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ILO WAEMU Youth Country Briefs

May 2026

Youth Labour Market Trends in Senegal[1]

Key points

- Senegal's economy has sustained solid growth in the new millennium, with real gross domestic product (GDP) expanding at an average rate of 4.3 per cent per year between 2000 and 2025, outpacing the country's population growth of 2.6 per cent per year. Senegal is a lower-middle-income economy with a purchasing power parity (PPP) adjusted GDP per capita (p.c.) of US$4,647 in 2025 – just below the sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) average of US$5,324. Extreme working poverty is relatively low in Senegal, and the country is also one of the most stable in the region, ranked among the top WAEMU countries according to the Global Peace Index (GPI).
- The service sector dominates employment in Senegal accounting for nearly half of all jobs in the country. Agriculture accounts for roughly one-third of total employment, and industry for the remaining one-fifth. Informal employment is pervasive, encompassing over 95 per cent of all workers and almost 99 per cent of young workers. Nevertheless, Senegal stands out in the region for having a relatively high and rising share of wage employment among youth – it is the only WAEMU country where the majority of young male workers are employees (rather than self-employed).
- The overall youth NEET rate (share of youth aged 15–29 not in employment, education or training) remains very high in Senegal, at 33.8 per cent in 2022. As in many countries, young women face a far higher NEET rate than young men – in Senegal, almost half of young women were NEET in 2019, compared to about one-fifth of young men. Both the male and female youth NEET rate have likely edged up since 2019, owing to slight decreases in young men's educational participation and young women's employment.
- There are pronounced disparities in youth labour market outcomes. Young people with disabilities experience extremely high NEET rates – roughly triple the rate of their non-disabled male peers. These gaps appear to have widened from 2019 to 2022. Similarly, there is a stark rural disadvantage: NEET rates in rural areas are higher than in urban areas for both sexes. By 2022, nearly 60 per cent of rural young women were NEET, and rural young men also had higher NEET rates than urban young men. Geographic and disability-related vulnerabilities often compound the gender gaps in youth inactivity in Senegal.
- Educational attainment in Senegal remains low compared to the SSA average, although there has been progress over the past decade – particularly for girls at the primary level. Only about 52.7 per cent of children complete primary school (2023), which is over 15 percentage points (p.p.) below the SSA average (67.4 per cent). Lower secondary completion stood at 31.1 per cent and upper secondary at just 15.8 per cent in 2023, also far below corresponding SSA averages (47.4 and 28.5 per cent). Gender disparities emerge across education levels: girls now outperform boys in primary completion (57.6 and 47.4 per cent respectively) and have a small edge in lower secondary, but by upper secondary the pattern reverses (female 14.4 per cent vs male 17.6 per cent). In 2019, 30.9 per cent of young men and 30.7 per cent young women were enrolled in education or training; by 2022 these shares had risen slightly risen for young women and dropped for young women.

[1] This brief was prepared by Niall O'Higgins and Vipasana Karkee (ILO) with some AI support managed by Dibyaudh Das (ILO). The authors are grateful for the very helpful comments provided by ILO colleagues Jonas Bausch, Yacouba Diallo, Sara Elder and Ali Madai Boukar as well as those provided by colleagues at the Mastercard Foundation including participants at a webinar organised by MCF on January 27, 2026.

1. Introduction: Contextual indicators

Following decades of relative stability and gradual economic reforms, Senegal has achieved strong macroeconomic performance over the last twenty-five years. As a result, over the new millennium as a whole, economic growth has slightly outpaced population growth. Between 2000 and 2025, Senegal reported an average real GDP growth rate (local currency) of approximately 4.3 per cent per annum (p.a.), compared to an annual population growth rate of about 2.6 per cent[2].[3] The early 2000s saw moderate real GDP growth (3.4 per cent per year on average up to 2010), which accelerated in the mid-2010s. Between 2014 and 2019, annual growth averaged 6.2 per cent. Senegal even maintained positive growth during the COVID-19 pandemic (1.3 per cent in 2020 and 6.5 per cent in 2021). Since 2021, economic growth has remained robust, even reaching 7.9 per cent in 2025, aided by developments in the energy sector and infrastructure investments. Overall, in the new millennium, Senegal's growth performance has been roughly on par with that of SSA as a whole, and above the global average rate of expansion (figure 1).

Box 1: YouthSTATS, a partnership between the ILO and the Mastercard Foundation

The ILO, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, has created a regularly updated dataset called YouthSTATS available on ILOSTAT. The dataset was first produced by the ILO as part of its partnership with the Mastercard Foundation "Work4Youth" project which concluded in 2016. Initially composed of labour indicators for young people aged 15-29 derived from the school-to-work transition surveys conducted through the partnership, the dataset now benefits from the ILO's stock of harmonized labour force survey micro-datasets. It serves as a central repository of international youth labour statistics.

This brief is one of eight country statistical briefs for WAEMU countries undertaken under the new partnership which provide an analysis of youth labour markets with a focus on gender, educational attainment and disability issues. To complement these statistical analyses, the new partnership also involves analyses of youth employment initiatives in WAEMU countries prepared with the direct engagement of young people in the region. The countries covered are Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo.

Senegal is a relatively large and geographically diverse lower-middle-income country. It has a PPP-adjusted GDP p.c. of US$4,647 in 2025, which is slightly below the corresponding average for SSA as a whole (US$5,324).[4] In terms of peace and stability, Senegal has long been one of the most stable countries in the WAEMU region. It is currently ranked among the top performers in WAEMU on the GPI[5]; in the 2025 edition, Senegal is placed first in the WAEMU region – which corresponds to 9th position out of 44 countries in SSA and 69th out of 163 globally. Unlike some of its neighbours, Senegal has not experienced major internal conflict in recent decades, and its GPI ranking has consistently been near the top of the WAEMU range. The country's stable governance and security situation provide a favourable context for investment and youth development initiatives. Senegal's GPI ranking in WAEMU is comparable with its ranking in the Human Development Index, where it is placed third among the eight countries. The country has made improvements to human

[2] IMF (2026).

