

WHAT ARE KENYAN YOUTH ASKING FOR?

Kenya stands at a critical demographic juncture, with 75% of its population aged under 35. This burgeoning youth population represents an immense opportunity for growth, innovation, and national transformation. From Jua Kali artisans to climate activists, from refugee youth in Dadaab to graduates in Nairobi, Kenyan youth are ready to drive progress. But government action is essential to remove barriers

This declaration outlines key demands to the Government of Kenya to harness the full potential of its youth, ensuring their active role in shaping a prosperous, equitable, and sustainable future.

UNLOCK KENYA'S INVISIBLE TALENT AND CERTIFY YOUTH'S SKILLS

Thousands of young people in Kenya have real skills – welding, tailoring, beauty, caregiving, ICT – but no papers to show for it. They've learned through doing: from family, from the mtaa, from hustling. But because they don't have formal certificates, they're locked out of jobs, tenders, and training programs. Even when you're good at your work, if you don't have a certificate, no one takes you seriously. Your talent becomes invisible.

The Industrial Amendment Bill, which will formalise and recognise the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) into law, is now out in the Kenya Gazette. Once passed, it will allow youth to get certified for skills they already have - no need to repeat school, just prove what you know. This can be a game changer for many young people, especially young women working in tailoring, cooking, caregiving, and salons – work that's often ignored but keeps the economy running.

THE ASKS

- Roll out the new RPL policy fully, so youth across the country can get certified and earn more.
- Make sure exam and certification fees are covered – through NGCDF or other government funds – so that cost doesn't lock youth out again.



TRAIN YOUTH FOR TODAY'S ECONOMY, NOT YESTERDAY'S JOBS

Too many youth are finishing school with papers but no marketable skills. TVETs are still teaching things that worked 10 or 20 years ago – yet today, companies want people who know digital marketing, coding, cybersecurity, data analysis, even AI. Meanwhile, digital skilling programs help - but not enough youth can access them, and they don't always go deep enough to prepare us for serious, well-paying jobs.

Youth want to work. We're ready to learn. But the system must teach us what the job market actually needs. We need hands-on skills in well-equipped TVETs, apprenticeships, and real partnerships with employers - not just theory in class.

THE ASKS

- **Make sure TVETs are aligned with real jobs - especially in areas like agriculture, MSMEs, housing, healthcare, and the digital economy.**
- **Expand and deepen digital skilling programs, so more youth can get into global online work and earn real income.**
- **Bring digital training closer to us – anchor it in places we already use and trust, like youth hubs and CBO centres, not just big institutions.**



CUT THE RED TAPE AND SIMPLIFY REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS FOR YOUTH-LED MSMES

Most young people aren't sitting around waiting for jobs – we're already working. We're running salons, selling mitumba, building apps, fixing bikes, farming, cooking. But too many of us are stuck in the informal economy – no registration, no protections, no access to finance, no way to grow. The truth is, the system makes it hard to be formal. Licenses are expensive. Taxes are confusing. Getting registered is a maze. Youth entrepreneurs are being punished just for trying to earn a living. Without proper support, youth businesses stay small. They can't hire others. They can't get loans. They can't grow.



THE ASKS

- **Create a simple tax system for small businesses – one we can actually understand and afford.**
- **Reward businesses that hire youth and vulnerable groups.**
- **Set up one-stop youth-friendly business hubs – places where we can get registered, trained, and linked to markets without running all over town.**
- **Clear government pending bills so that small businesses can get back on their feet.**

FINANCE THE FUTURE AND EXPAND ACCESS TO CAPITAL FOR YOUTH

Young people go through TVET, learn real skills – plumbing, welding, catering, coding – but when it's time to start something or look for a job, there's no capital to get from skills to income. At the same time, youth already running small businesses can't get loans – especially if they're not registered or don't have collateral. The money is there, but not for us. The result is that skilled youth end up back in informal work, doing what we can to survive – even though we're trained, ready, and full of ideas. It's worse for young women and marginalized youth, who face even more barriers just to access basic finance.

Without cash, credentials, or connections, our dreams stall. Help us take the next step.

THE ASKS

- Support TVET graduates with startup grants or loans – so we can turn our training into a real biashara.
- Expand access to financial support for youth who want to grow their skills into formal businesses.
- Use NGCDF funds to help youth pay for certification (especially through RPL)



MAKE YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH A RIGHT, NOT A PRIVILEGE

Kenya's youth are facing a silent but escalating mental health crisis. Our survey of youth shows that over 75% of young people report being stressed or anxious, yet mental health remains under-prioritized in the education system, public health policy, and funding allocation. Without targeted government action, the gap between youth mental health needs and available support will continue to widen. We are seeing progress in some areas, like the introduction of Nairobi County's Mental Health Strategic Action Plan for 2025-2030. With the right training, youth are able to become mental health ambassadors and start the conversation on mental health in their communities. Investing in community-driven mental health promotion is critical.



