



Gender-Based Inequities among Young Women Creatives in Kenya: A Fact Sheet

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Authors

Linnet Arisa,
Namuddu Diana Angella,
Diane Akayezu,
Chimaraoke Izugbara.

Executive Summary

Kenya's creative sector contributes approximately 5.32% of GDP and generates an estimated US\$6–7 billion annually, making it a significant driver of young women's economic empowerment. Yet gender-based inequities continue to limit their full participation.

A mixed-methods study by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, found that over half of the respondents (51.33%) faced workplace discrimination, (55.82%) felt they had limited access to opportunities within the creative sector, and 86.7% had experienced some form of harassment, among other challenges. Despite this, most women (90.18%) describe their work as dignified and fulfilling, and nearly all remain committed to long-term careers, signaling that targeted policy and institutional action can unlock the sector's full potential for gender equity.

Introduction

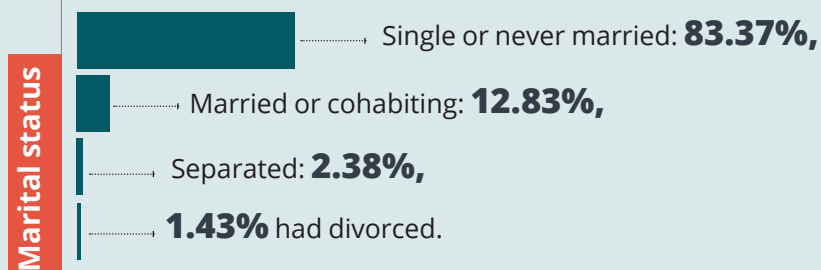
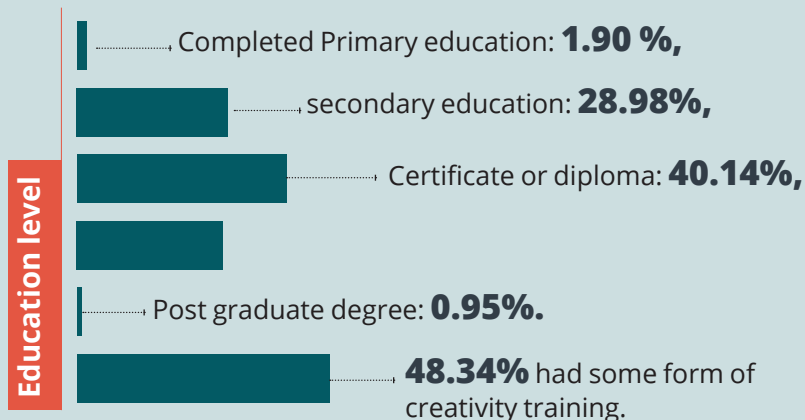
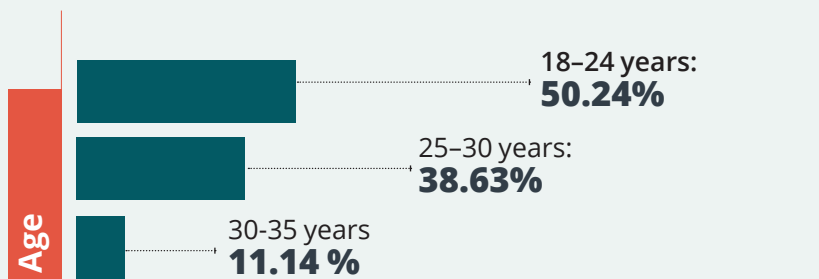
Kenya's creative sector has emerged as a strategic driver of economic growth, employing approximately 500,000 people formally and over two million informally, fuelled by youth innovation, digital transformation, and expanding internet access. Young women are central to this expansion, working across performing arts, design, audiovisual production, and digital media, yet persistent gender disparities limit their access to income, leadership roles, safe working conditions, and career advancement. This fact sheet builds on evidence from a mixed-methods study by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, comprising a survey of 422 young female creatives, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews, to inform targeted policy and institutional action to advance gender equity in Kenya's creative economy.



*I became friends
with the guys...
they told me
the amount of
money they're
being paid... only
to sit down with
the owner of the
group... and he
tells me a quarter
of what the
rest are paid.”*
**(Female FGD 4,
Kilifi County).**

Characteristics of Interviewed Women Creatives

The study sample reflects a diverse group of young women engaged in Kenya's creative sector:



Care work:

- 28.44% of respondents reported having children.
- 10% of respondents lived in households with at least one member requiring special care, such as elderly or disabled relative.



