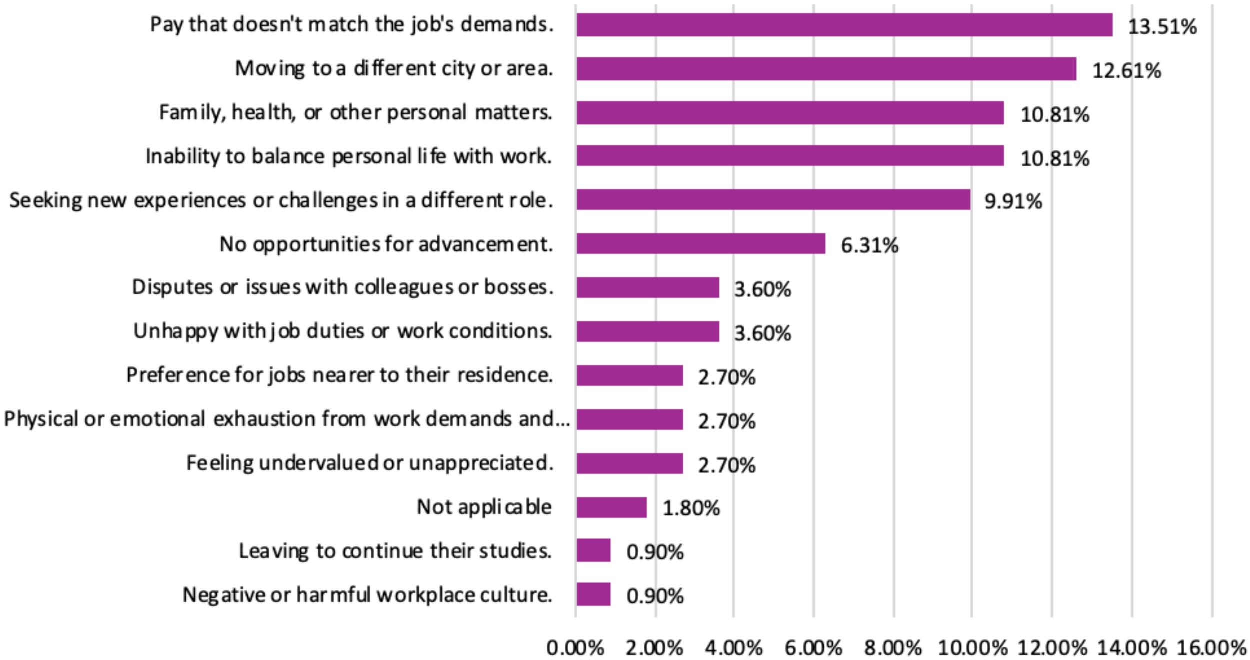

Fig 5: Reasons why employees leave the enterprises

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, a 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.

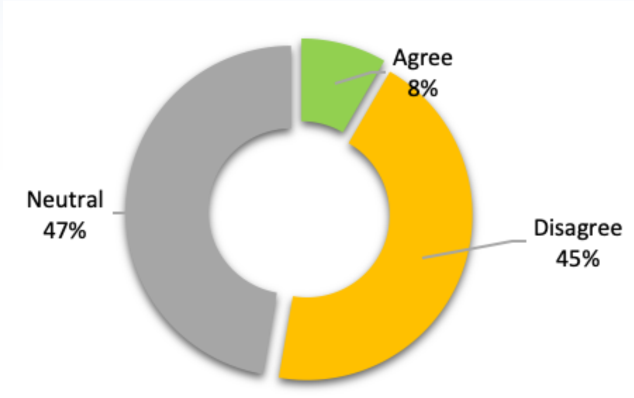

Fig 6: Is the current workforce working in the areas they are trained in?

