



# MARKET ASSESSMENT OF DIGITAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR REFUGEE YOUTH

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study presents an assessment of the labour market system responsible for creating sustainable digital employment opportunities for refugee youth in Kenya. It analyses the opportunities and challenges associated with this market for refugee youth, with a focus on women, and provides recommendations that are oriented around cultivating an enabling environment for the creation, attainment, and maintenance of digital employment opportunities for the target group. The key components of this report are:

1

Overview of the demands and opportunities associated with the digital economy.

2

Assessment of different components of the digital market system with an analysis of how they are/ are not functioning for the benefit of the target group.

3

Recommendations for how organisations and businesses can cultivate an enabling environment for the creation, attainment, and maintenance of digital employment opportunities for refugee youth.





# KEY FINDINGS

1. Refugee young people in Kenya are increasingly interested in the opportunities associated with digital employment. This interest stands in line with the hope being placed in the digital economy to provide jobs for young people within Kenya as a whole.
2. The interest in digital work is still far from universal, with women being less likely to unilaterally pursue engagement with the digital world for a variety of reasons including but not limited to; difficulties accessing devices, social stigma, and lower digital literacy rates.
3. A fairly vibrant landscape of digital skills training opportunities exists in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, however services are unevenly distributed and lack coordination.
4. In general, existing training offerings are ‘front loaded’ focusing on building skills necessary for employment but failing to successfully bridge the gap between training and employment, leaving participants frustrated.
5. Lack of supporting digital infrastructure is a key barrier to the participation of refugee young people in the digital economy. While services are slightly better for those in Kakuma than Kalobeyei, refugee and host community young people in both areas complain that patchy electricity, low internet bandwidth, and limited means to access personal devices and data bundles limit their ability to compete for online jobs and undermine training efforts by causing rapid skills depreciation.
6. A small population of refugee young people have begun to earn from online work opportunities. However, the work they are finding is primarily short-term and freelance (e.g., digital marketing, transcription), offering merely supplementary income and holding little potential for sustainable career development.
7. Out of the five broad categories of online work available to refugee young people in Kenya, digital entrepreneurship and outsourcing work hold the most promise for the development of sustainable livelihoods. Freelancing and location-based work are more expedient to quick income in the short term but cannot be considered sustainable in the long term.
8. Movement by the Kenyan government to ease access to work permits for refugees and services by national banks to improve financial inclusion are positive developments which will work in favour of refugee young people entering digital work. However, alongside these developments, greater awareness is needed among refugee communities and potential employers regarding the financial and legal requirements for and implications of working in the digital space.
9. Crucially, the overarching barrier limiting the potential success of refugee young people in the digital economy is the lack of demand for their skills within a highly competitive global market. Without the careful cultivation of opportunities which specifically target the services of disadvantaged populations, refugee young people will continue to be passed over for opportunities.
10. Employers require incentives and support to be encouraged to hire refugee young people, and NGOs and businesses must work creatively to provide both. Part of this process must include leading by example and looking for internal opportunities for employing refugee young people.

# Conclusions and recommendations

The findings of this assessment paint a sobering picture of the digital employment market system as it exists today. While undoubtedly the demand for digital skills is growing, it is far from certain that this growth will equate to an increase in long-term sustainable employment opportunities for refugee young people in Kenya. This is a market that favours speed, flexibility, and highly marketable skills; criteria that stack the odds against refugee young people from being able to compete at a global level. To make this system more amenable to the success of vulnerable populations, concerted efforts must be made to widen the pool of opportunities available to refugee young people, particularly women. To achieve this goal this report makes the following recommendations.

1. Curate a catalogue of digital service providers available for young people interested in building skills and getting involved in digital work.
2. Co-create a package of digital safeguarding training and awareness tools to be universally adopted by training centres and internet service providers.
3. Start a small grant scheme for the purchase of personal devices and data bundles for those in need.
4. Make short-term strategic investments into pre-existing services.
5. Focus longer-term investments into building services in the least developed areas.
6. Develop a new digital hub into a 'Centre for Digital Employment'.
7. Establish a training of trainers scheme.
8. Support refugee and host community freelancers to form business collectives.
9. Create a network skills database to aid the training employment pipeline.
10. Strategically plan for employment opportunities for refugee young people both internally and with partners.



# I. INTRODUCTION

## Background

### The opportunities of the digital economy for refugee young people in Kenya

Young people are one of the groups most disproportionately affected by displacement, with those between the ages of 18 and 24 accounting for 13% of the global refugee population.<sup>1</sup> Whether in camps or urban settings, refugee young people face challenges gaining access to employment; from legal constraints regarding the right to work or freedom of movement, to stiff competition with local populations seeking similarly scarce employment opportunities. Within this context, the digital economy has emerged as a promising vehicle for job creation.<sup>2</sup>

The potential benefits of involvement in the digital economy for young people are being demonstrated around the world. Kenya, the country of focus in this study, is no exception – between 2018 and 2019 alone, the country's ICT sector grew by just over 10%,<sup>3</sup> and even conservative estimates place the number of digital workers operating in the country at over 36,500.<sup>4</sup> Like many other countries on the continent, the Kenyan government has ambitions to grow infrastructure capacities that would facilitate the expansion of digital activities. By doing so, they hope not only to meet the employment demands of their increasingly young population but also to reduce the country's reliance on the largely unregulated, but pervasive informal sector where thousands of citizens and refugees currently source work.<sup>5</sup> Yet, while Kenya is inching ever closer to establishing itself as a fertile ground for digital employment opportunities, refugees face significant barriers to substantive inclusion.

To investigate these factors, a market assessment of digital employment opportunities for refugee young people in Kenya is presented, with a particular emphasis on opportunities for young women, and a strategic focus on those residing in Kakuma refugee camp and Kalobeyei integrated settlement. This assignment aims to assess the strength of the market system as a whole – examining the needs and challenges of both the supply side (refugee young people seeking work in the digital economy), the demand side (employers) as well as the labour market institutions which play a key role in shaping the interactions between supply and demand.

As ever, when seeking to examine and represent the refugee experience, it is salient to remember that as a vastly non-homogenous group, refugees will each experience challenges and limitations differently. This means any analysis of the potential gains that could be made in this market must utilise an intersectional approach that accounts for the additional challenges faced by women, and others who face multi-layered vulnerabilities based on their demographic situation. Implications on the host community must also be woven into considerations following the goals of the contemporary approaches, including the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, to pursue programming with inclusion and integration at its heart.<sup>6</sup> In its conclusion, this assignment strives to provide recommendations

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1 ILO, "Digitally empowering young people in refugee and host communities: What is possible?" 2021, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---ddg\\_p/documents/publication/wcms\\_810061.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---ddg_p/documents/publication/wcms_810061.pdf)

2 See: Samuel Hall, The Womanity Foundation, "Girls CAN code: Building a network of resilient changemakers in Afghanistan Evaluation and Strategy," 2020; ILO, "Towards decent work for young refugees and host communities in the digital platform economy in Africa," 2021.

3 International Trade Administration, "Kenya Country Commercial Guide" [online: accessed Oct 2021]

4 Mercy Corps, "Towards a Digital Workforce: Understanding the Building Blocks of Kenya's Gig Economy," 2019.

5 N, Ndung'u, "Next steps for the digital revolution in Africa: Inclusive growth and job creation lessons from Kenya," Africa Growth Initiative at Brookings, 2018.

6 UNHCR, Refugee response framework, [updated regularly] <https://www.unhcr.org/comprehensive-refugee-response-framework-crrf.html>



that will support businesses and organizations to make smart investments that can create an enabling ecosystem for sustainable digital employment opportunities for refugee young people in Kenya.

## Research objectives

The main objectives of this research are to: 1) Assess the labour market system, 2) Analyse elements of the system which are not functioning to the benefit of a target group (refugee young people with a particular focus on women), 3) Evaluate the areas where there are opportunities to improve and 4) Develop recommendations for smart investments for maximum impact.

This report uses a systemic approach based on a labour market analysis (LMA) to define and assess the labour market system that dictates the creation of sustainable digital employment opportunities for refugee young people in Kenya (with a specific focus on Kalobeyei and Kakuma as key areas of interest). It then analyses the opportunities and challenges associated with this market for refugee young people (particularly women), to develop multifaceted recommendations.

## Methodology and sampling

Data was collected in Kakuma refugee camp and Kalobeyei integrated settlement, as well as remotely where needed, throughout December 2021 and January 2022. A mixed-methods design was used containing quantitative and qualitative elements to allow for validation through triangulation. A summary of activities is below. Prior to data collection, the research team conducted a comprehensive literature review and organised a two-day training and piloting team for data collectors.

Table 1. Summary of activities

Activity	Location	Sample Size
Key Informant Interviews	Remote	10
Follow up Semi-structured interviews (SSIs) and case studies	Remote	4
Focus Groups Discussions	Kakuma Camp and Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement	4 Groups, 23 participants
Spatial Mapping Survey		45 unique service provider locations mapped across 8 locations in Kalobeyei (I, II, III) and Kakuma (I-IV, Kakuma Town), with a quantitative survey conducted as 38 of these locations

# Literature review

Before collecting data, Samuel Hall researchers reviewed and analysed all accessible documentation on the global digital economy, Kenyan digital economy, legal, digital, and financial infrastructures for refugees in Kenya, and general refugee employment opportunities.

The analysis was carried out using a matrix organised thematically and based on the research questions which allowed the researchers to identify the evidence available as well as the knowledge gaps, which informed the design of the research tools used during data collection.

## Spatial mapping with quantitative survey

To thoroughly assess the viability of commercially sustainable opportunities in digital employment, a scouting tool was used to provide a spatial analysis of the infrastructure available for online employment to refugees in Kakuma and Kalobeyei. It also served to assess the size and characteristics of the labour supply, and to identify high potential areas for investment. Infrastructure and stakeholders mapped included: businesses, training centres, civil society organisations and internet cafes or hubs, access to electricity, internet, finance, and hard infrastructure.

To complete the spatial analysis, a team of enumerators was sent to designated areas of interest in Kakuma camp and Kalobeyei settlement area equipped with tools capable of recording spatial information. They were instructed to observe, evaluate, and record a set of businesses, organisations, and infrastructure.

While completing the scouting, enumerators also conducted a quantitative survey of key stakeholders and populations of interest. The purpose of this survey was to obtain quantitative indicators that inform the viability assessment and identify key spaces where investment could add value. The questionnaire was conducted by local enumerators and was administered using Kobo Collect, an open-source software for collecting and managing data.

Not all services mapped were surveyed, as some additional service provider names were recorded when service providers surveyed were asked if they knew of any similar services in their area. While 38 services were surveyed, 45 were mapped based on this additional information.

*Table 2. Quantitative Survey Sample*

Location	# Services surveyed	Business type	# Services surveyed
Kakuma	23	Internet café	5
Kakuma I Kakuma II Kakuma III Kakuma IV Kakuma Town	13 1 2 2 3	Training centre	20
Kalobeyei	15		
Village I Village II Village III	8 6 1	Small businesses enabled by digital skills	12
		Other	1

# II. WHAT IS THE DIGITAL ECONOMY?

The digital landscape encompasses a wide range of services, tools, and platforms through which its rapid expansion has been particularly prominent with the emergence of information and communication technologies (ICT). This expansion has brought about innovations in the workforce, providing new business opportunities, including the development of new products, services, work processes, and organisational models for both online and offline businesses.<sup>7</sup> The bounds of what constitutes the digital economy are still broad. For example, the OECD identifies a digital economy as “all economic activity reliant on, or significantly enhanced by the use of digital inputs, including digital technologies, digital infrastructure, digital services and data. It refers to all producers and consumers, including the government, that are utilising these digital inputs in their economic activities.”<sup>8</sup> The Kenyan government’s report on the digital economy, on the other hand, defines the scope of the digital economy as “the entirety of sectors that operate using digitally-enabled communications and networks leveraging internet, mobile and other technologies,” regardless of the specific industries.<sup>9</sup> The slight variations across definitions converge on a main theme, however: the involvement of digital technologies in work opportunities.

The increasing level of digital transformation is often regarded as a positive factor for many countries on the African continent. The African Union and the OECD for instance, view the transformation as an opportunity for such societies to engage more globally, promote entrepreneurship, foster accountability in governance, and expand the economy through diversified labour.<sup>10</sup> Investment into the digital infrastructure in Kenya has grown dramatically in the past decade with over 4.6 million internet users added to its base of 13.5 million in 2012 and the ICT sector having the largest foreign direct investments across all other sectors in the country.<sup>11</sup>

On a general level, the types of work available in the digital economy vary largely given the broadness of the term’s definitions, the countless types of digital technologies existing, and the multitude of ways in which these digital tools can be incorporated into work. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) provides a fairly thorough outline of how digital technologies have been integrated into the workforce, including digital tools, digital skills, digital labour platforms, tech-driven entrepreneurship and outsourcing:<sup>12</sup>

1. The incorporation of digital technologies into the general workplace, such as through emails and word processing applications;
2. the implementation of digital practises for new solutions through digitally trained workers across various sectors;
3. online-based entrepreneurship opportunities such as in e-commerce platforms;

7 ILO, “World Employment and Social Outlook 2021: The role of digital labour platforms in transforming the world of work,” 2021, <https://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/weso/2021/lang--en/index.htm>, 34

8 OECD, “OECD Digital Outlook 2020,” 2020, [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/science-and-technology/oecd-digital-economy-outlook-2020\\_bb167041-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/science-and-technology/oecd-digital-economy-outlook-2020_bb167041-en), 5

9 Kenya Ministry of Information Communication and Technology, “Digital Economy Blueprint: Powering Kenya’s Transformation,” 2019, <https://www.ict.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Kenya-Digital-Economy-2019.pdf>, 13

10 International Telecommunications Union, “Digital Trends in Africa 2021: Information and Communication Technology Trends and Developments in the Africa Region,” 2017–2020, 3–4. <http://handle.itu.int/11.1002/pub/81836c3c-en>

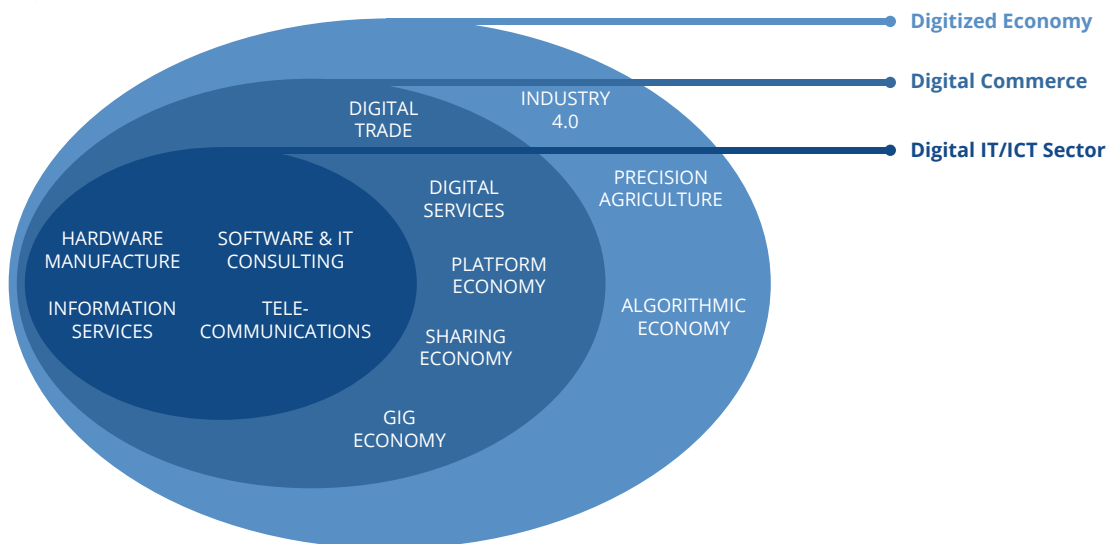
11 Ibid

12 ILO, “Digitally empowering young people.” 12-13

4. digital labour platforms offering online freelancing work of diverse forms ranging from translation to data analysis;
5. digital labour platforms offering location-based services mediated by technology such as delivery and taxi-hailing services; and,
6. outsourcing of specific work processes, typically supplementary business functions, to task-based hires.

While a comprehensive review of all the different types of opportunities presented through the digital economy extends beyond the scope of this research, a categorization of the diverse forms provides a strong overview. A Mastercard Foundation (MCF) 2019 report on digital commerce and young people employment in Africa differentiates the dimensions based on the nature of buyers and sellers, identifying the overarching categories of business-to-business (B2B), business-to-consumer (B2C), and consumer-to-consumer (C2C).<sup>13</sup> According to their report, B2B represents the most prominent sector within the digital economy but B2C relationships are more accurately tracked. The categories are then further separated by the provision of either physical or virtual goods, as seen in Figure 1.

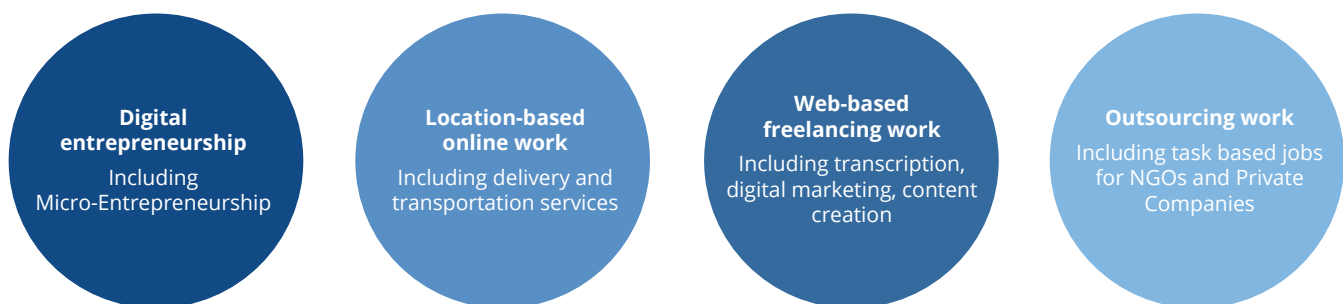
Figure 1. Landscape of digital commerce



Source: UNCTAD 2017

Broadly speaking, the most prominent digital employment opportunities in Kenya are represented by: (1) entrepreneurship including micro-entrepreneurships like e-commerce, (2) location-based online work, (3) online web-based work, and (4) outsourcing work. MCF’s framework helps distinguish between these different services.