Employment type:

- 41.47% of the respondents were engaged in full-time creative work and
- 58.53% engage on part-time.



Long-term careers in the creative sector:

- 93.35% expressed determination to pursue long-term careers in the creative sector



Social media use:

WhatsApp (92.21%) and TikTok (82.48%) were the most widely used platforms, followed by Instagram (78.35%), Facebook (70.07%), X (37.47%), and Telegram (25.55%).



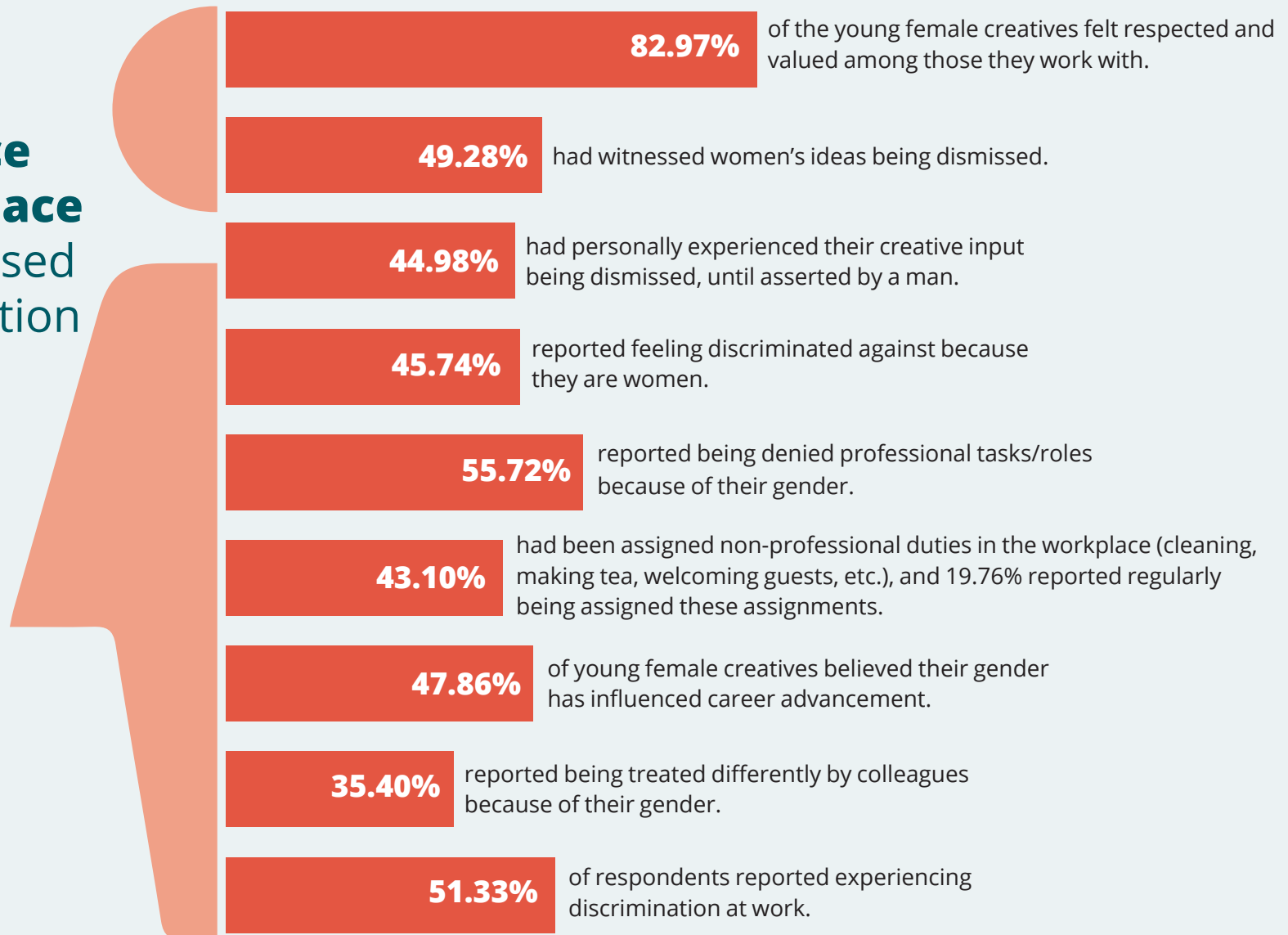
Residence:

