



International  
Labour  
Organization

# ► Skills gap assessment in tourism sector that are key to promoting inclusive decent employment and productive livelihood in Nakuru, Narok and Kajiado counties.

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Final Report



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Potrait of a woman from Maasai tribe  
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## Foreword

Tourism is one of Kenya's most reliable job creators, and nowhere more so than in Nakuru, Narok and Kajiado. Lake Naivasha and the Safari Rally, the Maasai Mara and its conservancies, Amboseli and the Magadi circuit; these assets draw visitors from across the world and sustain thousands of livelihoods, many of them held by young people and women.

Yet the sector is not short of graduates. It is short of the right skills. This assessment set out to establish, with evidence, where that gap sits and what is driving it.

The findings are pointed. Employers across the three counties struggle to recruit chefs, multilingual guides, event and conference managers, and digital marketers; while training institutions continue to produce large cohorts with generic hospitality qualifications and little practical exposure. Industrial attachments are short, self-sourced and weakly supervised. Digital competence stops at basic computer literacy in a market now run through online travel agencies. Green skills barely register as a training priority, even as international buyers and regulators make sustainability a condition of doing business.

The assessment also shows that the binding constraint differs by county. Nakuru's competitiveness turns on culinary specialisation and event management. Narok's turns on multilingual guiding and eco-lodge technologies. Kajiado's turns on conservancy management and conference logistics. A single national prescription will not fix three different problems.

Two findings give particular cause for optimism. First, employers want in: more than eight in ten are willing to host structured attachments, and a third are ready to help shape curricula. Second, the barriers keeping women out of guiding, culinary and managerial roles are practical and cultural rather than technical — which means they can be addressed through paired guiding, mentorship, targeted scholarships and safety-sensitive programme design.

This is the logic of the Public Private Development Partnership. Employers, training institutions, county governments and regulators are the ones who will build a market-responsive skills system. The ILO's role, with the support of Sweden through Sida and in partnership with ForumCiv, is to facilitate — to bring the parties together, put evidence on the table and help make new arrangements work well enough that they continue without us.

The recommendations that follow are sequenced over ten years, but the first steps are immediate: longer and better supervised attachments, short courses in digital tourism and foreign languages, and entry pathways that open high-value occupations to women and youth.

We commend this assessment to county governments, training providers, employers, workers' organisations and development partners, and we look forward to working with them to act on it.

**Isaac Muema Kiema**

Project Manager and team lead  
Nairobi, Kenya

**Elias Obando**

National Project Officer – Skills lead  
Nairobi, Kenya

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Dr Abel Benard Otieno, consultant, conducted the assessment and prepared the report.

The PPDP project team in Kenya coordinated the assignment and provided technical guidance, oversight and administrative support: Dr Isaac Muema K., Project Manager; Elias Obando, National Programme Officer; Ben Mang'eni, Monitoring and Results Measurement Officer; Francis Karugu, National Project Officer and Market Systems Development Lead; Jennifer Karunguru, Finance and Administration Officer; Joyce Macharia, Gender and Communications Officer; and Geoffrey K. Rono, Senior Driver and Logistics Support.

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Thanks are due to the County Governments of Nakuru, Narok and Kajiado, particularly the departments responsible for tourism, wildlife, culture, youth and TVET, and to NITA, TVETA, KNQA, the Federation of Kenya Employers and the Central Organization of Trade Unions.

The assessment drew on the experience of employers across the tourism and hospitality industry, and of Kabianga University, Egerton University, Rift Valley Institute of Business Studies, Kajiado Vocational Training Centres and Narok TVET, together with tour operator and hospitality associations, trainers and sector professionals who served as key informants.

Appreciation goes to the young people, hospitality and tour-guiding graduates, women entrepreneurs, curio and beadwork traders and cultural tourism groups whose accounts of training-to-employment transitions, enterprise development and gendered barriers shaped the findings.

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A rufous-tailed weaver gathers nesting material beside a safari vehicle in Kenya's grassland ecosystems.  
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## Executive summary

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Tourism remains a cornerstone of economic growth, employment, and cultural preservation in Kenya, with Nakuru, Narok, and Kajiado counties constituting a critical cluster within the Rift Valley circuit. These counties host globally renowned attractions including Lake Nakuru, Lake Naivasha, Menengai Crater, the Safari Rally, the Maasai Mara and its wildebeest migration, Amboseli National Park, Lake Magadi, and a network of conservancies and cultural Manyattas. Collectively, these assets define Kenya's competitiveness in conferencing, wildlife, adventure, cultural, and eco-industrial tourism. Recognizing the sector's potential for inclusive job creation, particularly for women and youth, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and partners commissioned this assessment under the PPDP framework to analyze skill gaps and align training supply with market demand.

The study deployed a mixed-methods design across the three counties. Employer surveys covered hotels, lodges, tour operators, conference centers, and curio businesses (Nakuru: 47; Narok: 49; Kajiado: 49) to quantify employer-reported shortages, surpluses, obsolescence, and aspirational mismatches. Youth and women perspectives were captured through four FGDs per county with hospitality/tour guiding graduates and women entrepreneurs in curio and cultural tourism. Key informant interviews (Nakuru: 15; Narok: 17; Kajiado: 12) engaged TVET trainers, hospitality managers, tour operator and hospitality associations, and business owners. Secondary data, including ILO STED studies, Utalii College tracer studies, and national tourism labor reports, provided benchmarking. Triangulation of these data sources yielded a robust, evidence-based diagnostic of sectoral skills gaps.

Tourism across the three counties is structured around two interdependent pillars: hospitality services (hotels, lodges, restaurants, camps, conferencing) and tour operations (guiding, logistics, eco-tourism, cultural tourism). In Nakuru, the ecosystem blends lakeside hospitality, conferencing hubs in Naivasha, Hell's Gate adventure tourism, and event-driven markets like the Safari Rally. Narok revolves around the Maasai Mara and cultural Manyattas, with lodge and camp-centric operations that depend on multilingual guiding and eco-lodge expertise. Kajiado combines Amboseli's safari lodges, Magadi's eco-industrial tourism, Nairobi-driven conferencing, and conservancy-based community tourism, producing a pluralistic hybrid model. Each county's ecosystem demands distinctive skill sets in hospitality management, culinary innovation, digital tourism, guiding, conservation, and cultural enterprise development.

Field evidence shows distinct skill gaps across counties. In Nakuru, 72% of employers reported difficulty recruiting skilled chefs, 67% cited event management shortages, 49% identified customer service as a persistent weakness, and 53% confirmed digital marketers were the hardest to recruit. In Narok, 81% of employers reported acute deficits in multilingual guiding, 74% in chef training, and 73.5% in eco-technology adoption, while cultural enterprises remained largely offline. In Kajiado, 71% of employers highlighted shortages in both event management and conservancy-linked skills such as ranger training, eco-certification, and rangeland monitoring, while 65% reported digital deficits in conference and booking systems. Across all three counties, more than 70% of training institutions continued to emphasize basic ICT, housekeeping, and generic hospitality, producing surpluses of under-specialized graduates while failing to address emerging digital and eco-tourism demands. Aspirational mismatches were evident as women remained clustered in low-value niches such as beadwork and curio shops, with near-total exclusion from guiding, culinary specialization, and managerial roles.

## Conclusions

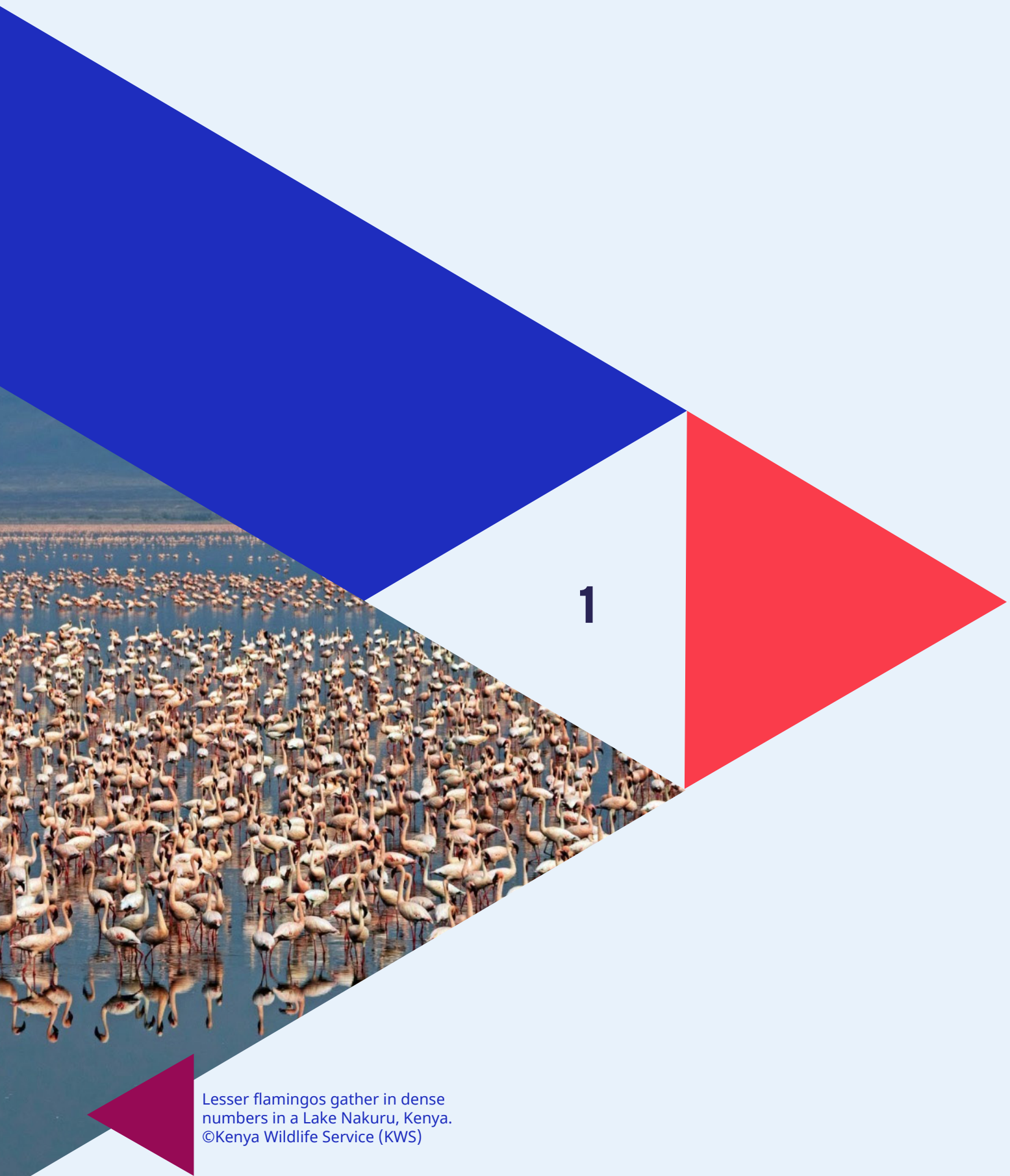
The comparative analysis reveals that while common systemic weaknesses such as digital obsolescence, weak foreign language capacity, culinary shortages, and ineffective attachments undermine competitiveness across all counties, the binding constraints differ by tourism architecture. Nakuru's competitiveness is tied to conferencing and events, making deficits in culinary specialization and event management most critical. Narok's reliance on international safari and cultural tourism makes multilingual guiding, eco-technologies, and globally benchmarked culinary skills its most pressing needs. Kajiado's hybrid profile, combining Amboseli, Magadi, Nairobi-driven conferencing, and conservancies, makes conservancy management, eco-certification, and event logistics its defining gaps. Without tailored interventions, counties risk perpetuating the paradox of high graduate output but persistent shortages, while women and youth remain excluded from high-value roles.

## Recommendations

Immediate actions in the short term period (0-2 years) include extending industrial attachments to at least six months with structured supervision, launching digital tourism bootcamps (OTA, SEO, e-booking), expanding multilingual training (German, Mandarin, Spanish), embedding customer service micro-credentials, and introducing green technology training in solar, waste, and water management. Gender-sensitive pathways must immediately open women's access to guiding and culinary professions through paired guiding, product innovation tracks, and digital curio marketing.

Medium-term interventions (2-5 years) should reform curricula to create specialization tracks consisting event management and culinary arts for Nakuru, multilingual guiding and eco-lodge management for Narok, conservancy and conference logistics for Kajiado. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) frameworks should certify experienced practitioners, while Sector Skills Councils at county level institutionalize employer-TVET partnerships. Centers of Excellence should be established in each county to anchor training and industry collaboration in their respective niches. Long-term reforms (5-10 years) must institutionalize eco-certification and smart tourism technologies, supported by a Tourism Skills Development Fund pooling county levies and donor resources. Policy anchoring should align county reforms to national frameworks such as the Kenya National Tourism Blueprint 2030, TVET reforms, and Kenya's green growth agenda, ensuring sustainability and systemic transformation.

A multi-county validation workshop involving stakeholders from Nakuru, Narok, and Kajiado including county tourism and TVET departments, tour operator associations, women's cultural enterprise groups, financial institutions, and national training and labor accreditation bodies confirmed the accuracy and relevance of the assessment findings and strengthened consensus on priority skills gaps. Stakeholders emphasized that the tourism workforce challenge is not the number of graduates, but the lack of market-aligned specialization, practical exposure, and recognized certification. The workshop reaffirmed that tourism in the three counties is fundamentally a green, conservation-dependent economy, requiring skills in sustainable lodge management, ecological interpretation, cultural value packaging, and digital visitor engagement. The workshop endorsed the establishment of county and cross-county training partnerships, conservancy-based apprenticeship models, and modular certification pathways to expand youth and women's access to higher-value roles. A separate Workshop Proceedings and Action Framework Report documents the agreed institutional commitments, curriculum reform directions, and phased implementation roadmap to guide operational rollout and inter-agency coordination.