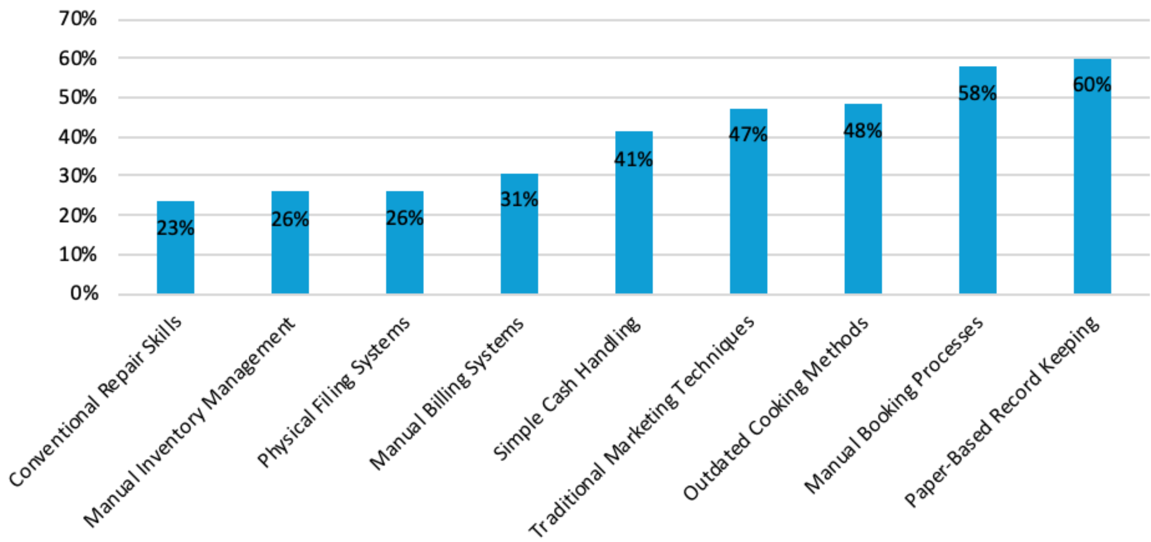

Fig 7: Skills that will become redundant in the near future

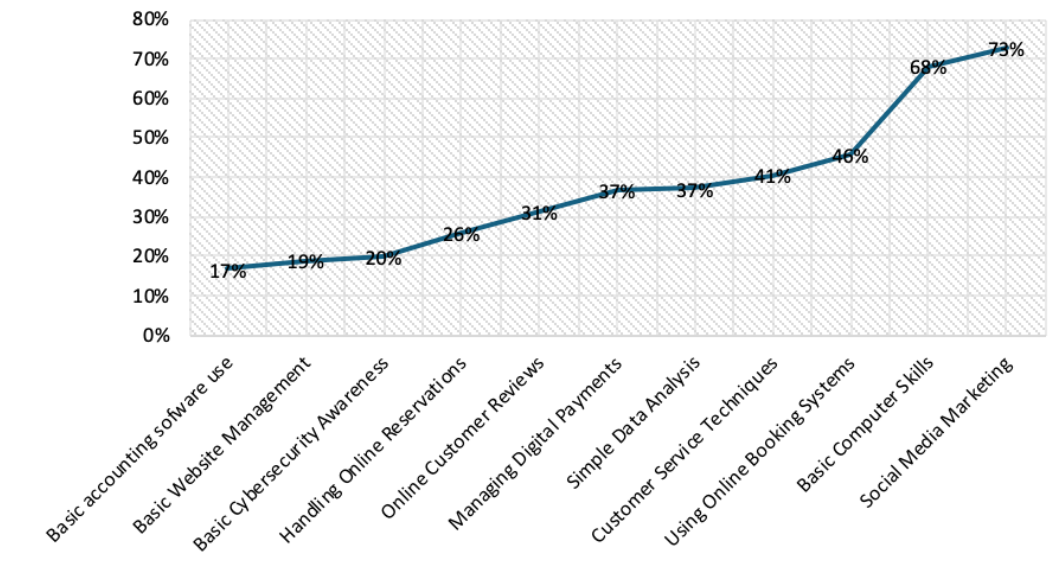

Fig 8: Skills gaining importance within the industry

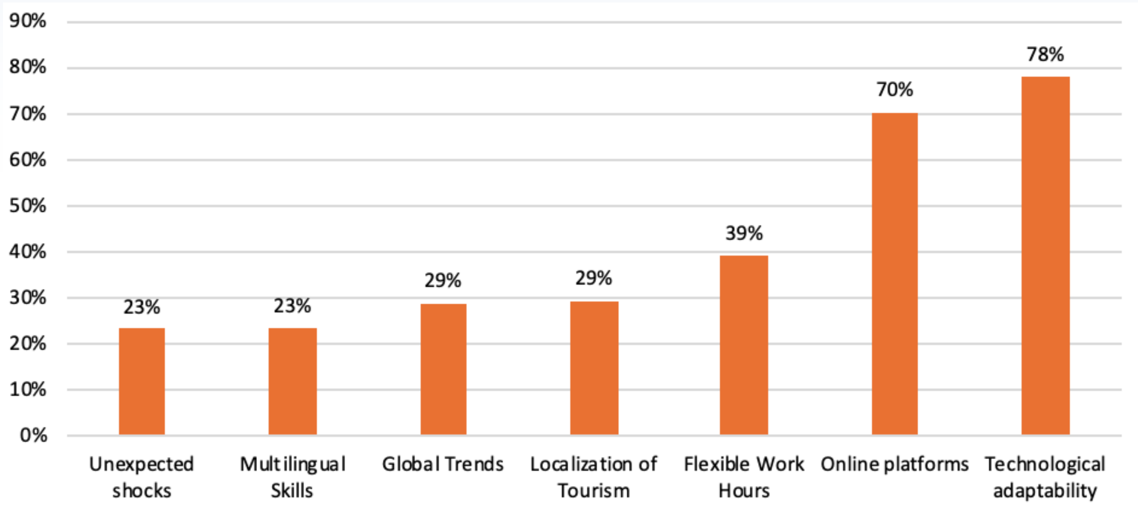

Fig 9: Trends that will influence employment in the industry (Source: Authors' computation from the longitudinal survey)

Finding 6: Skills composition, training and bridging skill gaps

The hospitality and tourism sector presents a mixed picture regarding workforce skills and employer satisfaction. While 50% of employers believe their workers have the necessary job skills, 40% express dissatisfaction with their workforce's skill composition. Notably, despite these gaps, 52% of employers lack structured upskilling programs. Where training does exist, it primarily consists of informal on-the-job learning (69%), often through peer-to-peer knowledge sharing within the enterprise.

Most roles in the sector require only TVET-level qualifications, mirroring the current workforce composition: 43% are TVET graduates, while fewer than 20% hold degree qualifications. The F&B subsector, in particular, relies on a blend of formally and informally trained workers, with some employees entering the industry without any prior training. Employers note that workers with experience in kitchen operations, housekeeping, or customer service adapt more quickly and require less supervision.

To address skill gaps, many establishments provide in-house training focused on hygiene, food presentation, and interpersonal skills—though these efforts are often unstructured and inconsistent in quality. A few progressive businesses collaborate with training institutions to develop tailored modules, offering a scalable model for industry-driven skill development. There is also growing demand for short modular courses and certifications that allow employees to upskill while remaining employed. Employers emphasize the need for competency-based training aligned with occupational standards to ensure graduates are job-ready.

Gender disparities persist in hiring, with 54% of employers preferring female candidates—particularly for front-office roles like receptionists, clerks, and accounting positions—while men are often favored for housekeeping, technical roles (e.g., Wi-Fi maintenance), and cooking positions.

Educational requirements for vacancies further highlight the sector's dynamics: 38% of open positions demand TVET qualifications, while only one in four requires secondary education, and fewer than 10% necessitate a degree. These trends underscore the need for more responsive training approaches and equitable hiring practices to meet the industry's evolving demands.