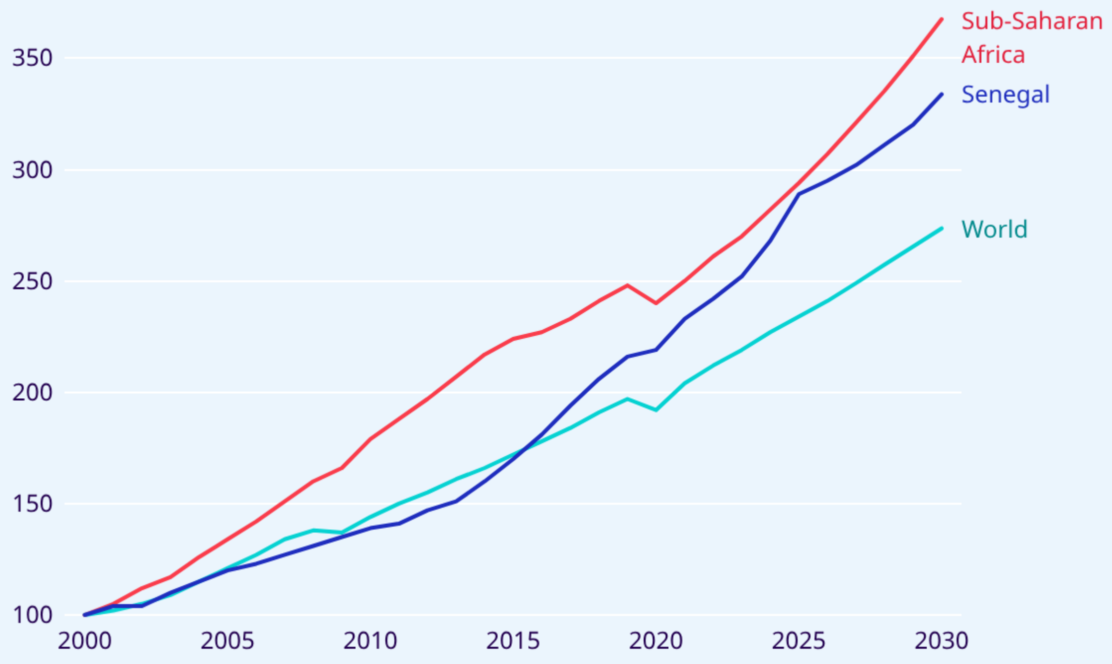
[3] UN estimates and projections, July 2024 (UN, 2024; data also reported in ILOSTAT).

[4] The PPP adjusted GDP p.c. estimates used in this brief are from the IMF April 2026 WEO Database (IMF, 2026). Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) adjusted GDP converts a country's GDP into (usually) USD using exchange rates that equate the cost of a representative basket of goods and services in different countries.

[5] Institute for Economics & Peace (2025) and GPI raw data, 2008-2023.

development in the 21st century, its relative position rose by one place between 2015 and 2023 (to 169th of 193 countries worldwide).[6]

▶ Figure 1. Real GDP, Senegal, Sub-Saharan Africa and the World, 2000-2030; 2000=100



Note: The figure reports indices for real GDP over time, for Senegal, Sub-Saharan African and the world with 2000 = 100
Source: Calculated from the IMF World Economic Outlook April 2026 database.

Labour force participation in Senegal is low compared to regional benchmarks, especially for women. The employment-to-population ratio (EPR) in the country for the population aged 15 and above was 50.5 per cent in 2022. This is significantly below the ILO's modelled estimate for SSA of 65.5 per cent and even below the global average of 57.5 per cent[7] (table 1). The low overall EPR in Senegal is driven by an unusually low employment rate among women. Only roughly one-third of working-age women in Senegal were employed in 2022, which is more than 20 p.p. lower than the SSA female average of 59.7 per cent. By contrast, the EPR for men in Senegal – two-thirds of men were employed in 2022 – while lower than the SSA male average (71.8 per cent), is much closer to typical levels in the region. This pattern results in a very large gender gap in employment as Senegal's female EPR lags far behind the male rate by over 30 p.p.

[6] UNDP (2025). The Human Development Index (HDI) is a broader measure of a country's human development which takes into account also life expectancy and educational attainment, in addition to per capita GDP.

[7] This brief applies the definition of employment established by the 13th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) in 1982. The 13th ICLS definition identifies all persons who worked for at least one hour during the reference period as employed. More recently, the 19th ICLS established a new definition which classifies as employed all those who work for "pay or profit" for at least one hour during the reference period, however, the EHCVM survey does not contain sufficient information to apply the newer definition. The 13th ICLS definition tends to have a higher recorded employment-to-population ratio, especially in lower income countries because, for example, it includes among the employed, workers in subsistence agriculture, whereas the 19th ICLS definition does not. However, both definitions include workers in informal jobs and any other type of remunerated work of at least one hour whether or not it is formally recorded (including, for example, street vendors, unregistered platform workers and domestic workers).