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Lesser flamingos gather in dense numbers in a Lake Nakuru, Kenya.  
©Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS)

# 1. Introduction

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Tourism is a cornerstone of Kenya's economy and a vital livelihood sector in Nakuru, Narok, and Kajiado Counties, collectively anchoring the central and southern Rift Valley tourism circuits. Each county is endowed with globally renowned attractions, unique cultural landscapes, and a dynamic hospitality economy that directly and indirectly supports thousands of livelihoods, particularly for women and youth. Yet, while these assets generate immense potential, systemic skills mismatches constrain competitiveness and equitable participation in the sector.

Nakuru County presents one of the most diversified tourism profiles in Kenya. Lake Nakuru National Park, globally famous for flamingos and rhinos, is a UNESCO-listed bird sanctuary that attract both domestic and international visitors. Lake Naivasha is a hub for water-based recreation and high-profile conferencing tourism, hosting an ecosystem of resorts, lodges, and events. Naivasha also hosts Hell's Gate National Park, popular for its dramatic landscapes, geothermal activity, rock climbing, hiking, and cycling safaris making it a premier adventure tourism destination. Importantly, Naivasha has also become synonymous with the World Rally Championship (Safari Rally Kenya), now a regular feature on the FIA global calendar. This annual event attracts international participants, sponsors, and visitors, reinforcing Naivasha's reputation as both a leisure and sports tourism hub. The Menengai Crater and surrounding conservancies add ecological and adventure tourism niches, further broadening Nakuru's tourism architecture. With such diversity, Nakuru's urban centers host mid- to high-tier hotels, lodges, and conferencing facilities that demand professional service standards, culinary specialization, event management expertise, and digital engagement with online travel agencies (OTAs).

Narok County hosts the Maasai Mara National Reserve, one of the most iconic safari destinations globally, and home to the annual wildebeest migration often described as the "seventh wonder of the world." This single asset makes Narok a global tourism hotspot, driving year-round demand for professional guiding, eco-lodge operations, and conservation-linked jobs. The county is also a hub for cultural tourism, anchored in Maasai *Manyattas* where women and youth are central to beadwork, dance, and storytelling enterprises. However, weak commercialization and minimal digital presence mean these cultural assets remain under-optimized. Unlike urban tourism centers, Narok's economy is lodge and camp-centric, with operations often in remote, off-grid settings requiring specialized competencies in sustainability, logistics, and guest management.

Finally, Kajiado County offers a multi-layered tourism economy that combines wildlife, cultural, leisure, and industrial tourism. Amboseli National Park, at the foot of Mt. Kilimanjaro, remains the county's flagship attraction, offering one of Africa's most photographed landscapes, wildlife viewing, and high-end lodges. Beyond Amboseli, Lake Magadi and the Magadi Soda tourism circuit provide unique industrial and ecological experiences, where soda ash mining co-exists with birdwatching, hot springs, and saline-lake landscapes that attract niche eco-tourists and researchers. Proximity to Nairobi has also made Kajiado a hub for domestic leisure and conference tourism, with resorts and conservancies in Kitengela, Isinya, and Ngong catering

to corporate and urban middle-class visitors. Importantly, emerging cultural Manyattas around Isinya and Kitengela are developing into significant cultural tourism nodes, where Maasai communities package dance, beadwork, and traditional homestead experiences for weekend tourists and international visitors transiting from Nairobi. Together, these diverse attractions create demand for specialized skills in event management, culinary innovation, eco-lodge operations, digital marketing, and commercialization of cultural enterprises.

Collectively, the three counties illustrate how tourism diversity shapes distinctive skill demands in Nakuru's lake-based and event-driven hospitality ecosystem (anchored in Lake Naivasha, Hell's Gate, and the Safari Rally), Narok's wilderness and cultural tourism economy (anchored in the Maasai Mara and Manyattas), and Kajiado's blend of Amboseli wildlife circuits and conference-driven hospitality. Yet, common challenges persist which includes shortages in digital marketing, multilingual guiding, eco-lodge operations, and specialized hospitality services while women and youth remain underrepresented in high-value roles.

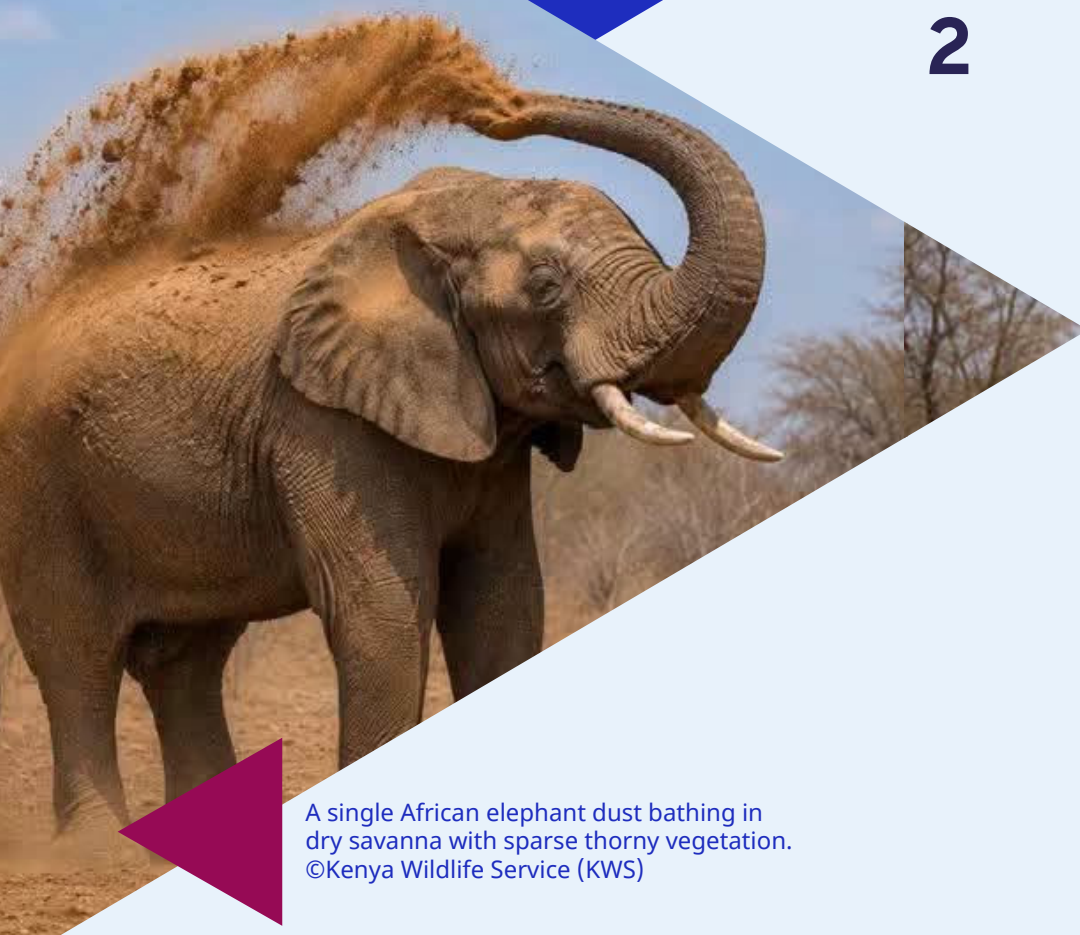
Collectively, the three counties underscore how tourism heterogeneity drives highly differentiated skill requirements with Nakuru's lake-based and event-driven hospitality economy anchored in Lake Naivasha, Hell's Gate, and the Safari Rally; Narok's globally significant wilderness and cultural tourism centered on the Maasai Mara and Manyattas; and Kajiado's hybrid portfolio of Amboseli's wildlife circuits, Magadi Soda eco-industrial tourism, and emerging cultural hubs in Isinya and Kitengela. These diverse ecosystems create distinctive competency needs across guiding, eco-lodge management, event and conference services, and cultural enterprise commercialization. Yet, convergent structural deficits persist across all three counties, including shortages in digital marketing, multilingual guiding, eco-tourism operations, and specialized hospitality services, coupled with the systematic underrepresentation of women and youth in high-value roles. This complexity justifies a rigorous, in-depth assessment of tourism sector skills to inform targeted, county-specific interventions that can unlock competitiveness, sustainability, and inclusive decent employment.

## 1.2. Objectives of the assignment

This comparative assessment, conducted under the ILO-Sida Public Private Development Partnership (PPDP) project, therefore seeks to:

- i. Diagnose the skills landscape and mismatches in the tourism within each county, including current capacities for green jobs.
- ii. Assess the existing skills landscape in the tourism and fodder sectors, including current capacities for green jobs.
- iii. Identify skills required for future growth, value addition, and sector transformation.
- iv. Evaluate the capacity and alignment of existing training and education programs with labor market needs.
- v. Explore the feasibility of establishing sector-specific skills councils.
- vi. Recommend concrete, gender-inclusive and youth-responsive interventions to address the identified gaps.

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A single African elephant dust bathing in  
dry savanna with sparse thorny vegetation.  
©Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS)

## 2. Methodological approach

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This assessment applied a multi-source, mixed-methods design that triangulated primary and secondary evidence to systematically diagnose skills mismatches in the tourism sector in the three counties. The methodology combined: **(i)** field-based qualitative and quantitative data collection, **(ii)** direct workplace observation of functional and seasonal dynamics, and **(iii)** structured analytical framing against an established skills mismatch typology encompassing quantity-quality imbalances, timing/experience gaps, information asymmetries, credentialing weaknesses, and emergent digital/commercial deficits. This integrated approach ensured that both supply and demand-side perspectives were captured while situating the evidence within a systemic framework.

In each county, the assessment employed a mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to ensure robust triangulation. Employer surveys were undertaken across hotels, lodges, tour operators, camp managers, and event organizers (Nakuru 47; Narok 49; Kajiado 49) to quantify employer-reported shortages, surpluses, and obsolescence trends. These were complemented by two youth-focused focus group discussions (FGDs) per county, targeting young people in hospitality and tour operations to interrogate training relevance, career aspirations, and gendered occupational dynamics, alongside two FGDs with women curio traders and cultural enterprise actors to capture women-specific perspectives. Key informant interviews (KIIs) with TVET trainers, college heads, hospitality managers, tour operator associations, and enterprise owners (Nakuru 15; Narok 17; Kajiado 12) provided expert insights on curriculum design, industrial attachment modalities, and supervisory practices. Finally, a structured desk review of secondary sources, including ILO's *Skills for Trade and Economic Diversification (STED)* studies, COTU tourism labour reports, and Utalii College tracer studies, contextualized county-level evidence against regional and national benchmarks. This multi-source triangulation generated the granular diagnostic evidence presented in this report.

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A wooden KWS gate sign reading "WELCOME TO LAKE NAKURU N. PARK" with the KWS logo, under acacia trees beside a dirt access road. Nakuru, Kenya  
©Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS)

## 3. Study findings

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### 3.1. Tourism architecture

Discussions with key industry players including tour operators, hotel managers, departmental heads from tourism and hospitality training institutions, and county-level tourism experts supported by KIIs and direct field observations, reveal that the tourism economies of Nakuru, Narok, and Kajiado are structured around two interlinked domains consisting hospitality services and tour operations. These two pillars frame the tourism architecture in each county, yet they manifest in distinctive ways depending on ecological endowments, cultural landscapes, and market dynamics.

#### 3.1.1. Tourism Architecture in Nakuru County

Nakuru's tourism architecture is a multi-layered ecosystem where lakes, parks, and events intertwine to create a diversified economy. Anchored in Lake Nakuru National Park's flamingo spectacle, the county also thrives on Lake Naivasha's conferencing and leisure circuits, the adventure tourism of Hell's Gate with its geothermal gorges and climbing trails, and the panoramic Menengai Crater. The county is uniquely positioned as Kenya's sports tourism hub through the World Rally Championship (Safari Rally Kenya), drawing global audiences to Naivasha. This blend sustains a dual structure with hospitality services ranging from star-rated hotels, resorts, and conferencing facilities to mid-tier urban lodgings and tour operations spanning guiding, logistics, eco-tourism, and cultural showcases. These interlinked domains demand skills in culinary arts, event management, multilingual reception, wildlife interpretation, and digital marketing, but gaps in service excellence, guiding, and women's participation reveal systemic fragilities.

#### 3.1.2. Tourism Architecture in Narok County

Narok's tourism economy is internationally renowned, anchored in the Maasai Mara National Reserve and the annual wildebeest migration, one of the world's most recognized natural spectacles. However, the tourism landscape is not limited to the Reserve itself; it is structured through an extensive network of community and private conservancies (including Olare Motorogi, Naboisho, Mara North, Ol Choro Oiroua, Lemek, and others) that collectively form the functional backbone of the Mara tourism system. These conservancies operate through community-private partnership models that provide wildlife habitat protection, eco-tourism experiences, and structured land-leasing revenue streams for Maasai households.

