

YOUTH AI SURVEY 2026

WORK, STUDY & LEISURE IN THE
AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

KENYA

COUNTRY POLICY BRIEF

This policy brief presents country-specific findings from the Youth AI Survey 2026, a multi-country study examining how young people aged 18-35 use, experience, and think about artificial intelligence. Conducted globally by Restless Development, the University of Cambridge Centre for Human-Inspired Artificial Intelligence, and Makerere University, the survey collected 1,864 responses from young people, primarily in Africa and South Asia, with the United Kingdom serving as a high-income country comparator.

This brief is intended for national governments, in-country NGO partners, international funders, technology companies, and youth organisations working in Uganda. It draws on country-level data to surface actionable findings and recommendations within the Uganda context.

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1. INTRODUCTION & COUNTRY CONTEXT

Country Context

Kenya enters the AI era with a distinctive combination of high policy ambition and uneven digital access. Young people (aged 18–34) make up roughly a quarter of Kenya's population, and unemployment among them remains a pressing concern: the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics' Economic Survey 2025 recorded unemployment of 16.8% among 20–24 year-olds and 11.1% among 15–19 year-olds, with over 80% of new labour market entrants absorbed into the informal sector. Nationally, internet penetration stood at around 40.5% of the population in late 2025 (DataReportal/ITU), even as mobile connections exceed the population (134%), a gap between connectivity and genuine internet access that shapes who can participate in Kenya's AI economy.

Kenya has moved quickly to position itself as a regional AI leader. In March 2025, the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Digital Economy launched the National Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2025–2030, built on three pillars: AI digital infrastructure, data ecosystems, and AI research and innovation, and anchored in the Digital Economy Blueprint, the National Digital Master Plan (2022–2032), Vision 2030, and the Data Protection Act (2019). Nairobi's established tech sector ("Silicon Savannah") and the government's Ajira Digital programme, which had trained close to 391,000 young people in digital skills by mid-2024, give Kenya more infrastructure for AI-related youth programming than most survey countries.

It is against this backdrop, high strategic ambition, a young and increasingly digitally-skilled population, but persistent gaps in connectivity, affordability, and formal employment, that this research matters for Kenya. Restless Development, University of Cambridge CHAI, and Makerere University surveyed 131 young people in Kenya between 4–22 March 2026, aged 18–35, capturing how a digitally connected and highly AI-engaged cohort of Kenyan youth is already using, benefiting from, and worrying about artificial intelligence.

“I believe AI has great potential to improve efficiency and decision-making, especially in data-related work and community programs. However, there is a clear gap in how well AI supports local languages and cultural context.”

– 27-YEAR-OLD FEMALE, FULL-TIME EMPLOYEE, PERI-URBAN KENYA

2. ABOUT THE RESPONDENTS

The Kenya sample (n=131) is evenly split by gender and skews young, urban, and highly educated relative to the national population, consistent with the survey's reliance on digitally-connected outreach channels. Half of respondents live in urban areas, with a further quarter in peri-urban areas; 22% live in rural areas and 2% in a refugee camp setting, a small but distinctive sub-group not present in most other countries' samples.

131 Total respondents	50% Female	50% Urban dwellers
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50% Aged 24–29 (largest group)	53% Bachelor's degree or above	82% Currently studying or employed
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Respondents are considerably more educated than the national average: 53% hold a bachelor's degree or above, and a further 27% hold a diploma. Fewer than 2% of respondents identify as having a disability, well below the 6.4% reported across the full 11-country dataset, a limitation worth noting when generalising these findings to Kenya's youth population as a whole. Employment status is mixed and often overlapping: 27% are full-time employees, 15% are students, 13% are self-employed, and 9% are seeking work, with many respondents combining categories (e.g. student and volunteer, or self-employed and seeking further work).

3. HOW YOUNG PEOPLE IN KENYA USE AI

85%
of Kenyan respondents
use AI daily

**11-COUNTRY
BENCHMARK**
11-country survey
average: 64% use AI
daily

Kenyan respondents are exceptionally engaged AI users: 85% report using AI daily, 21 percentage points above the 11-country average of 64%, with a further 13% using it weekly. Only 1.5% report monthly-or-less use, and none report never using AI, reflecting the highly educated, urban-leaning profile of this sample rather than the national population as a whole.