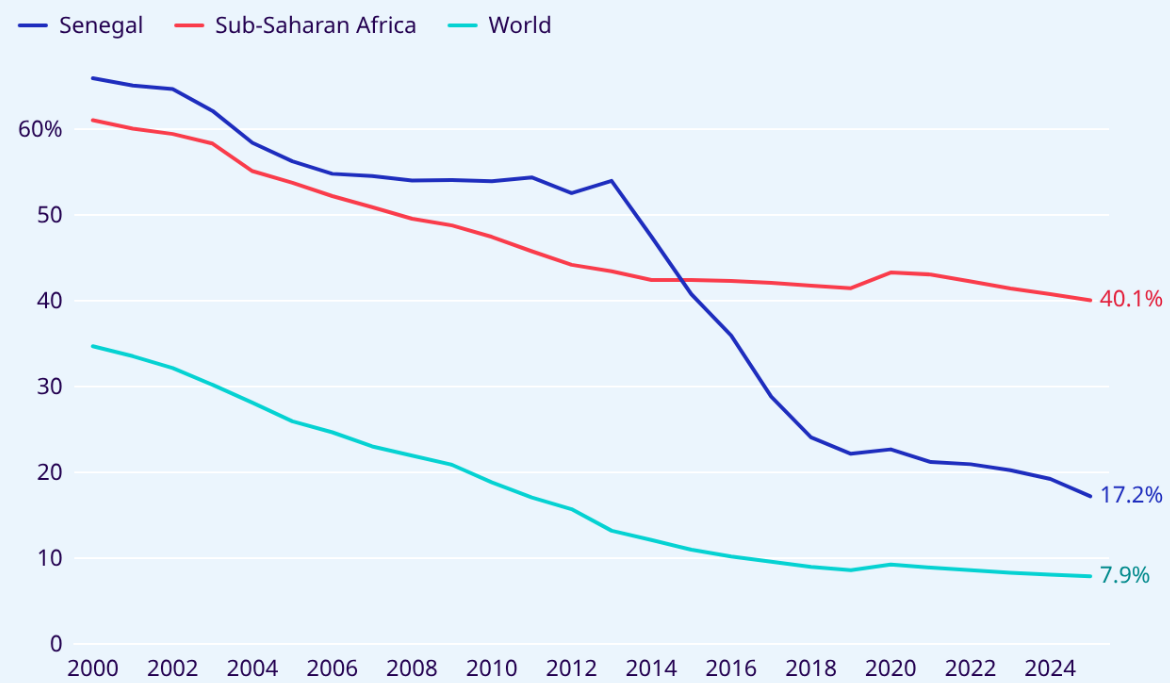
Empirical analysis of female employment in Senegal has documented the persistent barriers that women face in the labour market, including structural discrimination and unequal access to opportunities, even as educational attainment improves (IMF, 2019). Gender gaps in wages and employment access remain significant, with women disproportionately concentrated in informal, low-productivity activities, reflecting sociocultural norms and structural constraints.

▶ Table 1. Employment-to-population ratio by sex in Senegal, SSA, Africa, and the World, 2022 (age 15+) (percentage)

	Female	Male	Total
Senegal	37.9	67.0	50.5
Sub-Saharan Africa (ILO Modelled Estimates)	59.7	71.8	65.6
Africa (ILO Modelled Estimates)	50.5	69.9	60.1
World (ILO Modelled Estimates)	45.7	69.4	57.5

Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository; ILO Modelled estimates (November 2025), https://ilostat.ilo.org/
Note: The reported ratios all apply the definition of employment established by the 13th ICLS in 1982.

▶ Figure 2. Extreme working poverty rates, Senegal, Sub-Saharan Africa and the World, 2000–2025



Note: The figure reports extreme working poverty rates of employed persons aged 15 and over, for Senegal, Sub-Saharan Africa and the world.
Source: Based on ILO Modelled estimates (November 2025), https://ilostat.ilo.org/

The relatively high income levels in Senegal compared to its neighbours are also reflected in relatively low working poverty rates which in 2025 were estimated at 17.2 per cent, close to the global average rate of 7.9 per cent and well below the corresponding estimate for SSA as a whole of 40.1 per cent (figure 2).[8] Senegal's relatively higher income level compared to many neighbouring countries is reflected in its low working poverty. This relatively low rate of in-work poverty has been achieved alongside sustained economic growth, despite a slight uptick during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, between 2000 and 2025, Senegal's working poverty rate declined dramatically, falling by 32.9 p.p. between 2010 and 2022 alone, far outpacing the 5.2 p.p. reduction seen in SSA overall over the same period. Senegal's success in reducing working poverty reflects both rising incomes and the impact of social policies.

▶ Box 2: Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM) in WAEMU, 2019-2025

The analysis of youth labour market trends in the ILO-WAEMU Youth Country Briefs is being undertaken primarily using the Household Living Conditions Surveys (Enquêtes Harmonisées sur le Conditions de Vie des Ménages**;** EHCVM) being undertaken by the World Bank and the WAEMU commission in WAEMU member states. These are nationally representative Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) household surveys which incorporate labour modules, allowing for labour market analysis in the eight countries. The EHCVM surveys used in these briefs apply the same international statistical standards and questionnaires across years and countries, thereby collecting data that can be harmonized and allowing comparisons across countries and over time. These household surveys were conducted in each of the WAEMU countries in 2018-2019, 2021-2022 and 2025-2026.

Data for 2019 and 2022 has been received and processed by the ILO for all eight countries. All data in the ILO-WAEMU Country Briefs utilize EHCVM survey data unless otherwise stated. Data for the third round (2025-2026) will be available in late 2026.

The service sector is the main source of employment in the country with agriculture accounting for a relatively modest 31.8 per cent of total employment. Men predominate slightly in agriculture and industry, while women are significantly more likely to work in the service sector (table 2).

However, despite progress in poverty reduction, informality remains the norm in Senegal's labour market. In 2022, 95.1 per cent of workers in the country were informally employed; 93.7 per cent of male workers and 97.0 per cent of female workers were in informal employment in 2022.[9] Among young people, the incidence is even higher: almost 99 per cent were in informal jobs in 2019. This prevalence of informal work in Senegal is somewhat typical in other WAEMU countries and comparable to many low-income African economies.

Taken together, despite solid economic growth in the country since 2010, Senegal remains a predominantly informal, service-oriented economy. The challenge for Senegal going forward is to translate macroeconomic gains into more and better jobs for young people entering the labour market, while maintaining progress in poverty reduction.

▶ Table 2. Employment distribution by economic activity by sex, Senegal, 2022 (age 15+) (percentage)

	Female	Male	Total
Agriculture	27.5	35.0	31.8
Industry	17.3	26.0	22.3
Services	55.2	39.0	45.9

[8] ILO modelled estimates, November 2025. The working poverty rate is an estimate of the proportion of the employed population living in poverty despite being employed, implying that their employment-related incomes are not sufficient to lift them and their families out of poverty and ensure decent living conditions. Extreme working poverty is defined as the percentage of the employed population living in households with a per capita income of under US$3 PPP per day, https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/working-poverty/.