The tourism architecture is therefore camp and lodge-centric, with high-end lodges and tented camps located within both the Reserve and the surrounding conservancies, operating in remote, off-grid settings that require specialized competencies in eco-lodge operations, renewable energy systems, logistics, and guest safety. Tour operations are the dominant economic driver, built around professional guiding, wildlife interpretation, 4x4 logistics, conservation compliance, and eco-certification practices. Complementing this is a vibrant but under-commercialized cultural tourism economy rooted in Maasai Manyattas, where women and youth sustain livelihoods through beadwork, performance, and cultural interpretation, though most enterprises remain dependent on in-person traffic and informal marketing channels.

This blended tourism landscape consisting world-class wilderness tourism integrated with community-

owned cultural and conservation enterprises creates demand for multilingual guides, eco-lodge managers, rangeland and wildlife stewardship technicians, digital tourism marketers, and cultural enterprise developers. The assessment confirms significant skill shortages across these domains, alongside persistent gender barriers that limit women's participation in high-value guiding and lodge management roles, despite their central role in cultural tourism production.

### 3.1.3. Tourism Architecture in Kajiado county

Kajiado's tourism profile is pluralistic, integrating Amboseli National Park, renowned for elephant herds set against Mt. Kilimanjaro, with eco-industrial tourism in Lake Magadi's soda ash landscapes, and emerging cultural Manyattas in Isinya and Kitengela. Proximity to Nairobi gives Kajiado a dual orientation as a gateway for international safari tourists heading to Amboseli and a weekend/conference destination for Nairobi's corporate and middle-class visitors. Hospitality revolves around resorts, lodges, and conferencing centers, creating demand for event management, culinary innovation, digital booking, and green hospitality practices. Tour operations extend across wildlife guiding in Amboseli, eco-interpretation of Magadi's hot springs and birdlife, and cultural packaging of Maasai heritage for urban and foreign markets. Distinctively, Kajiado is also shaped by conservancy tourism models, linking private ranches, community conservancies, and eco-lodges. These require advanced skills in rangeland management, wildlife monitoring, ranger training, conservation enterprise management, and eco-certification. This hybrid model of global safari circuits, eco-industrial tourism, conservancy-based operations, and Nairobi-driven leisure markets creates opportunities for youth and women, though they remain concentrated in low-value roles and excluded from managerial and guiding tracks without targeted upskilling.

### Comparative Insight

While all three counties share the twin pillars of hospitality and tour operations, their tourism architectures reflect distinct strengths and challenges. For instance, Nakuru is lake and event-driven diversification while Narok is globally iconic wilderness and cultural tourism, and Kajiado is pluralistic blend of safaris, conservancies, eco-industrial experiences, and urban-driven conferences. This diversity underscores the need for county-specific skilling pathways that respond to both global competitiveness imperatives and local socio-cultural dynamics, particularly in ensuring inclusive participation of women and youth in higher-value tourism roles.

## 3.2. Hospitality architecture

The assessment revealed that hospitality services in all three counties are central to their tourism economies but manifest in distinct forms, clientele profiles, and skill demands. Hospitality encompasses hotels, lodges, resorts, restaurants, camps, and conferencing facilities. The critical functional areas requiring specialized technical and soft skills to ensure service excellence include:

- i. **Front office/reception:** This area mainly concerns customer service, guest relations, reservations, and interpersonal communication. Skills required include hospitality etiquette, service excellence, problem-solving, and foreign language proficiency for handling diverse clientele.

- ii. **Housekeeping:** Core concerns are cleanliness, hygiene, room preparation, inventory control, and safety standards. Requires technical know-how in cleaning protocols, attention to detail, and occupational safety.
- iii. **Food production (culinary arts):** Preparation of diverse menus, adherence to food hygiene standards, cost control, and kitchen management. Requires specialized culinary training, food safety certification, and innovation in menu development.
- iv. **Food & beverage service (waiter/bar attendants):** Efficient service delivery, barista/bartending, customer etiquette, point-of-sale (POS) operations, and upselling techniques. Requires both technical and soft skills in communication and customer orientation.
- v. **Event management & conferencing:** Coordination of conferences, weddings, and events requiring organizational skills, digital booking systems, audio-visual technology use, and people management.

### 3.2.1. Hospitality architecture in Nakuru County

Hospitality in Nakuru is diversified, spanning urban hotels, peri-urban lodgings, and Naivasha's conferencing resorts. Employers emphasized that front office/reception skills are a pressing gap, with 64% of surveyed hotels reporting shortages in guest relations and foreign language proficiency. Housekeeping functions, though critical, were rated by 58% of employers as inadequately staffed with trained personnel, especially around occupational health and safety compliance. Culinary skills emerged as the most critical shortage, with 72% of employers citing deficits in food production and kitchen management during peak conference seasons. Food & beverage services were flagged by 61% of employers as constrained by weak POS and bartending skills. Most distinctively, event management was rated by 67% of employers as the single largest skill gap, a finding reinforced during KIIs which highlighted AV technology and digital booking competencies as insufficient for Naivasha's growing conference and Safari Rally markets.

### 3.2.2. Hospitality architecture in Narok County

Hospitality in Narok is camp and lodge-centric, dominated by the Mara ecosystem. Employers identified front office/reception as the most acute shortage, with 78% of lodge managers reporting that staff lacked foreign language proficiency and OTA system skills. Housekeeping in remote lodges was cited as a challenge by 65% of employers, who stressed that global guests demand high sanitation standards in off-grid contexts. Food production (culinary arts) is under severe pressure where 74% of respondents confirmed that chefs lacked advanced international menu preparation and HACCP compliance training, forcing some lodges to hire expatriate chefs. Food & beverage services were cited by 69% of managers as falling short of international expectations in bar service and wine pairing. Event management plays a smaller role, but 42% of employers noted growing demand for skills in coordinating photographic safaris, conservation conferences, and cultural festivals.

### 3.2.3. Hospitality architecture in Kajiado County

Hospitality in Kajiado is shaped by Amboseli's international lodges and Nairobi's conference-linked resorts. Survey results show front office/reception shortages in 59% of establishments, particularly in bilingual/

multilingual receptionists. Housekeeping was cited by 54% of employers as constrained by inconsistent standards between eco-lodges and peri-urban resorts. Food production gaps were significant, with 68% of respondents noting inadequate culinary innovation to meet both high-volume conference catering and fine dining requirements in Amboseli. Food & beverage services were reported by 63% of employers as deficient in POS integration and upselling techniques. Importantly, event management and conferencing stood out where 71% of conference facility managers reported shortages in AV systems operation, logistics coordination, and digital booking expertise, underscoring the county's reliance on Nairobi's corporate retreat market.

### 3.3. Tour operations

The tour operations pillar connects visitors to the county's diverse natural and cultural attractions, including Lake Nakuru National Park, Menengai Crater, Lake Naivasha and conservancies, through guiding, logistics, eco-tourism, and cultural tourism services. This domain demands competencies in foreign languages, customer engagement, knowledge of flora and fauna, cultural interpretation, and the use of emerging digital and smart tourism technologies. Competencies demanded include:

- i. **Tour guiding & interpretation:** This involves knowledge of local flora, fauna, conservation practices, and cultural heritage. Requires foreign language proficiency, storytelling skills, safety and first-aid certification, and customer engagement.
- ii. **Wildlife and eco-tourism expertise:** Understanding ecological systems, sustainable practices, and compliance with conservation standards. Requires training in eco-tourism principles, carbon-neutral tourism, and community engagement.
- iii. **Transport & logistics (tour drivers/operators):** Safe and reliable operation of 4x4 safari vehicles, navigation, fleet maintenance, and guest safety. Requires technical driving certification, radio communication, and customer care.
- iv. **Cultural tourism:** Packaging of indigenous knowledge, cultural performances, and artisanal crafts into marketable experiences. Requires creativity, product development, cultural sensitivity, and digital marketing for visibility.

Despite this rich tourism architecture, the assessment identified a number of systemic skills mismatches that undermine women and youth participation in the industry. Hospitality employers emphasize severe shortages in customer service and front office etiquette, while tour operators report deficits in multilingual guides, eco-tourism practices, and digital marketing. Furthermore, youth FGDs reveal that tour guiding is almost exclusively male-dominated, limiting women's participation in a key occupational pathway. These mismatches highlight the urgent need for a skills ecosystem that matches sector complexity with specialized, competency-based training pathways.

#### 3.3.1. Tour Operations in Nakuru County

Tour operations in Nakuru are multi-faceted. Tour guiding & interpretation was reported as a shortage by 66% of operators, citing weak foreign language and ecological knowledge. Wildlife and eco-tourism expertise was flagged by 57% of employers, particularly around eco-certification for Hell's Gate geothermal

tours and birdwatching circuits in Lake Nakuru. Transport & logistics emerged as a significant gap, with 62% of operators reporting shortages in certified 4x4 drivers who combine mechanical know-how with customer service. Cultural tourism is less developed, but 48% of employers noted weak marketing and product packaging of peri-urban crafts and performances.

### 3.3.2. Tour Operations in Narok County

Tour operations dominate Narok's economy. Tour guiding was unanimously emphasized, with 81% of operators citing shortages in multilingual and professionally certified guides. FGDs highlighted the gendered exclusion of women, with youth groups confirming that guiding remains "almost exclusively male-dominated." Wildlife and eco-tourism expertise is severely lacking: 73.5% of surveyed camps reported non-adoption of eco-technologies such as solar, waste management, and water systems. Transport & logistics shortages were highlighted by 69% of operators, citing lack of certified drivers for remote terrain. Cultural tourism was rated as under-commercialized by 64% of cultural enterprises, with women curio traders emphasizing their exclusion from e-commerce and digital booking platforms.

### 3.3.3. Tour Operations in Kajiado County

Tour operations in Kajiado reflect its pluralistic landscape. Tour guiding was flagged by 62% of operators as constrained by limited ecological knowledge and poor foreign language skills among local youth. Wildlife and eco-tourism expertise is a unique differentiator here because 71% of conservancy-linked lodges reported shortages in rangeland management, ranger training, and eco-certification competencies, highlighting the county's conservancy model. Transport & logistics showed a 59% shortage, particularly in customer-focused drivers for Nairobi-based weekend tourists. Cultural tourism was emphasized by 65% of enterprises in Isinya and Kitengela, which confirmed strong domestic demand but noted that product packaging, enterprise management, and digital visibility remain weak.

### Comparative Insight

The statistics underscore clear contrasts across the three counties. Nakuru faces its greatest pressures in event management (67%) and culinary skills (72%), directly linked to its heavy reliance on conferencing and large-scale events. On the other hand, Narok demonstrates the sharpest gaps in multilingual guiding (81%) and eco-technology adoption (73.5%), consistent with its dependence on international wilderness tourism standards. By contrast, Kajiado shows its most acute needs in conservancy-related skills (71%) and event management (71%), a reflection of its pluralistic mix of Amboseli safaris, Magadi's eco-industrial niches, and Nairobi-driven conference tourism.

### 3.4. Skills gap typologies and evidence

Skills gaps are classified under the four typology categories: shortages, surpluses, obsolescence, and aspirational/relevance mismatches.

#### 3.4.1. Skills shortages

##### 3.4.1.1. Skills shortages in Nakuru County

###### a. Customer service & foreign language proficiency

The assessment reveals that across all counties, customer service/hospitality etiquette and multilingual proficiency represent the two most critical, interdependent skills gaps constraining tourism competitiveness in the three counties. Employers emphasized customer service and hospitality etiquette as the single most vital competency for people management and guest satisfaction (82%), with 49% of businesses reporting operational challenges in these areas over the last 12 months. In Nakuru 49% of employers and trainers consistently noted that graduates lack soft competencies such as interpersonal communication, teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving skills that are fundamental to high-quality guest engagement at the front office and service touchpoints.

Complementing this shortage is a language gap, where 53% of employers identified foreign language deficiencies among their staffs as a major constraint. Discussions with trainers confirmed that most institutions provide only basic French, yet international demand increasingly requires German, Mandarin, and Spanish alongside intercultural competence. This restricts the ability of staff to effectively manage guest relations, deliver cultural interpretation, or perform high-value guiding, thereby limiting both customer satisfaction and revenue potential. As one youth intern in Nakuru reflected:

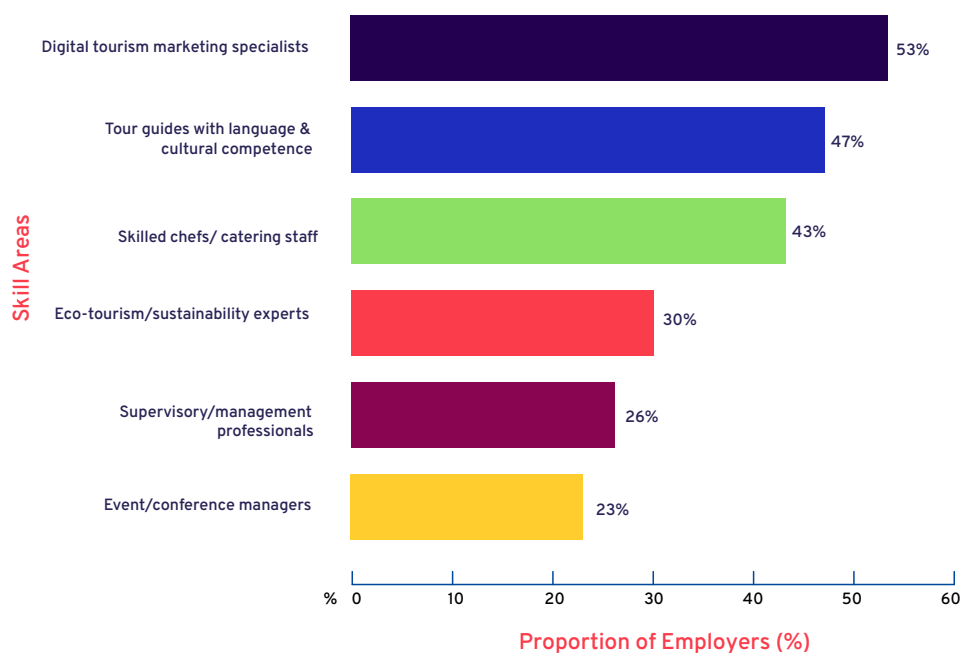
*“When you are put on the reception, then you realize you were not prepared at school on how to handle so many different people every day. Some of the European tourists only speak French or some foreign language which we not trained on. Many of us opt to work in areas like housekeeping where there are no interactions with guests” (Youth FGD, Nakuru).*

Taken together, these two shortages illustrate a dual deficit in communicative competence: while staff may possess procedural or technical knowledge, they lack the interpersonal etiquette and multilingual skills that underpin global service standards. The implications may be that hotels and tour operators lose competitiveness in attracting and retaining international clients, fail to maximize revenue opportunities, and remain over-reliant on a small pool of externally trained or self-taught staff.