Figure 2. Most prominent digital employment opportunities in Kenya



13 Williams, Tricia & Morawczynski, Olga, “Digital Commerce and Youth Employment in Africa”, 2019, Mastercard Foundation, <https://mastercardfdn.org/research/digitalcommerce/>



The first type of digital employment opportunity, digital entrepreneurship, in Kenya is most prominent in the B2C and C2C sectors. According to an estimate quoted by the MCF report, the proportion of global retail sales represented by B2C e-commerce increased from 7.4% in 2015 to 10.2% in 2017.<sup>14</sup> While the exact data on C2C e-commerce is harder to obtain, the emergence of social networking platforms provides users with opportunities to trade, sell, and buy physical goods from each other. In Kenya, the significance of e-commerce opportunities is highlighted by the growing number of trading platforms including [Jumia](#), [Masoko](#), [Mydawa](#), [Kilimall](#), [MoBar](#), and [PigiaMe](#) which are largely B2C.<sup>15</sup> More informally, online platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram provide platforms through which users can connect directly with other clients. According to the ILO, e-commerce platforms that target the needs of farmers and grocers have had particular success in catering to informal businesses, including those managed by refugees. Furthermore, beyond the micro-entrepreneurial opportunities, Kenya is considered a hub for tech entrepreneurship.<sup>16</sup> Examples of successful start-ups highlighted by the Kenyan Ministry of ICT include [Africa's Talking](#), [Cellulant Corporation](#), [Little Cabs](#), [Wezatale](#), [Sokowatch](#), and [Bitpesa](#).<sup>17</sup>

The second type of prominent digital employment opportunities includes location-based work on digital labour platforms. These types of employment include delivery and transportation services in which users identify the work through digital platforms, then perform the task in a specific location through the provision of physical goods and services. Some examples include [Bolt Food Africa](#), in which potential employees can sign up to deliver food, and [Careem](#), a vehicle-for-hire company which includes rides and food delivery services and is a subsidiary of the American company Uber. Others include [Little Cab](#), a taxi-hailing company, and the Uber option for motorcycles (Boda Boda's as they are called in Kenya) called 'Uber Boda.' Other examples of location-based digital work include home and care services, with examples including last-mile delivery services like [Kasha Kenya](#).<sup>18</sup>

Thirdly, digital labour platforms also offer the possibility of web-based work. The types of web-based work vary drastically based on the level of technical skills one possesses, but all are in the domain of providing digital goods and services. The restrictions that refugees face will be explored in further detail below. Some of the prominent freelance platforms in Kenya include [Upwork](#), [Samasource](#), [Freelancer](#), [iWriter](#), [Kuhustle](#), [Cloudfactory](#) and [Guru](#).<sup>19</sup> The types of work available on these platforms can range from those that do not require technical digital skills to those that require advanced digital skills. Table 3 below describes the different types of work available.<sup>20</sup>

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14 Ibid

15 KMoICT, "Digital Economy Blueprint," 2019, 39

16 Rockefeller Foundation, "Digital Jobs in Africa," 2014, 8

17 KMoICT, "Digital Economy Blueprint," 2019, 39

18 See: <https://kasha.co.ke/>

19 World University Service of Canada (WUSC), "Digital Livelihoods Market Assessment in Kakama," (Unpublished)

20 ILO, "Digitally empowering young people," 2021

Table 3. Skill level needed for specific web-based jobs

Jobs for Basic Digital Skills	Jobs for Intermediary Digital Skills	Jobs for Advanced Digital Skills
Transcription	Digital marketing	Graphic design
Translation	Virtual assistant	Software programming
Data entry	Content creation	Data science
Data labelling and image tagging	Videography and editing	Technical trainers
Online customer service		
Typing		
Writing		

Lastly, the digital economy also introduced outsourcing and job-matching platforms, as well as associations that provide work opportunities. This includes the likes of the [Xavier Project](#) which promotes refugee-led organisations and connects them to potential work. Others work to help connect potential employees with employers, sometimes with the explicit aim of targeting marginalised populations. Examples of social impact platforms include [Digital Lions](#), [LevelApp](#), and [Kazi Remote](#), which typically have explicit goals of incorporating marginalised populations, including refugees into their business models and helping negotiate contracts for refugees, including aspects such as payment methods and ID verifications.<sup>21</sup>

### How do refugees get paid for online work?

Mobile payment systems represent one of the most prominent payment methods in Kenya, with 70% of all e-commerce payments in the country estimated to be settled through diverse mobile payment platforms.<sup>22</sup> Mobile transaction platforms include M-Pesa, Airtel Money, T-Kash and Equitel Money, with M-Pesa the most common.

According to a conversation with a national researcher, most refugees engaged in online digital work are paid through M-Pesa. However, one of the main barriers is that M-Pesa requires refugees to have a sim card which they cannot buy without a national ID. An alternative for refugees without national IDs is to borrow a national ID from one of the locals in their host communities. The researcher stated that local community members are typically happy to share their IDs and that the mobile service provider’s customer care line will generally allow refugees to register with another’s ID. Alternatively, refugees can create bank accounts, such as with KCB and Equity Banks in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, which the researcher stated is “relatively easy.” These banks provide refugees with the opportunity to register using their UNHCR Family Mandate certificate, Refugee ID card, or even their home country IDs. Most refugees reportedly use Equity Bank rather than KCB, as Equity Bank is located in both Kalobeyei and Kakuma. However, people still prefer M-Pesa as it is immediate and links with their bank to allow them to get cash out of the ATMs in the markets. Bank accounts are typically used for savings while M-Pesa is generally more commonly used for spending.

21 WUSC, “Digital Livelihoods Market Assessment in Kakama,” (Unpublished)

22 KMoICT, “Digital Economy Blueprint,” 2019, 40

## Report structure

This report is divided into five sections focusing first on the experience and journey of refugee young people seeking digital employment in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, followed by supply and demand for such work. The findings and analysis in sections one to three of this report are structured in a way that presents a journey through the digital market system as a refugee young people may experience it.

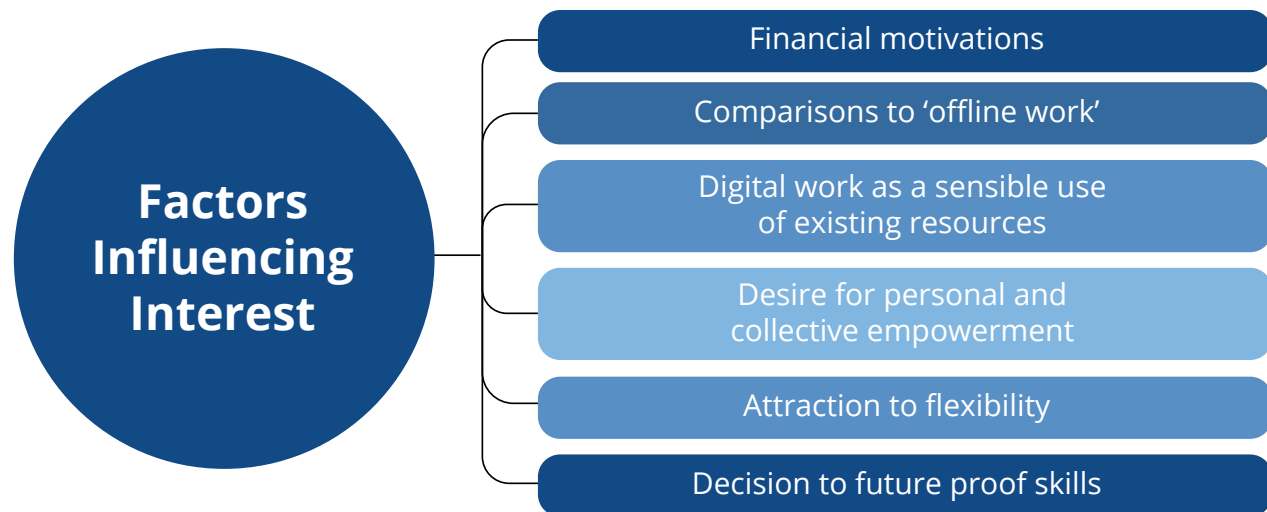


# III. ENSURING INTEREST IN DIGITAL EMPLOYMENT AMONG REFUGEE YOUNG PEOPLE

To stimulate the digital economy to the benefit of refugee young people in Kenya, there must be an appropriate level of interest in the opportunities from young people themselves. We can consider this interest shaped by informal rules and norms which this section will explore, first laying out the key reasons refugee young people are interested in digital employment and what their expectations are, and then moving to examine factors that limit the interest of particular groups, focusing on women.

## III.I. What are the key drivers of interest among refugee young people seeking to get involved in digital employment?

Figure 3. Factors influencing interest



### Financial motivations

The most frequently mentioned factor driving the interest of refugee young people in digital employment opportunities is the potential for financial gains – working online had transformative potential and it was common for participants to justify their expectations based on stories, anecdotes, and examples they had heard of others ‘just like them’ who had managed to begin earning online.

*“I have seen a few fellows who have better lifestyles and that is the courtesy of digital learning. There is a future in digital learning and as soon as I get adequate skills I will chip in.”*



#### **- R4, Female, Kakuma FGD1**

The financial opportunities associated with online work were also frequently compared to those available from 'in person' or 'offline' jobs such as teaching, manual labour or community-based NGO work. Participants commonly stated that they could expect to earn between KSH 6,000–7,000 (around \$60–\$70) working an offline job in Kakuma or Kalobeyei, yet with digital work, the perception is that one has the potential to earn far more than this, in a much shorter space of time.<sup>23</sup> The propensity of online jobs to be short term, cash-in-hand arrangements rather than monthly contracts and payments common for offline jobs also appealed to participants.

Interestingly, a few people interviewed believed that digital work paid better because earnings were untaxed.<sup>24</sup> Of course, this will not remain the case following the recent introduction of the Digital Services Tax in Kenya, which will tax all income derived through online transactions at the rate of 1.5%.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, it will be important that those engaged in facilitating digital employment ensure refugee young people have clarity on their legal obligations regarding digital work moving forward.

*“For me, I can say working using digital in the refugee camp is very advantageous. We work here in the camp for almost eight hours and at the end of the month, you will be paid \$60. But if you work online, using digital skills, you may work for five or four hours. And at the end of the month, you will be paid a better salary.”*

#### **- Male, Kalobeyei, FGD2**

*“It [online work] can change lives if it's supported well. Some online jobs e.g., transcribing paid like maybe \$25 that's a good amount of money you're receiving in a day if you are working or let's say you work only for those two hours in a day then multiply by 30 days in a month is good money you're receiving which can not only bring food on the table but change the lives of the whole family.”*

#### **- Male, Kalobeyei, FGD1**

## Comparisons to 'offline' work

Beyond earning more, refugee young people consistently said that they would prefer to work online because it is easier and less strenuous than offline jobs. Participants spoke about the physical strain associated with the offline work opportunities available to them in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, concluding that they see online work not only as beneficial to their finances but also their personal health.

In addition, participants were drawn to the fact that offline work was more amenable to building multiple streams of income, with many stating that their hope is to balance between three and four different online jobs at the same time to efficiently maximise earning potential to pursue other things alongside, such as continued study. This is a particularly attractive option to many young people who need to earn but also want to continue their learning journeys.

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23 FDG in Kakuma and Kalobeyei

24 R3, Female [Kenyan]: Kakuma FGD1

25 Kenyanote, “Understanding Digital Service Tax in Kenya (Finance Bill, 2020),” 2021.

*“Yeah, me also I can add that online jobs are goods, like here, in the camp with a lot of sun and dust, people who are working offline like outreach workers/facilitators, you will find someone is working from morning to evening, and the payment is very small. Sometimes, no transport to the field and back home has been provided to him.”*

**- Female, Kalobeyei, FGD1**

*“So compared to other physical jobs, online jobs, Yeah, you can handle two or three jobs, whereby you can earn a lot of money online. So in that case, yeah I can say, it is sustainable. It is worth living, it can change your standard, it can make everything perfect.”*

**- Male, Kalobeyei, FGD1**

## Digital work as a sensible use of existing resources

Refugee young people showed great resourcefulness when discussing their interest in online work by reasoning that, if nothing else, it is a sensible and effective use of existing resources. With 98% of refugees in the Kakuma refugee settlement already owning a mobile phone for personal use,<sup>26</sup> one dominant opinion was that a main benefit of online work is that it allows you to maximise these resources to cover the cost of personal use.

*“These phones take a lot from us such as purchasing bundles and charging phones yet we gain nothing from it. So if we could make use of this phone by gaining digital employment opportunities it would be a great help and that is one motivation.”*

**- R2, Female, Kakuma, FGD1**

*“I don’t know if it’s because of lack of awareness or skills for young people to engage in opportunities with digital works. Most young people have smartphones like about 60% of them have smartphones but they do not make use of those phones.”*

**- R6, Male, Kalobeyei, FGD2**

## Desire for personal and collective empowerment

Beyond the short-term interest in accruing a greater income and making use of resources, refugee young people applied a great deal of financial pragmatism and future-proofing logic to their decisions to try and enter the digital economy. Several participants made the point that building a career in online work would help. In this way, digital skills were often viewed as a welcome gateway out of the camp, back to home countries or onwards to others where digital abilities are prized within the labour market (specifically respondents spoke about moving on to Europe or America).

*“If more refugees get access to working online, opportunities will change – even I would love not to stay in this camp for long. Instead I’ll go back to where I come from and apply for those jobs if I see the condition back home someday is fine for me. Also, maybe when I go to other countries like abroad, I will get those jobs because wherever you go with that IT knowledge or online job skills, you will still access work online.”*

**- Female, Kalobeyei, FGD1**

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26 ILO, “Digitally empowering young people,” 2021

*“You may not get the chance to work in Kenya. But while you’re still in Kenya, you can work in other countries, even you can work in Europe, in America, and other parts of Africa. So these are the things which motivated me to be an ICT learner.*

**- Female, Kalobeyei, FGD2**

The idea of ‘online work as empowerment’ was a theme which ran through the answers of many respondents, but presented in slightly different ways. Men for instance, more often spoke about the potential of digital work for community empowerment – a way to connect to the ‘modern world’ and its associated benefits, such as access to goods, services and ideas. Women more often spoke about the potential that online work held for individual/personal empowerment. As illustrated in the words of the respondent below, working online can bring for women a sense of independence and heightened self-esteem.

*“In life I never dreamt of being a digital marketer or have more of online work but after I joined the online or freelancing work, I realised that it gives you the potential of being self-independent because you work for yourself and you work at any time that favours you and no one will push you to work for what you want. So, digital marketing indeed makes you more independent, and it gives you hope of seeing yourself as a potential person or a potential sponsor in real life [building self-esteem].”*

**- Female, Kakuma, FGD2**

## Focus on: The experience of refugee women

For women, the idea of online work being empowering in some way was linked to the fact that it was flexible, meaning that they could fit employment around expected caring responsibilities, all the while acting as ‘your own boss’.

This flexibility was especially important to women for whom cultural norms limit the possibility for them to work in offline jobs. The two vignettes below illustrate both the social pressures faced by women when it comes to seeking employment, and highlights the potential of the online world to ease some of those pressures.

### Fatima’s Story

*“I’m from the Somali community and sometimes working offline like reporting to the working station in the morning and coming back in the evening is condemned by our culture. For instance, if you get married and you are a lady, even if you finished your high school, still they are going to force you to be at home and be considered to do domestic work. But it is more advantageous if you have the knowledge of ICT, you can learn and do the work while at home. So that’s another crucial point which makes and motivates me to learn ICT.”*

**- Kalobeyei, FGD2**

### Nyamakal’s Story

*“I’m Nyamakal, a girl and South Sudan citizen. What motivated me to do the ICT or to do the IT training is that at the moment as a refugee in the camp, we are facing so many challenges as a girl child or as young people. A girl has to do a lot of work at home, like cooking, washing utensils, sweeping the compound, no time to learn and building herself to be fit in this competitive society.*

*Here in the camp young people lack jobs, we finish our studies at school, we remain with our knowledge at home, but when you have the knowledge of computer for example the software engineering, designing things online and like coding, you will easily find a job – as long you have the digital machine such as a computer or laptop you can anything you want. For example, animation, that will supply you with income at the end of the day. As long as you have the knowledge, with the laptop or computer, you can create opportunities for others like create a learning platform for them to access learning alone without being taught by a teacher instead they are guided by the tutorials.”*

**- Kalobeyi, FGD2**

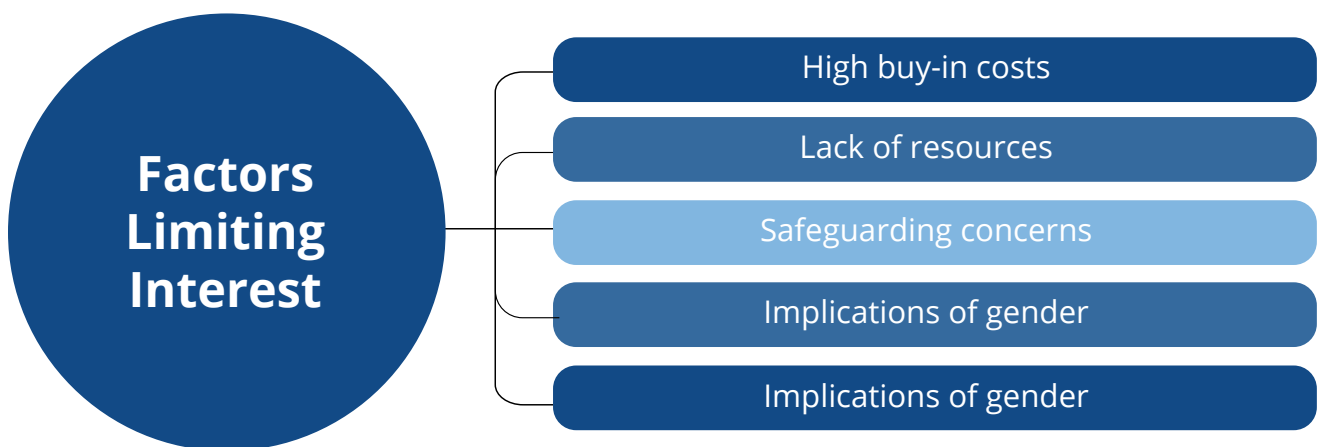
Online work often also allows for flexibility in terms of hiring procedures, which is appealing to women who are less likely to have received formal training or dropped out of school early to undertake caring responsibilities. Where offline jobs may require proof of formal qualifications and legal status, online jobs are often awarded based on skill and skill alone, making them less complicated for refugee young people.

### **Desire to future-proof skills**

Refugee young people saw digital work as a pathway to further skills development and to inclusion in the future of the labour economy writ large. Reference to the digital world as aligned with the aspirations of the new generation were frequent, as was a desire to be connected to the outside world through their work.

## III. II. What are the factors limiting interest in digital employment among refugee young people?

Figure 4. Factors limiting interest



### High buy-in costs and lack of resources

Training providers have cited difficulties in promoting online skill development and freelancing work due to the associated risks and upfront investment needed to begin engagement with the sector. The investment required to pursue online work is twofold; you need to invest time in training and establishing yourself online, and you need to invest financially in accessing services and devices. This second issue is particularly pressing for refugee young



people who also face the integrated issue of low connectivity meaning that even if personal devices can be accessed, they may not be usable at all times of the day. Furthermore, both investments carry a fairly high level of risk, as there is no guarantee of immediate returns. For refugees who are already in a vulnerable economic position, it is difficult to justify that these risks are worth the reward.<sup>27</sup>

## Safeguarding concerns

Safeguarding concerns were one of the biggest deterrents to engagement with online work among refugee young people. Those interviewed spoke of a reticence among their peers due to a lack of trust in online operations and fear that online work opens you up to risks of being scammed or exploited.<sup>28</sup> Participants shared anecdotes from friends and acquaintances who had fallen victim to scams which included signing up for online courses in digital skills that turned out to be fake, and being sent links to websites promising job opportunities which require the input of financial details.