[9] ILO micro database. As noted in box 2, these and the other labour market indicators analysed in this brief are derived from the EHCVM survey data.

Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/ ·

2. Youth labour market trends

Africa is a relatively young continent, with a youth population which continues to grow with the potential and challenges that come with it (ILO, 2020a; box 3). In Senegal, the youth population (aged 15–29) has been expanding at a slightly faster pace than in the rest of SSA. Between 2015 and 2025 the Senegalese youth population grew at an estimated 3.3 per cent per annum, only slightly above the SSA youth growth rate of 2.9 per cent p.a. (figure 3). This is unlike the longer-term trends: from 2000 to 2025, the number of young people in Senegal increased on average by about 2.7 per cent per p.a., which is between the growth rates of the youth population in SSA overall (2.8 per cent) and the world (2.5 per cent).[10]

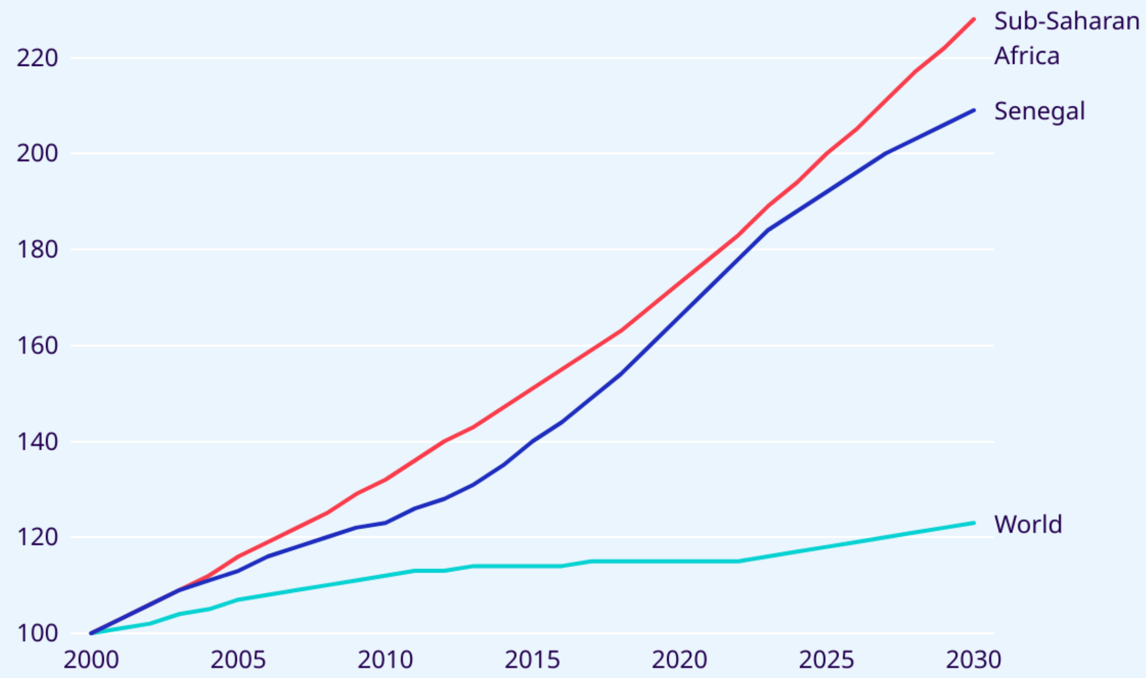
Box 3: Who are the youth?

For statistical purposes, the United Nations defines youth as persons aged between 15 and 24 years old. The specific age-group was originally intended to cover the period during which the School-to-Work transition takes place for most young people. This is the definition used for the standard indicators produced by the ILO in ILOSTAT including the ILO modelled estimates of regional and global age-based aggregate indicators (ILO, 2026).

In practice, varying approaches to the age-range applied to define of youth are to be found in different contexts. The African Union, for example, defines young people as those aged between 15 and 35 inclusive. For the analysis presented in this brief, following the standard practice for the country level indicators reported in the ILO's YOUTHSTAT database, youth refer to persons aged between 15 and 29 years old. This recognizes the fact that some young people remain in education for longer and captures more information on the post-graduation employment experiences of young people. For comparison purposes, selected indicators for young people aged 15-35 are available in an online data annex.

[10] UN estimates and projections, July 2024 (thousands), ILOSTAT

Figure 3. Youth (15–29) population in Senegal, Sub-Saharan Africa, Africa and the World, 2000–2030; 2000=100



The figure reports indices for the youth population (age 15-29), for Senegal, Sub-Saharan Africa and the World with 2000 = 100 in each case.
Source: Population indices are calculated on UN estimates and projections of population by age and sex, July 2024 (thousands)

Educational attainment levels in Senegal are low relative to regional averages, despite some improvements in recent years. UNESCO estimates that only 52.7 per cent of children completed primary education in Senegal in 2023 – well below the 67.4 per cent completion rate in SSA.[11] Still, this represents significant progress: the primary completion rate has risen substantially from earlier decades. Gains are especially notable for girls. By 2023, girls' primary completion (52.7 per cent) actually surpassed that of boys (47.4 per cent), largely due to targeted efforts to improve girls' schooling. The completion rates for lower secondary education remain modest, at 31.1 per cent for Senegal, compared to 46.6 per cent in SSA. Upper secondary completion is low, at only 15.8 per cent in Senegal, compared to 28.5 per cent in SSA in 2023. Here too, however, there have been some improvements over time; for example, between 2000 and 2023, Senegal achieved a 18 p.p. increase in lower secondary completion and a 9.9 p.p. increase in upper secondary completion. Notably, the gender gap in completion rates changes direction at higher levels. Girls maintain an advantage through lower secondary (31.2 per cent vs 30.8 per cent for boys), but by upper secondary, boys outperform girls (17.6 per cent vs 14.4 per cent) – indicating that the earlier female advantage in schooling diminishes at the tertiary entrance stage. Nevertheless, the gender differences in educational attainment are much less pronounced in Senegal than they are in other countries in the WAEMU region.