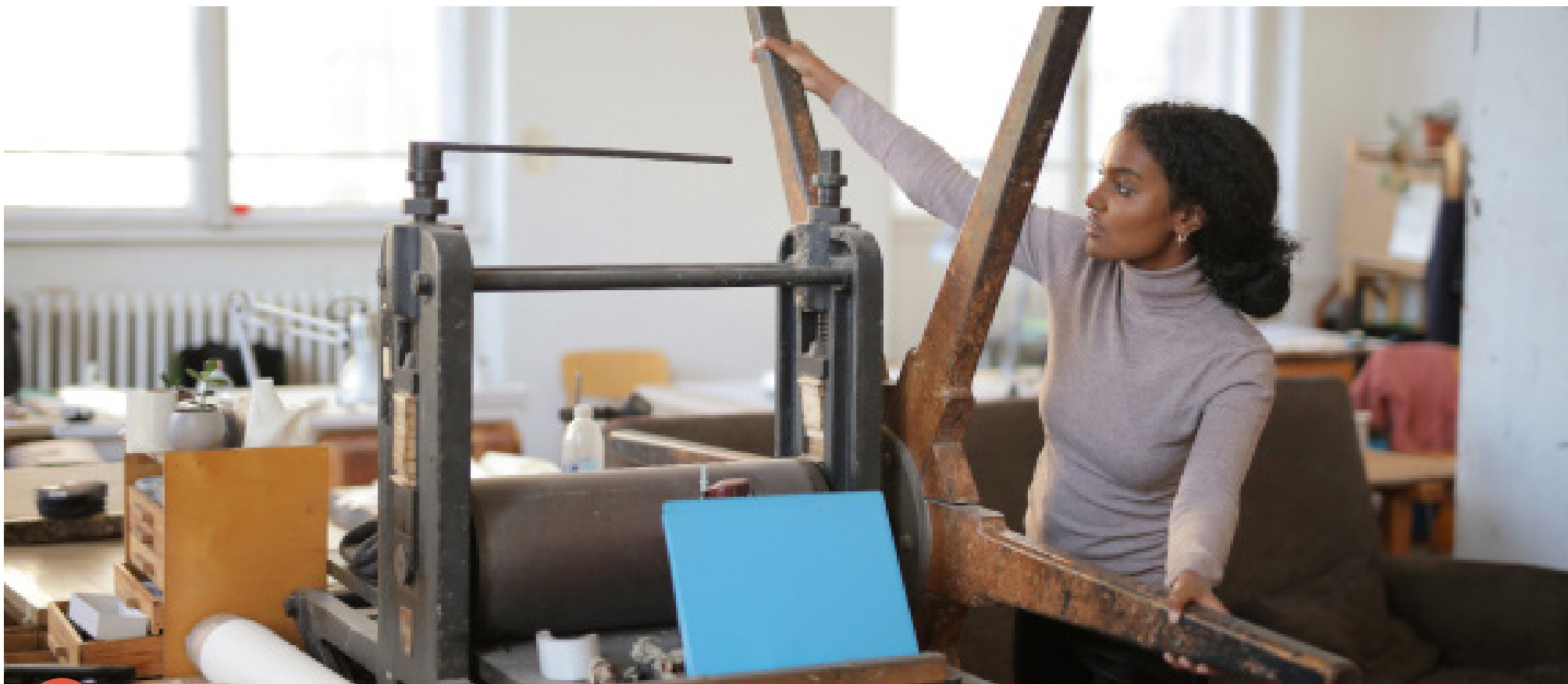
Majority of respondents in the sample (85.31%) resided in urban areas, while 14.69% lived in rural areas.

Emerging evidence

Despite many women reporting positive professional experiences, significant levels of gender-based discrimination persist across creative workplaces.

Experience of Workplace Gender-Based Discrimination





A Women's Harassment Experiences in Creative Workplaces

68.13%

reported experiencing gender-based harassment at work



35.48%

had been forced or pressured into sex (7.86% reported regularly experiencing this).