*“We have had some links of scholarships that are scams, they just want to access your details so that they probably hacked your bank account or Paypal. I have read articles about fraud and such incidents exist and people lost their money.”*

**- Male, Kakuma, FGD 2**

*“Another friend of mine ... paid for an online computer science course, indicated in Nairobi University but unfortunately he sent [KSH] 56,000 for a semester after receiving admission number but unfortunately he was not able to attend because the sent did not appear in his student portal and it was also a fake one.”*

**- Male, Kalobeyei, FGD2**

## Focus on: The experience of refugee women

Women’s engagement with the digital world is currently lagging; rates of internet usage alone are 12% lower among women globally than men.<sup>29</sup> Women are also less likely to own personal devices such as laptops or mobile phones and those that do face greater levels of social control over their continued use of these devices as well as access to the internet, particularly in more patriarchal societies.<sup>30</sup> These factors can conspire not only to limit refugee women’s abilities to engage with online work but go a step deeper to discourage interest in the space altogether, leading more women to self-select out of opportunities.

However, it is not merely access and ownership which present an initial barrier to female inclusion; once online, women are more likely to be subjected to harassment, increasing the stigma surrounding women building careers online. Interestingly however, in focus group discussions, women seemed less concerned about safeguarding issues than men. Female participants were more often of the opinion that online work held far less risk of scams and exploitation compared to offline work, where they feel more at risk of financial and perhaps sexual exploitation.

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27 ILO, “Digitally empowering young people,” 2021

28 R5, Female; Kakuma FGD1; R1, Female; Kalobeyei FGD1; R3, Male; Kakuma FGD2; R6, Male; Kalobeyei FGD2

29 S4YE, “Digital Jobs for Youth: Young Women in the Digital Economy,” 2018, <https://www.s4ye.org/node/1801>

30 Ibid

*"I found it is really good to work online since there is no corruption, like bribery, for one to be given a job like teaching, they do not look at the qualification, if they know you're not qualified to teach, you just have to pay a little amount of about KSH 3,000 and your name will appear to the candidates who are qualified, but with online it deals with your skills and experience ... And actually, I can not say, it is only better for women but it is a platform that they not require sexual exploitation, since some of the women are being exploit just in the name of getting the job".*

**- Female, Kakuma, FGD1**



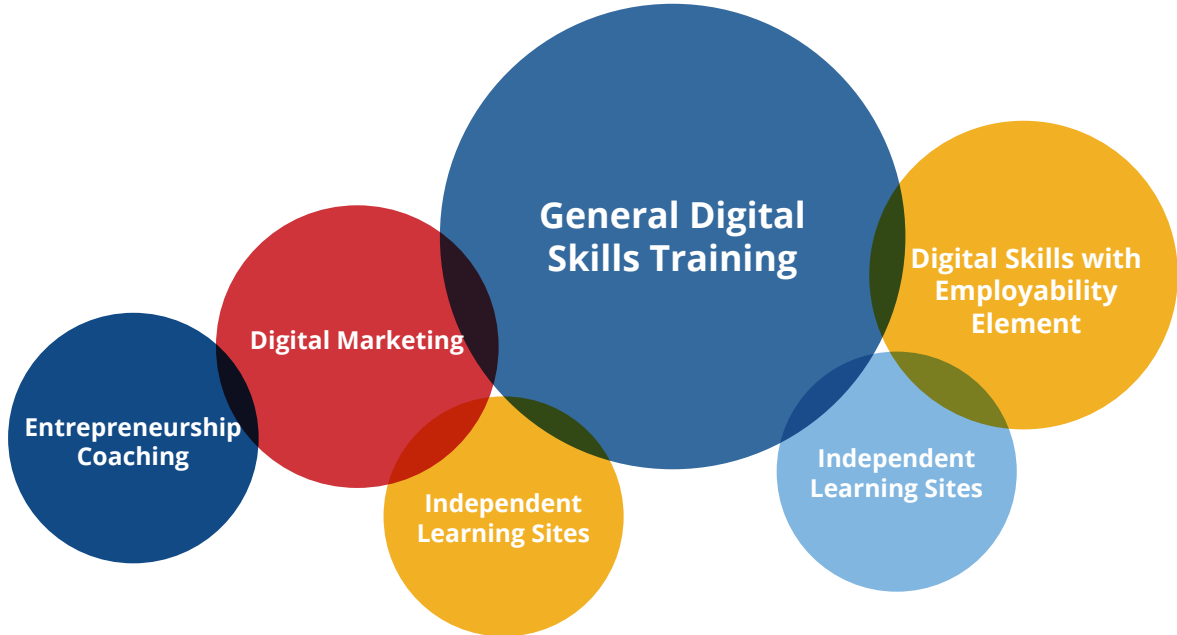
# IV. ACCESSING TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

For refugee young people to benefit from the digital market system, access to skills development and training services are critical. Not only can these services help build personal capacity among the target group, they also link education and employment through; a) connecting refugees with opportunities through strategic partnerships, and b) providing refugees with resources – access to which is often a determining factor of employment success.

This section begins by turning to previous literature to provide a rapid overview of training opportunities available to refugee young people in Kenya, with a focus on Kakuma and Kalobeyei. It then seeks to analyse how effectively current training offerings are facilitating the effective functioning of the market system. It ends with several case studies of training models that display an innovative focus for creating an employment pipeline.

## IV.I. What are the main training and skills programmes available to refugee young people?

Figure 5. Types of training opportunities available in Kakuma and Kalobeyei



The decision for a refugee to participate in a digital skills training programme relies on several factors which include access to basic devices and connectivity, perceived cost and benefit of the programme, and awareness of the programme. Granted that all of these factors align and a refugee decides to search for a training programme, different training programmes cater to different needs and desired outcomes. Some of the skills training programmes are geared more towards obtaining formal employment in the digital economy. These institutions can be distinguished largely by either: (1) including a component in supporting job search through mentorship, financial assistance, or partnerships with potential employers; and/or (2) certificates that help validate their learning.

Hosts for these training programmes range from social enterprises (e.g., [Village2Nation](#)), private enterprises with a social branch (e.g., [Vodafone & UNHCR's Instant Network Schools](#)), to non-governmental organisations (e.g., [Learning Lions](#)). Among these different types, the most common service providers in Kenya are NGOs.<sup>31</sup> However, there are also several private ICT enterprises and start-ups offering training programmes including [Samasource](#), and [Digital Divide Data](#). Samasource provides a training programme that includes skills development, job search coaching, and employer connections.<sup>32</sup>

Other examples of associations that provide training and job matching duties at the end include [Andela](#), and the Moringa school.<sup>33</sup> Don Bosco Kakuma Technical Institute is another, working with young people in Kakuma refugee camp, offering six-month and one-year certificates in information technology. The iTalanta Academy which was established last year in Kakuma through a partnership with Elwa, Windle International and Microsoft, also provides vocational training through a 30-week course preparing participants for employment as IT developers.<sup>34</sup>

## Don Bosco

*"I did ICT, which is a computer course in Kakuma, which was in 2018. The course took me six months, I did it and completed successfully and I was awarded with a certificate. The ICT course was actually facilitated by Samuel from Don Bosco. When I came to Kalobeyei last year, I did it in village three, which was facilitated by Stanley from AR Japan. In addition, yeah, the training included some guidance and things related to getting online jobs. They taught us the business language like how to communicate with dealing with clients and how to adhere to these business ethics, for instance good listening and speaking skills and where in you need to use them when communicating with up in different parts of the country for business opportunities, again they were telling us to form a group whereby they will support us to do business online."*

**- Male, Kalobeyei, FGD2**

## iTalanta

*"It's called iTalanta. So it's a new project in Kakuma, and even in Kenya. So, we are the first 20 learners who have been selected from both Kalobeyei and Kakuma. So, basically iTalanta is hosted by Elewa and Microsoft. So basically, we are trained on programming, how to become a software engineer. That's about coding. And as we speak, right now, it's been one month. We are going for six months, but it's been one month. And it's so quite interesting because we have already known how to create our website and host lively and advertise whatever you want. On that website... With iTalanta we have been provided with ThinkPad laptops, power and free Wi-Fi to aid us in our learning. Like us for the iTalanta Academy, they have promised us after six months we will be provided a two years apprenticeship, that's working. We will be employed in this organisation since IT people are not enough. So we will be employed there and we will do the job for three years for our experience but from there they promised us but obviously they say they will be paying us good money not like the money that we guys used to get when doing an offline job."*

**- Female, Kalobeyei, FGD1**

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31 ILO, "Digitally empowering young people," 2021

32 S4YE, "Digital Jobs for Youth: Young Women in the Digital Economy," 2018

33 WUSC, "Digital Livelihoods Market Assessment in Kakama," (Unpublished), 7

34 Reinartz, Peter, "iTalanta Academy launched in Kakuma," 2021, <https://blog.italanta.net/italanta-academy-launched-in-kakuma-d526d21ceded>.

On the other hand, several training programmes offer more basic digital training aimed at general vocational skills, provided in the form of more general digital education programmes. For example, [Eneza Education and the Xavier Project](#) have partnered with one another to “support formal and tertiary education” in Kakuma.<sup>35</sup> Another example is the [Instant Network Schools](#) (INS) which was established by the Vodafone Foundation and UNHCR in 2013. INS provides participants with digital learning content and the necessary infrastructures to access them for both the Kakuma and Dadaab camps, covering content in both primary and secondary schools. The [Jesuits Worldwide Learning](#) (JWL) also provides “learning labs” where students can access necessary digital tools and infrastructures. Their higher education offerings include tracks in Professional Programmes, Global English Language Programme, Certificate and Bachelor’s Programmes.<sup>36</sup>

Like JWL’s Professional Programmes, other skills programmes are more geared towards freelancing, focusing on providing refugees with the necessary skills to participate in the gig economy. For example, the online initiative set forth by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in partnership with the International Trade Centre and Samasource, called the [Refugee Employment and Skills Initiative](#) (RESI), prioritises “basic digital skills and freelancing techniques.”<sup>37</sup> Another example is [Village2Nation](#), which strives not only to “set up digital training centres but ensuring that every trainee can immediately leverage those skills...”<sup>38</sup> [Learning Lions](#), a non-profit organisation, similarly equips trainees with “IT and media skills and are encouraged to become entrepreneurs.”<sup>39</sup> [The Refugee Employment Skills Initiative](#) (RESI), launched by the NRC and International Trade Centre Livelihoods Partnership in the Dadaab camp, “harnesses the productive potential of refugees and host community members in Kenya, Jordan and Tanzania in the sectors of online freelancing and home décor.”<sup>40</sup>

### **Refugee Employment and Skills Initiative:**

*“I’m a beneficiary of the refugee employment and skills initiative that is RESI, which is a project that is funded by the International Trade Centre (ITC). But it’s implemented by NRC. So I took digital skills training for a period of six months, then later on we were taken through graphic design, digital marketing, email marketing, website development, search engine optimization, before we graduated, and later on we were given a two-month mentorship.”*

**- Male, Kakuma, FGD2**

### **Norwegian Refugee Council:**

*“For me, I did ICT, at NRC. We were targeting the clients worldwide. We were doing online editing, and we advertised through Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram for people to see. So when someone posted an advert for online work through Facebook or Instagram, we were taught how to apply for it and get the job and I am certain that others have already started earning money through those platforms like LinkedIn, Email and WhatsApp, so they advertise all the services and the goods they sell in their businesses and get the customers. Yeah for us we were told how to find jobs and we were also given the freelancers to capture their photos, that is someone may be doing a work in a hotel or selling clothes, we were sent there and captured the photos. So from there you upload these photos on your page and start to advertise that business of that person. So after doing that, they will pay you*

35 WUSC, “Digital Livelihoods Market Assessment in Kakama,” (Unpublished), 7

36 <https://www.jwl.org/higher-education/professional-programmes>

37 WUSC, “Digital Livelihoods Market Assessment in Kakama,” (Unpublished), 7

38 ILO, “Digitally empowering young people,” 2021, 26 - Annex II

39 Ibid, 26 - Annex II

40 <https://www.intracen.org/resi/>

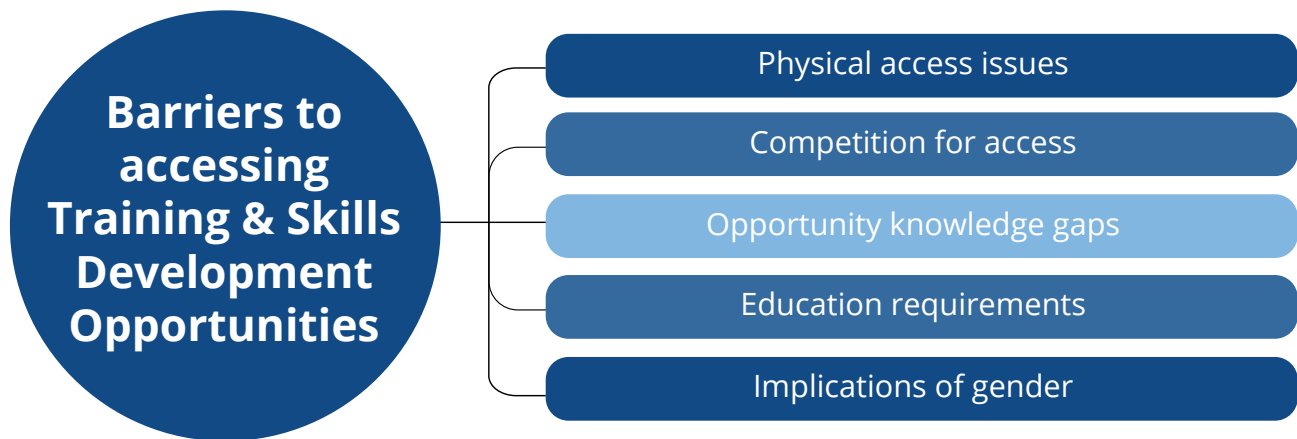


*for the work that you have done. The people who are interested may ask you what you are posting?  
And how much is the price?"*

**- Female, Kalobeyei, FGD2**

## IV.II Barriers to accessing training and skills development services

Figure 6. Barriers to accessing training and skills development opportunities



### Physical access issues

Something that came up frequently among refugees in Kakuma was the difficulty in accessing training facilities due to physical access barriers within the camp. Most notably, refugees spoke of struggling to get to centres after periods of heavy rain because of flooding. The spread of Covid-19 has also contributed to an inability of refugee young people to access centres as many closed or imposed limitations on capacity to enforce social distancing. This has severely limited the access of those without personal devices and/or an internet connection at home.

### Competition for access

Another barrier is the competitiveness of training services. Resource constraints (both in terms of appliances and human capital) limit the ability of training centres to serve the majority of the target group. Instead, services are reserved for a lucky few each year. This competition also sparked security concerns particularly among host community members, who expressed concern about their use of the training centres in Kakuma for fear of violence from refugee communities who they feared would react badly to them using what they perceive as 'their facilities'. The testimony from one FGD participant below illustrates this issue well.

*"I feel like this [FGD] is an opportunity for us to open up because it's been a challenge. I am at SIR (Solidarity Initiative for Refugees) today, but if you can imagine how many 1,000s of youths we are having outside there who are like looking for a centres like this (SIR centre), to access these digital learning skills, and they are not able to access centre, even if you look at like our abilities, we are not*

*even able to meet the needs of 1,000 youths in a month, in a year, we can serve 1,000. This does not mean that we have a bad intention or we are willing to serve them but if you look at our ability, the gadgets that we have, the internet bandwidth that we are having here and so on, you will find on a daily basis you can only be able to host not more than 40 or 50 youths.”*

**- Male, Kakuma, FGD2**

## Opportunity knowledge gaps

The information ecosystem surrounding digital skills training and their benefits seems weak. Refugees who have completed training have often completed more than one, suggesting that rather than constantly increasing their reach to more and more people, centres are feeding a smaller circle than it seems. There is a need for better awareness-raising and advocacy work in collaboration with local community leaders to build the pool of interested prospective digital workers.

### **Survey Insight:**

When asked about areas in which training centres require more investment, 75% of the respondents stated the need for more advanced training sessions and teachers with advanced knowledge to provide this training.

## Education Requirements

One barrier mentioned by respondents was the fact that many trainings require participants to have completed up to high school to participate. This excludes many who either have not completed formal education or cannot prove that they have completed school from opportunities. One participant felt extremely strongly about this point, arguing that requirements should be based more on language of instruction rather than formal education.

*“For digital opportunities you should not need to finish high school or primary school but most of the organisations when they advertise for the computer skills training they request for those who have completed high school. I will urge them to consider the person who has known the language of instruction like English to be taught the computer languages and it should not be made compulsory for someone to have completed high school. This should benefit all members of the community and putting a high school restriction locks some out. They should request applicants based on the interest.”*

**- Male, Kalobeyei, FGD2**

However, basing inclusion on language comes with its own risks of excluding those who do not speak English. It has therefore been argued that as well as eliminating educational requirements, training services should look into providing supplementary training on other basic skills that are required for digital work in conjunction with digital skills such as a basic grasp of the English language.

## Focus on: The experience of refugee women

Women expressed serious concerns about accessing training centres. For women, concerns are walking to the centres alone, particularly during the evening. Beyond issues of security, several women reported feeling that cultural norms and stigma presented a barrier to signing up for and completing training. In particular, issues arose around being out late (which posed a problem for attending evening classes), and using independent mobile devices due to assumptions that they could be contacting men or be exploited through social media sites.

*“Some cultures like ours, the Turkana, restrict a girl to be out till late hours and veto use of the mobile phones since they always conclude it as a way for us to meet with our lovers”.*

**- Female, Kakuma, FGD1**

## IV.III How effective are these trainings in helping get jobs for refugees? Do they play their role in the enabling ecosystem?

While digital training services can be evaluated on a great many fronts, given the strategic focus this report takes on ensuring the match of supply with demand through the creation of an enabling market system, evaluative questions posed to participants who had completed some form of digital skills training were highly focused around how effective they felt the trainings were in providing them with access to jobs.

When asked these questions, 3 respondents out of the 23 interviewed in focus group discussions said that they felt their training to have been integral to them getting ‘sustainable digital employment’.

Others in the groups had not managed to find sustained work following training, but felt optimistic that the skills they gathered would lead them to a job. Often this optimism came from the anecdotes and stories of friends and acquaintances, about how much money they were making through digital employment. Mostly these success stories were shared on joint WhatsApp groups among training alumni and act as a continuous source of inspiration for those still seeking to get on the digital employment ladder.

*“I’m hoping to get it [a job] and with the familiarisation and information from my colleagues who have undergone the online digital employment training I’m hoping to get the same benefits or even better benefits than them, one of my colleagues is a social media activist and he has gained many followers, he able to post the product on his platform and visitors are able to like and buy from through him.”*

**- Female, Kakuma, FGD1**

*“Okay, personally, I’d say that I haven’t gotten a chance to land on a job (online) yet. However, I have witnessed colleagues who are being congratulated on our social media WhatsApp group for having landed their first job and the second job. Those are the likes of Susan and Gadong, Susan and Gadong are students at SAVIC who are being given contacts of the clients and they have to contact the clients using the platform called StepUp.com where they are asked by their client to advertise products and websites on their social media. They have been congratulated on our WhatsApp platform for their first and second leading jobs.”*

**- Male, Kakuma, FGD1**

## Most training programmes connect participants to job sharing platforms, while some go further and connect to initial employment opportunities.

