

| Call for Contributions  
| February 2026

**KABARAK  
LAW REVIEW**

**BLOG SYMPOSIUM  
ON THE AFRICAN  
YOUTH CHARTER**

**@20**



## Introduction

2 July 2006 marked a significant year in the African continent as the date of adoption of the African Youth Charter.<sup>1</sup> This year, 2026, we mark twenty (20) years since the adoption of the African Youth Charter. This is an achievement for a continent that is the youngest in the world, with a median age of approximately 19 years.<sup>2</sup> Over the past two decades, the Charter has provided a common vision that has aimed to promote youth rights and development across Africa.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, it has helped shape national youth policies and pushed governments and partners to invest in the development of sustainable youth projects.<sup>4</sup>

With regard to its development, the African Youth Charter has accounted for nearly 70 per cent of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>5</sup> Such a youth bulge, has presented a significant opportunity for the young people to realise their full



potential when empowered.<sup>6</sup> However, for many African youths, this potential remains unrealised.<sup>7</sup> It is in this context that Alcinda Honwana conceptualises the condition of many African youths as waithood – a liminal phase characterised by a prolonged suspension between childhood and adulthood.<sup>8</sup>



1 African Youth Charter, 2 July 2006.

2 Worldometer, 'Africa population', 20 January 2026.

3 African Youth Charter, Article 1(2). See for example the Youth Charter has obligated state parties to take 'necessary steps' in the realisation of the obligations contained in it.

4 Uche Uwaezuoke Okonkwo, 'Re-invoking the African Youth Charter in policy making at the state government level in Nigeria', 3(4) *Journal of Law and Conflict Resolution* 59-60.

5 Office of the high representative for the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states, 'Young people's potential, the key to Africa's sustainable development', *United Nations*, 20 January 2026.

6 Luanda Mpungose and Lennon Monyai, 'Carrying forward the momentum of the 2017 African Union year of the youth', *South African Institute of International Affairs* (2018) 7.

7 Romola Adeola, 'The African Youth Charter and the role of regional institutions in an age of Africa rising', *Afric Law*, 6 July 2015.

8 Alcinda Honwana, 'Enough is enough!': Youth protests and political change in Africa', *University of the Free State*, 2.

## Who constitutes the youth?

To meaningfully advance African youth rights, a pertinent question arises. Who qualifies as a 'youth'? However, there is no universally accepted definition of the term, as different legal and policy instruments adopt varying age thresholds and confer youth rights on different groups.<sup>9</sup> At the international level, the United Nations provides no formal legal definition of a youth. Although, for statistical purposes it commonly classifies youth as individuals aged between fifteen and twenty-four.<sup>10</sup> Regional instruments on the other hand similarly lack a sense of uniformity. While the Ibero-American Convention on Youth Rights adopts the fifteen to twenty-four age range,<sup>11</sup> European Union youth

programmes generally extend youth status to those under thirty.<sup>12</sup> Notably, the African Youth Charter adopts one of the broadest approaches by defining youth as persons between fifteen and thirty-five years.<sup>13</sup>

## Youth under the African Youth Charter: Abstract or substance?

If youth is defined so expansively as to include persons up to thirty-five years of age, the Charter risks transforming youth from a legally meaningful category into a politically convenient abstraction.<sup>14</sup> In such a configuration, 'youth' becomes less a rights-bearing subject and more a rhetorical device – often prompted in policy



9 Yusuf Abdullahi Manu and Habu Mohammed, 'The African Youth Charter and Youth Development: A reflection on challenges of implementation in Nigeria', 9 (1) *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Political Science* (2024) 48.

10 United Nations, 'Who are the youth?', 29 January 2026.

11 Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Youth, 11 October 2005, Article 1.

12 European Commission, 'Funding for youth exchanges and activities', 27 August 2025.

13 African Youth Charter, Article 3.

14 Amani Kasherwa, 'The role of youth organizations in peacebuilding in the African Great Lakes Region: A rough transition from local and non-governmental to the national and governmental peacebuilding efforts in Burundi and eastern DRC', *Journal of Peace Education* (2025) 2-3.



discourse but insufficiently anchored in enforceable entitlements.<sup>15</sup> This raises the deeper question of whether the African Youth Charter, in its current form, is structured to respond meaningfully to the lived conditions of African youth, or whether it merely symbolises continental commitment without generating transformative impact.<sup>16</sup>

Against this backdrop, the *Kabarak Law Review Blog* has convened a symposium on the African Youth Charter at twenty.



The symposium provides a platform for critical engagement with the Charter. Especially, its implementation across member states, and its relevance to the lived realities of African youth. It invites diverse perspectives to examine both the potential and the limits of the Charter as a tool for advancing youth rights and inclusion on the continent. The themes of the contributions include but are not limited to the following as outlined below.

### Proposed themes for the African Youth Charter at twenty symposium

#### 1. Youth political agency, resistance, and collective action

- Youth-led protest movements and democratic contestation in Africa
- Digital activism and new forms of political mobilisation
- Protest, repression, and state responses to youth dissent

#### 2. Youth unemployment and economic exclusion

- The right to gainful employment under the African Youth Charter. An aspiration or enforceable entitlement?
- Youth vulnerability in contexts of insecurity, including exposure to extremist recruitment
- Precarious labour and economic exploitation of young people
- The gap between academic qualifications and labour-market demands
- The marginalisation and exclusion of the youth from decision-making processes

15 Kasherwa, 'The role of youth organizations in peacebuilding in the African Great Lakes Region: A rough transition from local and non-governmental to the national and governmental peacebuilding efforts in Burundi and eastern DRC', 2.

16 Kasherwa, 'The role of youth organizations in peacebuilding in the African Great Lakes Region: A rough transition from local and non-governmental to the national and governmental peacebuilding efforts in Burundi and eastern DRC', 2.

### 3. Political participation beyond voting **Submission guidelines**

- Legal and institutional barriers to youth candidacy and leadership
- Role of political parties and patronage networks in marginalising youth
- Assessing Article 11 of the African Youth Charter on meaningful participation

### 4. State obligations and accountability under the African Youth Charter

- Domestication and implementation of the African Youth Charter at a national level
- African Union youth initiatives. Are they measurable outcomes or largely symbolic?
- National youth policies and their substance and impact
- Monitoring, reporting, and accountability mechanisms under the Charter

- All contributions must be the original work of the author(s) and must not have been submitted to any other publication for consideration.
- Blog articles should be between 1,000 and 2,000 words.
- Contributions may be submitted in English or Swahili and should be edited for language before submission.
- The authors should adhere to the Kabarak University Legal Citation Guide (KALCI) accessible here [https://journals.kabarak.ac.ke/public/site/legal\\_citation\\_guide.pdf](https://journals.kabarak.ac.ke/public/site/legal_citation_guide.pdf).
- Submissions should be submitted using the email [klrb@kabarak.ac.ke](mailto:klrb@kabarak.ac.ke).
- Deadline for submission: 31 July 2026.
- Submissions will be considered, processed and published on a rolling basis.