Learning new skills is the dominant use case (86%, above the survey average of 60%), followed closely by creative and coding tasks (69%) and academic support (66%). Notably, 27.5% of Kenyan respondents report earning income directly through AI, nearly double the 11-country average of 14%, and among the highest income-generation rates in the survey. Even so, a substantial gap remains between broad AI engagement (86% use it to learn) and direct monetisation (28% earn from it), underscoring that skills uptake is translating into income for only a minority.

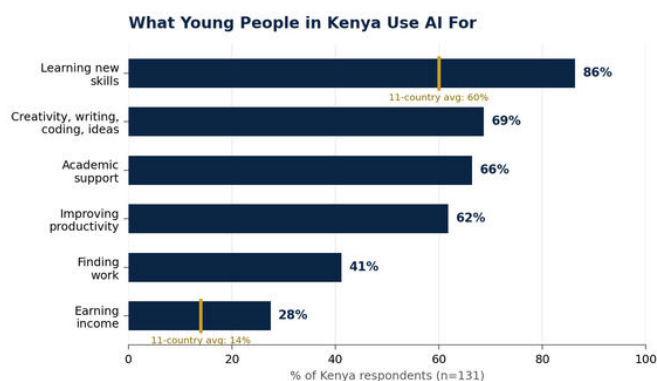


Figure 1. What young people in Kenya use AI for, with 11-country benchmarks shown in gold where available.

Key Findings: AI Use Patterns

- Daily use is exceptional: 85% of Kenyan respondents use AI daily, 21 percentage points above the 11-country average of 64%, among the highest daily-use rates recorded in the survey.
- Income generation leads the benchmark: 27.5% of respondents report earning income through AI, nearly double the 11-country average of 14%, though this remains far below the 86% who use AI to learn. The survey does not distinguish whether this income is primary or supplementary, or whether it is earned through formal or informal work. These findings should therefore be interpreted as evidence of AI-enabled income generation rather than stable employment.
- No rural lag in Kenya: unlike the general 11-country pattern, rural respondents in Kenya report slightly higher AI use for learning (93% vs 86% urban) and income generation (35% vs 28% urban), a distinctive reversal worth investigating further, and potentially explained by rural respondents' concentration in agriculture and education-focused AI use.
- Gender gap concentrates in productivity and income: the largest gender gaps are in earning income via AI (34% of males vs 22% of females, a 12pp gap) and academic support (74% vs 60%, a 14pp gap), consistent with the survey-wide pattern of females using AI somewhat less to advance learning and earning opportunities.

“Majorly, I use AI to prepare my lesson plans, summarize notes throughout the term, set CAT questions and to recommend best teaching methods based on my learners' behaviour pattern... It has really made my work easier as a teacher.”

— 22-YEAR-OLD MALE, FULL-TIME EMPLOYEE (TEACHER), URBAN KENYA

4. WHO BENEFITS, WHO DOESN'T?

Barriers to AI Access

71% cite high data costs as a barrier	34% cite weak connectivity	27% cite fear of scams
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Barriers to AI Access

High data costs dominate as the primary barrier to AI access in Kenya (71%), well above weak connectivity (34%) and low digital skills (20%). This is consistent with the 11-country report's finding that data costs are a barrier for more than half of respondents in nearly every African country surveyed; Kenya fits this broader regional pattern rather than diverging from it. Fear of scams (27%) also features prominently, more so than low digital skills, suggesting that trust and safety concerns are, for many young Kenyans, as significant a barrier as affordability or connectivity.

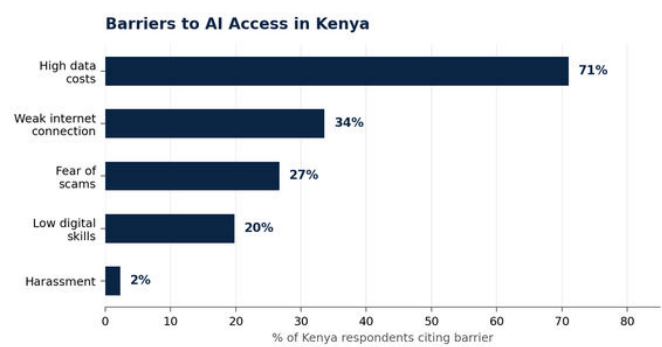


Figure 2. Barriers to AI access reported by Kenyan respondents.