Training programmes that respondents had participated in provide different levels of support in finding and obtaining job opportunities. Most often programmes ended with introductions to freelancing platforms such as LinkedIn and UpWork. A very select few ended with internships or traineeships. The prevalence of an immediate turn to freelancing as the advisable next step for trainees by training services is an interesting finding; while it is indisputable that freelancing is a simple and natural avenue for refugee young people at the beginning of their digital employment journeys, questions have been raised by many about the sustainability of this sort of work.<sup>41</sup>

*“We took a six month training with NRC, then after two months, we took our two month mentorship training, when we were doing mentorship training, we were able to create some of this online platforms that can link us with jobs, we were able to create a personal UpWork account, we were also introduced to the opening of a LinkedIn account.”*

**- Male [Host], Kakuma, FGD2**

*“I think all the training that digital learning offers is good because of their contents on how to guide and orient students in different platforms like LinkedIn and UpWork. Now it’s the student to implement the experience that he or she has gained to bring the good outcome or to turn into something good that is more suitable and profitable to him or her.”*

**- Female, Kakuma, FGD2**

## Training centres should invest in creating a sustained pipeline to employment opportunities and to prepare participants for the digital marketplace.

For many respondents, the gap between training for work and obtaining work loomed large and they felt that the training centres they were a part of could have gone further in helping them to connect to job opportunities and generally preparing them for entry into the digital marketplace. Instead, most trainings focused only on building basic digital literacy, which participants felt disappointed by having been sold on a future of online work.

*“We were taught all about digital literacy, working with computers, knowing how the internet works but I’m not doing that online marketing because I was not guided and also lacking personal gadget and internet to do research on my own, and in fact I don’t understand the steps to be followed for one to join a given platform, like the aforementioned LinkedIn. We actually focused mostly on basic computer skills.”*

**- Male, Kalobeyei, FGD2**

For most people, digital skills training is not enough – they require personalised mentorship to help them with developing their profiles and tailoring applications. The lack of this personalised pipeline support often left participants feeling let down and disheartened. It seems there is a gap between the picture of a potential future that training services paint for their prospective students, and the realities that many of them face after completion. One

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<sup>41</sup> ILO, “Towards decent work for young refugees and host communities in the digital platform economy in Africa: Kenya, Uganda, Egypt,” 2021, [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/youth-employment/publications/WCMS\\_816539/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/youth-employment/publications/WCMS_816539/lang--en/index.htm)

participant from Kakuma estimated that in his class of 50, only 5% of students were able to find jobs following the training.<sup>42</sup>

*“I went through a lot of training but at the end of the day it didn’t help me to get a job because the training didn’t end the way we expected. The organisation promised us that after the end of the training they will introduce us to online marketing in various online jobs. In addition, the NRC promised to connect us to online jobs but they didn’t adhere to the promises they made.”*

**- Male, Kalobeyei, FGD1**



One contributing factor is the limited duration and depth of the skills training opportunities. Many of the training programmes are short term.<sup>43</sup> Across six countries studied in Rockefeller’s (2014) report, including Kenya, “over 2 million high potential young people enter the job market each year, yet only about 41,000 inclusive digital jobs are created.”<sup>44</sup> In the context of an increasingly competitive digital economy, surface-level digital skills are typically not enough to become competitive. Especially with the growth of artificial intelligence that demands the need for more technical and advanced skills, many training programmes lack the depth and extensiveness to provide competitive digital skills.

The lack of appropriate skills training programmes also aligns with the general issue of a skills mismatch which has been particularly relevant for location-based and freelance work, where highly skilled workers often undertake work requiring low skills.<sup>45</sup> In such cases, the issue may point not necessarily to the training programmes, but instead, “reflects a wider absence of decent quality jobs in the economy more generally.”<sup>46</sup> Mercy Corps (2019) highlights the skills match phenomena, present not just for refugees, but general to Kenya’s IT students in general, stating that the “curriculum taught in universities is not up to date, and so does not give graduates relevant skills that can be applied in jobs immediately.”<sup>47</sup>

42 R1 Kakuma, FGD2, Male

43 ILO, “Digitally empowering young people,” 2021

44 Rockefeller Foundation, “Digital Jobs in Africa,” 2014, p. 3

45 ILO, “Towards decent work for young refugees and host communities: Kenya, Uganda, Egypt,” 2021, 62

46 Ibid, 63

47 Youth Impact Labs & Mercy Corps, “Competing in a Digital Age: The Development of IT Skills & Jobs in Kenya and Uganda,” 2019, <https://>



*“We haven’t been taught to advertise products and services online in a business, neither guidelines nor an orientation on selling goods online have been made to us. So that is now the greatest challenge we are facing and it is very hard for us to get involved in online marketing.”*

**- Male, Kalobeyei, FGD2**

Participants interviewed were eager for training that provides very specific guidance on how to monetise the skills they have learned. Several argued that training models need to be re-evaluated, made more specific and vocational to properly set students up for success in a particular type of work that interests them.

Related to this, something that was observed and emphasised by the field team was a need to upskill training staff to ensure that they are fully equipped to train students on programmes most relevant to demands of potential employers. As one participant pointed out, this will require investment in a diverse range of highly skilled trainers as well as appropriate software programmes.

*“The trainers should be able to have specific skills like web design skills, they’re supposed to be taught HTML, Bootstrap, JavaScript, and PHP, among others. For the web designers, for the graphic designer, they’re supposed to be taught Adobe Illustrator, Adobe Photoshop, Corel Draw, to be able to make designs for people’s online logos and posters. If you’re interested in transcription online, youth need to be taught, which websites like now the website called transcribe me is where people are getting videos online and are told to transcribe, they’re supposed to be taught on how to access that website.”*

**- Male, Kalobeyei FGD2**

Beyond a focus on specific programmes or vocational skills, many also expressed a particular desire to learn about the nuts and bolts of different sectors – a good example is digital marketing, which is perceived as being one of the most immediately lucrative freelance jobs.

*“Online work here is somehow hard. For example, now for me personally, I have an idea of just running a business, for example, selling clothes online. But the problem is, there are some other things like the site of the business that is needed for one to start running a business. Within the course, we can even for example, now we are hoping to purchase things like clothes from Nairobi, I’m talking about the clothes now to be transported. But it needs some other things to meet those kinds of business online”.*

**- Male, Kalobeyei, FGD2**

Post-training support to Wi-Fi and devices must be factored into programmes to reduce the risk of skill depreciation. Both refugees and members of the host community spoke about how a lack of a clear pipeline to employment meant that the skills they had picked up during the training had started to depreciate.

*“Yeah, let me now talk as a host too, as we have been trained from there for almost six months, actually before the training we were told that after the training we are going to be given jobs, however after the training we were not given any work currently we are just at home seating with the*

*skills in our heads, it is just useless and again we were told that after the training we were going to be given the laptops, but after that it was just a fake promise and at long last we don't have laptops and how are we going to use the skills minus the laptop so this goes wasted."*

**- Female [Host], Kakuma, FGD2.**

*"There needs to be changes on how the youth are being trained, the training models in the camp are not sufficient enough to equip people that have skills of getting jobs online. Training models will be changed and should concentrate on specific skills that really empower someone to do a job online."*

**- Male, Kalobeyei, FGD2,**

It was repeatedly acknowledged that the issue of skills depreciation following intensive training was also intrinsically linked to the fact that the end of training, in many cases, also spells the end of an individual's access to devices and a reliable internet connection. Several participants shared examples of how they had lost out on jobs following training due to this lack of access.

*"We were taught all about digital literacy, working with computers, knowing how the internet works but I'm not doing that online marketing because I was not guided and also lacked personal gadgets and the internet to do research on my own."*

**- Male, Kalobeyei FGD2**

*"So for me, the training has really helped me to get knowledge, but I have not yet gotten a job. So I have been applying for online work, but I have been lacking some of the crucial materials that are necessary for the work, for instance the laptop. I remember I once applied for an online work with step up one using LinkedIn however they told me that they need someone who has a laptop and since I had no laptop I lost that opportunity like that but I since I am an optimist in life I know I will find one of the online jobs which pays enough amount of money."*

**- Female, Kalobeyei, FGD2**

While most training centres offer use of their facilities to alumni, most have a cap on this use of between one and six months. Within this time, refugees need to be supported to find spaces or services which allow them to have consistent access to devices or they risk skill depreciation and disheartenment. To this end, several respondents advocated for organisations to assist individuals to purchase personal devices after they come to the end of training.

## Summary

The many issues raised in the findings above stem from an overarching problem: training and skills development services currently operate in silos – removed not only from other actors focused on building a talented labour supply, but also often lack harmonisation with demand-side actors who are the vanguards of digital employment opportunities. To respond to this problem, training services must prioritise:

1. Building pipelines to digital employment that work for refugee young people specifically, and;
2. Working collaboratively with other actors within the market system to strengthen it holistically.

To think through how service providers could begin to act upon these priorities, the research team spoke to two highly established training organisations based in Nairobi working with underserved communities, each of which have a unique approach that speaks to the two identified needs gaps.



## Case study 1:

### How can training services build a personalised pipeline to digital employment

#### In-focus: Tunapanda

##### What is Tunapanda

[Tunapanda](#) is a non-profit social enterprise that runs intensive three-month technology, design and business training courses in extreme low-income environments in East Africa such as Kibera (an informal settlement in Nairobi). Their mission is to train young people in practical tech, design, and business skills so they can become lifelong learners, earners, and problem solvers.<sup>48</sup> Since they began seven years ago they have trained 11 cohorts of learners. Recently the Tunapanda team has signed a contract with EMPACT (a WFP project which provides digital and soft skills training to young refugees) to roll out their programme to refugee communities.

What is special about Tunapanda's approach?

**Internal apprenticeship model and peer to peer learning:** Following the standard three-month tailored training, Tunapanda learners that show particular promise in different areas (e.g., content creation or technical support) are invited to stay at Tunapanda and work as apprentices; creating and leading training courses and mentoring the learners that come after them. This model places peer to peer learning at the heart of Tunapanda as an organisation, with most active staff having been beneficiaries of the training themselves.

**An established feedback loop to create an iterative curriculum:** Tunapanda maintains contact with graduates who have completed the programme, monitoring their jobs and locations. Periodically they will reach out to graduates of the programme who are working to ask what the most desirable skills are for their employer, and to keep up to date with trends in the digital gig economy, all to update their curriculum and roster of training.

**Bridging certification barriers through effective signposting:** One barrier that Tunapanda, like many training institutions face, is that they are not an accredited institution, and the learners they work with often do not have the formal qualifications preferred by hiring organisations in the sector. To bridge this gap, Tunapanda sources and shares information about other accredited training opportunities with its current and past cohorts of learners to enable them to supplement their CVs and follow a path of continuous learning.

**Personalised support through the employment journey:** Learners are given access to business skills development courses throughout their time with the organisation. Next, after finishing the three months of training, learners are invited back for a CV and cover letter writing session. They also receive personalised feedback from facilitators on their performance in classes and, based on this, recommendations for the type of employment. Their details are added to the Tunapanda database of learners categorised by skill set and interest. Using this database, Tunapanda facilitators send potential jobs to candidates, and provide support on their applications. For learners still waiting on job opportunities, Tunapanda offers further mentorship from their wide network of graduates and employer affiliations.

**Empowering women in the digital workplace:** Tunapanda runs a specific training programme for women called [Tech Dada](#), which goes beyond building digital skills and focuses on building confidence in the workplace. They also engage girls at a young age through outreach in schools, getting them excited about tech and pre-emptively breaking the stigma around a woman's place in the digital world. The impact on women is measured on an individual basis. A key priority of Tunapanda right now is fundraising to scale and measure this training programme.

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48 <https://tunapanda.org/>

**A robust database and employer partnerships:** For Tunapanda, the key to creating an effective employment pipeline for graduates is a thriving network. As well as their database of past graduates with whom they keep in close contact, they have established trusted partnerships with digital employers, such as M-Kopa Solar and Somo Africa, who send them job opportunities for them to share with their database. The job database is continuously populated and updated by Tunapanda staff who can spend time quality checking job opportunities to reduce safeguarding risks.

## Case study 2:

### How can training services build a personalised pipeline to digital employment

#### In-focus: Nairobites

#### What is NairoBits?

[NairoBits](#) is a youth-based organisation that uses ICT multimedia creatively to improve the lives of less privileged children and young people from non-formal settlements.<sup>49</sup> Their primary service is an intensive vocational training programme with diploma accreditation, which operates in two phases. Phase 1 covers digital literacy and Phase 2 (which is offered only to a select group of promising Phase 1 students) provides advanced training in design and web development, ending in a three-month work placement. Since it was founded in 1999 it has positively impacted the lives of over 1,500 youngsters in Kenya.

What is special about Nairobit's approach?

#### **Diverse partnership model which caters to different needs of the enabling ecosystem:**

Nairobites has a partnership model which encompasses four different types of organisations:

1. Development Partners who provide technical and financial support.
2. Community Based Organisations (CBO) - who help mobilise young people and allow Nairobites to stay aware of the needs of the community.
3. Business Partners who provide internship/job opportunities.
4. Government Partners with whom Nairobites engage in their advocacy efforts.

These partnerships allow Nairobites to target their work to holistically meet the needs of their students.

#### **Blending digital skills with life skills training:**

As well as an intensive full-time digital literacy courses, Nairobites provides life skills training that spans a variety of different areas, from job preparedness to sexual and reproductive health, all to ensure that students are encouraged to make smart decisions that will improve their lives and their income prospects. They also hold events aimed at building the confidence and tapping into the creativity of young people such as hackathons, presentations and video impact training.

#### **Demanding commitment to ensure results:**

Nairobites is clear that their programme, particularly for those who graduate to Phase 2, is a big commitment which will not only include classes which blend lectures, practical application and group projects, but also self-study and independent learning. This commitment is made very clear to prospective students and to their guardians who are invited to the training centres to help them incentivise those in their care to stay motivated. The course also charges a small fee, intended not to profit from learners, but to hold them accountable.

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<sup>49</sup> <https://nairobites.wordpress.com/about/>



### **Incentivising female participation through activating peer educators and the alumni network:**

Like many digital skills initiatives, NairobiBits has faced challenges recruiting young women to participate. They rely heavily on peer educators – young leaders in their respective communities, and alumni of their former cohorts. Both of these groups help to spread the word in their respective communities and social networks. Female alumni in particular are a great resource in incentivising participation as they can demonstrate how transformative their experiences have been and help break down stigma attached to women’s abilities in the digital workplace.

### **Ensuring an unwavering focus on female progress with targeted programmes:**

In 2015 NairobiBits implemented the [Sistech project](#) which focused on providing safe spaces for girls to access digital skills training. In 2021 it launched [Girls Go!](#) Which is aimed at ensuring that girls/young women build their agency and access equal opportunities in learning and the job market. Through the girl centres, NairobiBits has targeted marginalised girls aged 17 to 24 from Mathare, Kibera, Korogocho, Huruma, Kawangware, Dandora and Kariobangi settlements. Through the support of the Malala Foundation, the project had reached 360 girls with 80% employment and 70% retention in the ICT sector and consequently supporting their families by 2018. Currently, NairobiBits reaches about 150 girls per year and intends to scale the number through the GirlsGo! project.

### **Creating a culture of continuous learning:**

NairobiBits places a huge emphasis on creating a culture of continuous learning for both staff and students. Following this philosophy, NairobiBits mandates a weekly training session for all staff where they share lessons and experience, and take self-development/upskilling courses that they can pass on to students. They also work with business partners to continuously develop their curriculum to meet the needs of potential employers.

### **Designing with the user in mind at all times:**

As one member of the NairobiBits team shared, “there is no one size fits all approach to training – designing with the user is key.”<sup>50</sup> This approach does not only apply to course content but also to structure. Like many institutions when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, NairobiBits was forced to go remote. This presented a challenge because many of their students did not own personal laptops. To meet this challenge, NairobiBits surveyed their cohort and figured out how to relay the course over smartphones and how to schedule and structure the course to ensure that all students could access a phone at a certain time one way or another (e.g., planned courses in the evening so students could borrow the phone of a parent once they had returned from work). Learning from this experience, NairobiBits is embarking on a project with the British Council aimed at developing training especially targeted at groups who cannot enrol in full-time training.



# V. ACCESS TO INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES

This section addresses the state of enabling infrastructure in Kakuma and Kalobeyei for improving digital skills and employment. For each infrastructural component of power supply, internet connectivity, physical space, and digital devices, this section explores which areas are most and least served, as well as barriers to access for different sub-groups. The lack of digital infrastructures, including mobile coverage, internet access, and digital technologies, present issues for refugees, not only in finding employment opportunities, but also in maintaining them.

Studies have found that among the top three barriers for Kenyans to participate in the digital economy, expensive internet cost was the leading factor (53%),<sup>51</sup> followed by insufficient skills to match digital jobs (52%), and lack of internet connectivity (21%). This is significant given that a majority of refugees in Kakuma access the internet through 3G smartphones rather than Wi-Fi.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the limited access also extends to digital technologies with “most skilled job seekers in Kakuma refugee camp [not owning] a desktop or laptop computer.”<sup>53</sup> Even if refugees gain the necessary skills to participate in the digital economy, there is still a high chance that they will not have the tools to search for jobs or maintain them effectively.

*“Doing online work here in Kalobeyei is not something easy ... When you’re doing online work, you need to have the data bundles, Wi-Fi, computer or laptop connected to the internet and the electricity. It is not going to be easy for one to do online work. For our case here in Kalobeyei, we don’t have electricity, internet connection, Wi-Fi and sufficient laptops. That is why I say it is very hard for us to do online work.”*

**- Female, Kalobeyei, FGD2**

## V.I Service mapping

Various service providers that help improve digital employment, from training centres to internet cafés and small businesses, can be found in Kalobeyei and Kakuma. To get a better idea of what services already exist, for who, and where, the research team conducted a mapping survey of service providers in the area. The GPS coordinates were recorded, along with information on users, internet speed, and electricity reliability, among other areas. Forty-five unique service providers were interviewed in total. The map below displays a birds-eye view of the distribution of digital service providers in Kakuma and Kalobeyei.

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51 The Kenyan Wall Street. “5 percent of the adult population in Kenya re digital workers – report,” 2021, <https://kenyanwallstreet.com/5-of-the-adult-population-in-kenya-are-digital-workers/>

52 ELRHA & Samuel Hall, “Innovating mobile solutions for refugees in East Africa: Opportunities and barrier to using mobile technology and the internet in Kakuma refugee camp and Nakivale refugee settlement,” 2018, [https://www.elrha.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Innovating\\_mobile\\_solutions\\_Report.pdf](https://www.elrha.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Innovating_mobile_solutions_Report.pdf)

53 WUSC, “Digital Livelihoods Market Assessment in Kakama,” (Unpublished)

## V.I.I Service mapping by area

Kalobeyei is underserved compared to Kakuma when it comes to nearly all types of digital services and infrastructure. Only one-third of the 45 service providers mapped are located in Kalobeyei. The majority of training centres (65.2%), small businesses with digital infrastructure (58.3%), and internet cafés are located in Kakuma – with only one of the nine internet cafés mapped located in Kalobeyei.

Map 1. Service providers in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, by type of service



The geographic distribution by service provider type can be seen in the maps below. There are also intra-camp disparities in service providers. For example, Kakuma Camp II has only one service provider mapped by the survey, while Kakuma Camp I by the river and closer to Kakuma Town has 17.