50.12%

reported having received comments on appearance/body (36.58% reported experiencing this regularly). 80.29% reported having experienced sexualized jokes. 42.01% had experienced sexual nicknames.

71.73%

reported having received inappropriate online messages.

The lack of workplace safety reporting systems was viewed as common and a contributor to these problems.

B Workplace Harassment (<12 months before the survey-Feb 2025)

68.13% young female creatives reported to have experienced workplace gender-based harassment in the 12 months prior to the study: Among these,

83.13% had received unsolicited remarks about their appearance.

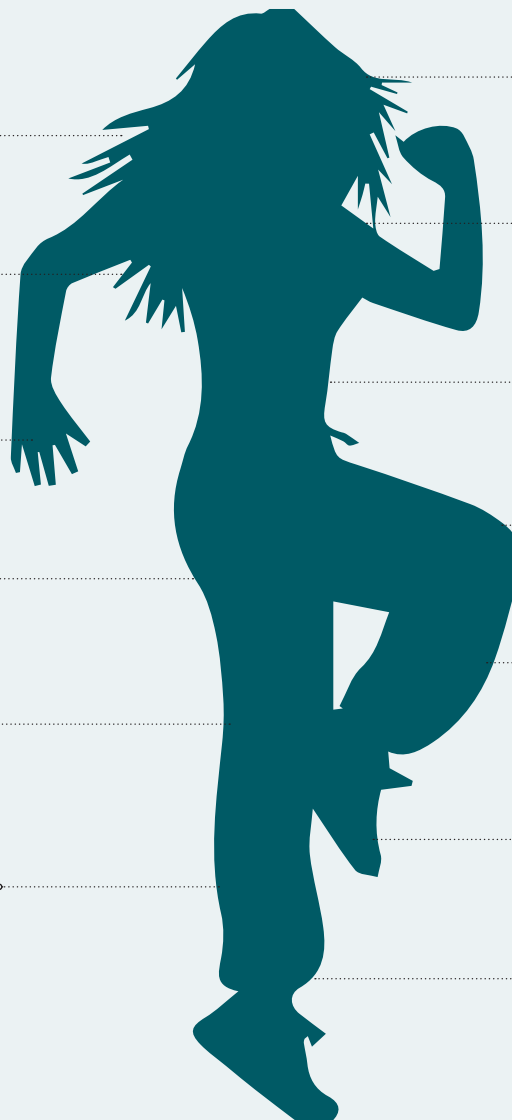
72.21% had been targets of sexual jokes.

71.97% had received comments on private/marital lives.

61.19% had received comments about their sexual life.

36.81% had been referred to by sexualized nicknames.

63.96% reported being asked to spend time with someone, even after they refused, often a powerful male in the sector, in exchange for opportunities/roles/jobs.



62.71% had experienced obscene gestures/sounds.

62.14% had received sexualized messages/emails.

6.67% reported experiencing workplace hostility.

15.23% reported experiencing gender-stereotyping behaviors in the workplace.

64.37% Unwanted/unnecessary touching was reported by

24.46% reported being touched in intimate parts,

43.34% were forced/pressured into sex.



Workplace Gender Equity, Pay Gap, and other Challenges

78.14% reported unequal task assignments due to their gender.

62.24% of respondents had witnessed unequal pay between men and women creatives

54.31% reported personally experiencing gender-related pay disparities.

74.88% encountered discriminatory job advertisements (gender, age restrictions).

59.52% avoided bidding for certain jobs due to late hours or security risks.

About 10.09% avoided opportunities simply because they were young women.

2.41% reported avoiding certain opportunities because of unequal pay.



Workplace policies or practices were generally considered inadequate to accommodate women's needs, including menstrual, pregnancy support, and childcare needs.

Women with disabilities reported compounded barriers, including stigma and assumptions about their creative abilities.

3.61% avoided opportunities to prevent experiencing sexual harassment.

6% avoided opportunities because they believed men would be preferred.

0.96% avoided opportunities due to expectations of verbal abuse.

62.23% disagreed that men and women in their workplace had equal promotion/advancement chances.