Gender Gaps in AI Knowledge & Economic Impact

23 pp Kenya average: 62% of males vs 38% of females report 'a lot' of AI knowledge (a 23pp gap)	11-COUNTRY BENCHMARK Survey average: 38% of males vs 23% of females report 'a lot' of AI knowledge (a 15pp gap)
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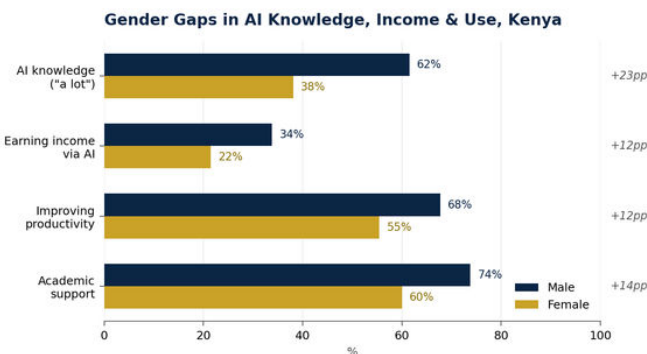


Figure 3. Gender gaps in AI knowledge, income generation, productivity, and academic support, Kenya.

Kenya shows a wider-than-average gender gap in self-reported AI knowledge and confidence: 62% of males report 'a lot' of AI knowledge compared with 38% of females, a 23-percentage-point gap, above the 15-point gap recorded across the full 11-country dataset. This mirrors the report's broader finding that confidence gaps, not just access gaps, shape how young males and females describe their own AI expertise. On AI's reported impact on income and employment opportunities, Kenya's data shows males are somewhat more likely than females to report a 'high' impact (65% of males vs 44% of females).

On language, 65% of respondents across the full dataset use English to access AI. Kenya's own data shows a similar pattern but with a notable local-language undercurrent: 33% of Kenyan respondents currently use Swahili with AI tools, while 44% say they would like more Swahili-language support, an 11-point gap between current use and desired provision. This aligns with the main report's finding that Swahili was among the languages most frequently requested for greater AI linguistic diversity. This suggests that improving AI accessibility is not only a question of connectivity and affordability, but also of linguistic inclusion.



"English is definitely not my mother tongue, and it's more expensive to prompt in a local language."

— 29-YEAR-OLD FEMALE, SELF-EMPLOYED, URBAN KENYA

5. YOUNG PEOPLE'S AI CONCERNS

Across the full 11-country dataset, daily AI users are the most concerned about AI risks. This pattern holds strongly in Kenya, and more sharply than the survey average. Daily users show higher concern than non-daily users across all five domains, with the largest gap in data ownership: 84% of daily users express high concern, versus 58% of non-daily users, a 26-point gap, wider than the 11-country average gap of 20 points.

Concern is highest for data ownership (80% express 'a lot' of concern), followed by the power of AI companies (74%), working conditions for AI data workers (59%), environmental impact (54%), and mental health and wellbeing (47%, the lowest of the five domains). Gender patterns in Kenya do not fit neatly into either of the two patterns identified in the main report (female-dominant concern, as in the UK, India and Zimbabwe; or male-dominant concern, as in Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Tanzania). Instead, Kenya shows a mixed pattern: females report higher concern on four of five domains (most notably mental health, +16pp, and environmental impact, +11pp), while males report higher concern specifically about data ownership (86% vs 76%). Daily users were more concerned compared to occasional users.

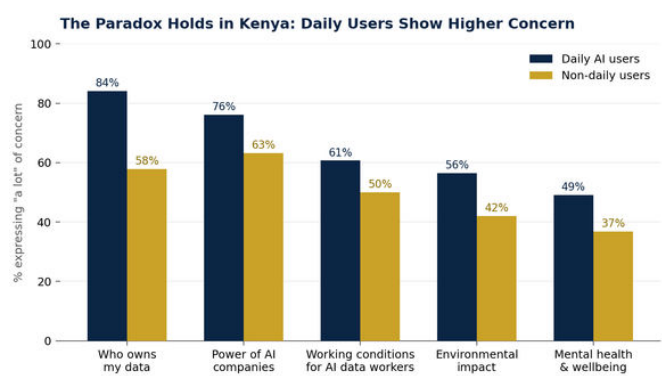


Figure 4. Concern levels by domain, daily vs non-daily AI users, Kenya.