Turning to educational participation among young people aged 15 to 29, slightly more young men were in education and training than women in 2019, however, their enrolment decreased by 1.8 percentage points by 2022 to 29.1 per cent (figure 4). At the same time, female participation in education increased from 30.7 per cent in 2019 to 31.9 per cent in 2022 – an upswing likely influenced by expanded secondary and tertiary opportunities and a recovery in schooling following the disruptions of the pandemic. Much of the increase in educational participation among young women in recent years has been accompanied by a corresponding reduction in employment. However, the decrease in EPR among young women does not only stem from more young women remaining in school longer as the NEET rates have risen over the same

[11] http://sdg4-data.uis.unesco.org/ [accessed on 18 August 2025].

period. This was also the case for young men: a portion of young men who might otherwise have entered the workforce did not enter the workforce but instead shifted to NEET.

▶ Box 4: NEET

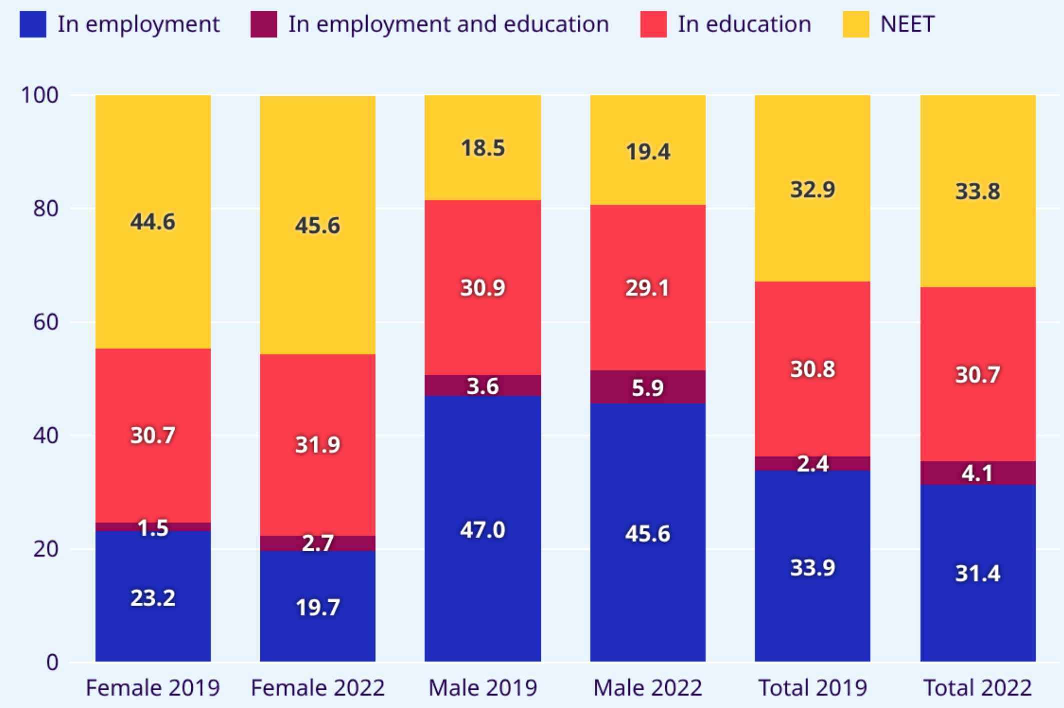
This brief makes extensive use of the NEET rate – the share of young people Not in Employment, Education or Training – as a measure of youth labour market vulnerability. This is in line with the adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 and the consequent establishment of reductions in the NEET rate as the target indicator (SDG 8.6.1) chosen to measure progress in youth labour markets. Although NEETs also includes (most of) the young unemployed[12] (the so-called 'Active NEETs), the NEET rate is a broader concept encompassing all young people who are, for whatever reason, not studying or working for pay or profit. NEETs are consequently a much larger, as well as a more heterogeneous group than the young unemployed including a substantial group of young people who are not studying or working, but who are also not actively looking for work. Often termed 'inactive' NEETs, many of these young people would like to work but are not looking for it, either because they believe no jobs are to be found or because they face additional obstacles - such as care responsibilities - which impede their active participation in the labour force.

Inter alia, the shift from the youth unemployment rate to the NEET rate as the focus of policies to promote decent work amongst young people leads naturally to a broadening of the scope of such interventions. Reducing the NEET rate can be achieved both by increasing entry into employment, but also by increasing participation in education and training. Moreover, there are many factors underlying (different types) of NEET status. These include in particular obstacles to obtaining decent work faced by specific groups – such as young women and/or young people with disabilities.

Source: O'Higgins et al. (2023). O'Higgins (2025) provides a brief non-technical overview.

[12] Excluding a relatively small but increasingly significant group of young people who are both unemployed and in education.

▶ **Figure 4. Youth status (age 15–29) in Senegal by sex, 2019–2022 (percentage)**



Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/

In Senegal, the reductions in EPR and educational participation are associated with an increase in the number of young people becoming NEET: overall, the EPR decreased by 0.7 p.p., educational participation decreased by 0.1 p.p. and NEET increased by 0.8 p.p. As a result of a slight reduction in job opportunities during the pandemic period, the youth EPR fell between 2019 and 2022. However, upon digging into EPR by gender, differences emerge. Only young women experienced a decline in EPR, from 24.7 per cent to 22.5 per cent, whereas young men found more job opportunities in this period with EPR rising from 50.6 per cent to 51.5 per cent.

