

Afr/ca HR.



Preparing and connecting Africa's workforce to the global economy

Why Africa's Workforce Will Shape the Future of Work

By Africa HR Solutions in collaboration with
The African Leadership University (ALU).



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The Global Talent Equation

The world is running out of workers (or so it seems).

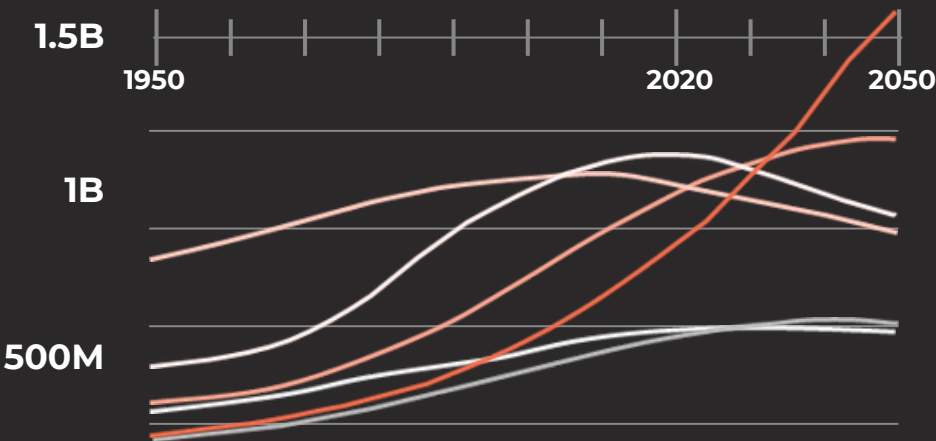
Across Europe, East Asia, and North America, ageing **populations are shrinking** talent pools, forcing employers to look beyond their own borders for the skills they need to grow. At the same time, the nature of work itself is shifting.

The rise of remote and hybrid work models, propped up by advances in technology and artificial intelligence, has made it increasingly possible (and easy) to hire talent from anywhere.

For businesses operating across multiple markets, the question is no longer simply about sourcing workers who meet minimum requirements. The key now is to find workers who are **adaptable, technically capable, and quick on their feet** so they can contribute in a rapidly changing environment.

Working-age (15-64) population

McKinsey Global Institute, 2023



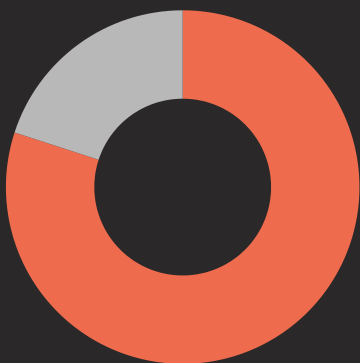
Year	Africa	India	China	Europe	North America	Latin America
2020	753M	928M	1,035B	969M	480M	439M
2050	1.549B	1.111B	855M	814M	519M	488M

Africa's Demographic Advantage

Africa is home to the world's youngest and fastest-growing population.

By 2050, the continent is projected to account for **more than 25% of the global workforce**. Already, its working-age population is growing and outpacing other regions.

Urbanisation is accelerating, bringing more young people into education, connectivity, and opportunity. Enrolment in higher education has been rising steadily, with 88% of students surveyed across 9 African countries by the **African Leadership University (ALU)**, reporting plans to pursue further study. Interestingly, this desire is driven not merely by the need for employment, but it is also shaped by a genuine wish to develop skills and contribute to national development.



88%

of students surveyed across 9 African countries by the African Leadership University (ALU), report plans to pursue further study.

The Workforce Readiness Gap

The potential is clear, but realising it requires confronting a significant challenge.

According to the [ALU 2025 Africa Workforce Readiness Survey](#), which gathered responses from nearly 8,000 students and employers across 9 countries, including Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Ghana, Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, and Côte d'Ivoire, there is a real disconnect between what graduates can offer and what employers need.

Only 15% of employers surveyed rated recent graduate joiners as having excellent employability skills, and 32% were either unsure or disagreed that higher education adequately prepares graduates for the job market.



15%

rate graduate employability as excellent.

32%

say higher education doesn't adequately prepare graduates.

More than a third of employers were not confident that the next generation of graduates could help their business grow. It would be erroneous and too easy to say that this gap is primarily one of intelligence or ambition. Students are motivated and aspirational. The problem lies in what universities teach and how they teach it. A structural misalignment exists between [academic programmes and the practical demands](#) of a fast-evolving economy.

What Employers Actually Need

The [ALU 2025 Africa Workforce Readiness Survey](#) is insightful when answering the question of which skills employers most value and which they find most lacking in graduates who join their organisations. Perhaps surprisingly, communication was the most commonly cited skill employers look for, identified by 37% of respondents.

Innovation and creativity followed at 29%, with analytical thinking at 27% and flexibility and adaptability at 24%.