Misinformation & Safety

73% concerned about AI misinformation	47% say safety concerns limit their AI use	67% want stronger laws on AI
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Concern about AI-generated misinformation in Kenya (73%) is well above the 11-country average of 64%, and higher even than the concern expressed by females in the UK (69%), the highest country/gender group identified in the main report. This positions Kenya among the countries most anxious about misinformation, in contrast to Angola and Zimbabwe, where the report notes lower concern, possibly reflecting desensitisation. On whether safety concerns actively limit AI use, Kenya's figures (47% yes, 29% sometimes, 24% no) track the 11-country average almost exactly (47% / 29% / 24%).

What Would Make AI Safer?

Kenyan respondents want action on nearly every front, and at rates that consistently outpace the 11-country average: digital literacy training (68% vs 57% average), platform accountability (64% vs 47%), and community awareness campaigns (65% vs 48%) are all requested well above benchmark, alongside stronger laws (67%, close to the 64% average). This breadth of demand, rather than a single dominant preference, suggests young Kenyans see AI safety as a multi-pronged governance challenge, echoing the main report's finding that young people overwhelmingly frame safety as a governance issue rather than a purely technical one.



"Trust is dying. The biggest change I see is that we can no longer believe our own eyes and ears. With deepfakes and AI voice cloning, it's becoming impossible to tell what's real from what's a digital hallucination."

– 22-YEAR-OLD MALE, STUDENT, RURAL KENYA

6. EMPLOYMENT, FUTURES & SENTIMENT

87% of Kenyan respondents expect AI to have a positive impact on education & learning in the next 5 years

11-COUNTRY BENCHMARK
11-country average: 71% expect positive impact on education

Kenyan youth are markedly more optimistic than the 11-country average across nearly every forward-looking measure. 87% expect AI to improve education and learning over the next five years (vs 71% average), and 70% expect it to improve employment and economic opportunities (vs 50% average). Optimism is more moderate, though still above average, on mental wellbeing (44% expect improvement, vs 32% average). This optimism coexists with strong concerns about misinformation, data ownership and online safety, suggesting that young people distinguish between AI's developmental potential and the risks associated with its use.

Online safety is the exception, and a genuinely polarised one: 38% of Kenyan respondents expect online safety to improve (still above the 27% average), but a larger share, 48%, expect it to worsen- also above the 37% average who say the same across the full dataset. Kenyan youth are simultaneously more optimistic and more pessimistic about online safety than their peers elsewhere, a bimodal pattern that should temper any simple 'leapfrog' narrative.

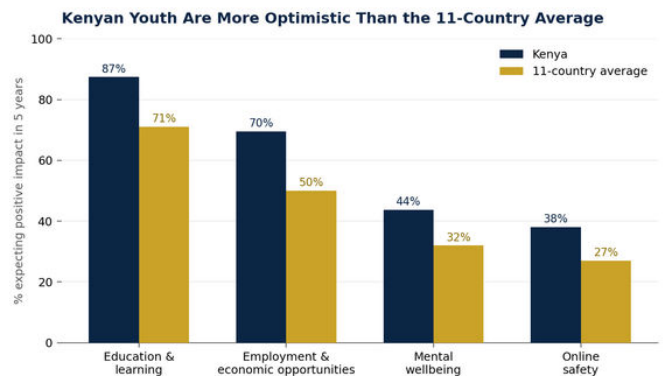


Figure 5. Five-year expectations, Kenya vs 11-country average, % expecting a positive impact.

Taken together, Kenya sits closer to the 'leapfrog' end of the spectrum described in the main report, alongside Tanzania and Zambia's high optimism, but without the same degree of coexisting pessimism seen in Uganda, and far from the marked pessimism recorded in the UK. Combined worry about income (little + very worried) is 39%, below what Kenya's strength in AI engagement might predict, suggesting many young Kenyans see AI as more of an opportunity than a threat, even as they remain clear-eyed about its risks to online safety.



"I'm not gonna lie, AI is growing so fast, and it is taking over most of the tasks that would get me paid. I'm a bit worried, but I'm also confident because I can use it to my advantage and it would speed up my work and delivery to my clients."