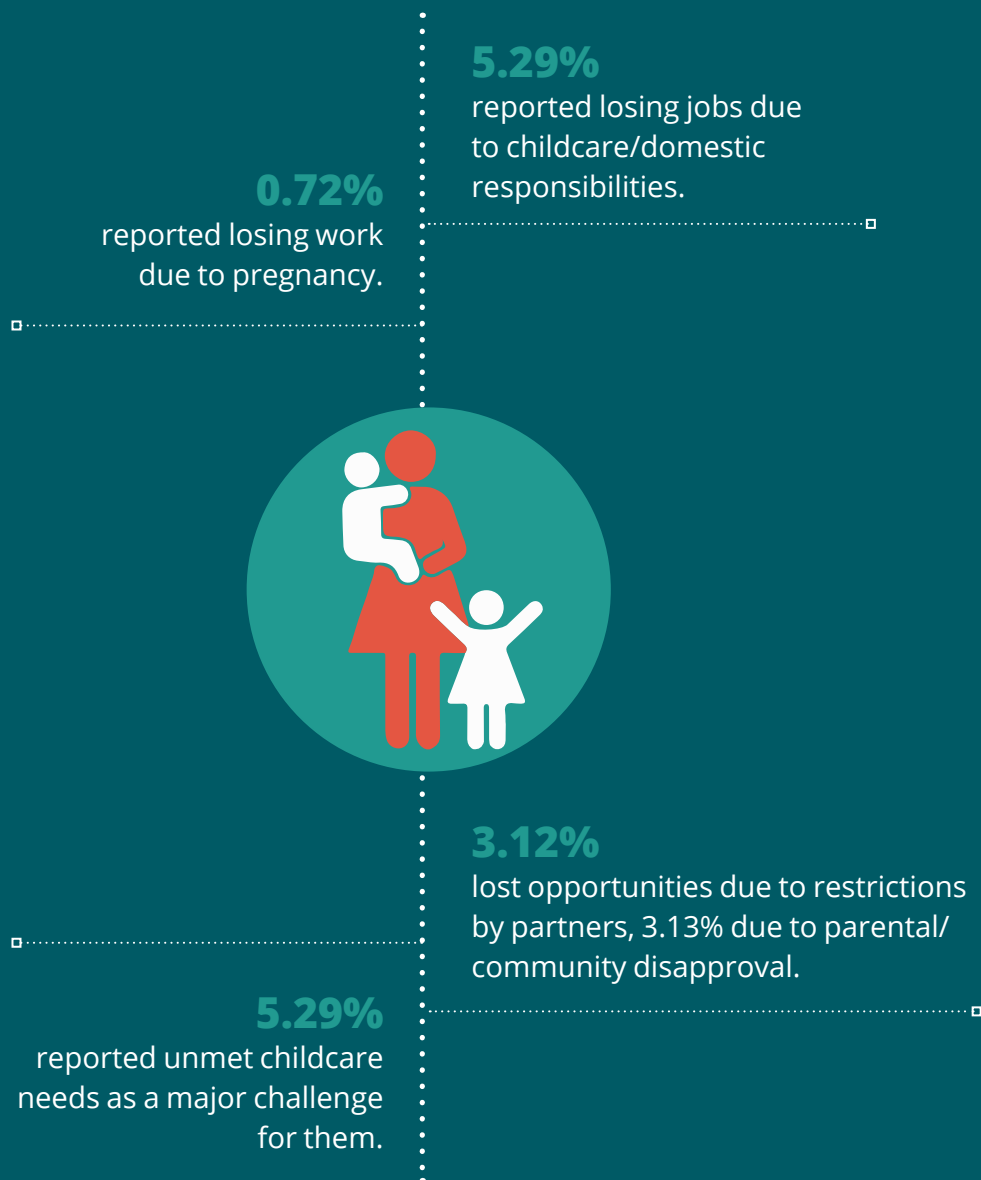
3.81% reported not receiving due credit for their work because they were women