While not entirely representative of services available due to the survey's non-exhaustive nature, the areas least served in terms of the numbers of service providers mapped are, from lowest to highest: Kakuma Camp II (1), Kalobeyei Village III (1), Kakuma Camp III (2), Kakuma IV (4), Kakuma Town (6), Kalobeyei Village II (6), Kalobeyei Village I (8), and Kakuma Camp I (17).

## V.I.II Service mapping by user type

In the survey, internet cafés and training centres were asked the proportion of users who were female and refugees or displaced people. The distribution of female and refugee users can be seen in the map below.

Map 2. Distribution of female and refugee users

Percent users female, aggregate average by neighborhood



Percent users refugees/displaced, aggregate average by neighborhood



### Gender

The average percent of female users overall for both areas is 41.2%. The rate is slightly higher in Kakuma than in Kalobeyei (42.2% vs. 38%). Kakuma III had the highest percent of female users at 50%, while Kakuma Town had the lowest at 25%, with Kalobeyei Village II & III following close behind at 30%. Training centres overall had a higher proportion of female users (42.2%) than internet cafés (32.5%). Barely any small business reported employing females with digital skills.



## Refugee status

The average percent refugee/displaced users across all services and areas was 87.5%. This was highest in Kakuma II, III, IV, and Kalobeyei Village II at 99% respectively, followed by Kalobeyei Village III (90%), Kalobeyei Village I (82%), and Kakuma Town (40%). Training centres overall also had a much higher percent of users who were refugees or displaced (92.8%) than internet cafés (66.3%).

## Obstacles to access

During FGDs and SSIs, women in particular mentioned difficulties accessing training centres, especially when they were located far from their homes and transportation was expensive. Host community members also mentioned the difficulties of accessing ICT training centres and the high cost of transportation, which they mentioned were all mostly focused on serving refugees, with no dedicated training centres for the host community.

*“So a big challenge on our site as host communities is that we don’t have an ICT centre. We just rely on the Kakuma IV centre because we are always referred to it and they always tell us the centre is open if you want to go and do some work ... [with laptops and internet]. But ... Kakuma IV is very far, coming all the way from Kakuma Town and boarding a motorcycle is quite expensive, going and coming back costs 500 shillings.”*

**- Male, host community, Kakuma, FGD2**

The physical environment of Kakuma and Kalobeyei itself, located along rivers in a semi-arid landscape can also be a barrier to accessing training. During the rainy season, flooding can make transit between camps very difficult, especially between Kakuma town and the camps on the other side of the river where the training centres are largely located.

The overall lack of spaces available can lead to an overcrowding of services and large competition for digital resources. One of the main challenges to extending digital skills in Kakuma and Kalobeyei cited by business owners, training centres, and internet cafés is a lack of physical space. There is a general lack of dedicated centres for those seeking to access and maintain online work – with all oriented around training which often means exclusive access only for students. In Kalobeyei, there is only one centre run by NRC for the three villages to help young people access online jobs, leading to an overreliance on a single service.

Refugees report using training centres and internet cafés as an option when they run out of data bundles. For those who arrive early in the morning, they can be selected to be given a link to access online jobs by a supervisor at the Kalobeyei computer training centre.<sup>54</sup> However, this points to the over competition for limited internet resources.

The cost for using an internet café and training services can be high. The average cost for internet café services in the survey was KSH 98 per hour – which can be cost prohibitive for many. Some internet cafés in the host community were reported to be as high as KSH 180 per hour. Thus, few people can afford regular personal internet connectivity on their own. The costs for training centres varied, with some being free and others charging a monthly fee. For example, AAR Japan charges KSH 20 per use of laptop, electricity, and Wi-Fi.<sup>55</sup>

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54 FGD 1, Kalobeyei

55 FGD 2, Kalobeyei



# V.II Electricity and internet infrastructure

## V.II.II Electricity

Electricity is fundamental for advancing digital skills employment for refugees. It is the backbone of ensuring internet access, charging of essential devices such as computers and smartphones, and providing light to allow individuals to work more flexible hours that are better adjusted to individual needs and schedules, with competing demands from household work and other employment. However, in Kakuma and Kalobeyei electricity provision can be sporadic at best and is uneven between neighbourhoods and services.

One hundred percent of training centres surveyed cited ‘reliable access to electricity’ among their most pressing business needs. In a survey, service providers were asked to rate the electricity reliability of their building on a scale of 1–5. Training centres ranked their electricity provision the most reliable. This was followed by small businesses using digital skills, and finally internet cafés. The average reliability was 3.4 (‘regular’) across all services regardless of service area.

*“Power and lack of electricity are a problem in Kalobeyei, for digital devices have to be charged all throughout ... Stable power supply also can help our devices to get charged throughout to reduce hitch ups.”*

**- Survey respondent, Kalobeyei Village**

Geographically, the electricity was notably rated as more reliable by service providers in Kakuma (3.7) than in Kalobeyei (2.5). Service providers in Kakuma IV ranked highest at 4.5 (between reliable and very reliable), while service providers in Kalobeyei Village II ranked lowest at 2 (unreliable). A participant in one FGD in Kalobeyei noted that electricity had not been supplied to villages II and III.<sup>56</sup> Map 3 shows this geographic breakdown of electricity reliability through a heat map of ratings by service provider coordinates.

Table 4. Electricity reliability, by service type

Service type	% ‘Reliable’ or ‘very reliable’	Average rating
Internet café	20%	2.6/5
Small business	33.3%	2.9/5
Training centres	81.3%	3.9/5

## V.II.III Internet

Following the fundamental component of electricity, internet and Wi-Fi access are key for accessing digital employment opportunities. However, in a manner similar to electricity, internet connectivity is known in Kakuma and Kalobeyei to be often unreliable or unable to meet the demands of those seeking digital employment. One hundred percent of training centres surveyed cited ‘reliable internet access’ among their most pressing business needs.

56 FGD 2, Kalobeyei

On a scale of 1-5, the average ranking of internet reliability by survey respondents across Kalobeyei and Kakuma was 2.8 (between 'unreliable' and 'regular'). The internet was noticeably ranked more reliable in Kakuma than Kalobeyei (3.23 v. 1.625), where it was ranked between 'very unreliable' and 'unreliable.' Kakuma II and Kakuma Town ranked highest at 4 ('reliable'), while Kalobeyei Village II and III ranked lowest at 1 ('very unreliable').

The average internet download and upload speed during a speed test across all areas was 2.3 Mbps. This was much higher in Kakuma (2.69 Mbps) than in Kalobeyei (0.75 Mbps). Kakuma I ranked highest at 2.89, while Kalobeyei III ranked lowest at 0. The average internet upload speed during a speed test was 3.65 Mbps. Kakuma I and Kalobeyei Village III ranked highest at 4.33, while Kalobeyei III ranked lowest at 0 - illustrative of the low internet connectivity available in the area. Internet café owners, mostly in Kakuma, voiced that more reliable internet and electricity were essential to make them a sustainable hub where refugee young people could pursue sustainable online work.

Table 5. Internet reliability and speed, by service type

Service type	% 'Reliable' or 'very reliable'	Average rating	Average speed (upload + download)
Internet café	40%	3.4/5	3.7 Mbps
Small business	33.3%	2.3/5	n/a Mbps
Training centres	37.5%	2.9/5	2.7 Mbps

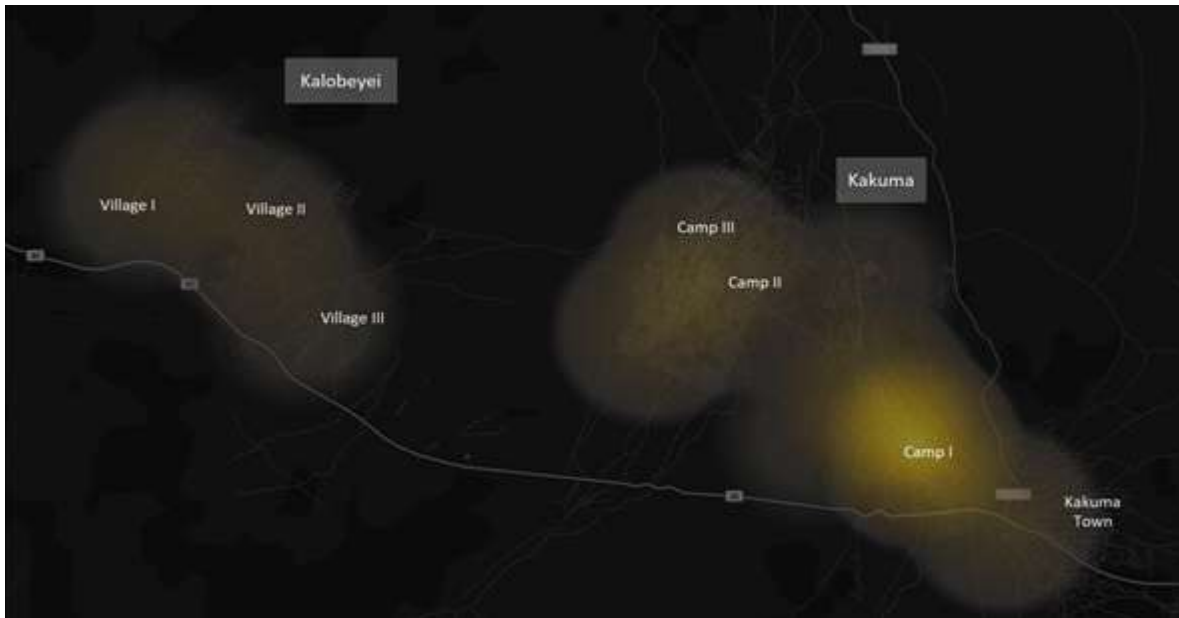
At training centres, sporadic internet connection can disrupt learning and lead to incomplete tasks. Online connectivity would allow for more self-paced learning for students coming from different skill levels, linguistic and educational backgrounds. Lack of stable internet also can create obstacles to job opportunities and online interviews. Employers may be more likely to go with someone who has reliable internet connection. Furthermore, online work often requires a person to be regularly reachable to build trust. Thus, not having a regular connection gets in the way of people being able to develop sustained working relationships with employers. For work that is on a tight timeline, internet disruptions can create delays in the timely submission of deliverables.

SIR Centre | Kakuma, 2021

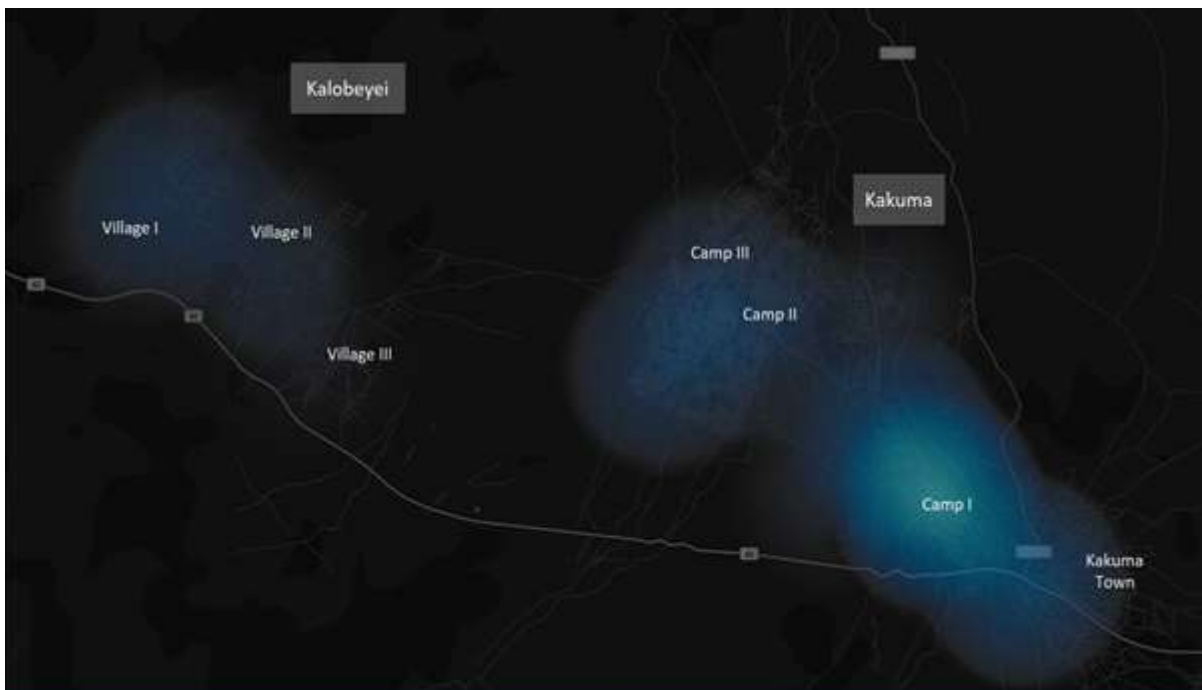
Computer and Training Centre | Kalobeyei, 2022



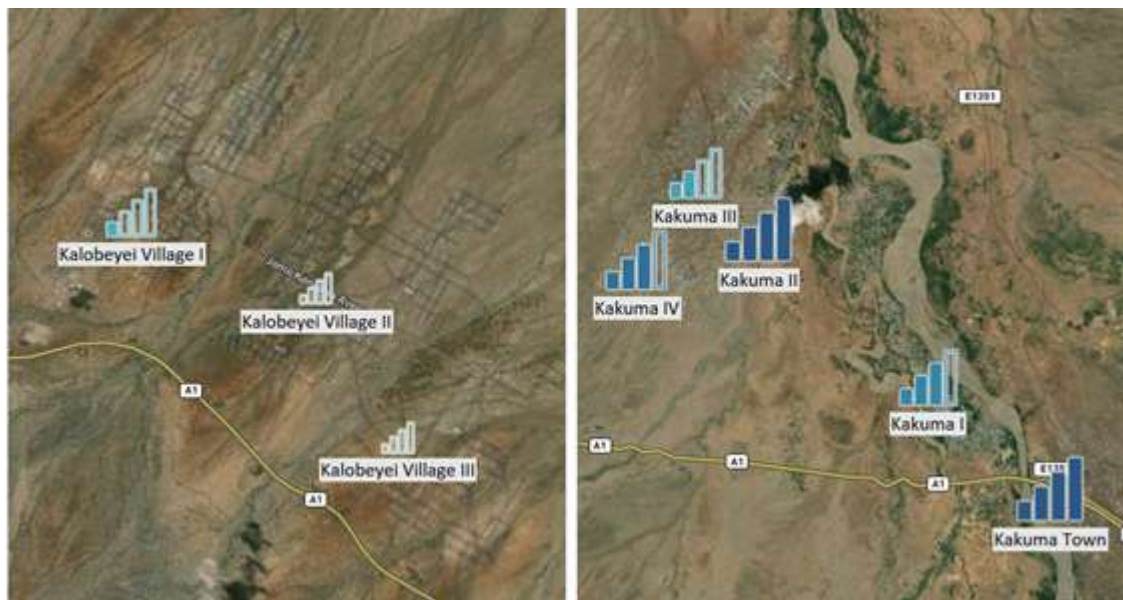
Map 3. Electricity reliability heat map, rating on a scale of 1-5 by service provider location \*Brighter yellow indicates a higher reliability ranking



Map 4. Internet reliability heat map, rating on a scale of 1-5 by service provider location. \*Brighter blue indicates a higher reliability ranking



Map 5. Average internet upload/download speed (mbps), by service provider mid-point location. \*More bars, darker blue, larger size indicates stronger internet speed.



In addition to electricity and internet, physical resources such as adequate and affordable building space, as well as laptops and computers are critical for enhancing the digital skills ecosystem in Kakuma and Kalobeyei.

*“If you are given skill, then you are not given the necessary tools, the skills are useless. At NRC centre, we were given laptops, we were trained and given skills, then at the end of the training we were not given the laptops, no one gave us the bundles and whatever is necessary for us to search for these online jobs. So, somebody like me, just to say very little, sometimes when I have bundles that is when I logged into some of these platforms but when I don’t have bundles that day just ends like that.”*

**- Survey respondent, internet café provider, Kakuma FGD 2**

## Computer access

Computers and laptops play a key role for refugees to access digital work, yet they are in very limited supply for use in Kakuma and Kalobeyei.

Ninety-four percent of training centres surveyed cited ‘more computers to meet demand’ as their most pressing business need. Yet, only 60% of internet café operators, and 63% of training centres said there had been a ‘small increase’ to digital infrastructure in the last five years. Internet café operators universally reported only a ‘small increase’ in those owning a personal computer. In terms of computers available for public use, on average, training centres reported 29 public computers per centre (vs. 33 computers per trainee per centre). Internet cafés reported on average 7.2 computers available for public use at each location. Some refugees reported that the computers in certain training centres, such as NRC, are for training purposes only and not for work.<sup>57</sup>

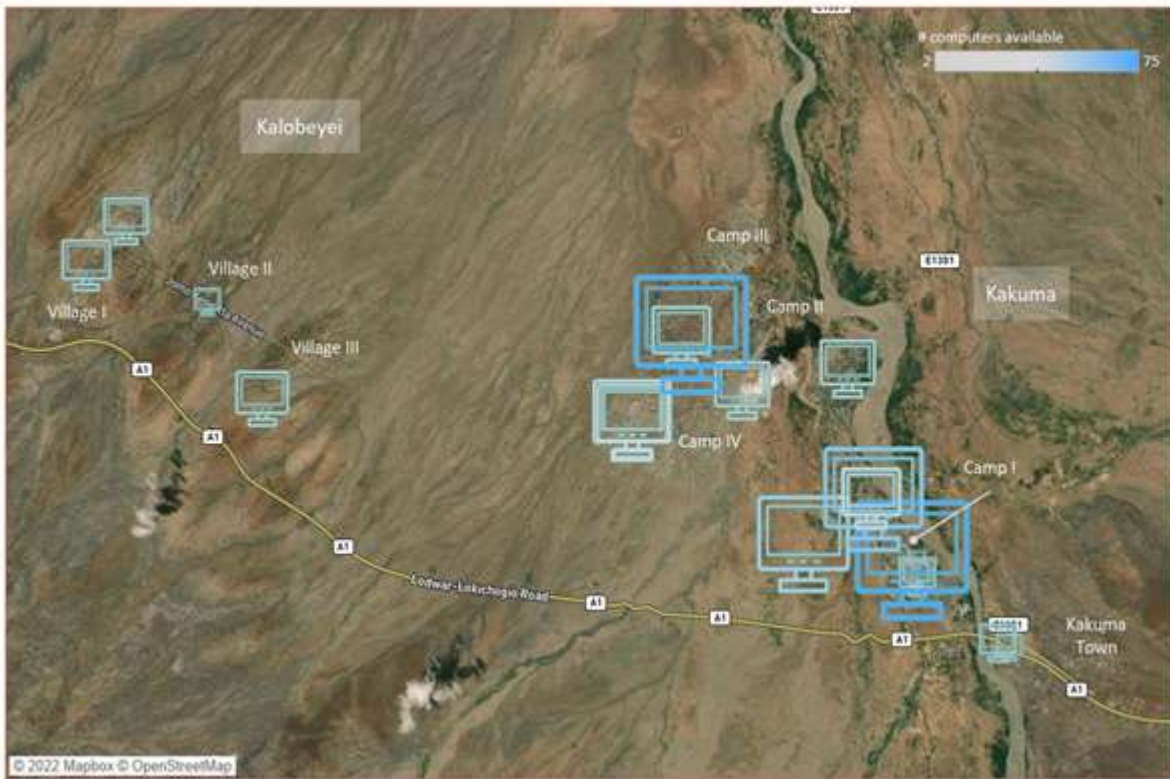
In Kakuma there are 89 computers available for public use from the mapped service providers, more than 3.4 times the number available in Kalobeyei (26; all concentrated in Village III). None of the services in Kalobeyei villages I & II had computers available for public use. Kakuma Town and Kakuma II are also relatively underserved in terms of computers available according to the survey. Kakuma I had 2.6 times more computers (254) than the next highest

57 FGD 1, Kalobeyei



neighbourhood of Kakuma III. Map 6 visualises the breakdown of the number of computers available for use by the neighbourhood.