-26-YEAR-OLD MALE, SELF-EMPLOYED, URBAN KENYA

7. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Kenya presents a distinctive profile within the 11-country dataset: a highly engaged, optimistic, and disproportionately urban and educated cohort of young AI users who already report higher levels than the survey average in daily use, income generation from AI, and optimism about education and employment. Yet this same cohort reports a wider-than-average gender knowledge gap, a data-cost barrier that is the single most cited obstacle to access, and a misinformation concern that ranks among the highest recorded anywhere in the survey. The picture is not one of straightforward digital exclusion, nor one of unqualified enthusiasm; it is a cohort that is using AI intensively, benefiting from it disproportionately relative to peers elsewhere, and simultaneously more anxious than average about data ownership, corporate power, and online safety.

This combination- high use, high benefit and high concern, sits well with Kenya's own policy ambition. The National AI Strategy 2025-2030 explicitly names skills, governance, and inclusion as priority pillars; the findings in this brief suggest specific areas where implementation could be most consequential: closing the cost barrier that the report shows is common across African countries but is particularly acute in Kenya (71% vs a regional norm of 'more than half'); addressing the self-reported knowledge gap between young males and female; and building the platform accountability and reporting mechanisms that young Kenyans are already asking for at rates well above the international average.

FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF KENYA

- Prioritise targeted affordability measures (such as educational data bundles and zero-rated public-interest AI tools) as part of the National AI Strategy's digital infrastructure pillar- data costs remain the single largest barrier to AI access reported by young Kenyans (71%).

- Expand Swahili-language AI tooling and require language accessibility considerations in publicly funded AI procurement, responding to the 11-point gap between current Swahili use (33%) and desired Swahili support (44%)
- Fund independent verification and reporting mechanisms for AI safety, building on the Data Protection Act (2019) and the Strategy's governance pillar- 64% of young Kenyans want platform accountability mechanisms, well above the international average of 47%.
- Integrate AI literacy-including responsible AI use, critical evaluation of AI-generated content, privacy awareness and misinformation detection- into TVET and university curricula, given that 68% of young Kenyans identify digital literacy training as a top safety priority.
- Develop practical implementation guidance for the National AI Strategy 2025-2030 across education, public service and youth employment programmes to ensure consistent and responsible adoption of AI.

FOR TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES

- Invest in Swahili and other local-language model performance for the Kenyan market, an explicit ask from young users and one echoed in the main survey report's language findings.
- Design pricing models (data bundles, offline-first tools) that address the disproportionate cost burden cited by 71% of Kenyan respondents, rather than assuming parity in connectivity with high-income markets.
- Close the gender confidence gap in AI literacy (23 percentage points in Kenya, above the 15-point survey average) through targeted onboarding, mentorship, and visible representation of female AI users in product design and marketing.

- Strengthen data transparency and consent mechanisms, given that data ownership is the single highest-ranked concern among young Kenyans (80%) and the sharpest driver of the 'daily users are more concerned' analysis.

FOR ALL SECTORS (GOVERNMENT, CIVIL SOCIETY, FUNDERS, ACADEMIA)

- Commission nationally representative research to determine whether the rural-urban pattern observed in this survey reflects broader national trends or sample characteristics before informing large-scale programming.
- Support community-level AI safety and misinformation literacy programming, responding to misinformation concern in Kenya (73%) that exceeds the 11-country average and even the highest-concern country/gender group recorded elsewhere (UK female, 69%).
- Ensure refugee and other marginalised groups are represented in future data collection and programming; this survey's small refugee-camp sub-sample (n=3) offers only a preliminary signal that should not be treated as representative.

FOR RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT & NGO PARTNERS

- Build on the Ajira Digital programme's existing reach (391,000 youth trained by mid-2024) to embed AI-specific skills and safety content, rather than launching parallel infrastructure.
- Design income-generation programming around AI that explicitly targets young females, given the persistent 12-point gender gap in AI-based income earning.
- Prioritise programmes that support the transition from AI skills acquisition to sustainable livelihoods, recognising that relatively few respondents currently translate AI use into income.
- Use Kenya's above-average optimism about AI's impact on education and employment as an entry point for youth engagement, while pairing it with grounded, practical guidance on the online safety risks young Kenyans are increasingly worried about.



I believe I should embrace AI so that it does not replace me. In the creative economy, it has already changed the landscape, so I need to learn how to use it."

27-YEAR-OLD FEMALE, DIGITAL ECONOMY WORKER, URBAN KENYA

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