*“These tourists like guides who speak and explain things in their language especially French, German and stuff like that. Yes, we were taught some very basic French units which we just passed exams but we can use it to speak to anybody. A college like Rift Valley Institute of Business Studies offer foreign language as a different course which you pay for separately but you cannot pursue concurrently with hospitality of tour guiding courses” (FGD with youth tour guides in Menengai Forest).*

These interlinked gaps reflect a curricular imbalance across tourism sector training institutions within Nakuru county. While technical hospitality skills (e.g., food production, housekeeping) receive some attention, the human interaction and communication dimension of service delivery remains underdeveloped. Unless addressed, Nakuru's tourism workforce will continue to underperform in the very competencies that define customer experience and global competitiveness.

► *Figure 1: Proportion of employers unable to get qualified local women & youth per skill area in Nakuru County*



Source: Authors' elaboration based on employer survey data, ILO Tourism Skills Gap Assessment questionnaire, Question 10 ("Which of these skills are most difficult to recruit for from among locals?"), Nakuru County responses (n=49).

## b. Digital tourism marketing

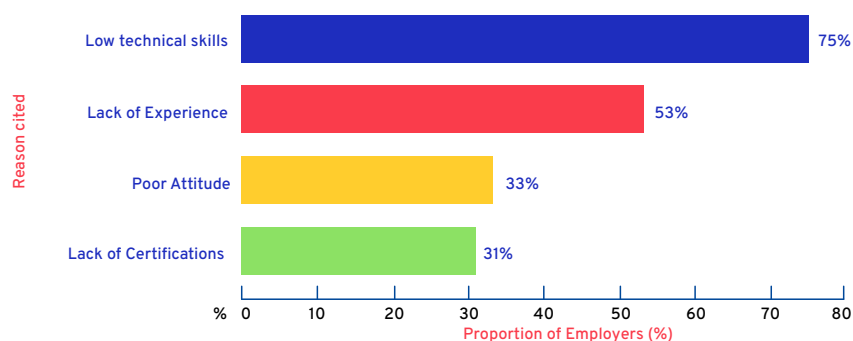
The study identified digital tourism marketing as one of the most acute skill shortages in Nakuru's hospitality and tour operations ecosystem. 49% of businesses reported facing operational challenges in the past year due to inadequate digital skills among staff. Furthermore, 53% employers confirmed that they are unable to find local youths and women specialists with digital tourism marketing competencies to recruit despite the centrality of these competencies to contemporary tourism business models. A key dimension of this shortage was captured aptly during Key Informant Interviews with a trainer who observed thus;

*"Our ICT training curriculum for the tourism sector does not relate to building capacity in leveraging Online Travel Agencies (OTAs), global digital platforms such as Booking.com, Expedia, Airbnb, and TripAdvisor that dominate tourist booking and visibility. We are still confined to training on Word, Excel and the likes"*

Effective engagement with OTAs requires skills in dynamic pricing, digital content management, online customer engagement, and reputation management. However, evidence from 97% of employer interviews in Nakuru town and business reviews shows that most local hotels and lodges operate websites or social media pages (e.g., Facebook) that are restricted to static pricing information, lacking interactive interfaces for reservations, customer feedback, or live engagement. This limits visibility, erodes competitiveness, and excludes Nakuru operators from the mainstream global digital marketplace.

The shortage extends beyond OTA management to broader digital marketing competencies. Businesses reported deficits in skills for social media campaigns, digital storytelling, targeted advertising, and search engine optimization (SEO). The absence of digital analytics capacity further constrains operators from tracking booking patterns, customer preferences, and marketing return on investment. This aligns with regional evidence from World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2022), which highlighted that African tourism enterprises underperform in digital adoption, reducing their share of high-value global markets.

▶ *Figure 2. Reasons cited by employers for recruitment difficulty, Nakuru County (percentage)*



*Source: Authors' elaboration based on employer survey data, ILO Tourism Skills Gap Assessment questionnaire, Question 8 ("If yes, specify reasons," following Q7 on recruitment difficulty), Nakuru County responses (n=49). Multiple-response question; percentages are not expected to sum to 100%.*

### c. Emerging digital demands in tourism

The assessment reveals that Nakuru's tourism sector is experiencing accelerating digital transformation pressures, but the local training institutions, workforce and enterprises are inadequately prepared to respond. Beyond the acute shortages in digital tourism marketing, the study highlights systemic gaps in online travel agency (OTA) engagement, virtual tourism, smart tourism technologies, data-driven decision-making, and functional digital training.

#### i. Virtual tours and smart tourism technologies

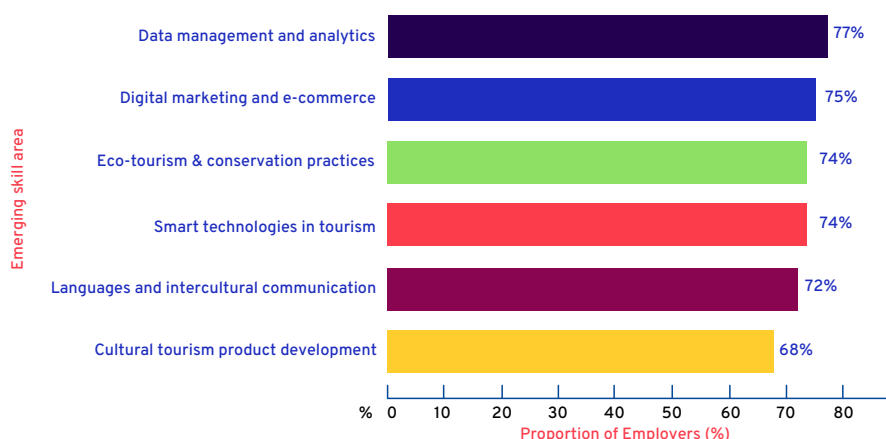
Employers identified smart tourism technologies and virtual experiences as emerging skill gaps, with 74% citing staff unpreparedness. Virtual reality (VR) tours, augmented reality (AR) interpretation tools, and digital guiding apps are increasingly used globally to enhance visitor engagement both pre-visit and on-site. Yet, Nakuru's guiding and hospitality workforce has minimal exposure to these tools. The absence of such capacity limits opportunities for destination marketing, off-season revenue diversification, and appeal to tech-savvy tourists, especially from younger demographics.

#### ii. Data analytics and decision-support skills

A striking 77% of employers reported that their staff lack competencies in data management and analytics. Modern tourism operations rely heavily on data for demand forecasting, customer profiling, pricing

optimization, and marketing ROI analysis. In Nakuru, however, businesses remain dependent on manual systems or fragmented records, leading to inefficiencies in tracking customer behavior, occupancy patterns, and market trends. This absence of a data-driven decision-making culture undermines both competitiveness and operational efficiency.

Figure 3. Employers demanding emerging tourism skills not yet held by current staff, Nakuru County (percentage)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on employer survey data, ILO Tourism Skills Gap Assessment questionnaire, Question 11 ("Are there any new technologies, standards, or market expectations that your business is trying to adopt, but where you feel your staff are not adequately prepared?"), Nakuru County responses (n=49); six of the question's response categories are shown. Multiple-response question; percentages are not expected to sum to 100%.

### iii. E-commerce and digital storytelling

The rise of e-commerce has opened new markets for cultural products, curio shops, and local artisans. Yet 75% of employers and curio shop owners acknowledged that their staff lack capacity in e-commerce platforms, social media campaigns, and digital storytelling. This limits the ability of women and youth entrepreneurs to reach global customers, perpetuating dependence on walk-in buyers and seasonal tourist

*"Here most of curio shops are owned and run by women. We make the beads ourselves having learnt it from our parents. We buy wood carvings from Ukambani and soap stone carvings from Kisii. We do not sell our products through the internet because we do not know how it is done. We just wait and hope tour guide drivers will bring guests to our shops"* (FGD with women curio sellers in Nakuru town)

### d. Training gaps in TVET and colleges

A critical bottleneck lies in the **training supply system**. The assessment established through indepth discussions with training experts that TVETs and colleges offering tourism-related programs in Nakuru county largely restrict their digital curricula to **basic computer literacy (e.g., Microsoft Word, Excel, internet navigation)**, which has **minimal relevance to sector needs**. These entry-level ICT skills do not equip graduates to manage OTA platforms, run social media campaigns, analyze customer data, or design digital content, all of which are now core functions in tourism enterprises. Employers further noted that even when they are willing to sponsor staff for further training, local institutions lack functional, industry-oriented digital modules, rendering capacity upgrades ineffective. This points to a structural gap in the supply side of the skills ecosystem, which perpetuates the digital deficit despite strong employer demand.

The combined digital deficits across OTAs, smart tourism technologies, virtual tours, data analytics, and functional digital training represent both skills shortages and obsolescence. They lock majority of Nakuru's tourism enterprises into analogue service models at a time when global competitiveness hinges on digital adoption. This exacerbates dependency on broker-like tour guide drivers, narrows customer reach, and excludes youth from the fastest-growing segments of tourism employment. Unless addressed through structured curricula, industry-college partnerships, and targeted digital skilling women and youth alike will remain unable to participate in the global online tourism economy.

#### **e. Skilled Chefs and Culinary Specialists**

The survey revealed that 43% of firms reported difficulties in sourcing competent chefs from local youths and women, and 32% confirmed that they have faced operational challenges due to lack of adequate skills among their current staffs. This indicates a persistent shortage of culinary specialists with functional expertise in food production, menu innovation, and hygiene compliance. The study established that there persists weak curricular specialization, short/poorly supervised attachments, and lack of certification frameworks for culinary competence.

Discussion with youth graduates in the sector revealed that colleges in Nakuru generally provide generic hospitality training without offering culinary specialization tracks (e.g., pastry, butchery, diet-specific cuisines). As youth interns noted, specialization occurs informally after employment, guided by personal interest rather than structured training. This results in inconsistent quality and inefficiency in building professional culinary capacity.

Practical Exposure Gaps through industrial attachments are limited to a one-off 3-month period, widely regarded by managers in the hospitality sector as too short to expose trainees to all hospitality departments. Discussions with graduates further reported that supervision by teachers is minimal, often only once, at the end of the attachment, leaving students with little feedback on practical skills. This weakens both competence and confidence in food production roles.

***"The interns who come here for industrial attachments do not have adequate time to learn practical skills because the attachment period is too short to cover all the departments" (KII with Hotel manager, Naivasha).***

The shortage of skilled chefs undermines menu diversity, and customer satisfaction, particularly in establishments serving international clientele accustomed to global culinary standards. It also restricts star-rated big industry players in Nakuru to source for youths trained in Utalii and other training colleges outside the county limiting participation of local youths into culinary tourism, a fast-growing niche.

#### **f. Tour guiding and interpretation**

While only 19% of businesses explicitly cited tour guiding gaps, qualitative findings reveal more profound systemic weaknesses. Employers emphasized that guides with language and cultural competence are among the hardest to recruit (47% identified this shortage) from local youths and women. Focus Group Discussions highlighted that tour guiding is male-dominated, largely due to perceptions of travel intensity, safety risks, and long-distance commitments. This systematically excludes women from one of the highest-value occupational areas in the tourism value chain, reinforcing gender disparities.

Guides often lack structured training in **intercultural communication, ecological interpretation, and storytelling techniques**. Instead, many rely on informal, experiential knowledge rather than standardized professional competencies. The absence of multilingual training exacerbates the gap, as guides are expected to serve international tourists with diverse linguistic needs. Employers consistently noted that without **foreign language competence**, guiding services remain limited and less competitive.

As with hospitality, **college curricula do not provide specialization in guiding**, leaving youth without the technical, linguistic, or safety certifications (e.g., first aid, conservation knowledge) necessary for professional guiding. Attachments rarely include field guiding, further widening the gap. This competency gap diminishes the **quality of visitor experiences**, limits opportunities for upselling (e.g., specialized eco-tours), and constrains Nakuru's youth and women competitiveness against guides in destinations like the Maasai Mara, where guiding is more professionalized.