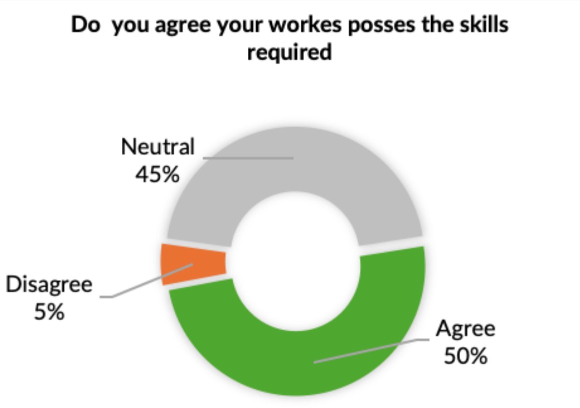

Figure 10: Skills possession by the workforce

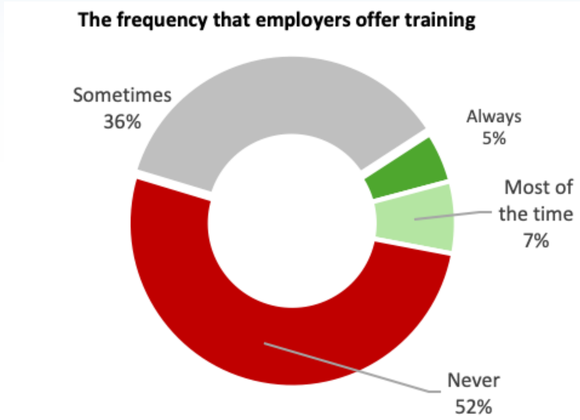

Fig 11: Non-Technical Skills Lacking in the Workforce

Fig 12: How employers bridge the existing skill gaps

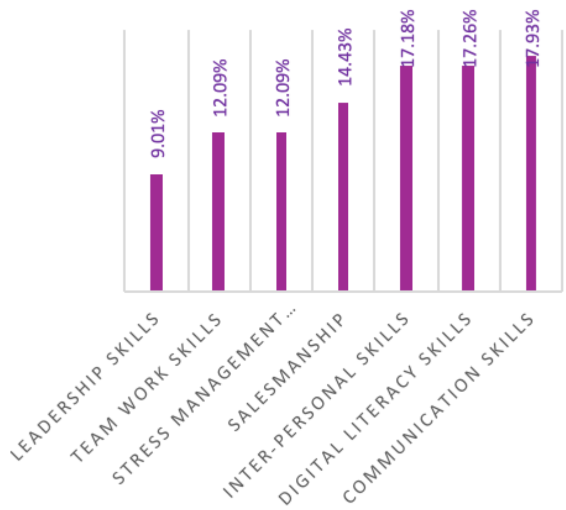

Fig 13: Soft skills lacking for the workforce

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

Many training institutions fail to adequately prepare youth for the hospitality and tourism sectors due to a persistent disconnect between curriculum content and industry needs. Outdated syllabi and limited hands-on experience leave graduates ill-equipped for employment, undermining employer confidence in formal education. While some institutions have improved through internships and partnerships with local hotels, such initiatives remain sporadic. Additionally, the lack of career guidance and mentorship leaves many youth uncertain about their career paths in the sector.

Industry players emphasize the need for reform, with 22% recommending more practical training—aligned with Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET) expectations—as the most critical intervention. Other key focus areas include teaching digital skills (16%) and updating curricula to match industry demands (15%). However, government-led youth empowerment programs receive low marks for effectiveness, with only 16% of employers believing they adequately address sector needs. While 32% consider these initiatives effective, 23% find them somewhat effective, and 29% rate them as not very effective highlighting a lack of coordination between policymakers and industry stakeholders.

To drive meaningful change, youth-focused programs must integrate employer networks, prioritize practical skills, and provide sustained support during early employment. Without these adjustments, certificates will continue to fail as a bridge to meaningful opportunities in hospitality and tourism.