▶ **Table 3. Youth (age 15–29) employment distribution by economic activity and sex in Senegal, 2022 (percentage)**

	Female	Male	Total
Agriculture	38.8	41.4	40.5
Industry	14.1	31.1	25.2
Services	47.1	27.5	34.3

Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/

Young people in Senegal who do find work tend to be concentrated in certain sectors, with notable differences by sex and age. Youth are more likely to work in agriculture, and less likely to work in services, than the working-age population aged 15 and over (table 3). In 2022, about 41.4 per cent of employed young men worked in agriculture, and 31.1 per cent worked in industry. For young women, services dominate even among youth: almost half of employed young women were in services, with 38.8 per cent in agriculture and only 14.1 per cent in industry. In particular, young men are slightly more likely to work in agriculture and twice as likely to work in industry than young women, whereas young women are far more concentrated in services.

In 2019, 42 per cent of young male workers and 56.9 per cent of young female workers in Senegal were self-employed (including own-account workers and contributing family workers) (table 4).[13] Between 2019 and 2022, the proportion of youth employment accounted for by self-employment rose for both young men and women, to 49.9 per cent and 61.5 per cent, respectively. This indicates that among those youth who are employed, a growing share are moving out of waged and salaried jobs. Sustained economic diversification and investment in enterprise development will be needed to create more wage jobs for Senegal's youth going forward.

▶ Table 4. Youth (age 15–29) employment distribution by status in employment and sex in Senegal, 2019 and 2022 (percentage)

	Female		Male		Total	
	2019	2022	2019	2022	2019	2022
Employees	43.1	38.5	58.0	50.1	52.4	46.1
Self-employed	56.9	61.5	42.0	49.9	47.6	53.9

Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/ .

Much like global patterns, informal employment is even more common among young people than among older workers in Senegal. In 2022, an estimated 98.9 per cent of young workers were in informal employment – compared to about 93 per cent of adults aged 30 and over. One factor contributing to this pervasive youth informality is the high share of self-employment among youth. The prevalence of informality among young workers does not vary significantly across sectors; nearly all employed youth across every broad sector are in informal employment. Still, young people in the market services sector have slightly smaller shares of informal employment (table 5).

▶ Table 5. Distribution of employment, prevalence of self-employment and prevalence of informality by sector among youth (age 15–29) in Senegal, 2019 and 2022 (percentage)

Sector	Employment by sector		Prevalence of self-employment		Prevalence of informality
	2019	2022	2019	2022	2022
Agriculture	34.1	40.5	81.9	86.8	99.7
Manufacturing	14.6	17.0	27.5	33.1	99.1
Construction	6.1	7.1	9.0	11.8	99.4
Mining and quarrying; Electricity, gas and water supply	0.9	1.1	46.7	22.5	98.3
Market Services (Trade; Transportation; Accommodation and food; and Business and administrative services)	20.0	20.6	53.5	44.8	96.9
Non-market services (Public administration; Community, social and other services and activities)	24.3	13.6	16.3	20.5	99.0

[13] The ILO status in employment indictor subdivides workers to describe the relationships of their jobs to the workplace. Broadly, the employed are classified as either "employees" or "self-employed". The former are in paid employment (with explicit or implicit contracts) which provide them with basic renumeration, whereas the latter are mainly or wholly reliant on sales and profits. Self-employment is dominated by own-account workers in low quality informal employment and in the past was indeed used as a proxy for informal employment.

Note: Informality could not be defined in the 2019 EHCVM/ECVM surveys due to missing information on registration and bookkeeping of enterprises.

Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/

The changes in EPR have has marginally further widened the enormous gender gap in NEET rates, which rose from 26.1 p.p. to 26.2 p.p. – a disparity that one finds all too often in youth labour markets in low- and lower-middle-income countries (O'Higgins et al. 2023). Young women in Senegal continue to be about twice as likely as young men to be NEET (figure 4, box 4).

The vast majority of young NEETs in Senegal fall into the category of inactive NEETs – that is, they are neither working nor actively looking for work. As shown in table 3, 96.4 per cent of young women NEETs and 90.3 per cent of young men NEETs were inactive in 2019. By 2022, these shares had increased slightly for both men and women (to 96.6 per cent for female NEETs and about 91.1 per cent for male NEETs). In practical terms, this means that nearly all young women who are not in education or employment are outside the labour force entirely, and around nine out of ten young male NEETs are also not actively seeking work. It is noteworthy that such a high proportion of NEET youth are disconnected from the labour market, which is a concern. These figures highlight the importance of policies that encourage labour market engagement (or educational re-engagement) among NEET youth. At the same time, the pattern of predominantly inactive NEETs is typical in the WAEMU region; similar profiles are observed in neighbouring countries

▶ **Table 6. Youth (age 15–29) NEET distribution by active-inactive status and sex in Senegal, 2019 and 2022 (percentage)**