Map 6. Computers available for public use across service providers



## Space and opening times

Larger spaces to fit more users and computers were cited by service providers as an essential business need. Training centres reported being open 8.9 hours a day, 5.4 days a week, while internet cafés reported being open 11.8 hours, 6.8 days a week on average, with users spending an upward of three hours a day in the spaces. Overcrowded spaces with too many people using the Wi-Fi at once can also lower the strength of the Wi-Fi, as was pointed out in an FGD. Certain spaces have very limited access, only allowing their students to use the space, such as NRC.<sup>58</sup>

*“The reason why we are lagging behind is that we don’t have any facility within us in the host community. My recommendation as a host community member is that we need to set up ICT infrastructure on our site (host community). This kind of imbalance is not good, you find you are traversing all the way from Kakuma Town to Kakuma IV and to Kalobeyei Settlement to access ICT centres. So many of us are in the local community. We are so passionate about digital skills, but the only problem is that, if you look around, we don’t have any ICT infrastructure. So my appeal is that, if the organisations will look at this, many of us will join digital training.”*

**- Male, Host community, Kakuma, FGD 2**

58 FGD 2, Kalobeyei

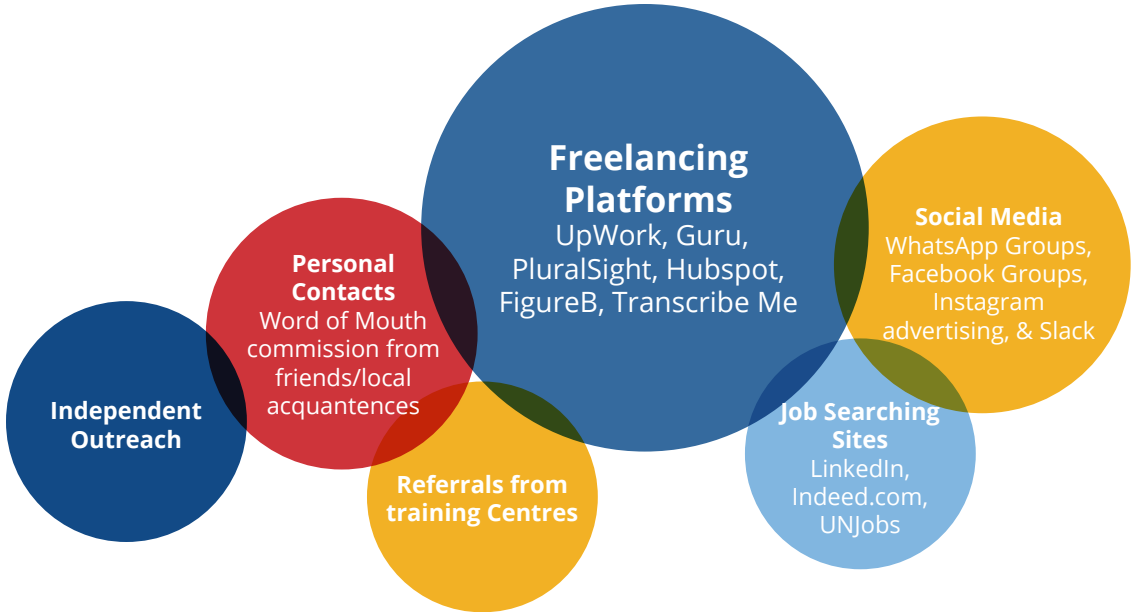


# VI. FINDING AND MAINTAINING DIGITAL EMPLOYMENT

The first four sections have examined key elements of the market system, all of which must function effectively and in tandem for opportunities for online work to arise and become sustainable. This section moves to an examination of the central relationship within a market system – between those providing a supply of labour and those demanding it. It examines this relationship first from the supply side, providing an overview of how refugee young people are currently tapping into demand by searching for jobs, then turning to an assessment of the various barriers they face in successfully obtaining jobs. It will move next to an examination of the types of online jobs refugee young people in the target location are currently engaged in, and then dive into an evaluation of the quality of this work with a specific focus on whether the digital employment landscape as it currently stands can feasibly provide decent, sustainable work for refugee young people.

## VI.I How are refugees currently searching for jobs?

Figure 7. How refugees are currently searching for jobs in Kakuma and Kalobeyei



There are a variety of different means through which refugees can search for employment in the digital economy. Methods include freelancing platforms, social media, job search sites, referrals from training centres, personal contacts, and independent outreach. Freelancing platforms such as UpWork, Guru, PluralSight, Hubspot, Figure8, and Transcribe Me allow users to access jobs posted directly on their sites. While these platforms make it easy for clients to access jobs once registered, different registration processes can pose obstacles for refugees, such as if they ask for a registration fee or if they require a form of national identification.

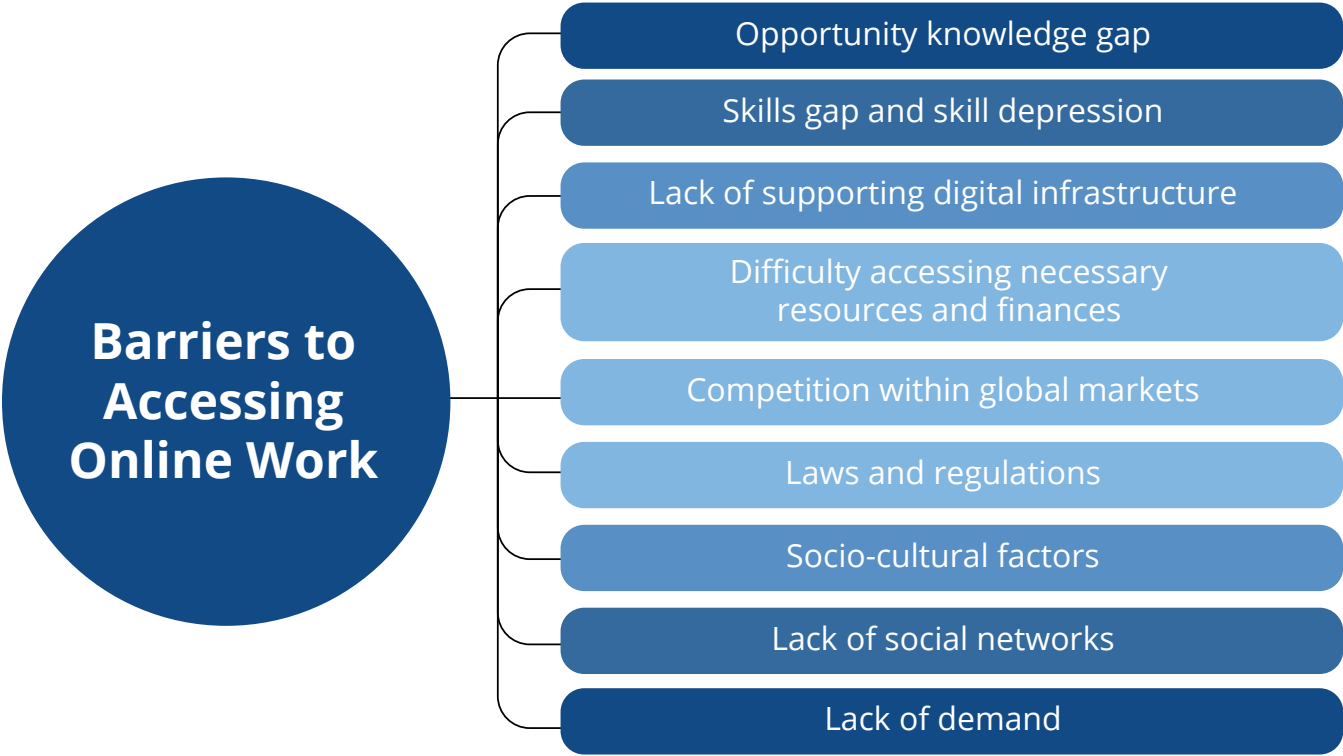
Job search sites, such as LinkedIn, Indeed.com, and UNJobs, mediate jobs from other organisations for the jobseekers. Refugees also utilise social media platforms such as WhatsApp groups, Facebook groups, Instagram advertisements, and Slack to learn about employment opportunities.

Additionally, refugees can learn about employment opportunities through their personal connections, whether that is through word of mouth or commissions from friends and local acquaintances. Those who participate in training centres can receive referrals from the centre, particularly if the training centres have partnerships with employers. Lastly, refugees can also reach out to companies independently, which is typically rarer.

## VI.II Barriers to accessing online work

The following section offers a rapid overview of the ten key barriers to accessing work online as identified in contemporary literature and corroborated by the findings of fieldwork. In particular, this summary relies on the ‘six layers of exclusion’ as conceptualised by the ILO,<sup>59</sup> as well as UNDP’s work on digital livelihoods for people on the move.<sup>60</sup>

Figure 8. Barriers to accessing online work



### Knowledge opportunity gap

A foundational barrier to the refugee young people’s ability to access employment opportunities is their lack of knowledge that such opportunities exist. This barrier can emerge at two stages: First, at the very start – affecting the decision to engage in the market system, and second, following the completion of training or skills development –

59 ILO, “Towards decent work for young refugees and host communities: Kenya, Uganda, Egypt,” 2021

60 UNDP, “Digital Livelihoods for People on the Move,” 2019

affecting their ability to move to earning due to a lack of awareness about sourcing sustainable opportunities which match their skills levels.

*“Okay, I will say no, it’s not easy for youth to engage in such marketable skills because of lack of opportunities awareness, some are just here but actually don’t know where the opportunities have been offered.”*

**- Male, Kalobeyei, FGD1**

## Skills gaps

A lack of digital literacy skills among refugee populations undermines the ability of refugee young people to engage in the market system as competitive actors for obvious reasons. While more and more organisations are stepping in to provide training and skills development services, these opportunities remain out of reach for many.<sup>61</sup>

Just as inimitable as the low rates of technological skills among refugee young people, is the lack of ‘soft skills’ which are also critical for success in digital employment – these can include interpersonal skills as well as work-related skills such as interview style, CV presentation or general professional demeanour. Such skills are often given less attention in digital skills development courses but not having them presents a barrier to the attainment of quality work opportunities.<sup>62</sup>

*“Few of us are exposed to this digital literacy and a good number of the refugees and the host community have not benefited from these programmes. Access to computers and gaining knowledge from them is really a challenge and that is why it comes out clearly to me as a great barrier for them to get online job opportunities.”*

**- Male, Kakuma, FGD1**

## Skills depreciation

The uncertain nature of digital work and the lack of fully functioning pipelines from training services to employment opportunities means that refugee young people often experience rapid skills depreciation which decreases their abilities to be competitive in a global digital market. Many refugees note that while they were “given some guidance on how to get employed and some sites were listed from where [they] can get jobs after the training,” but after a certain amount of time, “everything that [they] learned evaporated” due to a lack of opportunities to practice or apply them.<sup>63</sup>

## Lack of supporting digital infrastructure

A lack of reliable internet connection, mobile data connectivity and electricity presents a staggering barrier to accessing digital work opportunities. This barrier presents differently for different groups of refugee young people in Kenya depending on where they are located and can be more insurmountable for women due to issues related to security and social stigma.

*“How will you go out to the outside world to implement your skills? For example, let’s say they have*

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61 Ibid

62 ILO, “Towards decent work for young refugees and host communities: Kenya, Uganda, Egypt,” 2021

63 FGD1, Kalobeyei

*given you skills in digital marketing or graphic design. What if you don't have a laptop? Will you go and steal the laptop and start implementing and start connecting with people from the outside world? No, of course your skill will just lay there not unless you have a smartphone. That is when you are going to login and connect yourself to the people, even though they have given you an online platform. If you don't have the resources, you will not reach your people so that you showcase your skills."*

**- Female, Kakuma, FGD2**

*"[There is a] need for more computers, internet and power supply to be stronger to accommodate more number of users, building more rooms to accommodate a large number of Learners."*

**- Male, Arrupe Learning Centre, Survey**

## Difficulty accessing resources

In addition to the need for supporting digital infrastructure such as Wi-Fi and electricity, refugee young people often require other resources to enter the digital labour market. These resources include personal devices such as laptops and mobile phones. Less tangible resources are also required, such as time, time to invest in training and skills development, to search for work, and to complete low paid jobs that could lead to better work in the future. This is a luxury resource not often available to refugee young people, especially women who are more likely to have to balance caring responsibilities and households.

## Financial limitations

Digital work requires a certain level of financial capital to be invested up-front by those seeking access. This capital is required for things such as bundles, paying for use of internet cafes, devices, signing up to job sharing platforms or paying for training courses or software programmes.

## High level of competition in global markets

The surplus of applicants in comparison to the limited demand creates raises the threshold for relevant and competitive skills. This competition is prevalent not just for refugee training programmes, but also the national university diploma programmes as well.<sup>64</sup> This makes it extremely difficult for refugees to compete on a global scale. Several FGD participants revealed the difficulty of securing a job in such a competitive space.

*"Some of the platforms like Fuzu ... record your educational background information and all your qualifications and they will connect you with some of the jobs online, which they will alert you at any time when there is a vacancy. They also gave us one of the platforms known as the LinkedIn platform, which is also an online platform where you can get online jobs and get notified of those vacancies. Surely I received many calls from them after I uploaded my results there, however my qualifications limited me from securing those opportunities."*

**- Male, Kalobeyi, FGD1**

*"Actually, for me it has really helped me to try to apply for some online employment opportunities but unfortunately, I have not gotten one due to my qualifications. I have basic knowledge of using*

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64 Youth Impact Labs & Mercy Corps, "Competing in a Digital Age," 2019 (p. 9)

*computers, not technical courses like graphic design, where the clients seeking for employees online will be pleased with my qualifications.”*

**- Male, Kakuma, FGD1**

## Laws and regulations

By virtue of their refugee status, young refugees in Kenya face difficulties when interacting with the financial and legal infrastructures necessary to provide them with the means to access and maintain work. Firstly, movement restrictions imposed on those living in Kakuma camp make refugees less attractive for certain types of online employment. Second, while the Kenyan government has recently opened up the avenue for refugee access to work permits, it remains a bureaucratically protracted process. Access to financial institutions can be similarly protracted with refugees requiring the intervention of UNHCR to open bank accounts and a national ID to access a SIM card for the use of the popular mobile money service M-Pesa.<sup>65</sup> Finally, it is common for refugee young people to lack documents and certifications such as proof of education and job references required for the completion of a legal hiring process.

## Socio-cultural factors

Refugees can face myriad forms of discrimination which can bar them from access to employment opportunities. As highlighted throughout this report, women are most often subject to distinct forms of social exclusion and cultural stigma which prevents them from entering the digital sphere. This can include the inability to attend training, and difficulties combining taken for granted care work with precarious digital labour.<sup>66</sup>

## Lack of social networks

A common trend within the displacement experience is a total rupturing of social networks, which can prove challenging in the context of finding work in a sector in which success is often dependent on informal networks. As UNDP makes clear in their research into creating successful digital livelihood opportunities, “even people with high capabilities and high levels of access to resources may lack the networks to obtain digital and other work if they are in a new place.”<sup>67</sup> Social networks play a huge role in most market systems by linking people with opportunities, decoding job descriptions and building confidence of applicants.

## Lack of demand

Central to the flourishing of an effective market system is the existence of sustained demand for the supply of labour provided by a target population. However, currently the digital economy is defined by a critical gap between supply and demand – there are simply more high-potential young people entering the workforce each year than there are new digital jobs being created.<sup>68</sup> This is an issue that extends beyond the context of refugee young people in Kenya, casting a shadow over hopes for the transformative impact of the digital economy on the continent. This case has been strongly advocated by scholars and developmental organisations alike, who decry the vehemence with which actors in this space have unquestionably begun to hail digital employment as a panacea for the employment crisis. Without careful cultivation of opportunities within the market system through the creation of jobs which recognise and target the services of disadvantaged populations, the services of refugee young people are likely to be undercut in the global marketplace.

65 ILO, “Towards decent work for young refugees and host communities: Kenya, Uganda, Egypt,” 2021

66 Ibid, GSMA, “The digital lives of refugees and Kenyans with disabilities in Nairobi” 2020,

67 UNDP, “Digital Livelihoods for People on the Move,” 2019

68 Rockefeller Foundation, “Digital Jobs in Africa,” 2014



# VII. WORKING IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY: THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE

## VII.I What are the main jobs refugees in Kakuma and Kalobeyei are doing?

Figure 9. Types of online work refugees are engaging in



### (1) Digital entrepreneurship including micro-entrepreneurship like e-commerce - facilitated by e-commerce platforms and social media sites.

Digital entrepreneurship is one of the most common routes taken by refugee young people in Kakuma and Kalobeyei to earn money online. This type of work requires limited digital skills and no formal qualifications; often the only thing needed is a merchant/vendor/traders account with an e-commerce platform such as Jumia, Cash-24 or Facebook marketplace. The returns from engagement in e-commerce can be high depending on the type of goods being sold and the cut taken by the platform site.<sup>69</sup> However, since earning is tied exclusively to sales, there is little stability in this type of work. Often, refugees engaged in this form of work spoke of it as a ‘side gig’, something to supplement existing income they were receiving for offline work with few viewing it as a sustainable career. The only exception to this is those who were engaged in the creation and sale of items or content. Social media platforms are also used widely as informal e-commerce platforms for buying and selling goods and content. WhatsApp groups seemed to be the most popular forum used, with Instagram and Facebook marketplace also frequently referred to by participants.

*“It was in October last year that I created a WhatsApp group where I will advertise my designing skills. One of the local football teams approached me to design them a logo and they paid me Ksh. 700 which is equal to \$7. Yes, the difficulties which I have is when I need help somewhere. Most of the time I used to ask my design teachers, but in the process we ended up sharing the money. And another platform which most of the time I used to and currently visit online is Shopify, I am working with that platform designing logos ... Most of the time I used to create and design something, when I design*

69 Kenya’s largest e-commerce site Jumia for instance, varies the tariffs charged to merchants selling on its site “based on monthly transaction volume” Another popular e-commerce site, Shopify.com, charges vendors a monthly minimum rate of \$29 per month to advertise products on their site and takes a cut of 2.6% per transaction.