1.19% considered their workplace to be unsafe for women

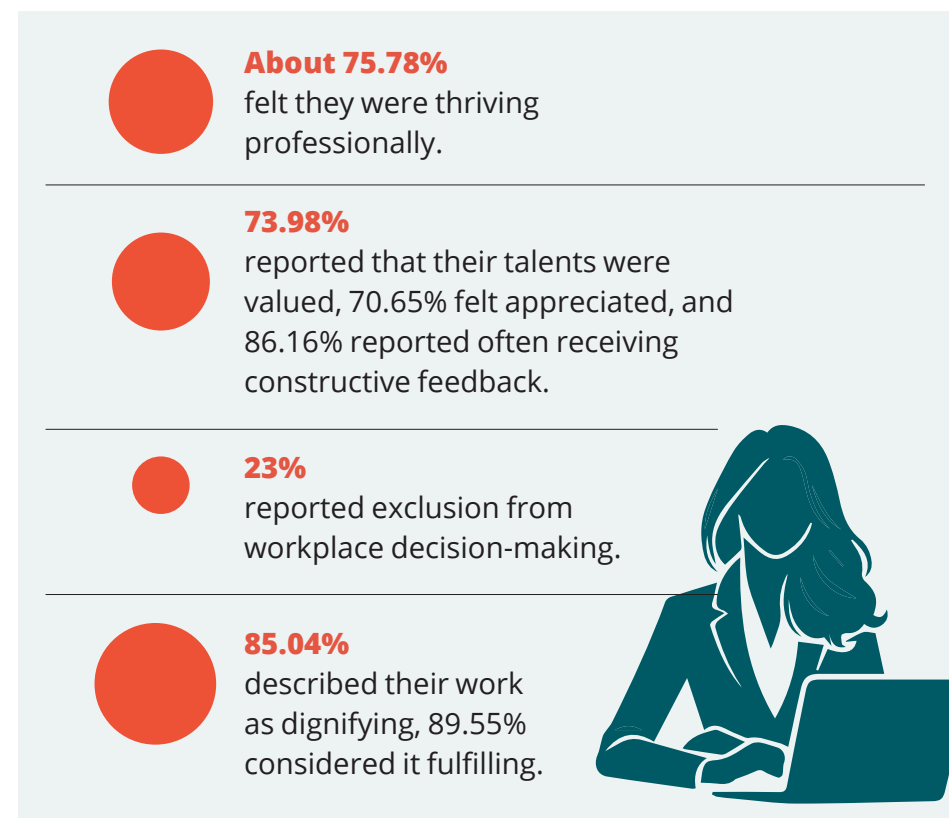
21.19% reported reduced access to roles and opportunities because they were women

52.01% of the respondents reported limited safeguards against gender discrimination in their workplaces

D Domestic and Care Work Pressures



E Dignifying and Fulfilling Work



- Respondents also indicated that their work would be more fulfilling and dignified if they received greater respect, more opportunities for self-expression, treated and valued fairly, and enjoyed improved economic benefits.
- Safer work environments and consideration for pregnancy- and unpaid care-related responsibilities were seen as essential for enhancing women creatives' job fulfilment and dignity.

Conclusion

This evidence brief draws on the experiences of young women working across multiple subsectors of Kenya's creative economy. Although many respondents are actively engaged in creative work and remain committed to pursuing long-term careers in the sector, the findings show that their professional experiences continue to be shaped by persistent structural and gender-based inequities. These include discriminatory practices such as the dismissal of women's ideas, unequal allocation of roles, limited participation in decision-making, and gender-related pay disparities. At the same time, many respondents reported experiencing workplace harassment, including sexualized remarks, unwanted physical contact, inappropriate messages, and coercive demands linked to professional opportunities, often in environments with weak reporting and accountability mechanisms. These challenges are further compounded by domestic and caregiving responsibilities, pregnancy-related constraints, and broader social expectations that limit women's access to opportunities. Even so, most participants described their work as dignifying and fulfilling, highlighting both the resilience of young women creatives and the sector's potential to support women's economic empowerment if these inequities are addressed.

Policy and Programmatic Recommendations

Gender disparities continue to constrain the participation and advancement of young women within Kenya's creative economy. These challenges not only affect individual livelihoods but also limit the sector's overall productivity, innovation potential, and global competitiveness. Addressing these inequities requires coordinated action from government institutions, industry associations, private sector actors, civil society organizations, and development partners.

