as the government continues to incentivise investors in low-cost housing in a country with one of the highest housing deficits in Africa.

"The commercial construction sector is expected to expand… before registering an average annual growth of more than 5% from 2024 to 2027, supported by investment in the construction of retail buildings and in leisure and hospitality projects, amid a rebound in tourism activities – which is one of the leading sources of foreign exchange for Kenya," states GlobalData's report on Kenya.

Such positive reports are causes for optimism among key players in the country's property sector with the housing deficit elsewhere in Africa offering an opportunity for developers. It is expected that the continent will become home to six of the 43 megacities in the world by 2030 with the middle class increasing to 1.1 billion people by 2050, pushing the need for better housing and retail facilities further. Nigeria, for example, will require at least 22 million houses to address the current housing deficit.

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

As the GTC tower rules the Nairobi skyline, the country's new malls are competing for the middle- to high-class pockets. From the industrial town of Thika north of Nairobi to Kitengela, a township located southeast of the city and aptly known as 'Nairobi's bedroom', the shopping experience is no different to anywhere else around the world.

Gucci, Givenchy, Prada and Chanel have become household names to shoppers in these malls. Scenes of young ones reaching out for a bite at a KFC, Burger King or Subway in an upmarket mall away from Nairobi's CBD while their parents shop at the French giant retailer Carrefour are common. And these malls are getting bigger by the day.

For example, Two Rivers Mall, located next to the diplomatic node of Gigiri, has dominated the shopping scene for the last six years, drawing on its mixed-use concept – where people live, work and play – to reel in customers. At 65,000sq m, it has

This pic, and below: KOFISI Africa is a market leader in delivering bespoke workspaces for offices, restaurants and hospitality areas

The rise of

FLEXIBLE OFFICE SPACE

In a number of African destinations, a new concept of flexible working spaces has emerged, complete with amenities such as a gym, kitchen, nursing rooms and gaming areas. We interviewed **Michael Aldridge**, CEO and founder of KOFISI Africa about what the new office trend means for the continent

Q Can you give us an overview of KOFISI's presence in Africa? We've been in the Kenyan market since 2014 and rebranded as KOFISI in 2019. We have six centres in Nairobi, one in Dar es Salaam and one in Lagos. We've expanded our centre in Lagos and are taking on more space in Dar es Salaam. We are opening a centre in both Kigali and in Casablanca in 2024. We target on operating 300,000-500,000sq ft of work and office space in each gateway city on the continent.

Q What gaps are you seeking to fill? There is a gap in the market for a premium, 'customer service driven' office product. Companies are looking to build a stronger culture of productivity and connection through superbly designed spaces fitted with the latest technology and a full range of hospitality services including room and reception services, food and beverage, restaurants, bars and wellness – akin to the services you'd expect in a hotel. We call it the 'hotelification of the workplace'. We have attracted a number of multinationals such as Google, GIZ, Bolt and Amazon.

Q How has the model been embraced? Post-Covid, there was a huge shift globally with companies embracing the flexible office model as opposed to long and costly office leases. The future of the workplace is more than providing just a desk and a chair. Hospitality and hotel design is shaping that trend, especially in Kenya and across Africa, where a young, savvy and technologically advanced working population wants to work from premium, engaging and service-led environments.

Q How would you describe Nairobi's Grade A office space? Nairobi's Grade A office space is of exceptional quality, but there's not enough of it, with an oversupply of Grade B buildings. Companies with offices inside Grade B buildings are often tied down to lengthy traditional leases with fixed rents too high for the current economic climate. Transitional clients often want to move into Grade A space, but their contracts are fixed. The current perception of a 'glut' in office space is because many landlords are not responding to the cyclical or recessional drivers in play. They're holding out to achieve rental rates that are no longer affordable or justifiable to most businesses.

Q What kind of infrastructure is needed to support these flexi working spaces in a city like Nairobi? Road infrastructure has improved access to most of our centres, opening up Westlands and Riverside as a preferred destination for business. The Nairobi Expressway has provided easy access from the airport and reduced travel time between Karen and central Nairobi. However, we need a more forward-thinking approach to city planning with investments in cycle and bus lanes with pedestrian walkways. Some African cities have smart city traffic and management systems. A similar investment in Nairobi would enhance the urban experience in this innovative city.