*logos, or posters, I used to send them into my WhatsApp after that I send them also to my WhatsApp contacts, when they view it most of the time, if they like, they used to come to me, and ask me if I can design any logo for them, and I used to design for them.”*

**- Female, Kalobeyei, FGD1**

*“When you create a website, you can link yourself with companies like the step up one, Jumia and even Amazonas, these big companies advertise their goods and you might be employed there and get payment either through PayPal or Mpesa, you can also do some editing of photos and advertise them. Also on Instagram you post your stuff for instance the goods to be advertised and the followers may also view your uploads and you get paid. I remember a friend of mine who was doing a business online whereby she ordered clothes from the sellers who used to advertise their goods to be specific clothes online. She ordered from them through Jumia and the clothes were brought to her. This is actually what I have heard from people but I am looking forward to being trained and getting involved in online marketing.”*

**- Female, Kalobeyei, FGD2**

## (2) Location-based online work including delivery and transportation services like Bolt Food or last-mile delivery services like Kasha – facilitated by digital labour platforms and private companies.

Data collection uncovered very few refugees engaged in location-based online work. Several refugees (mainly women) were engaged in last-mile delivery services like Kasha Kenya (see case study below) and others (mostly men) have started to engage with ride-sharing applications such as Uber and Bolt. However the cut taken by such platforms dissuaded many from registering (e.g., as a boda boda (motorbike) driver) on them, with most transportation services in Kakuma and Kalobeyei still negotiated informally and drivers paid by individual customers via M-Pesa.

## (3) Web-based freelancing work including transcription, digital marketing, content creation and data entry – facilitated by online freelancing platforms such as UpWork and Samasource.

Web-based freelancing was revealed as the other most common type of work refugee young people were engaged in. As previously discussed, it is common for digital skills training services to teach programme participants how to register for such platforms – often giving them advice on marketing themselves to potential clients. Training cohorts are also encouraged to form working groups to jointly apply for more ‘meaty’ technical projects (such as coding work or software development), together. Such opportunities are commonly shared on community Slack chats, WhatsApp groups or collaborative freelance platforms such as GitHub. This is a model that has been formalised in Dadaab refugee camp by the ‘Dadaab Collective Freelancing Agency,’ which provides dedicated space for freelancers to work together and bid collectively on projects, paying a small fee to the collective.<sup>70</sup> Among the variety of freelancing tasks refugees have taken on via platforms such as Upwork and FigureX, some of the most prevalent are; transcription, website development and data labelling. Expected salaries for this type of work, as well as qualifications required to achieve it, vary massively per project and project specification. For instance, those working on transcriptions

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<sup>70</sup> See, <https://www.dadaabcollective.com/services>

via transcribe me can expect to earn between \$15-\$20 per hour<sup>71</sup> whereas experienced web developers can charge anywhere from \$20-\$45 per hour.<sup>72</sup>

*“I also have a part-time job, I do also freelancing, not only teaching is in my website but also a freelance platform where I have local clients, I have designed over 15 websites now for organisation, and other institutions like churches and currently I am on my last face of mentorship since the way I design websites is a bit different. When you come to me as a client, I design for you, and then choose a member from your team that I can mentor so that they can take over the maintenance of the website and that is how I do it. It is also of value to me, because I am able to pull in a client after two months, or sometimes if I’m lucky, I collaborate with anyone who possesses the same skills as mine to have two clients per month.”*

**- Male, Kakuma, FGD2**

*“The only site or the platform that we have been given is slack for communication, however the GitHub application is for developers or software engineers to collaborate on their project. So from there, you can find other software developers.”*

**- Female, Kalobeyei, FGD1**

#### (4) Outsourcing work including task-based jobs – facilitated (most often) by partnerships between training centres and demand-side companies or impact sourcing platforms.

Digital work outsourced by private companies or NGOs is highly desired but less frequently gained by refugee young people. Most examples of outsourcing work that were shared by FGD participants came as the result of training courses with embedded employability elements (internships, traineeships or referral systems). Others found work through social impact sourcing platforms such as [StepUp.one](https://stepup.one). The benefit of such arrangements stems from the fact that they are often more formalised arrangements than freelance gigs, meaning that risk of fraud and exploitation is lower.

*“With StepUp.one, we are sent the contacts of the clients who want to employ people online. Once you receive the contacts on stepUp, you send your first message to the employer you want to work with, a message that shows interest in you, then the employer reviews your message and of course it links him to your stepUp account, where the employer will check on your account and look at the skills your best at and if the skills is relevant to the work the employer wanted to be done, they will contact you and tell you disclose to you the task to be done if you can, it is now upon you to check on your skills to complete to the best you can. “*

**- Male, Kakuma, FGD1**

*“So, as far as we have joined iTalanta Academy, our coaches told us that, there is setup applications called slack. Where software engineers always meet there, if maybe there is a job advertisement or there is someone who’s looking for a software engineer who can build for him or her or for the company website, there, you can directly find the person who is looking for a developer, you can find*

71 See <https://bit.ly/3wAD40i>

72 See [https://www.payscale.com/research/KE/Job=Web\\_Developer/Salary\\_and](https://www.payscale.com/research/KE/Job=Web_Developer/Salary_and) <https://www.daxx.com/blog/development-trends/average-rates-offshore-developers>

*that person through slack. And you can meet that person on Skype, or on Zoom, so you discuss all the things they or the company wants there, and you'll start building that website for that company or for that person, but we don't use it as personnel. We don't use them as individuals, we use as a group, a group of developers so if that opportunity only needs you, and you don't need help, you can build that website alone and hosted and become lively and you get paid by the company."*

**- Female, Kalobeyei, FGD1**

## **(5) Other, including: Brand partnerships via youtube, teaching online courses, working as an online travel agent**

Not all the online work refugee young people engage in can be simply classified. Refugee young people are often highly resourceful when it comes to sourcing income, so it is unsurprising that many find themselves engaged in less 'traditional' or 'standard' means of online income generation. Several examples from focus group discussions illustrate this point well. One participant shared that they managed to negotiate a deal with a national flight booking website that allows them to act as an independent travel agent and pays commission on services. Another described how she is monetising her YouTube channel through brand partnerships. Two participants further outlined how they had taken the initiative to create their own online courses on digital skills which they charge for through personal websites.

*"Another place where I'm searching for jobs online is the aeroplane booking websites, booking flights for Juba to Nairobi and I booked Kenya Airways flights, Tarco Airways flights, African Express Airways flights, Premier airlines, Uganda airlines, Ethiopian Airlines, Egyptian Airways. So what I basically do is I get clients who want to travel and they take the date of travel. I take their passport photos I booked for the flights, download the ticket and attend to them. And I'm getting paid per ticket using M-pesa, one client who is successfully booked, I am paid KSH 2,000."*

**- Male, Kalobeyei, FGD2**

*"I can say that the training, which I got has really helped me because even now as I am speaking I have my YouTube channel where I can post my content mostly short funny video clips and whenever people view, subscribe and engage to the ads on my videos. Money gets in my bank account depending on the subscribers I have and engagements with the ads on the videos... but when the viewers are not there nothing actually gets into my account. To be realistic, I used to get like 20 shillings once my short video clip was viewed by many people."*

**Female, Kalobeyei, FGD1**

*"The media that we use today like Facebook, and Messenger. These were the two platforms which I took most of my time on, on how to advertise on Facebook using paid apps or you can use a free marketing platform that was the ability I first learned. So I took that seriously and in the year 2020, I launched my own website, and I recreated the same course, the same training I learned for myself, because I had acquired another skills from another platform called Udemy, from there I took a course on how to teach online because I saw this potential with what I learned can turn as another income stream for me, instead of only looking for jobs, I already have skills, I can't help myself with. Nevertheless I can employ myself. That actually led me to open my own online school. I created the first four courses, which are social media marketing. I was dealing with Chatboard design, Facebook marketing class plus blogging and web design. These were the three I was having at that moment."*

- Male, Kakuma, FGD2

## VII.I Evaluating the quality and sustainability of online work opportunities for refugee young people

While digital employment is often portrayed as a panacea for refugee self-reliance, there is a need to examine the quality and sustainability of employment opportunities. The ILO has done important work highlighting the flaws of the digital economy (with a focus on gig work) in providing decent work opportunities. The crux of the issue with online freelance platforms is that for their business model to be productive as well as relatively free from risk and responsibility, workers must be classified as self-employed. This classification removes the accountability from an employer–employee relationship meaning workers bear more risk and costs for engaging in the employment relationship. Costs for the worker begin at the very start of engagement with platforms whose revenue models are driven by taking substantial portions of their clients’ profits after connecting them to careers. Furthermore, these different platforms’ dependency on corporate partnerships also makes them very susceptible to economic changes, as we saw during the COVID-19 pandemic, which can lead to sudden and dramatic losses of clients.

With this in mind, ILO concludes that “training for online freelancing operates with a somewhat problematic assumption that individual refugees must be willing to take on risks and pursue the goal of self-employment without the security of returns.”<sup>73</sup> This was a frustration which played out in the accounts of almost all study participants who had been engaged in freelancing platforms.

*“The experience that I have from online work is that it doesn’t have a guarantee. An employer can decide to terminate the contract any time. So, you need to be much focused and also deliver at your level best. So that you convince this person though the person you are working is not with you physically.”*

- Female, Kakuma, FGD2

Outsourcing work holds promise as an option for digital freelancing to occur within the confines of a more traditional, contractually defined employer/employee relationship. However, these sorts of work opportunities are still not free from risk. Firstly, oftentimes outsourcing work operates by a pay-by-deliverables model wherein payment is only awarded to a consultant or short-term hire if they manage to submit deliverables of a task before the contractually agreed deadline. While this is a fair expectation of most workers, this sort of structure frequently presents specific challenges for refugees who may find working to a deadline particularly hard due to unreliable access to internet and devices.

*“The only fear comes in, after doing the work for example designing the logo they wanted and it doesn’t come out as expected, the company may decide not to pay you and imagine the workload and the time you have invested in designing is wasted. Because, you’re not paid before completing, you’re paid after completing.”*

- R6, Kalobeyei, FGD2

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73 ILO, “Towards decent work for young refugees and host communities: Kenya, Uganda, Egypt,” 2021



Out-of-contract payment models are also more ad-hoc and subject to change. It is common for contracted workers to wait long times for payments to be processed and they have little recourse to complaint, not only by law, but also by virtue of them lacking personal relationships with employers that regular, salaried workers can often draw upon in issues of pay disputes.

*“Actually, digital employment, I can’t say that it is 100% sustainable. Because you are working with somebody who is like a million miles away from you. And any slight mistake, your work is at stake. So it’s good like, when you’re doing online work, you need to deliver at your level best and count and put in your mind that there is a time that this work is going to end. So plan like online tasks or you should have Option B.”*

**- Male, Kakuma, FGD2**

*“So, this needs trust between you and the company. I once experienced this delay with African Express airways. I processed the tickets for three clients in one week, but they didn’t pay me immediately, they took 3 weeks to be paid.”*

**- Male, Kalobeyei, FGD2**

## Focus on: The Experience of Refugee Women

Refugee women engaged in the digital economy frequently mentioned that earning money online often requires managing multiple workstreams. Freelance work can be extremely time-consuming to obtain and carry out, reducing the intended ease of balancing commitments. This is especially true in cases where women do not own their own personal device or a reliable internet connection since this lack ties them to the schedules of internet cafes or training centres thus reducing their freedom and control over personal time.

*“My difficulties in completing my online work. First thing is the lack of gadgets, internet and also commitment like time. Most of the time, an online job wants your commitment. You have to do that job for a client every day. You don’t want to miss it. In case of anything like sickness, you have to force yourself because the client and the owner would not understand the problem.”*

**- Female, Kakuma, FGD1**

The value claim for women also fails to appropriately take into consideration the long shadow of gender disparities regarding the historical undervaluing of women’s unpaid labour.<sup>74</sup> This point aligns with the argument that the digital economy will only truly ‘work’ for women if those that perpetuate its growth take greater accountability for those that work within it. A key measure here will be advocating for the integration of social protection and income security measures into online employment – including maternity benefits and sickness coverage. This point is equally as salient when it comes to the opportunities of online work for refugees with disabilities, who conceivably require even greater protections. Without such measures, there is a risk that the digital economy will grow only to further marginalise vulnerable groups.

SIR Centre | Kakuma, 2021

DRC Youth Centre | Kakuma, 2021

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74 ILO, “Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work,” 2018, [https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS\\_633135/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_633135/lang--en/index.htm)

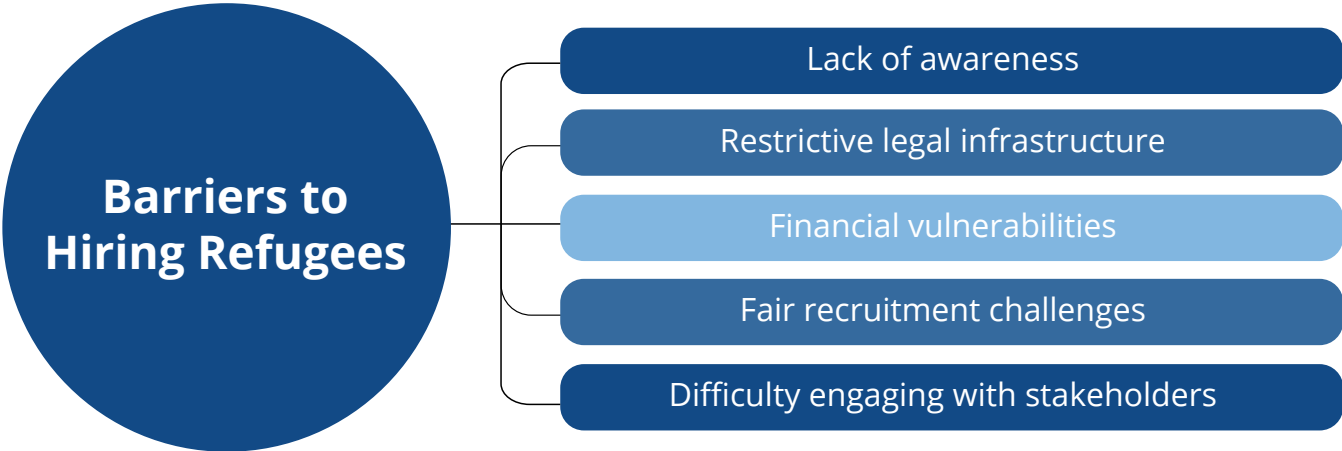
# VIII HIRING IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY: EMPLOYER EXPERIENCE

Having provided an outline of the view of the digital market system through the eyes of those on the supply side, this section will now turn to the outlook of those on the demand side – namely employers of refugee young people. It first draws from the literature and KIIs with employers to form conclusions about what factors may be blocking the growth of an equitable demand-driven market for the online labour of refugee young people, and then provide recommendations on what can be done to reduce these blockages.

Demand for labour is the crux of the labour market system. Without demand, no matter how well people are trained, no matter how many devices they are given – no jobs will be obtained. Drawing on previous studies which have engaged with both national and international employers,<sup>75</sup> as well as several KIIs conducted with employers and job matching services,<sup>76</sup> there are several barriers to hiring refugees to complete online work that employers consistently come up against. These barriers can be divided into several key categories: 1) lack of awareness 2) restrictive policies 3) financial vulnerabilities 4) fair recruitment challenges, and 5) entrance issues.

## VIII.I Barriers to hiring refugees

Figure 10. Barriers to hiring refugees



75 UNHCR, OECD, “OECD-UNHCR Study on third country solutions for refugees: family reunification, study programmes and labour mobility,” 2018, <https://www.oecd.org/migration/UNHCR-OECD-safe-pathways-for-refugees.pdf> & ITC & Amahoro, “An Assessment of Kenya’s Private Sector Digital Outsourcing Landscape and Its Potential to Support Refugee Economic Inclusion,” 2022, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/90779>

76 Specifically: Kasha Kenya, Samuel Hall, Mastercard Foundation and the Toolkit iSkills

## Lack of awareness

Interviews with employers uncovered a lack of awareness in two main areas that hinder positive decision making when it comes to hiring or setting targets to hire refugees for online work. First, a recent survey conducted by ITC & Amahoro found that 92% of surveyed businesses in Kenya's private sector currently outsource tasks to freelancers through online freelancing platforms.<sup>77</sup> However, there is often no way for these companies to know that the people they are hiring are refugees since this is not data asked for by common platforms, nor always collected by employers.<sup>78</sup> Social impact platforms such as StepUp.One, offer a clever solution to this issue by combining the provision of freelance digital services with the social mission of improving the lives of vulnerable communities. However this approach needs encouragement from private sector partners and NGOs.

A lack of awareness comes into play in a more subtle way when it comes to the impression employers have of the administrative hurdles they often believe hiring a refugee entails. Research conducted by UNHCR and OECD found that it is common for employers to overestimate restrictions and obstacles and disregard applications from refugees.<sup>79</sup> The report points out that this is more common among small- and medium-sized enterprises which may not have their own human resources departments.<sup>80</sup>

## Restrictive legal infrastructure

**a. Restrictions on movement:** While the beauty of online work for refugees is that it can be done from home, restrictive movement policies imposed on those who are camp-based can still prove challenging, particularly for those seeking long term digital employment with a company which may require site visits or in-person meetings upon occasion.<sup>81</sup>

**b. Lack of acceptable identification:** Refugees often suffer from a lack of identification deemed acceptable by companies' hiring procedures. While some companies will accept recognition of refugee status (proof issued by UNHCR in the form of a document or an ID card<sup>82</sup>) this is the exception, not the rule.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, not all refugees are registered (this can be due to a multitude of reasons including administrative failures, lack of awareness or because someone is still waiting for an asylum claim to be processed).<sup>84</sup>

**c. Difficulties in accessing work permits:** In Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, the country's president, signed the Refugee Bill into law which grants the refugees living in Kenya opportunities for "economic integration and self-reliance" through access to education and healthcare, among other livelihood opportunities.<sup>85</sup> Substantially, the Bill allows refugees to obtain an M-class work permit which entitles holders to engage in any "occupation, trade, business or profession."<sup>86</sup> While this is unquestionably a positive development, refugees interviewed predicted that it would be a while before permits were widely held due to the administrative bureaucracy of obtaining the permit, which may put people off starting applications. To get a permit one must have a letter from an intended employer, a refugee ID card and a letter from the Refugee Affairs Secretariat.<sup>87</sup>

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77 ITC & Amahoro, "Kenya's Private Sector Digital Outsourcing Landscape," 2022

78 KII with Kasha Kenya

79 UNHCR, OECD, "OECD-UNHCR Study on third country solutions for refugees," 2018

80 Ibid

81 KII with Samuel Hall Recruitment Team

82 See here: <https://www.kenyanews.go.ke/kenyans-on-refugees-database-issued-with-ids/>

83 KII with Kasha

84 ILO, "Digitally empowering young people," 2021

85 See, <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/kenya-irc-welcomes-president-kenyattas-move-sign-refugee-bill-law>

86 Cited by WUSC, "Digital Livelihoods Market Assessment in Kakama," (Unpublished), 27

87 See, <https://help.unhcr.org/kenya/kakuma/livelihoods/>

## Financial vulnerabilities

For Kenyan nationals or those with residency status, all earnings for consultancy and other professional engagements that total over KSH 24,000 (\$240) are subject to a 5% withholding tax. Those without local registration documents which give an individual a tax authority pin (KRA Pin) are classed as foreigners. For foreigners, there is no threshold on tax and all earnings, however small or large, are subject to 20% withholding tax. This presents an issue for refugees seeking employment with a Kenyan registered company since, without a KRA pin, even though they live on Kenyan soil they are treated as foreigners meaning that their earnings will be reduced by 20% to account for the tax. Not only does this reduce the potential earnings of a refugee quite substantially (especially if earnings are coming from short-term online task-based work for example), it places an additional administrative burden on employers.<sup>88</sup>

## Fair recruitment challenges

One issue that is consistently raised by employers is refugees' lack of official records of qualifications and references. Since reaching out to the previous employer of someone who has been forcibly displaced is understandably impossible in most circumstances, mandatory security or background checks are difficult for employers to fulfil. The same goes for proof of previous employment and educational qualifications.<sup>89</sup> Of course for many freelance gigs or e-commerce work, such formalities may not be necessary. However, taking a long-term approach to developing sustainable, fulfilling employment opportunities also means taking these factors into account. Certain skills training programmes circumvent this obstacle by providing certifications that track and communicate refugees' learnings.<sup>90</sup> Examples include the [Don Bosco Kakuma Technical Institute](#) which offers six-month and one-year certificates in information technology. Other associations like the [Fairwork Foundation](#) aim to promote a certification process for employers in the gig economy. However, the effectiveness of these certification processes depend on a variety of factors including buy-in from employers to provide certificates, the perceived validity of certificates, and the match between the skills of certificates and market needs.