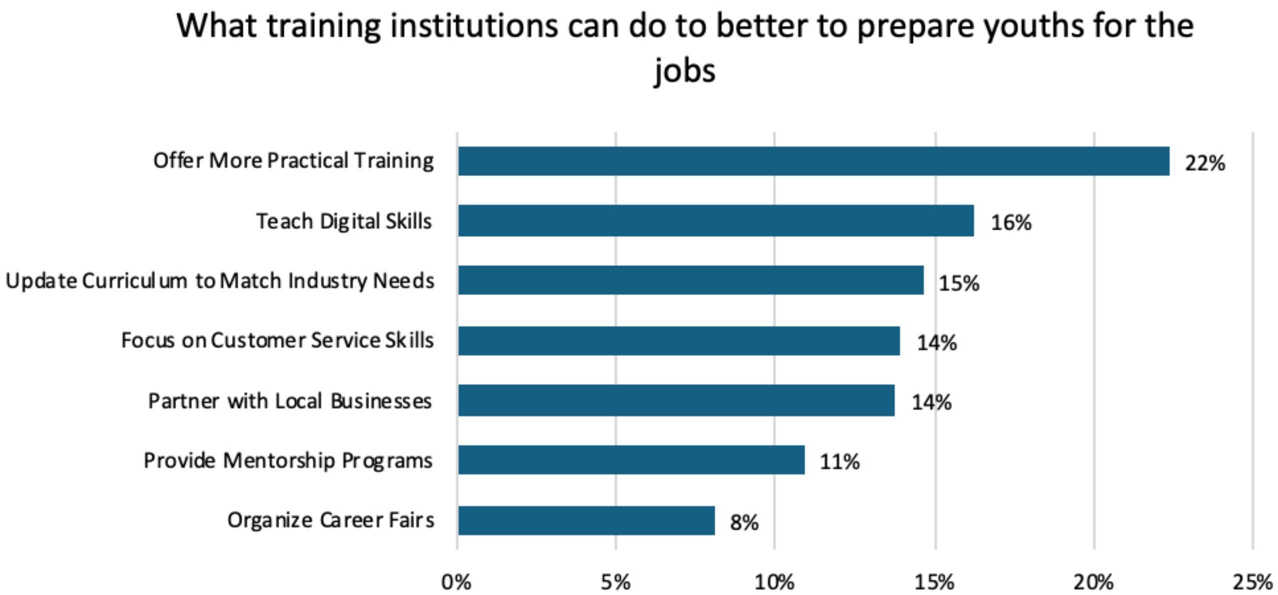

Fig 14: What training institutions can do to better to prepare youths for the jobs in the industry

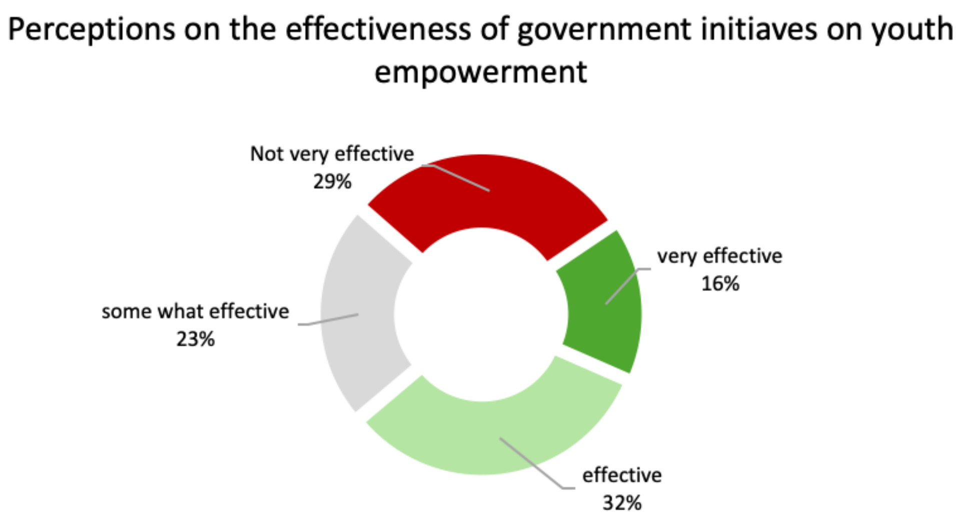

Fig 14: What training institutions can do to better to prepare youths for the jobs in the industry

Finding 8: Employee Renumeration, Benefits and Hiring Preferences

The hospitality and tourism sector in Kenya is characterized by low wages and limited benefits, with 70% of employees earning a maximum of KES 20,000 per month. Only 1% of the workforce falls into the highest income bracket (KES 41,000–50,000), while workers in large and medium-sized establishments generally earn more than those in smaller enterprises. Most employees lack essential benefits—only 20% receive the minimum wage, 20% get sick leave, 10% maternity leave, and a mere 8% are paid for overtime. Additionally, 56% of workers rarely or never receive a written employment contract before starting work, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation.

Remuneration in the food and beverage (F&B) subsector is particularly low, especially for entry-level and casual workers, often falling below national averages. Employers cite financial constraints and seasonal fluctuations as reasons for minimal compensation, with few providing health insurance, pension benefits, or structured perks like meals or transport stipends—benefits that are mostly limited to larger hotels.

Hiring practices further compound these challenges, as employers prioritize candidates with prior experience, particularly in customer-facing roles. Formal qualifications alone are insufficient; practical exposure, demonstrated work ethic, and completion of apprenticeships or internships weigh heavily in recruitment decisions. Proximity to the workplace also influences hiring, as businesses prefer local workers to reduce absenteeism and lateness.