Skills employers most value



29%

Innovation and
creativity.



27%

Analytical
thinking.



24%

flexibility and
adaptability.

What Employers Actually Need

When asked which skills were most lacking among recent graduate hires, employers pointed to problem-solving at 22%, a leadership mindset at 21%, initiative and self-direction at 20%, and flexibility and adaptability also at 20%. As such, the picture that emerges is not one of a technical skill issue alone, but rather of **a gap in the basic/foundational, transferable skills** that enable workers to navigate complexity and work effectively across teams and contexts.

Skills most lacking among recent graduate hires

22%

Problem-solving

21%

Leadership mindset

20%

Initiative and self-direction

20%

Flexibility and adaptability

What Employers Actually Want

Employers are clear about what they want higher education institutions to do differently. 63% called for a greater focus on developing leadership skills, 47% on technical skills, and 45% on stronger partnerships between universities and businesses.

63%

Developing leadership skills.

27%

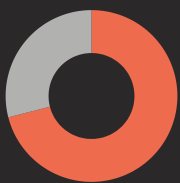
Developing technical skills.

24%

Stronger partnerships.

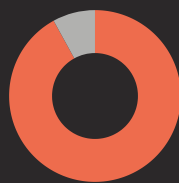
Perhaps most telling of all, 71% said they are more likely to hire a graduate who has **practical work experience**, a figure that rises to 92% among Kenyan employers and 82% among Ghanaian employers.

More likely to hire a graduate who has practical work experience



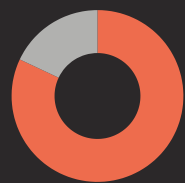
71%

Africa average



92%

Kenya



82%

Ghana

The Role of Universities in Closing the Gap

The research points to a persistent reliance on theoretical knowledge and traditional academic models. Naturally, these do not adequately reflect the practical and adaptive skills that industries now require. As emerging technologies mould and reshape entire sectors, curricula that were designed for less disruptive years are producing graduates who are qualified on paper... but not necessarily workplace-ready.

Closing the gap requires higher education to be organised around employer needs and students' career aspirations.

The ALU recommends that universities:

Prioritise both **soft and technical skills** development

Expand work-based learning through **internships, apprenticeships, and real-world projects**

Align academic offerings with the **fastest-growing sectors** (engineering, technology, finance, and healthcare...)

Integrate digital competencies such as **coding and AI fluency** across all courses

The ALU study also highlights how public and private sector collaboration (with shared investment in programmes, research, and infrastructure), is essential to achieve measurable, noticeable change.

The Risk of Africa's Brain Drain

Fewer than half of all students surveyed said they plan to remain in Africa after completing their education, and 35% said they do not intend to stay on the continent at all. The most popular intended destinations were the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Europe. Students from Ghana and Nigeria were among the most likely to plan to study abroad, at 60% and 45% respectively.

Employers are acutely aware of this risk. 64% agreed that the brain drain represents a significant issue for Africa's future.



35%

of students plan not
to remain in Africa

Borderless Hiring and the New Talent Map

For international organisations, Africa's workforce represents an increasingly interesting talent source. Remote roles in technology, financial services, business process management, and professional services can easily draw from African talent pools, and a growing number of organisations are already doing so.

Besides, the practical barriers to onboarding workers across borders have also been greatly reduced by the growth of employer of record (EOR) services. These allow companies to comply with local labour laws and employ workers in markets where they have no legal entity.

This operating model is particularly well-suited to African expansion, with a diversity of 54 African countries and their individual:



Labour law
frameworks



Payroll
obligations



Regulatory
requirements

This diversity, although a strength in many cases, can otherwise represent a significant deterrent to international employers.

Borderless Hiring and the New Talent Map

AI, meanwhile, is reshaping the talent market from another direction.

The [**ALU 2025 Africa Workforce Readiness Survey**](#) found that 54% of employers across Africa plan to integrate AI into their businesses, and 53% believe workers will need to reskill multiple times during their careers as a result. Students, particularly in Uganda and Ethiopia, were broadly optimistic about AI's potential to create new opportunities. For organisations looking for adaptable, digitally engaged talent for the future, Africa's young workforce is an increasingly interesting source.

How AI is reshaping the talent market



54%

of African employers are planning to adopt AI in their operations.



53%

believe employees will need to reskill several times throughout their careers.

Africa as the Next Global Talent Hub

The conditions for Africa to become a major global talent hub are slowly but surely being met:

A young, growing, and **increasingly educated population**

Rising investment in higher education

Expanding **digital infrastructure**

A generation of students motivated by a **desire to solve real problems**

63% of students surveyed expressed optimism about the future of the African economy, and 67% said they feel positive about their prospects of finding work after completing their education.

What is needed now is concerted effort and convergence: between what universities teach and what employers need, between the ambitions of young Africans and the opportunities available to them at home.



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