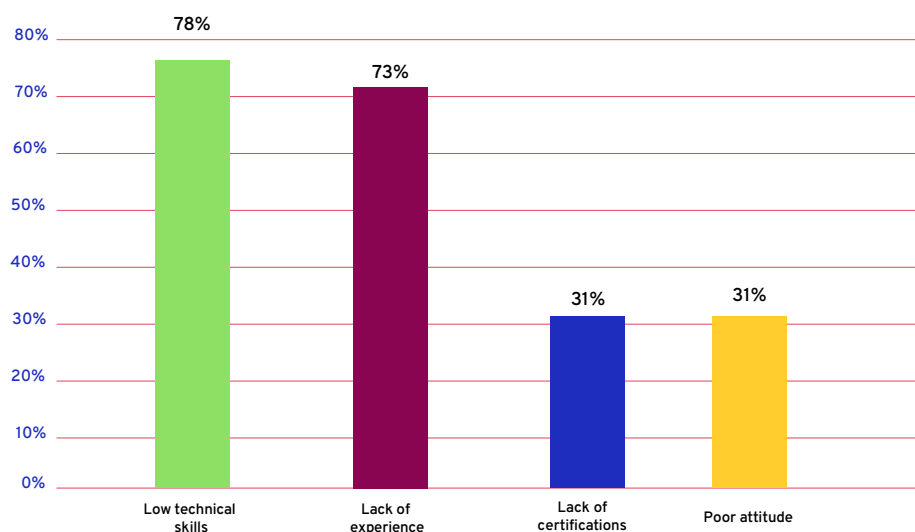
Both culinary and guiding roles illustrate the **systemic absence of specialization in local training institutions**. Students receive broad hospitality training but are not directed toward functional areas (e.g., culinary arts, front office, guiding, event management). Instead, **specialization occurs post-employment**, often informally, leading to **skills mismatches, inconsistent standards, and prolonged learning curves**.

### 3.4.2. Skills shortages in Narok County

In Narok, where 75% of clients are international, skills shortages are more pronounced and globally consequential. 78% of lodge managers reported severe gaps in customer service and foreign language proficiency (76%), particularly in German, French, and Mandarin. FGDs with youth confirmed that most local colleges only provide rudimentary French, leaving graduates unable to meet guest expectations.

Digital marketing remains underdeveloped with 61% of employers admitted they rely heavily on tour drivers and informal brokers to secure bookings, while 75% of women curio traders confirmed they lack skills to sell through e-commerce or digital platforms. This locks local enterprises out of global visibility despite Narok's iconic attractions. The assessment shows that 57% of employers encounters difficulties in recruiting local women and youth, due to low technical skills (78%) and lack of practical experience.

*Figure 4. Reasons cited by employers for recruitment difficulty, Narok County (percentage)*



*Source: Authors' elaboration based on employer survey data, ILO Tourism Skills Gap Assessment questionnaire, Question 8 ("If yes, specify reasons"), Narok County responses (n=49).*

Culinary skills present a sharper bottleneck than in Nakuru. 74% of lodges reported shortages of local chefs trained in international cuisine, often resorting to hiring experience Utalii College-trained chefs already employed in star rated hotels in Naivasha, Nairobi or Mombasa and even expatriate hires. Employers lamented that graduates from local colleges lack exposure to dietary diversity and supply chain management in remote settings.

*Graduates from local colleges are not trained to specialize in either food production, housekeeping or bar tending. Rather they come here and overtime we train them because they only have basic skills. You cannot for example put them to make specialized dishes for high value clients like foreign tourists” (KII- Hotel manager Narok).*

Tour guiding represents Narok’s biggest challenge where 81% of tour operators reported shortages in multilingual, certified guides. The profession remains male-dominated, with FGDs confirming that women are systematically excluded due to cultural and safety norms. Eco-tourism competencies are also weak with 73.5% of operators reported non-adoption of eco-technologies (solar, water, waste management), reflecting gaps in sustainability training.

### 3.4.3. Skills shortages in Kajiado County

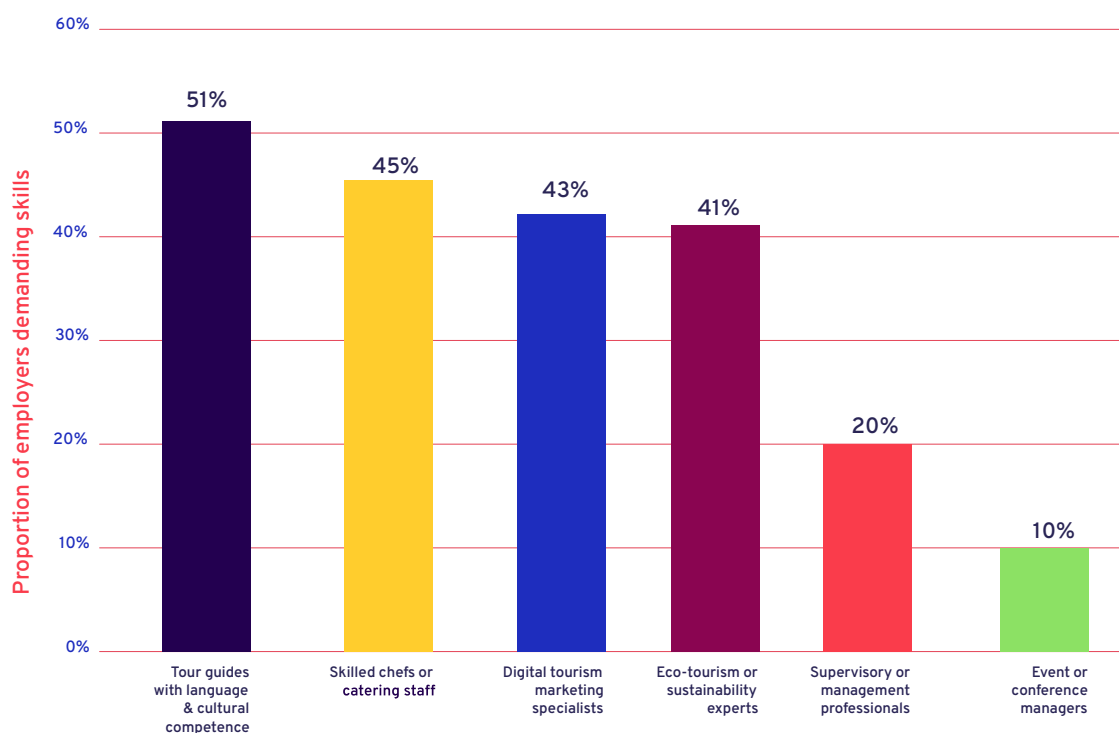
Kajiado’s pluralistic tourism economy presents dual demands divided into catering to Amboseli’s international safari tourists and Nairobi’s conference-driven domestic market. Employers highlighted acute shortages in customer service and bilingual proficiency, with 59% reporting deficits in front-office staff who can switch between domestic corporates and international clients.

Digital tourism marketing emerged as a structural gap, with 65% of hotels and lodges reporting that their staff have weak capacity in using OTAs like Booking.com and Expedia. This was aptly captured at Fred’s Ranch in Isinya where the manager observed thus;

*“Nairobi corporates increasingly depend on digital latforms for booking retreats, by we here and most of my staff and I also know that staff from local hotels and lodges remain confined to static websites and basic social media” (KII, Isinya).*

Culinary arts are equally constrained where 68% of employers cited inadequate culinary capacity within their current staff, particularly in meeting dual needs of high-volume conference catering in Kitengela/Isinya and fine dining in Amboseli lodges. Employers noted that without specialized training, local youth cannot compete with chefs from Utalii College or Nairobi-based training institutions. The study further confirmed that most staff in the food production functional area in most hotels and lodges visited were not from local communities nor were they trained in the only local TVET institutions offering hospitality courses, the Masaai National Polytechnic based in Kajiado Town.

Figure 5. Employers reporting difficulty recruiting each skill area, Kajiado County (percentage)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on employer survey data, ILO Tourism Skills Gap Assessment questionnaire, Question 10 ("Which of these skills are most difficult to recruit for from among locals?"), Kajiado County responses (n=49).

Tour guiding in Kajiado revealed distinctive gaps linked to conservancy models. While 62% of operators cited that their staff are deficient in ecological literacy and multilingual guiding, discussions with KIIs showed that conservancy-linked lodges faces unmet demand for ranger training, rangeland ecology, wildlife monitoring, and eco-certification. 71% of conservancy managers confirmed they struggle to find locally trained staff with these competencies. Further, FGDs revealed that women around Kitengela town are actively participating in peri-urban Manyattas but lack enterprise management, product packaging, and digital marketing, limiting their competitiveness.

Figure 6. Maasai women at a newly built manyatta cultural-tourism site, Olosira, Isinya, Kajiado County



In the background, a group of roughly 15 Maasai women in colourful shuka dress and beadwork, standing in a line outside a large thatched manyatta structure; at the foreground, at centre a maasai man wears an elaborate feathered/beaded headdress - Olosira, Isinya, Kajiado County, Kenya.

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## Comparative Insight

The comparative assessment underscores that while all three counties exhibit systemic skills shortages, the nature and intensity of these deficits are highly county-specific, reflecting their underlying tourism architectures and market orientations. In Nakuru, the most acute constraints are found in event management (67%) and culinary competencies (72%), directly tied to the county's heavy reliance on conferencing, large-scale events, and festival tourism such as the Safari Rally. Employers consistently emphasized that deficits in AV technology management, digital booking systems, and large-capacity catering undermine Nakuru's ability to consolidate its position as Kenya's premier conferencing hub.

In contrast, Narok's shortages are sharper and more internationally consequential, given the county's dependence on the Maasai Mara and the global safari market. The most significant gaps include multilingual guiding (81%), chef training and HACCP compliance (74%), and eco-technology adoption (73.5%). These deficits undermine the delivery of globally competitive services in a destination where over 70% of tourists originate from non-English speaking countries. Narok's reliance on expatriate chefs, coupled with the absence of guides proficient in German, French, or Mandarin, represents a structural weakness that threatens its competitiveness in the high-value wilderness tourism segment.

Kajiado presents a hybrid profile, where shortages are distributed across both international safari and domestic conference markets. The most acute deficits lie in conservancy-related skills (71%), such as rangeland management, ranger training, and eco-certification, and in event management (71%), reflecting the county's pluralistic mix of Amboseli wildlife safaris, Magadi eco-industrial tourism, and Nairobi-driven conferences and retreats. Employers stressed that the lack of specialized conservancy skills risks undermining the sustainability of community-based tourism enterprises, while gaps in event management reduce the county's competitiveness in capturing Nairobi's fast-growing market for corporate retreats and leisure events.

Taken together, the findings highlight that although customer service, multilingual proficiency, culinary specialization, and digital tourism marketing are common gaps across all three counties, the binding constraints differ: Nakuru's are linked to conferencing and event hospitality, Narok's to international wilderness standards, and Kajiado's to conservancy and hybrid conference-safari markets. This divergence underscores the need for county-specific skilling pathways and training curricula, aligned to the distinct drivers of tourism competitiveness in each locality.

## 3.5. Skills surpluses

### 3.5.1. Skill Surpluses in Nakuru County

Local colleges and TVET institutions in Nakuru continue to produce large cohorts of generic hospitality graduates, but the majority remain ill-prepared for the functional realities of the sector. Employers, trainers, and youth interns consistently emphasized that graduates lack depth in customer service, etiquette, and foreign language proficiency, leaving them unemployable despite holding certificates. This results in an oversupply of "paper-qualified" graduates with theoretical knowledge but minimal workplace competence.

A critical driver of this surplus is the failure of most colleges to secure industrial attachment placements for their students. Attachments are often short (three months), self-sourced, and sometime unstructured, which means students must independently seek opportunities, frequently ending up in low-tier facilities with limited exposure to professional service environments. By contrast, prospects for employment in star-rated hotels and lodges are strongly correlated with the quality and location of attachments. Graduates who secure placements in establishments such as Sarova or Merica hotels are more likely to transition into formal employment, while the majority, placed in informal or under-resourced hotels, remain underprepared and struggle to enter the labor market.

This highlights a systemic gap in practical training depth and duration. Star-rated facilities offer structured rotations across departments (front office, housekeeping, F&B, events), giving trainees holistic exposure, while smaller establishments often lack the capacity to provide comprehensive learning. Furthermore, weak supervision from training institutions with lecturers often visiting only once at the end of attachments which suggests that learning outcomes are neither monitored nor reinforced, perpetuating the disconnect between training and industry needs. The result is a quantity-quality paradox where there are high numbers of graduates with certificates but insufficient practical exposure to secure jobs in the competitive hospitality and tourism market. Surpluses of underprepared graduates contribute directly to youth unemployment and underemployment, while at the same time, employers face persistent shortages in specialized roles such as chefs, multilingual guides, and digital marketers. This inefficiency reflects a structural misalignment between the education supply system and labor market demand, echoing findings from the ILO's (2018) East Africa tourism labour market analysis, which identified inadequate work-integrated learning as a key constraint undermining employability in the region.