Given these conditions, there is a pressing need for sector-wide wage standards and a stronger culture of decent work to ensure fairness, dignity, and employee well-being across the industry. Without systemic reforms, low wages, insecure employment terms, and inadequate benefits will continue to undermine worker stability and sector growth.

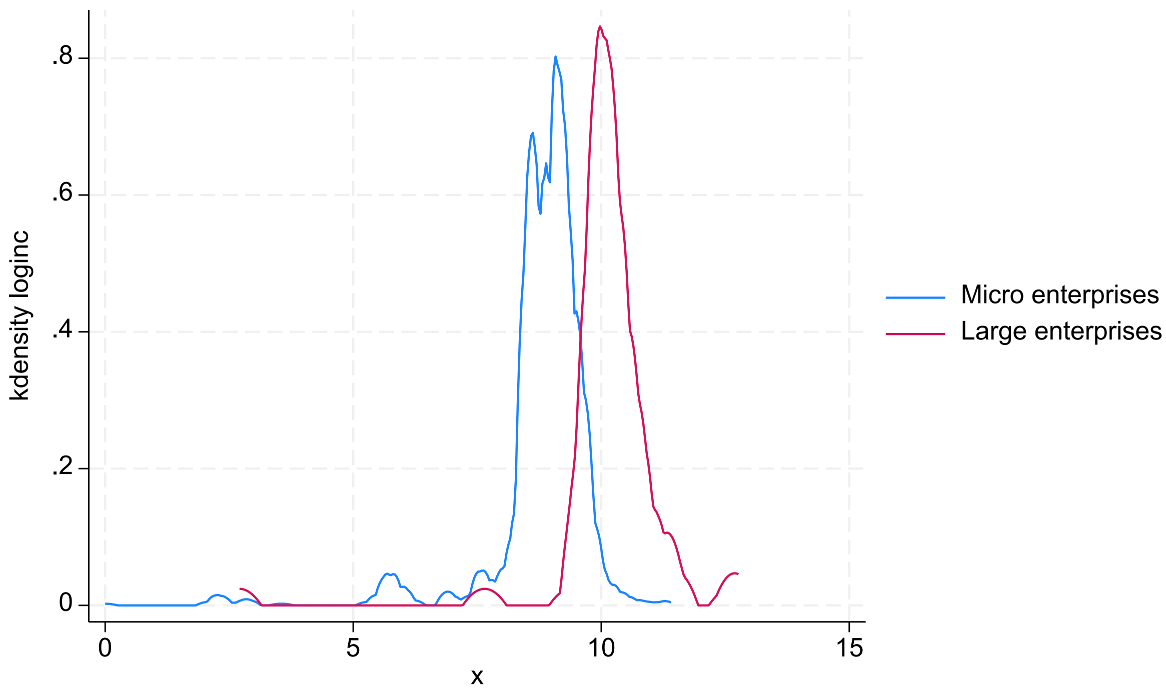

Figure 16: Earnings gap for employees by size of enterprise

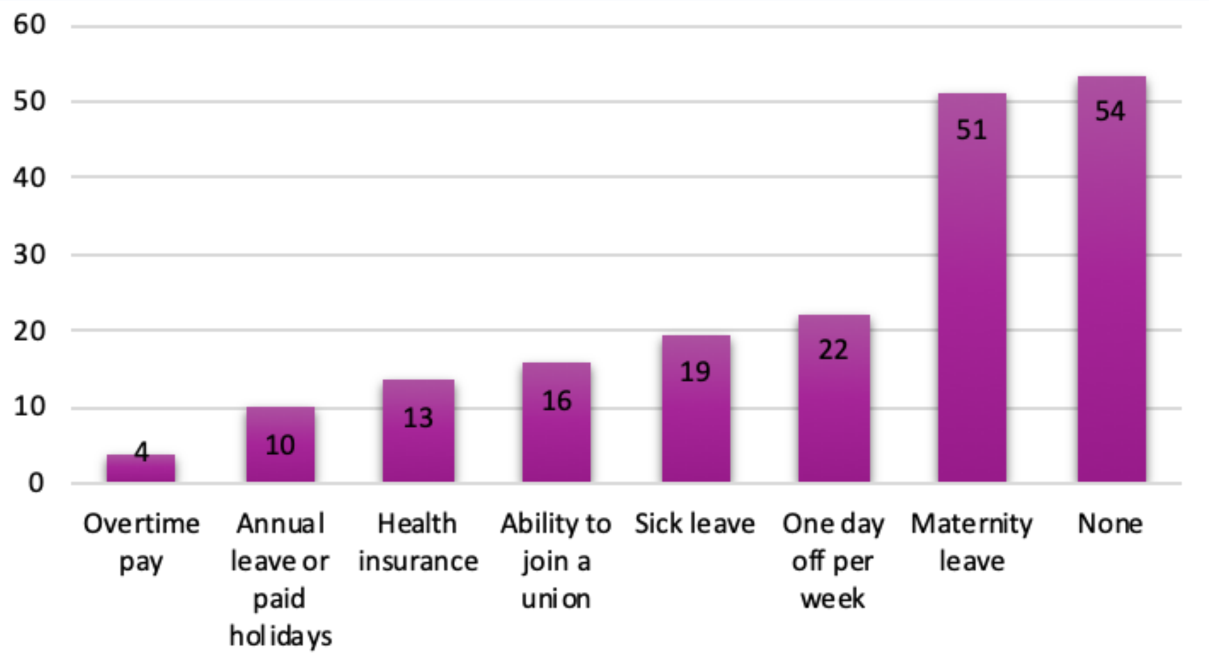

Figure 17: Non-salary benefits to employees (Source: Authors' calculation from employers' survey)


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Conclusion and Suggested Recommendations

To address the persistent mismatch between youth skills and labor market demands in the food and beverage sector, a multi-pronged approach is necessary. Strengthening alignment between human resource practices and industry expectations is a key priority. Facilitated dialogue between human resource managers and employers can help harmonize recruitment practices, staff management approaches, and workplace culture. Concurrently, business owners—particularly in small and medium enterprises—require targeted training to enhance their human resource capacities, especially in effective hiring and performance management.

Improving collaboration between training institutions and employers is also critical. Building formal partnerships between TVET providers and local enterprises can encourage more targeted recruitment and enhance employer confidence in TVET graduates. Establishing sector-specific training committees will ensure that training curricula are regularly updated to reflect real-time industry needs, local trends in Mombasa, and workplace expectations. This approach will support a shift toward demand-driven training models that are more responsive to employer needs.

Enhancing workplace readiness through structured mentorship and exposure to industry realities is another critical area of intervention. Mentorship should be integrated into early career guidance, enabling young people to make informed decisions. Job shadowing programs, co-developed by trainers and employers, can introduce youth to real work environments and roles. Importantly, efforts must also be made to prepare employers for the dynamics of working with younger