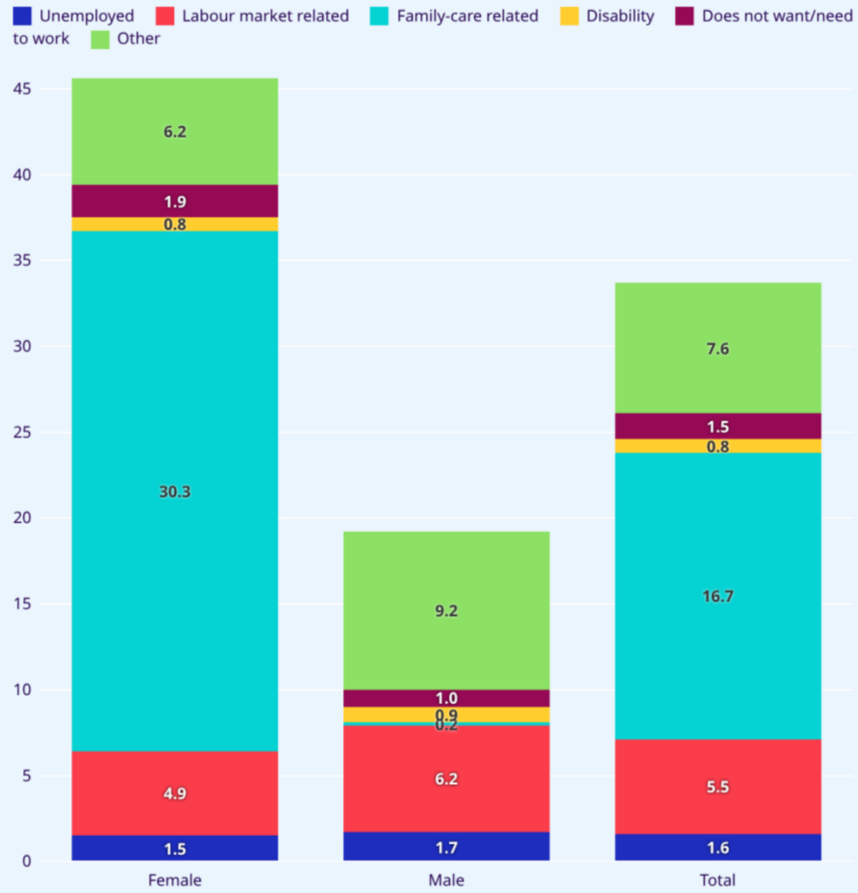
	Female		Male		Total	
	2019	2022	2019	2022	2019	2022
Active NEET	3.6	3.4	9.7	8.9	5.2	4.8
Inactive NEET	96.4	96.6	90.3	91.1	94.8	95.2

Note: Active NEETs are those who are not engaged in employment, education or training but are available and actively looking for employment opportunities, whereas inactive NEETs are also not engaged in employment, education or training but are not available or actively looking for employment.

Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/

Most young NEETs in Senegal are either discouraged from seeking jobs, awaiting job or business prospects, or remain outside the labour force due to domestic or care responsibilities (figure 5). Traditional gender roles play a significant part in the large gender gap in NEET rates. Consistent with patterns observed in other countries in the region, 30.3 per cent of young women in Senegal are NEET due to care responsibilities at home, compared to only 0.2 per cent of young men. All other reasons for being NEET are relatively similar for young women and men. Family-care responsibilities consequently account for most of the widest NEET gender gap in WAEMU.

Figure 5. NEET rates of young people (aged 15–29) by sex decomposed by reason for being NEET, Senegal, 2022 (percentage)



Note: **Unemployed** NEETs are those who are not engaged in employment, education or training but are available and actively looking for employment opportunities**. Labour market related reasons** for being NEET include those associated with discouragement (past failure to find a suitable job, lack of experience, qualifications or jobs matching the person's skills, lack of jobs in the area, considered too young or too old by prospective employers, and does not know how/where to find a job) as well as other labour market reasons (waiting for an answer to an application, and seasonal break). **Family-care related reasons** cover looking after small children and other household and domestic responsibilities; **disability** covers young people who are not seeking a job due to disability or illness; whereas a young NEET who **"does not need/want to work"** may have other sources of income. **Other** is a residual category covering a variety of motivations not covered by the first four categories.

Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/.

3. Vulnerable groups in the youth labour market

3.1 Sex

Young women in Senegal face significantly greater challenges than young men in gaining entry to the labour market. Almost all key youth labour indicators show a large gender gap that is unfavourable to women. The NEET rates among young women are more than twice as high as those for young men. Similarly, the EPR for young women are extremely low (one-fifth of young women are employed, versus over half of young men), and the educational participation rates for young women have improved only marginally between 2019 and 2022. Young women are also less likely to be in wage employment than young men.

While there have been some improvements in recent years with some narrowing of gender disparities, young women remain worse off in the labour market. The decline in overall youth EPR from 2019 to 2022 occurred only as a result of a drop in EPR among young women; at the same time, the EPR for young men increased, further widening the gender gap. Moreover, the share of young female workers who are employees has fallen slightly (with a corresponding rise in the share of female self-employment). In short, most labour market indicators suggest widening gender gaps in recent years. Young women's labour force inactivity – much of it driven by discrimination, gender norms and household responsibilities, early marriage, and limited job opportunities – is a critical challenge (Diallo, 2025). Tackling the barriers that young women face (from educational access to childcare to social norms around work) is essential for improving youth labour market outcomes in Senegal.

3.2 Disability

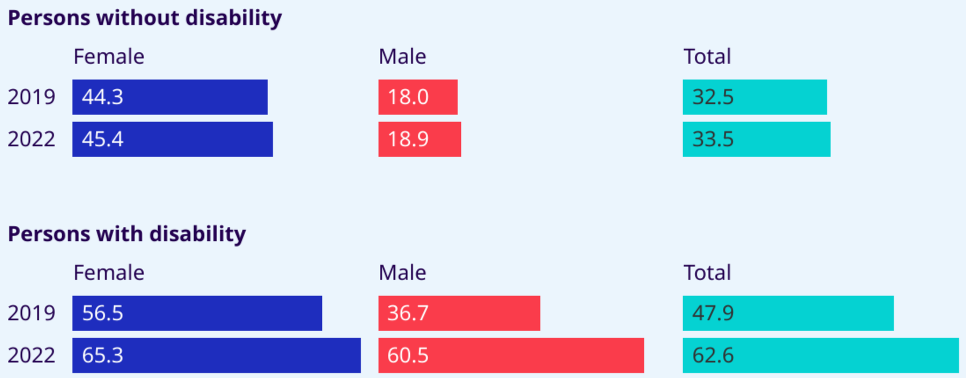
People with disabilities face additional obstacles to their effective participation in the labour market. As pointed out by the 2025 Global Disability Summit in Berlin, young people with disabilities are especially disadvantaged at the global level, facing NEET rates that are twice those of their non-disabled peers.[14] In 2022, 1.1 per cent of the youth population in Senegal reported having an illness or disability that affected their ability to work. Evidence shows significant disadvantages for this group with the magnitude of the gap being somewhat similar to some other WAEMU countries (figure 5).[15]