THE ASKS

- Mandate mental health education and psycho-social support services in all schools, TVETs, and youth centers
- Fund and scale grassroots community youth mental health programs and pair these with mobile mental health outreach in partnership with CBOs and CHVs
- Include outpatient counseling, therapy, and rehabilitation services in Social Health Insurance (SHA) coverage for youth

MAKE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT TRANSPARENT, FAIR, AND YOUTH-ACCESSIBLE

The government spends billions every year on goods and services. There's a law that says 30% of public tenders should go to youth, women, and persons with disabilities. But on the ground, youth struggle to access these opportunities, and payments take forever. For youth running start-ups or small businesses, even one government contract can be life-changing. It can help grow the business, create jobs, and open new doors.

THE ASKS

- **Enforce the 30% procurement rule for youth, women, and PWDs - let youth compete.**
- **Set up a clear way for youth-owned businesses to report late payments and shady procurement practices – and actually get action.**



GUARANTEE EVERY YOUNG KENYAN ACCESS TO A NATIONAL ID

Without a national ID, young people can't access most basic opportunities - jobs, education financing, government services, mobile money, bank accounts, tenders, or even voter registration. While the government has removed fees for first-time IDs, many youth still face barriers when renewing a lost or expired ID, or getting one in the first place - especially in informal settlements, rural areas, and among vulnerable groups like displaced youth or young women. Long delays, travel costs, missing documents, and limited registration points make things worse.

An ID is not a luxury – it's a basic requirement for youth to participate in economic and civic life. Without one, they are blocked from moving forward, no matter their skills or ambition.



THE ASKS

- **Waive or reduce renewal fees for youth in marginalized areas, building on the removal of first-time ID fees**
- **Partner with counties, chiefs, and local youth organizations to roll out proactive “ID Drives” in informal settlements, rural areas, and high-unemployment regions with mobile ID registration units, public awareness campaigns, and extended working hours.**
- **Digitize and simplify the first-time ID application processes to allow youth to obtain an ID online**

DELIVER ON THE PROMISE OF UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE FOR YOUTH

The new Social Health Authority (SHA) was meant to give every Kenyan access to affordable, quality healthcare. But right now, many young people are being left out - especially those not in formal jobs. To register for SHA, youth are being told to pay a full year of premiums upfront, or at least four months through the Lipa Pole Pole option. For youth in informal or gig work, this kind of lump-sum payment just isn't possible. And there was a promise of fee waivers for the most vulnerable, but youth aren't seeing this on the ground.

Without health coverage, youth delay treatment, borrow to pay medical bills, or go without care entirely. This is especially hard on young women, youth with disabilities, and those in poor rural or urban areas.

THE ASKS

- **Immediately remove the requirement for one-year advance payments for youth not in formal employment**
- **Roll out the promised fee waivers for vulnerable youth – and make the process simple, clear, and transparent.**
- **Include youth voices in SHA decision-making and monitoring**



INSTITUTIONALIZE YOUTH COUNCILS WITH REAL POWER AND RESOURCES

Youth make up the majority in Kenya, but when it comes to decisions about budgets, policies, and development plans, we're rarely at the table. And when we are, it's often for show – one-time forums, token consultations, or PR photos. Most counties and national agencies don't have real, structured ways to include youth in planning, budgeting, or monitoring.

In the National Independent Survey conducted by Infotrak and supported by SHOFCO, 96% of youth said it's hard to influence county decisions. However, promising models like Homa Bay County's youth-inclusive policy process show that co-creation leads to more responsive, equitable, and impactful governance. These should not remain isolated examples but be scaled nationwide.



THE ASKS

- Institutionalize permanent Youth Councils at national and county levels
- Embed youth councils formally within County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs) with clear mandates and resources to engage consistently, not just during elections or consultations.
- Replicate co-creation models with technical support, funding, and capacity-building for counties to adopt co-designed youth policies and implementation frameworks.

BRING DIGITAL ACCESS TO EVERY CORNER OF KENYA

Kenya's digital economy is growing fast and over 50% of future jobs will require digital skills by 2030. However, while national digital infrastructure is expanding, it is highly unequal. Most of the investment in infrastructure goes to big towns and cities. Meanwhile, young people in remote areas struggle with poor connectivity, no working hubs, no computers, and sometimes no electricity.

Without digital access, youth are cut off from opportunity, from online work, and from digital jobs with no access to online business tools. Many encounter computers for the first time in a training program - only to find the internet is down, the router is broken, or the hub is locked. This pushes youth back to survival hustles, especially in places where travel costs are high. But when digital tools are paired with savings groups, finance, and local support (like SACCOs and CBOs), youth grow businesses, build confidence, and contribute to their local economies.

THE ASKS

- Use inclusion-based criteria (e.g. youth unemployment, dropout rates, remoteness) and not just population size to guide infrastructure investments in fibre connectivity and digital hubs.
- Partner with local CBOs to equip at least one digital hub per ward in underserved counties with solar-powered internet, routers, laptops, and space for co-working and learning



These policy recommendations reflect the lived experiences and aspirations of Kenyan youth. From RPL to resilience funds, these ideas aren't new — they're overdue. Let this be the moment we move from plans to action.

Youth Voice. Youth Power. Youth Policy.