employees. Post-placement mentorship, including buddy systems and short-term shadowing for up to two months, can ease the transition for both employers and new hires. Technology and data must be leveraged to improve job matching processes. A central databank of youth seeking employment would enable better skills matching by employers. At the same time, there is a need to clarify the specific skills required within the food and beverage sector, supported by sector-specific digital skills training to enhance relevance and employability.

To enhance recruitment and job placement, an outsourced model that identifies and matches youth with available vacancies can be developed, ensuring employers receive pre-screened candidates that meet their requirements. Sustainability of such services will depend on viable revenue models for placement agencies, making them accessible to both youth and businesses. Building a stakeholder-driven referral network—leveraging existing human connections—can also improve placement outcomes. Moreover, a mobile or web-based application can be developed to connect youth to opportunities in micro and small enterprises, integrating multi-channel approaches and working with aggregators like the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA).

Integrating industry into training models is essential to close the gap between education and employment. A structured rotational model where students alternate between classroom learning and industry placement every three months would offer practical experience. Additionally, training should equip youth with multiple, complementary skills—such as combining hospitality with digital marketing—to increase their flexibility in the labor market. Youth should be given the agency to choose between employment and entrepreneurship, with support systems in place to unlock their potential as job creators. Finally, employers must play a more active role in workforce preparation. Dedicated time and effort should be invested in properly onboarding and mentoring new recruits and trainees. Establishing Training-Industry Collaboration (TIC) committees can further support this effort by setting clear, high-performance standards that guide training providers in aligning their programs with industry demands.

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