## Difficulty engaging with stakeholders

Something that should be incredibly clear for actors entering the digital employment space, is that this is an oversaturated market, even as it relates to facilitating employment for refugees. This has created a complex field of action which companies find difficult to navigate – identifying who the most relevant and best-placed interlocutors are can be challenging and potentially off-putting to companies considering dipping their toe into this space.<sup>91</sup>

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88 KII with Samuel Hall Finance Team

89 UNHCR, OECD, "OECD-UNHCR study on third country solutions for refugees," 2018

90 ILO, "Towards decent work for young refugees and host communities: Kenya, Uganda, Egypt," 2021

91 UNHCR, OECD 2018

## Case study 3

### Last-mile delivery platforms as a source of regional digital employment opportunities for refugees

#### In-focus: Kasha

#### What is Kasha?

[Kasha](#) is a digital retail platform that distributes women's health and personal care items to the last mile. Kasha is motivated by the belief that women should have convenient and confidential access to products and information that help them care for their minds and bodies.<sup>92</sup> They have sales agents in locations all over Kenya, including Kakuma refugee camp.

#### How does Kasha employ refugees?

Kasha employs refugees in Kenya as sales agents who work on commission to sell products to consumers in their local areas. Digital sales can be made with just a feature phone through SMS, meaning that neither agents nor consumers do not require an internet connection to shop. Kasha Kenya sales agents can expect to make up to \$600 per month selling products and providing last-mile delivery to consumers in their local area.

In 2021, Kasha worked with the Girls e-Mentorship (GEM) Program to provide short term internships to refugees in conducting market research. After completing the internship they were taken on as sales agents.

Why is Kasha's model particularly amenable to the employment of refugees?

**Recruitment:** Agents for Kasha are required to show proof of ID but will accept refugee identification (proof that someone is registered as a refugee in the UNHCR database, which can come in the form of an ID card or document).<sup>93</sup>

**Workload.** Kasha agents are not contracted, rather they operate as gig workers – working when and as much as they can. This arrangement makes the job flexible, (e.g., for those with caring responsibilities) and attractive to agents with multiple sources of income from different jobs.

**Resources.** All an agent requires to work for Kasha is a mobile phone (this does not have to be a smartphone). This reduces the high upfront entry costs that characterise many online gig economy jobs, which may require laptops and a stable internet connection.

**Payment.** Agents are paid monthly via an M-Pesa transfer, meaning that they do not require a bank account.

**Collaborative services.** As a last-mile delivery service, Kasha does not require full freedom of movement from their agents, their logistics partners deliver products straight to them and they in turn deliver to the customers in their local area.

Arrupe Learning | Kakuma, 2021

92 See, <https://kasha.co.ke/>

93 See, <https://www.kenyanews.go.ke/kenyans-on-refugees-database-issued-with-ids/>



# CONCLUSION AND KEY FINDINGS

The findings of this assessment paint a sobering picture of the digital employment market system as it exists today. While undoubtedly the demand for digital skills is growing, it is far from certain that this growth will necessarily equate to an increase in long-term sustainable employment opportunities for refugee young people in Kenya. As this assessment has shown, this is a market that favours speed, flexibility, and highly marketable skills; criteria that stack the odds against refugee young people from being able to compete at a global level. To make this system more amenable to the success of more vulnerable populations, concerted efforts must be made to widen the pool of opportunities available to refugee young people, particularly women. Ten key findings from the report are outlined:

1. Refugee young people in Kenya are becoming increasingly interested in the opportunities associated with digital employment. This interest stands in line with the hope of being placed in the digital economy to provide jobs for young people within Kenya as a whole.
2. The interest in digital work is far from universal, with women being less likely to unilaterally pursue means to engage with the digital world for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to; difficulties accessing devices, social stigma, and lower digital literacy rates.
3. A fairly vibrant landscape of digital skills training opportunities exists in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, however services are unevenly distributed and lack coordination.
4. In general, existing training offerings are ‘front loaded’ focusing on building skills necessary for employment but failing to successfully bridge the gap between training and employment, leaving participants frustrated.
5. Lack of supporting digital infrastructure is a key barrier to the participation of refugee young people in the digital economy. While services are slightly better for those in Kakuma than Kalobeyei, refugee and host community young people in both areas complain that patchy electricity, low internet bandwidth and limited means to access personal devices and data bundles limits their ability to compete for online jobs and undermines training efforts by causing rapid skills depreciation.
6. A small population of refugee young people have begun to earn from online work opportunities. However, the work they are finding is primarily short-term and freelance (e.g., digital marketing, transcription), offering merely supplementary income and holding little potential for sustainable career development.
7. Out of the five broad categories of online work available to refugee young people in Kenya, digital entrepreneurship and outsourcing work hold the most promise for the development of sustainable livelihoods. Freelancing and location-based work are more expedient to quick income in the short term but cannot be considered sustainable in the long term.
8. Movement by the Kenyan government to ease access to work permits for refugees and services by national banks to improve financial inclusion are positive developments which will work in favour of refugee young people entering digital work. However, alongside these developments, greater awareness is needed among refugee communities and potential employers regarding the financial and legal requirements for and implications of working in the digital space.

9. Crucially, the overarching barrier limiting the potential success of refugee young people in the digital economy is the lack of demand for their skills within a highly competitive global market. Without the careful cultivation of opportunities which specifically target the services of disadvantaged populations, refugee young people will continue to be passed over for opportunities.
10. Employers require incentives and support to hire refugee young people and NGOs must work creatively to provide both. Part of this process must include leading by example and looking for internal opportunities for employing refugee young people.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Echoing the structure of the report, which focused on different elements of the market system as refugee young people experience it, the recommendations follow a journey plan which conceptualise a refugee young people's 'journey' from an interest in digital employment to the attainment of sustainable work as occurring in five phases:

1. Developing an interest in entering the digital economy.
2. Gaining basic digital skills.
3. Gaining advanced digital skills.
4. Competing for sustainable digital employment.

Between each phase lies several 'key intervention moments'; points at which organisations and partners should focus on programming for maximum impact. Following the systemic approach of this analysis, these five intervention moments are oriented toward treating the root causes of the main issues and barriers identified, with the overarching goal of creating a more enabling ecosystem for the development of digital employment opportunities. Figure 11 visualises these five phases, and Figure 12 shows where each key intervention moment sits on this journey plan.

Figure 11. Five barriers to digital employment

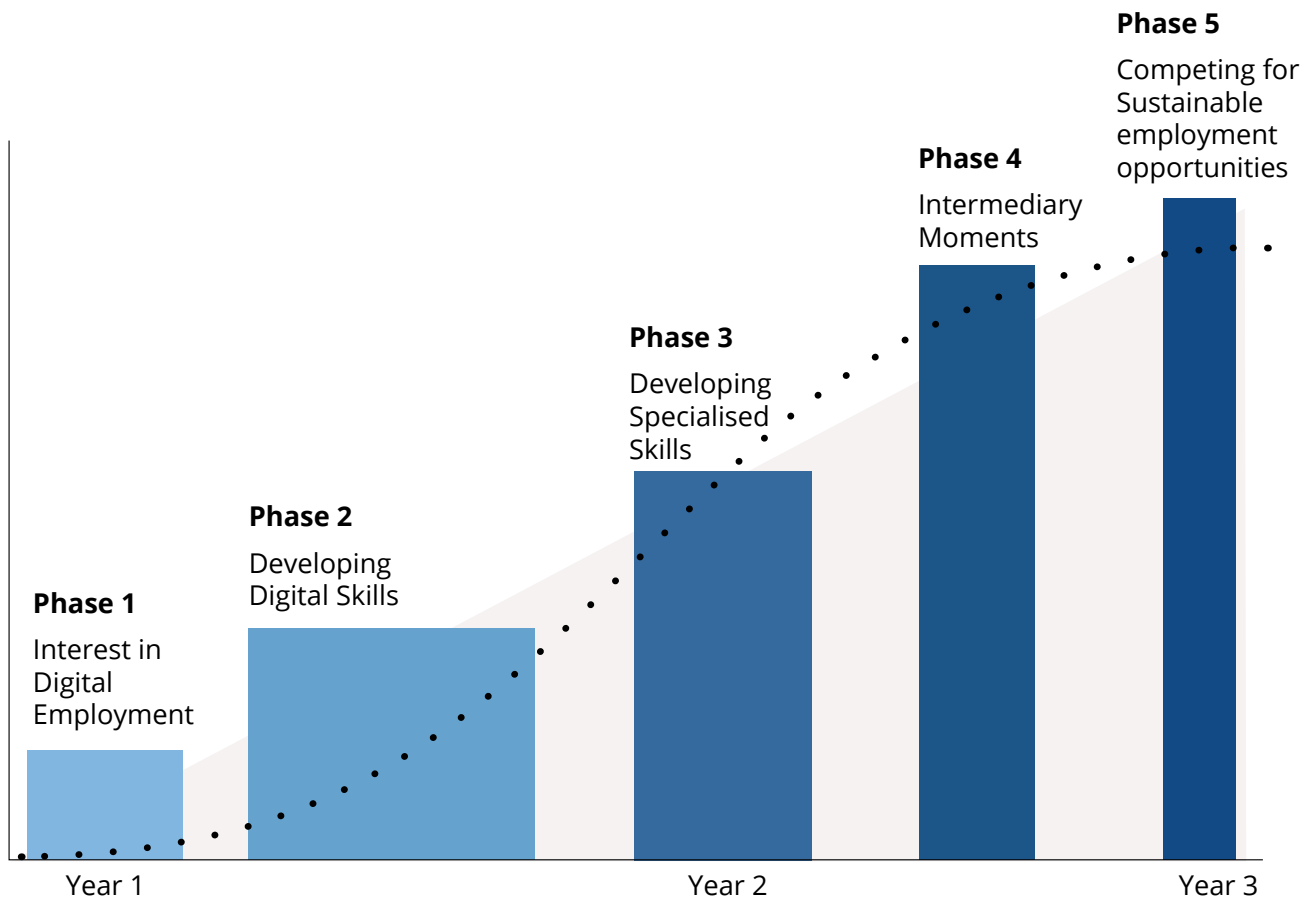
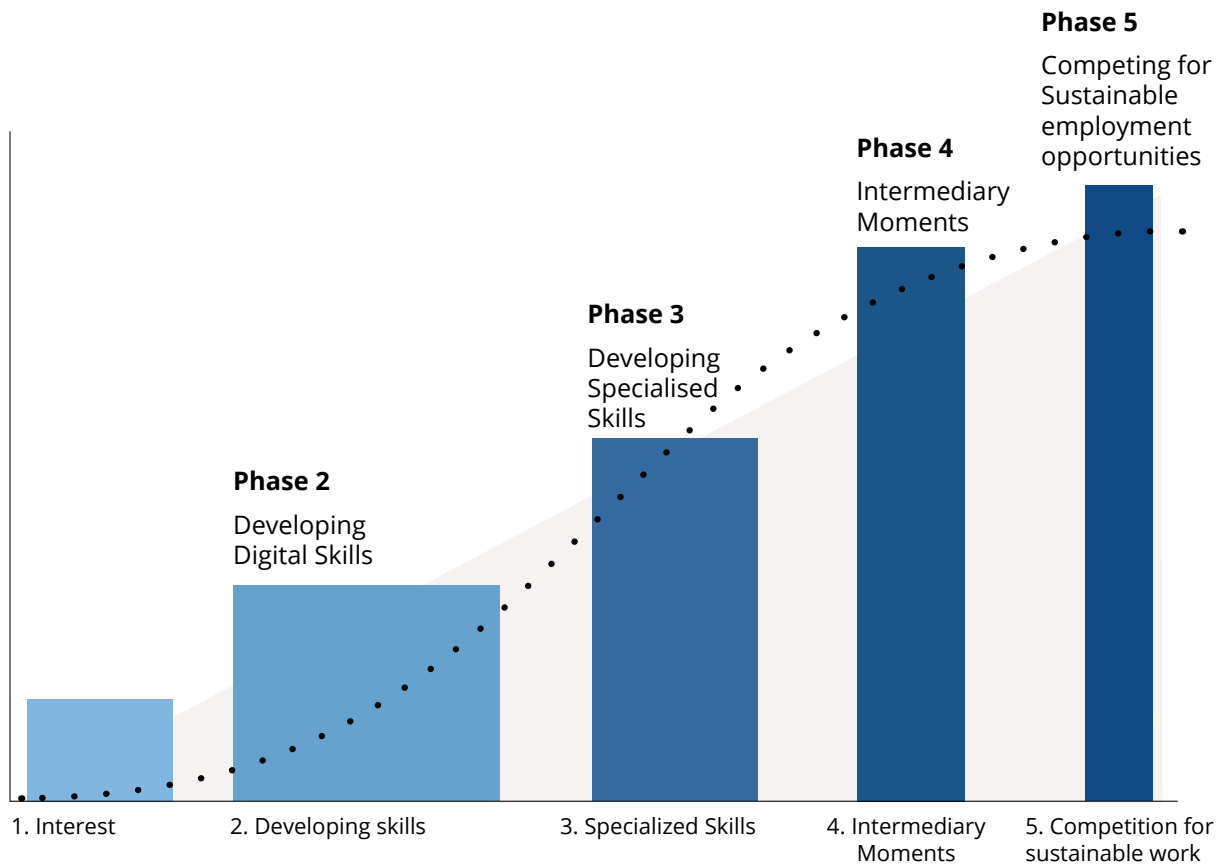


Figure 12. Key interventions for enabling digital employment.



The ten key recommendations below are grouped under each key intervention point and labelled as short, medium, or long-term priorities.

## I. Creating interest

**Recommendation 1:** Curate a catalogue of digital service providers (either training centres or internet providers) available for young people interested in building skills and getting involved in digital work.

[Priority: Short-term]

- Specify clearly which services are most amenable to refugee women through a rating system which scores services on a series of key indicators designed for each target group. For example, services scoring highly for refugee women would take into consideration indicators such as: flexible opening hours, access to devices, existence of female-only classes, ease of access to major roads/transit corridors and lighting.
- The catalogue should include carefully articulated value propositions tailored to each target group summarising the potential benefits of undertaking digital skills training with an overview of the types of work different skills could lead to. Categorisations used in this report can be taken as a starting point.
- Information should be collated into an online brochure which can be distributed on Facebook and WhatsApp groups and printed to be shared in community hot spots.

**Recommendation 2:** Co-create a package of digital safeguarding training and awareness tools to be universally adopted/displayed by training centres and internet service providers.

[Priority: Medium-term]

- Package should be multimedia, making use of both offline and online modes of communication such as short online courses as well as posters which can be put up in internet cafes and training centres.
- Rather than creating resources from scratch, draw on the many existing resources already available open-source from organisations such as [The Alliance](#) or [Action against Violence \(AVA\)](#) among many others.

## II. Strengthening infrastructure

**Recommendation 3:** Start a small grant scheme for the purchase of personal devices and data bundles for those in need.

[Priority: Short-term]

- Provide small grants or micro loans (depending on resources) to an annual cohort of refugee young people who have completed digital skills training
- Grants should target refugee women who are less likely to be able to access public internet cafes, to allow them to work from home.
- Outreach for the scheme should be prioritised in areas where there are fewer services available and Wi-Fi connection is weaker, requiring individual data bundles.
- Criteria for applicants should involve the completion of digital skills training within the last two years and a justification from the recipient of how they plan to use the device.
- To ensure progress and accountability, recipients should be linked to mentors who they can meet [either in person or remotely] on a semi-regular basis to check on progress and provide employment support.

**Recommendation 4.** Make short-term strategic investments into pre-existing services

[Priority: Short-term]

- Short-term investments should be made to scale up the services of existing digital hubs which are already established and have a trusted community of users. The purpose of these investments is to improve services to the extent that they provide bases refugees can rely on for the maintenance of full-time employment online

**Recommendation 5:** Focus longer-term investments into building services in the least developed areas

[Priority: Long-term]

- Longer-term investments should focus on building electricity and internet connectivity in the least developed areas identified in the research to provide access to the most marginalised, reduce the burden on other more established centres, and reduce tensions.



## III. Developing employment pipeline

### **Recommendation 6:** Develop centres for digital employment

[Priority: Short-term]

- The centre for digital employment will provide a series of services aimed specifically at helping refugees find and maintain digital employment opportunities within their areas.
- Centre staff will liaise with training providers whose services stop after a certain period. When registering with the centre, refugee young people would add their interest, training experience and skills to a live database.
- Centre will provide computers for the use of refugee young people who have completed some form of digital skills training or are currently applying for or completing online work opportunities. A select few laptops could be available for 'signing out' overnight so that refugee women with caring responsibilities are not tied to the opening hours of the centre.
- Beyond computer access, the centre could provide on-site job-hunting support including seminars on job hunting and CV writing.

### **Recommendation 7:** Establish training of trainer's scheme

[Priority: Medium-term]

- Develop a scheme to train trainers and feed them into already existing services. Participants should be existing trainers that require upskilling in a certain area, or promising members of previous training cohorts in partner organisations.
- Determining topics for training should be done first by liaising with social impact sourcing platforms that can connect with employers to determine specific skills/programmes which are most in need, and second by surveying current training providers in target areas to allow them to identify their own weak spots.

### **Recommendation 8:** Support refugee and host community freelancers to form business collectives

[Priority: Medium-term]

- Refugee young people should be encouraged and supported to develop business collectives, a configuration that can allow them to register as vendors or small companies to bid for projects.

## IV. Creating opportunities

### **Recommendation 9:** Create a network skills database

[Priority: Medium-term]

- Co-create an interactive database which tracks skills and interests of refugee young people seeking to gain opportunities in digital employment.
- Encourage training provider partners to contribute with details of graduates from their trainings.
- Partner with social impact sourcing platforms to help get this list into the hands of employers interested in

hiring refugees for digital work.

**Recommendation 10:** Strategically plan for employment opportunities for refugee young people both internally and with partners

[Priority: Long-term]

- In order to lead the way in advocating for the employment of refugee young people, organizations and businesses interested in employing refugee young people should pursue an internal evaluation highlighting whether there are internal digital employment opportunities that they could offer.
- The capacity of partners on an international level to absorb refugee young people identified through the employment centre should also be explored. Partners should include interested partner universities as well as foundations set-up for purpose (e.g., the Mastercard Foundation).





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