Key priority actions include:

1 Government Agencies and Policy makers

- Develop a standardized "Fair Contract" template specifically for young female creatives to prevent predatory "buy-out" clauses. Kenya Copyright Board (KECOBO) and the Office of the Attorney General to establish a dedicated legal aid desk to provide pro-bono contract reviews for women-led startups, ensuring their intellectual property is protected before signing with major labels or agencies.
- Collaborate with the Ministry of Youth Affairs, Creative Economy, and Sports to establish industry-wide minimum wage and pricing benchmarks for freelance creative work (e.g., graphic design, digital content creation, and music production) to close the gender pay gap in the informal creative sector.
- The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) to integrate modules on digital safety, financial literacy, and "Creative Entrepreneurship" into the curriculum of all arts-focused TVETs and universities.
- The State Department for the Creative Economy to launch a "Digital Rights and Safety" certification program for women in tech and arts, equipping them to navigate and mitigate Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) as they build their digital presence.
- Create a "Creative Sector Window" within the Women Enterprise Fund and Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) that offers low-interest, collateral-free loans specifically for women-led creative businesses.

- The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection should issue a directive requiring all creative agencies and production houses to have a visible, enforceable anti-harassment policy and an anonymous reporting mechanism as a condition for business license renewal.
- Leverage the National Care Policy to incentivize creative hubs and co-working spaces to provide on-site, affordable childcare facilities. County Governments to also include “Creative Zones” in their urban planning that offer flexible, safe, and tech-enabled environments for women to work remotely, acknowledging their dual roles in the care economy and the creative sector.

2 Donors and Gender Equity Organizations

- Invest in capacity-building initiatives and mentorship programs that strengthen women’s participation in the creative sector.
- Support community platforms and networks that promote collaboration and peer learning among women creatives.
- Fund initiatives that promote safe, inclusive, and gender-equitable creative work environments.
- Fund hands-on training programs in business skills, intellectual property law, and digital marketing, with a focus on practical application.
- Support public campaigns and educational initiatives that challenge gender stereotypes and highlight the success of female creatives.
- Support the creation and sustainability of platforms where young women creatives can share experiences, access support, and advocate for change.

3 Private Sector Businesses and Organisations

- Implement and enforce anti-harassment and non-discrimination policies with clear, confidential reporting mechanisms.
- Promote gender equity in leadership, management, and technical roles within creative enterprises.
- Adopt transparent pay scales and ethical contracting practices to address gender pay gaps.

4 Civil Society Organisations

- Lead and support public awareness campaigns that challenge stereotypes and promote recognition of creative work as a legitimate profession.
- Strengthen networks and community platforms where women creatives can share experiences, support each other, and advocate for change.

"As a model above 30 you cannot be taken to any modeling agency... But for male models, they even model at the age of 40." (Female FGD 6, Kisumu County).

"You're the girl here so how can I wash utensils, and you are here?" (Female FGD 2, Kilifi County).

"Even if we are doing the same job, they will pay the man three times more." (KII 5, Nairobi County).

"Dignified work is one which you are respected, accepted, and where there is good pay" (KII 1 Kilifi County).

"They chose you because of the ass." (Female FGD 6, Kisii County).

"We are looking for the owner. Where is he?" and when she responded that she was the owner, the reply was, "No, no, no, we want a man" (Female IDI 2, Mombasa County).

"I really have to wake up early... kids have to go to school, I have to do it myself, the time for weaving becomes very limited" (Female FGD 3 Kisii County).

"I was supposed to quit acting not because I want to, but because I'm pregnant." (Female FGD 6, Kisumu County).

"Why should it cost more to make me feel safer?" (Female FGD 5 Kilifi County)

"Most creatives... don't know their rights or how much they're supposed to be paid" (Female FGD 2 Kilifi County), "We work with a lot of contracts, but we don't know how to protect our intellectual properties... they take 70%, and you're left with 30%" (Female IDI 6 Vihiga County).

"I buy the pads myself. You come, I ask you, 'Why didn't you come?' You say, 'I'm on my periods and I didn't have a pad.' And I'm like, okay, take" (Female FGD 7 Kisumu County).

"We can't work with you, you'll tell us you're going to see your child, we want someone who is free" (Female FGD 2 Kilifi County).

"It is difficult to undertake my creative work fully because of the responsibilities of taking care of the child. I cannot go to studio, I cannot write songs... It's not easy" (Female FGD 6 Kisii County).

"And also, another challenge. It is like when you go to these places where you're supposed to perform, they're not accessible. Maybe the stage is so high you can't climb there, you know? It limits you to some places, even in terms of accessibility." (Female IDI 6 Vihiga County).



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