### 3.5.2. Skill Surpluses in Narok

*Figure 7. Women selling beads on site, Kajiado County (see note below)*



*Dr. Abel Benard Otieno in a checked shirt and olive trousers examining a small beaded item, beside a small group of Maasai women (one in a wide-brimmed hat) near a thatched hut; a blue beaded cloth is laid on the ground as a display for beaded items in the foreground.*

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Narok presents a paradox where a surplus of low-skilled labor coexists with shortages of high-value competencies. Employer surveys showed that while 62% of camps and lodges faced acute shortages in multilingual guides and chefs, they simultaneously reported an oversupply of casual workers such as cleaners, general kitchen assistants, and unskilled hands recruited from surrounding communities. FGDs with youth confirmed that many who aspire to guiding or lodge management end up in casual labor roles such as drivers, largely due to lack of certifications or foreign language training. The chairman of Narok Tour Guides Association operating near the Maasai Mara put it bluntly:

*“Our local youth tour guides find it difficult to get foreign visitors especially during the annual wildebeest migration because they do not know foreign languages such as Italian, German, Spanish and French although some old members of our association have learnt some foreign language informally as they interact with the visitors. Also majority of our members do not have tour guiding licenses so they can only be absorbed as casuals to help visiting tour-drivers with sighting animals, often with very low pay.” (KII, Narok)*

The field observation showed that women engaged in the tourism economy around Narok are concentrated in beadwork and curios. While this demonstrates entrepreneurial activity, the mismatch means women remain locked in low-value segments despite their potential to contribute more directly to guiding, lodge management, or digital marketing. The surplus of casual labor thus masks deeper systemic issues demonstrating an underdeveloped skills pipeline that channels most women into peripheral functions rather than high-value tourism occupations.

### 3.5.3. Skill Surpluses in Kajiado

In Kajiado, surpluses are most visible in peri-urban hubs such as Kitengela and Isinya, where multiple private colleges churn out hospitality graduates with generic skills that exceed current market absorption. ♦41% of employers reported receiving repeated streams of applicants trained in the same basic curriculum, with little to no distinction in competencies. Cross-tabulation of employer and youth responses revealed that 72% of these graduates had no exposure to conference logistics, digital booking platforms, or eco-tourism operations, despite these being the very skills demanded by Kajiado’s hybrid tourism economy.

This oversupply of generalists is particularly problematic in a county where the dual tourism structure of Amboseli’s global safaris and Nairobi’s corporate retreat market demands specialization in event management, AV systems, and conservancy-based operations. Instead, employers reported that they are forced to retrain generic graduates internally, which increases costs and reduces efficiency. FGDs with youth also revealed frustration, with many expressing that despite having certificates, they were “boxed into waiter or housekeeping roles,” with limited mobility toward higher-value positions. As one conservancy manager in noted:

*“We get many interns from local colleges and universities but most of them know only the basics of food service and cleaning. We need people who understand rangeland, who can do eco-certification, or manage conference clients. Those skills are absent, so the surplus adds no value.” (KII, Lodge manager)*

The surplus of generalists in Kajiado therefore highlights the failure of training systems to align with the county’s pluralistic tourism structure, leaving both the high-end conservancy subsector and the rapidly growing conference niche underserved.

## 3.6. Skills obsolescence

### 3.6.1. Skills obsolescence in Nakuru

Beyond shortages and surpluses, the tourism sector in Nakuru is also constrained by skills obsolescence, where competencies once considered adequate have become outdated under the pressures of digital transformation and evolving market standards. Field data shows that 49% of enterprises face operational challenges due to weak digital marketing and online booking capacity, while 53% employers identify digital marketers as the hardest professionals to recruit from the local labor pool. Employers further noted systemic unpreparedness in critical emerging areas: 75% in digital marketing and e-commerce, 74% in smart tourism technologies, 77% in data analytics, and 72% in languages and intercultural communication. These figures demonstrate that while graduates are trained in basic ICT literacy and analogue service approaches, they lack the functional, industry-specific digital competencies that underpin competitiveness in a globalized tourism marketplace.

### 3.6.2. Skills obsolescence in Narok

In Narok, skills obsolescence is strongly evidenced by field data showing that 73.5% of employers reported non-adoption of new technologies, with only a minority 26.5% integrating digital or eco-friendly practices into their operations. Employer surveys identified digital marketing and online booking as the hardest positions to recruit, with 39% mentions across sampled lodges and tour operators. FGDs with women curio entrepreneurs further reinforced this finding where women admitted to lacking any e-commerce or social media marketing capacity, relying exclusively on brokers or tour drivers for clients or direct hawking by the gate of Masaai Mara Game reserve. This demonstrates that while basic ICT literacy is widespread, it has become obsolete under current market pressures where Online Travel Agencies (OTAs), SEO, and digital storytelling drive visibility and competitiveness.

In guiding, 81% of operators expressed difficulty finding certified multilingual guides, and KIIs revealed that most staff rely on experiential knowledge rather than structured training in ecological interpretation or intercultural communication. FGDs highlighted that women remain excluded from guiding, citing safety risks and absence of certification pathways. Together, these figures point to a systemic lag where Narok's tourism workforce is trained for a bygone model of traditional lodge management and oral storytelling, but is not prepared for the eco-digital competencies that now underpin global safari competitiveness.

### 3.6.3. Skills obsolescence in Kajiado

Kajiado's tourism economy demonstrates significant skills obsolescence, reflecting a dual market shaped by Amboseli's international safari circuits and Nairobi's corporate retreat demand. Field data reveal that 65% of employers identified digital tourism marketing and online booking as unmet needs, while 62% of conference facilities specifically flagged weak competencies in operating AV systems and digital booking platforms. Cross-analysis further shows that although peri-urban training institutions around Kitengela and Isinya produce many graduates in hospitality, over 70% of these entrants were only exposed to basic ICT (Word/Excel) rather than OTA systems or event management software. This gap has rendered traditional ICT training obsolete, as it fails to equip graduates for Nairobi's increasingly digitized conference market. Employers reported that reliance on analogue booking and paper-based event coordination has led to client dissatisfaction and reduced competitiveness compared to Nairobi-based hotels that already use integrated digital systems.

Conservancy-linked enterprises in Amboseli and Magadi present a second layer of obsolescence. 71% of conservancy managers reported lack of staff trained in eco-certification, rangeland monitoring, or conservation enterprise skills, despite these being central to emerging community-based tourism models. KIIs revealed that most recruits enter with generic hospitality certificates but lack the ecological literacy or technical training required to manage wildlife monitoring or implement carbon-neutral tourism. FGDs with youth and women further emphasized that while cultural Manyattas remain active, over 65% of female entrepreneurs operate offline and have no exposure to e-commerce or digital storytelling, underscoring an inability to adapt to modern visitor expectations. Collectively, these findings show that Kajiado's training and labor systems are still aligned to analogue hospitality and traditional cultural trade, leaving both the safari conservancies and the high-end conference markets under-served. Unless curricula integrate eco-tourism technologies, event logistics, and digital commercialization, the county risks losing competitiveness in both its international and Nairobi-driven segments.

The obsolescence in the three counties is most evident in the sector's limited ability to engage with Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) such as Booking.com, Expedia, Airbnb, and TripAdvisor. Instead of leveraging sector-specific digital platforms for real-time pricing, reservations, and customer feedback loops, most business involved in cultural products (curios), hotels and lodges maintain static websites or Facebook pages that display only price lists, without interactive interfaces for engagement. This outdated approach locks enterprises into **low-visibility market positions**, reduces their share of international clientele, and forces women selling curios to depend on broker-like tour guide drivers or seasonal walk-in customers. Unless curricula and workplace learning models evolve to embed **OTA management, digital storytelling, e-commerce, and analytics**, youth and women workforce risks losing competitiveness in an industry where **digital-first capability is no longer optional but a baseline standard**.

**Tour guiding also illustrates obsolescence. While only 23.1% of firms surveyed cited guiding competency gaps, employers emphasized more pressing qualitative concerns. Most guides largely rely on informal knowledge of landscapes and culture rather than structured, certified training in ecological interpretation, safety, or intercultural communication. FGDs revealed that guiding is male-dominated, excluding women due to perceptions of travel intensity and safety risks. Moreover, the lack of multilingual skills renders many guides unable to meet the expectations of diverse tourist markets, with of employers (Nakuru 47%, Narok 20%; Kajiado 51%) highlighting guides with language and cultural competence as among the hardest to recruit.**

Graduates and interns and hotel managers also cited **culinary obsolescence**, where limited practical in culinary diversity is taught in colleges highlighting the failure of training to keep pace with international cuisine standards. Global hospitality increasingly demands competencies in **specialized culinary tracks (e.g., dietary-specific cuisines, pastry arts, food safety certifications)**, yet graduates remain generalists, acquiring specialization only informally after employment. This structural lag reduces quality assurance, menu innovation, and opportunities to develop **culinary tourism niches**.

### 3.7. Training supply-side limitations

A critical factor driving obsolescence in the three counties is the narrow digital and practical content in TVET and college curricula. Most institutions provide only basic computer literacy (Word, Excel, internet navigation), which has little functional relevance to tourism enterprises. This leaves graduates ill-prepared for OTA management, digital storytelling, e-commerce integration, or data-driven hospitality management, even when employers are willing to invest in staff capacity upgrades. Skills obsolescence in the tourism

sector is therefore two-fold; Technological Obsolescence where staff are unable to meet modern digital, e-commerce, and analytics standards, leaving enterprises excluded from global platforms and Practice Obsolescence in which guiding and culinary services remain tied to informal knowledge and generalist approaches, falling behind global expectations of certified, specialized, and inter-culturally competent professionals. The persistence of these outdated skills undermines service quality, competitiveness, and youth employability, while simultaneously constraining the counties ability to capture growth opportunities in eco-tourism, culinary tourism, and digital-first travel markets.

### 3.8. Aspirational mismatches

Aspirational/relevance mismatches arise when youth expectations, training content, and hiring realities diverge producing graduates whose career choices and competencies do not match what firms actually reward and use. Discussion with youths employed in the sector and interns revealed that youth often pursue tourism training driven by misconceptions about tips rather than a clear view of skill requirements. In Narok county, it was found that most male youth pursue tour operation in the hope that they will land into foreign female tourists that may marry them and take them out of the country. One young female employee in the hospitality industry capture this so well;

*"I wanted to be a bar tender/waitress because when we were while in college, there were stories about waiters get tips everyday" (KII, Naivasha).*

The Industrial attachments are short (3 months), self-sourced, and inequitable, with access to top hotels limited, undermining workplace readiness. Placement in star-rated hotels strongly predicts hiring outcomes, yet most students cannot access these facilities. Supervising lecturers often appear only once, at the end, weakening feedback loops and competency development. Employers confirm that 97% face difficulties recruiting local youth, primarily due to low technical skills (**Nakuru n=75%, Narok=73%; Kajiado n=82%**) and lack of experience at 78%.

The findings confirm that aspirational and relevance mismatches are systemic and multidimensional, spanning youth expectations, training models, and workplace realities. Many young people enter hospitality and tourism training under the misconception of quick financial gains through tips, rather than a clear understanding of the technical and soft competencies required for sustained employability. Training institutions compound this by offering generic, theory-heavy curricula and short, self-sourced attachments, which limit exposure to professional environments and fail to align graduates with industry standards. Employers' feedback show that confirms that the education-to-work pipeline is structurally misaligned.

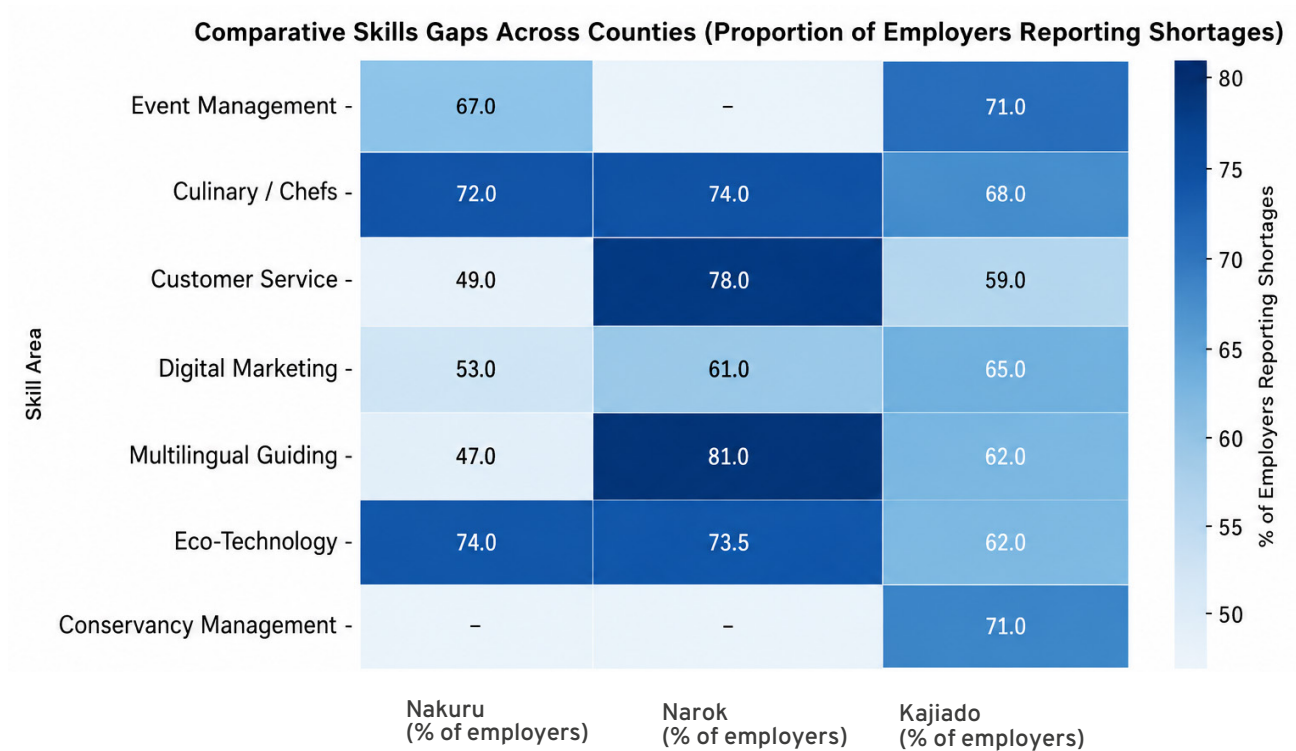
The gendered nature of these mismatches further deepens inequality. Women remain confined to low-value curio retail roles, excluded from guiding and interpretation pathways due to travel and safety concerns, while men dominate high-value, mobile opportunities. Collectively, these mismatches perpetuate a cycle of youth underemployment, high turnover, and employer dissatisfaction, while simultaneously reproducing gendered exclusion from lucrative subsectors. Unless career guidance, functional specialization, structured attachments, and gender-sensitive pathways are institutionalized, Nakuru will continue to produce an oversupply of underprepared graduates who cannot fill critical vacancies, undermining both youth and women livelihoods and the county's competitiveness in tourism markets.

These findings indicate that training-to-work transitions are poorly designed resulting in students pursue the wrong signals (tips), receive generic curricula, and complete brief, weakly supervised attachments that rarely translate into competence or job offers especially for those outside elite placement networks.

### 3.9. Severity of skills mismatches

Employers rated the overall mismatch between graduate skills and business needs at 3.5/5 which is a moderate-to-severe misalignment.

Figure 8: Tourism sector skill mismatch severity matrix



Source: Authors' elaboration based on Table 1 below, itself drawn from the county-level employer survey questions on skills shortages (see Figures 1, 4 and 5 and their sources).

The color-coded heatmap provides a visual synthesis of the comparative skills gaps across Nakuru, Narok, and Kajiado counties, highlighting the proportion of employers reporting difficulties in either recruiting qualified staff or managing with under-skilled personnel. In the heatmap, darker red cells represent more acute shortages, indicating competency areas where a higher percentage of employers cited persistent challenges. Conversely, lighter shades denote less acute shortages, where employer demand and available skills are better aligned.

This visual clearly illustrates how different counties face distinct binding constraints: Nakuru is most constrained in event management and culinary skills, Narok in multilingual guiding and eco-technology adoption, and Kajiado in conservancy management and event logistics. The heatmap thus reinforces the evidence that, while some skills shortages are common across counties, their intensity and implications vary sharply according to the tourism architecture of each locality.



4

KWS rangers in camouflage/khaki ranger uniform performing pull-ups on a metal bar apparatus during an obstacle-course session at the Kenya Wildlife Service Law Enforcement Academy in Manyani, Taita Taveta County.  
©Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS)

## 4. Industry-training institution collaboration

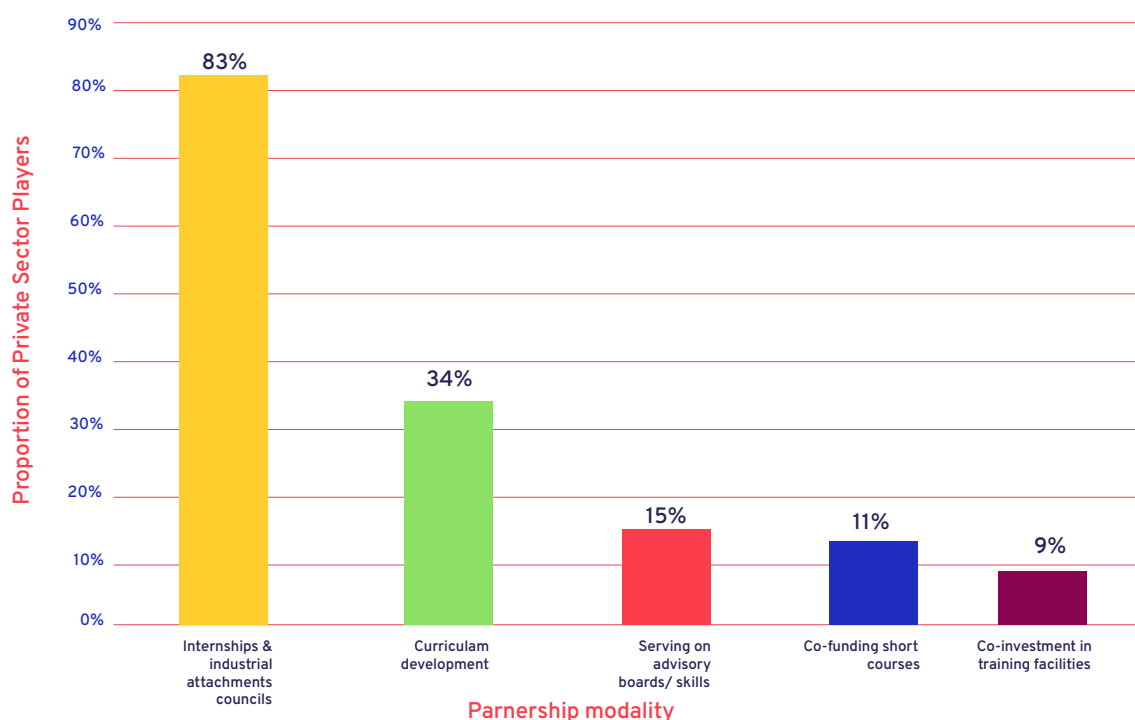
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The assessment investigated the extent and nature of collaboration between tourism employers and training institutions in Nakuru County. Findings revealed that **63.4% of employers** across the three counties reported some form of engagement with local TVETs and colleges offering tourism and hospitality programs. However, the evidence underscores that these collaborations are **largely informal and unstructured**, limited primarily to accepting students for industrial attachments on an *ad hoc* basis. In such arrangements, employers allocate in-house staff to provide day-to-day supervision and subsequently fill out institutional forms to confirm that students were placed. Beyond certifying attendance, employers rarely contribute to the assessment of students' performance, with final grading remaining the responsibility of lecturers who typically visit only once at the tail end of the attachment period. Employers argued that this model is insufficient for building practical competencies, as it reduces their role to passive hosts rather than active co-educators.

When asked about their willingness to engage in structured Public-Private Development Partnership (PPDP) models, all respondents expressed strong commitment to participate. Employers highlighted specific areas where their involvement could add value, including:

- i. **Curriculum co-development:** integrating practical industry requirements, soft skills, and digital competencies into formal training programs.
- ii. **Reformed work-integrated learning (WIL):** introducing rolled-out attachment periods throughout the student lifecycle, enabling exposure across multiple departments and aligning with the seasonal nature of tourism demand.
- iii. **Industry-led practical instruction:** inviting senior technical staff to deliver guest lectures or short modules on customer service etiquette, complaint handling, and workplace culture.
- iv. **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL):** allowing experienced but uncertified staff to access structured on-the-job training and certification through partner TVETs, thereby formalizing competencies of industry practitioners who have developed expertise without formal qualifications.

Figure 9. Employers willing to engage in each partnership modality (percentage)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on employer survey data, ILO Tourism Skills Gap Assessment questionnaire, Question 19 ("What types of partnership would you be willing to support?")

**Figure 9** shows strong employer willingness to participate in industry-training partnerships, particularly through internships and industrial attachments (83%). This is followed by curriculum development (34%) and participation in advisory boards/sector skills councils (15%). Employer willingness to make direct resource commitments is considerably lower, with 11% indicating willingness to co-fund short courses and 9% willing to co-invest in training facilities. These figures illustrate both the opportunities and constraints of partnership; while employers are enthusiastic about providing practical learning environments and advisory input, direct financial commitments may require stronger facilitation, cost-sharing arrangements, and incentives under a PPDP framework. Collectively, these insights highlight a strong appetite for deeper, institutionalized partnerships between training providers and industry actors, which could be leveraged under PPDP facilitation to bridge systemic skill gaps and align curricula with labor market demand.



Two KWS-uniformed rangers carrying tree seedlings for planting during the 10th edition of the Kaptagat forest annual tree growing exercise  
©Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS)

## 5. Green technologies as a cross-cutting skills agenda

Although global tourism markets are increasingly defined by sustainability and low-carbon competitiveness, the assessment found that a significant number of industry players other than lodges within conservancies did not acknowledge green technologies as emerging skill areas. Employers largely framed their training needs around customer service, language proficiency, digital marketing, and culinary specialization, with minimal reference to energy efficiency, waste management, or climate-smart practices. This absence of recognition reflects a critical perception gap because while international visitors, regulators, and OTAs demand sustainability credentials, local enterprises do not yet view green skills as a lever for competitiveness or cost efficiency.

This disconnect points to a missing training and awareness landscape. No structured curricula or CPD programs currently embed skills on renewable energy (solar/biogas), water efficiency, sustainable waste systems, or eco-friendly transport leaving youth and staff unprepared for an increasingly “green-first” tourism economy. The implication is twofold; first, such players’ risks being locked out of eco-conscious international circuits where environmental performance is a prerequisite for contracting; and second, opportunities for new green jobs from solar system maintenance to eco-lodge operations remain untapped for local women and youth. **Table 1**, present a summary of the proportion of industry employers facing difficulties in recruiting local youth and women in critical functional areas in the sector in the last 12 months.

*Table 1: Summary of skill gap facing industry employers*

| Skill Area             | Nakuru | Narok | Kajiado |
|------------------------|--------|-------|---------|
| Event Management       | 67%    | -     | 71%     |
| Culinary / Chefs       | 72%    | 74%   | 68%     |
| Customer Service       | 49%    | 78%   | 59%     |
| Digital Marketing      | 53%    | 61%   | 65%     |
| Multilingual Guiding   | 47%    | 81%   | 62%     |
| Eco-Technology         | 74%    | 74%   | 62%     |
| Conservancy Management | -      | -     | 71%     |

*Note: - = nil or not applicable (this skill area was not raised as a shortage for that county).*

*Source: Authors' elaboration based on the county-level employer survey questions on skills shortages (see Figures 1, 4 and 5 and their sources).*

The PPDP should urgently commission a dedicated assessment of green technology applications in tourism, mapping the skill needs, adoption barriers, and training pathways required to mainstream sustainability. Such a study would close the perception gap, demonstrate the business case to employers, and position the sector to align with both global sustainability standards and Kenya’s green growth agenda.



Lenna Rupp, Sida with a group of Maasai women during one of the field visit activities in Kajiado county.  
©Joyce Macharia / ILO

## 6. Conclusion

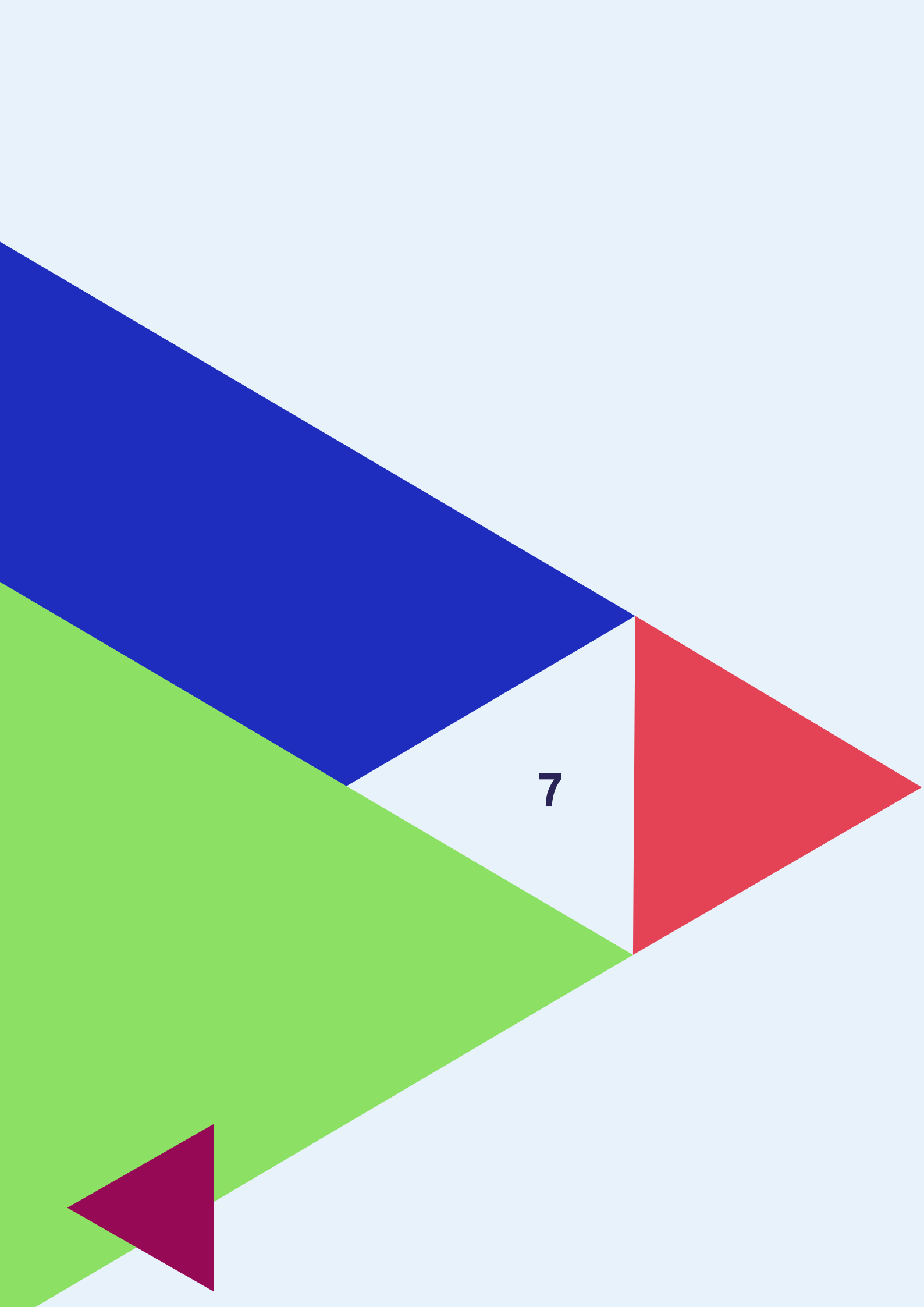
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The tourism skills gap assessment across Nakuru, Narok, and Kajiado counties highlights both common systemic weaknesses and county-specific distinctions. Overall, a high proportion of employers across all three counties reported severe difficulties in recruiting staff with the right competencies or managing with under-skilled personnel already in their workforce. Core shortages were consistently identified in customer service and etiquette, foreign language proficiency, digital marketing and online booking, and culinary specialization, with employers emphasizing that these gaps undermine competitiveness in both domestic and international markets. Industrial attachments were also flagged as too short and weakly supervised, producing graduates unprepared for peak-season demands. Gendered exclusion persists, with women disproportionately clustered in low-value functions such as curio trade and administration, while being almost absent from higher-value guiding, culinary, and event management roles.

The nature and magnitude of these deficits, however, differ sharply by county. In Nakuru, 67% of employers cited serious challenges in filling event management positions and 72% reported difficulties in sourcing skilled chefs, reflecting the county's reliance on conferencing, festivals, and events. At the same time, 49% of enterprises reported operational challenges from weak customer care, and 53% confirmed digital marketers were the hardest professionals to recruit locally. In Narok, the picture is more globally consequential: 81% of tour operators reported severe shortages of multilingual, certified guides, 74% of lodges reported difficulty finding competent chefs, and 73.5% acknowledged lacking staff capable of managing eco-technologies such as solar and water recycling — exposing heavy dependence on expatriates. In Kajiado, 71% of conservancy managers confirmed gaps in rangeland management, eco-certification, and ranger training, while an equal 71% of employers in the hospitality sector reported shortages in event management capacity, consistent with its hybrid profile of Amboseli safaris, Magadi eco-industrial tourism, and Nairobi-driven conferences. Employers also noted that over 70% of graduates from peri-urban institutions in Kitengela and Isinya arrive with only generic ICT training, leaving them obsolete in digitized event and eco-tourism markets.

The study also demonstrates that while more than 60% of employers collaborate with TVETs, these partnerships are ad hoc and unstructured, limited to hosting students for attachments. Yet, industry employers express strong willingness to engage in structured PPDP arrangements, including curriculum co-design, continuous work-integrated learning, and recognition of prior learning (RPL). This underscores a major opportunity to transform the training-to-employment pipeline into a demand-driven, inclusive, and future-ready skills ecosystem.

In conclusion, while the structural weaknesses are common across the three counties, the policy response must be differentiated. Nakuru requires urgent investment in culinary and event-management specialization; Narok in multilingual guiding, international-standard culinary training, and eco-technology competencies; and Kajiado in conservancy management and event logistics, integrated with modern digital skills. Without targeted, county-specific skilling pathways, youth and women will remain excluded from the most dynamic tourism opportunities, and each county risks underperforming in the very market niches that define its competitive edge.



7

## 7. Strategic recommendations

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The findings of this assessment underscore that skills development in tourism is both a shared challenge across counties and a differentiated necessity shaped by each county's tourism architecture. Common gaps consist digital marketing, customer service, foreign languages, culinary specialization, and gendered exclusion affect all three counties. However, the drivers of competitiveness vary; Nakuru's conferencing and event-driven economy, Narok's global wilderness and cultural tourism, and Kajiado's conservancy-conference hybrid system. To respond effectively, interventions must therefore be tiered by urgency (immediate, medium-term, long-term) and tailored by county, ensuring that each local economy receives targeted reforms while benefiting from shared national and regional synergies.

### 7.1. Immediate Interventions (0-2 years)

#### 7.1.1. Strengthen Work-Integrated Learning and Industrial Attachments

Across the three counties, attachments were consistently flagged as too short and poorly supervised. Transform attachments from self-sourced 3-month placements to structured, MoU-based rotations covering all key hospitality and tour operation departments. Joint supervision by industry mentors and instructors will ensure practical competency development. Immediate interventions should extend attachment periods from the current three months to at least six months, aligned with peak tourism seasons, while ensuring dual supervision by both institutions and employers. This will enhance exposure to guiding, culinary, event logistics, and eco-lodge management.

#### 7.1.2. Rapid Upskilling in Digital Tourism Marketing and Languages

With over 50% of employers in all counties reporting shortages in digital skills and multilingual competencies, targeted short courses should be rolled out through TVETs, polytechnics, and private training providers. Priority areas include OTA management, SEO, social media campaigns, digital storytelling, and conversational foreign languages (German, French, Mandarin, Spanish). Such rapid courses can immediately fill market gaps, particularly in Nakuru's conferencing hubs, Narok's Mara lodges, and Kajiado's peri-urban conferencing market.

#### 7.1.3. Targeted Gender-Sensitive Programs

Given the near absence of local women in guiding and managerial roles, gender-sensitive initiatives should be introduced, including mentorship schemes, scholarships for women in guiding and culinary specialization, and safety-sensitive training modules. Immediate action will help dismantle cultural and institutional barriers while creating a pool of female role models.

#### 7.1.4. Green Technology Assessment & Training

A rapid assessment of green technologies should be undertaken, focusing on solar and biogas for hotels, water conservation, waste management, and eco-transport systems. Employers in Narok (73.5%) and Kajiado (62%) already identified eco-technology gaps; embedding such training into short courses will enable hotels, lodges, and conservancies to meet sustainability standards and position themselves for eco-conscious international markets.

### 7.1.5. Digital Tourism Bootcamps

Employers across all three counties highlighted deficits in OTA engagement and social media use (over 65%). Intensive digital bootcamps should be introduced to train youths and women in practical OTA onboarding, SEO/Maps, e-booking, and live digital campaigns, bridging immediate theory-practice gaps.

### 7.1.6. Gender-Sensitive Entry Pathways

Introduce a women's product innovation track (curio e-commerce, digital storytelling) and gender-sensitive guiding pathways (paired guiding, safe travel arrangements). This will immediately begin to shift women from marginal curio roles into more competitive occupations.

## 7.2. Medium-Term Interventions (2-5 years)

### 7.2.1. Curriculum Reforms and Specialization Tracks

Training institutions across the three counties must align curricula to market-specific demands. For Nakuru, specialization in event management and culinary arts is critical; for Narok, eco-lodge operations, multilingual guiding, and HACCP-compliant culinary training are priority areas; while for Kajiado, conservancy management, ranger training, and conference logistics should be embedded in TVET and college programs. These reforms should be competency-based and developed in partnership with industry to reduce the mismatch between supply and demand.

### 7.2.2. Industry-Training Partnerships for Curriculum Reform and Specialization

Establish structured partnerships between employers and training institutions to embed digital platforms, smart tourism technologies, and eco-technology practices in training modules. TVETs and colleges should embed specialized training pathways that reflect county niches. For instance, Narok's lodges can co-invest in training eco-certification auditors; Kajiado's conservancies can support ranger ecology programs; and Nakuru's conferencing sector can co-develop digital booking and AV training. Such collaboration will ensure practical exposure, reduce obsolescence, and build an adaptive workforce.

### 7.2.3. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Establish county-level RPL frameworks to certify long-serving practitioners (guides, chefs, artisans) who lack formal qualifications but demonstrate occupational mastery. This will raise standards and professionalize the workforce, particularly in Narok and Kajiado where informal labor dominates.

### 7.2.4. Clustered Centers of Excellence

*Transition from pilot MoUs to countywide placement frameworks, mandating multi-term attachments, departmental rotations, and standardized assessment rubrics co-developed by industry and academia.*

### 7.2.5. Clustered Centers of Excellence

Medium-term actions should scale women's inclusion through incubation hubs for women-led cultural enterprises (Isinya, Kitengela, Narok Manyattas), coupled with mentorship and targeted financing.

### 7.2.6. Clustered Centers of Excellence

Each county should establish one or two tourism skills centers of excellence focusing on its competitive niche that is, conferencing/events in Nakuru, wilderness/ecotourism in Narok, and conservancy/conference tourism in Kajiado. These centers would coordinate training, certification, applied research, and labor market information systems, ensuring skills development aligns with the evolving industry landscape.

### 7.2.7. Sector Skills Councils

Institutionalize county-level Sector Skills Councils as platforms for employers, trainers, and regulators (TVETA, NITA, KNQA) to align curricula, oversee CPD compacts, and anchor reforms within the PPDP framework.

## 7.3. Long-Term Interventions (5-10 years)

### 7.3.1 Institutionalize Eco-Certification and Smart Tourism Standards

To remain globally competitive, counties must anchor eco-technology and digital adoption as long-term standards. This entails integrating eco-certification (solar, waste, water recycling, carbon-neutral tourism) and smart tourism technologies (AR/VR interpretation tools, digital booking ecosystems, data-driven analytics) into all tourism enterprises. This will future-proof Narok's wilderness economy, Nakuru's conferencing sector, and Kajiado's conservancy tourism against evolving global standards.

### 7.3.2. Tourism Skills Development Fund

Establish a sustainable financing mechanism to continuously upgrade workforce skills. This could be structured as a public-private Tourism Skills Development Fund, pooling resources from county governments, tourism levies, and development partners. The fund should support continuous professional development (CPD), innovation in training methodologies, and scholarships for women and youth in specialized skills.

### 7.3.3. Strategic County Policy Anchoring and National Integration

Finally, counties must integrate tourism skills development into broader national frameworks, including the Kenya National Tourism Blueprint 2030, Vision 2030, and TVET reforms. This alignment will ensure systemic transformation beyond isolated projects. For example, Narok's multilingual guiding can be embedded into national certification frameworks, while Kajiado's conservancy competencies can influence Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) training standards.

### 7.3.4. Workforce Professionalization through Continuous Learning

Institutionalize lifelong learning through mandatory CPD programs across guiding, culinary, event, and conservancy professions, linked to sector-wide occupational standards.



Close-up of an elephant's head, eye and tusk, with a blurred safari vehicle visible in the background on Kenya's grassland savanna.  
©Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS)

## 8. Validation workshop reflections and multi-stakeholder alignment on findings

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A multi-county validation workshop was convened with participants drawn from Nakuru, Narok, and Kajiado to collectively review and validate the tourism sector findings. Representation included County Departments of Tourism, Wildlife, Culture, Youth, and TVET; tour operator associations; women's enterprise representatives; training and accreditation bodies (NITA, TVETA, KNQA); employer and labor organizations (FKE and COTU); financial institutions (Equity Bank); and higher learning and skills institutions including Kabianga and Egerton Universities, Rift Valley Institute of Business Studies, Kajiado VTCs, and Narok TVET. This diverse participation ensured that perspectives from lake-based tourism (Nakuru), wilderness and conservancy tourism (Narok), and hybrid wildlife-industrial-conference tourism (Kajiado) were jointly considered. The workshop therefore provided a rigorous validation platform that confirmed the accuracy, depth, and relevance of the assessment's diagnostic findings.

Across all three counties, stakeholders confirmed the accuracy of the diagnostic findings, particularly the persistent shortages in eco-lodge and hospitality operations, multilingual guiding, cultural tourism commercialization, digital tourism marketing, and conservation-linked workforce roles. Participants emphasized that the tourism workforce challenge is not the number of trainees, but the lack of market-aligned specialization, practical exposure, supervised attachments, and recognized certification across the tourism value chain. They also confirmed surpluses of hospitality graduates lacking practical specialization, demonstrating that the challenge is not the number of trainees, but mismatches between training content and the competency requirements of high-end camp/lodge environments and conservancy-linked operations. Furthermore, participants emphasized that digital tourism capabilities, including proficiency in online travel agency (OTA) platforms, social media storytelling, virtual tourism content creation, and e-commerce for cultural products, are now foundational to market visibility and revenue diversification, yet these remain largely absent in current training pathways.

The workshop strongly reaffirmed that tourism in the three counties is fundamentally a green and conservation-dependent economy, particularly where conservancies in Narok, national parks in Kajiado and community sanctuaries in Nakuru serve as both ecological assets and employment systems. The workshop endorsed county-level and cross-county training partnerships, conservancy-based apprenticeship pathways, and modular certification in collaboration with NITA and TVETA to standardize competence and enable youth and women entry into high-value tourism roles.

Finally, the workshop reached consensus on the need to re-engineer the tourism skills ecosystem through coordinated county-conservancy-institution partnerships, integrating competency-based training, modular certification, extended and supervised industrial attachment models, cultural enterprise incubation, and digital commercialization support. A separate Workshop Proceedings and Action Framework Report provides the full record of deliberations, the specific institutional role commitments agreed upon, the proposed curriculum reform and certification pathways, and the phased implementation roadmap across the three counties. This companion document should be used as the primary reference for operational rollout, stakeholder coordination, and alignment of county-level policy and green skills programming decisions.



Leopard resting on a tree, on Kenya grassland savanna  
©Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS)

ILO Kenya Office  
UN Complex, Block 17,  
Level 1, UN Avenue, Gigiri  
P.O. Box 2168-00621,  
Nairobi, Kenya