Almost two out of three young people with disabilities in Senegal were NEET in 2022. In 2019 young women with disabilities had a NEET rate of 56.5 per cent, meaning more than half of them were NEET compared to 44.3 per cent among their counterparts without disabilities. For young men with disabilities, the NEET rates in 2019 were lower overall, at 36.7 per cent, but the relative gap with those without disabilities was even larger: young men with disabilities were twice as likely to be NEET as young men without disabilities. Of some concern, the relative situation of youth with disabilities appears to have worsened between 2019 and 2022. Among young women, NEET rates for those with disabilities increased further to 65.3 per cent, while NEET rates for those without disabilities rose marginally by 1.1. p.p. – thus widening an already large gap. Similar patterns were observed among young men: NEET rates increased for both groups between 2019 and 2022, but they rose considerably more for those with disabilities to 60.5 per cent. These statistics underline the severe exclusion faced by youth with disabilities – especially young women – and the need for tailored policies (such as inclusive education, accessible training programs, and anti-discrimination measures) to improve their education and employment prospects.

[14] For a more detailed analysis of the disparities in the labour market outcomes faced by people with disabilities, see, for example, Annanian and Dellaferrera (2024).

[15] The sample size of persons with disabilities is typically rather small in the household surveys, and even smaller for the age group of 15 to 29. This small sample size means that the estimates of indicators for youth with disabilities are necessarily relatively imprecise.

▶ **Figure 6. NEET rates of young people (aged 15–29) disability status in Senegal by sex, 2019 and 2022 (percentage)**



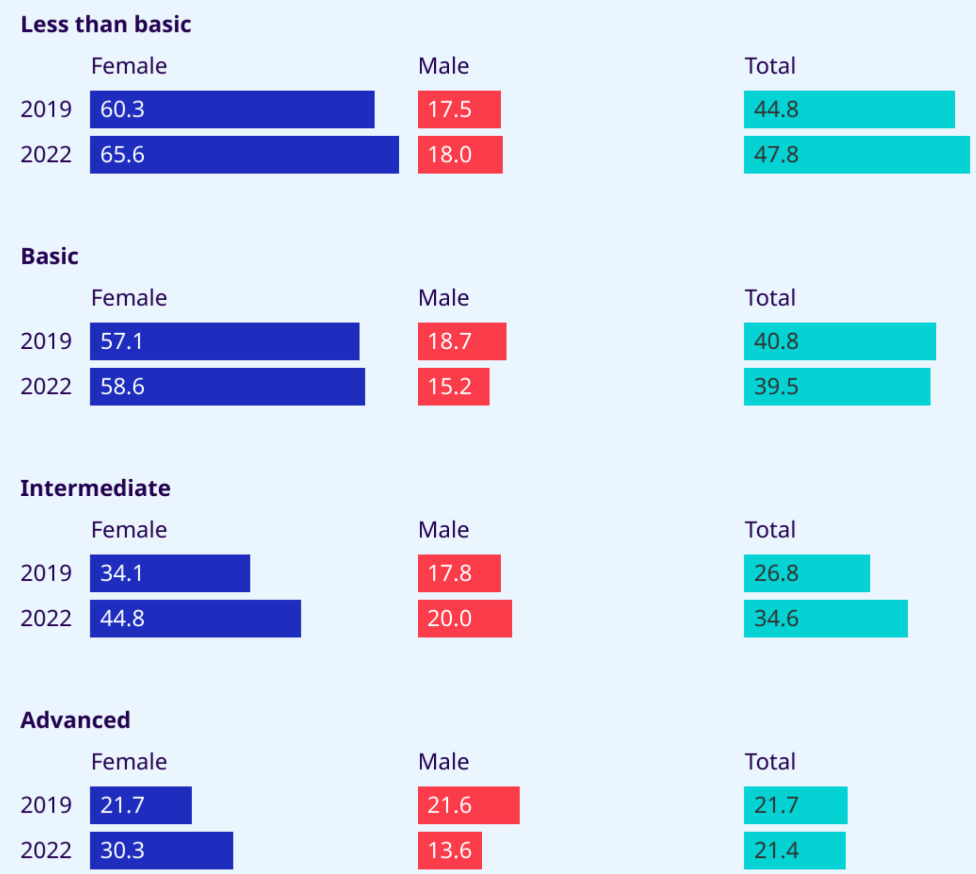
Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/

3.3 Educational attainment

The gender gap in educational participation and attainment was already observed above. One way in which this is important is in determining young people's access to labour markets. Globally, NEET rates amongst young people are significantly higher amongst young people with lower levels of educational attainment (O'Higgins et al. 2023). This relationship, however, tends to be less pronounced in low and lower-middle income countries with quite some variation across countries. In Senegal overall, higher education tends to reduce the likelihood of being NEET, more markedly among young women. In 2022, young women with less than basic education had the highest NEET rates at 65.6 per cent, and those with only basic education had NEET rates at 58.6 per cent, which further declined among those with intermediate and advanced education with NEET rates of 44.8 per cent and 30.3 per cent (figure 7). However, even young women with an advanced degree are more likely to be NEET than young men at any education level. Young men's NEET rates are comparatively low and relatively stable across education levels. Consequently, the gender gap in NEET is largest among the least-educated youth and narrows for those with higher education but remains present.

Between 2019 and 2022, the NEET rates of most groups overall improved slightly, so the general pattern of NEET falling with higher education held true. However, only young men experienced declining NEET rates at almost every education level over this period while women experienced increasing NEET rates at all levels. These findings underscore the importance of expanding educational opportunities and aligning higher education with labour market needs – while also creating jobs for educated youth, with policies focused on young women. More education in itself does not create more jobs, and the high NEET rates observable amongst those with advanced educational qualifications suggest the existence of an educational mismatch in the country as discussed in recent editions of the ILO's Global Employment Trends for Youth (ILO, 2020b, 2024).

▶ **Figure 7. NEET rates of young people (aged 25–29) by educational attainment in Senegal by sex, 2019 and 2022 (percentage)**



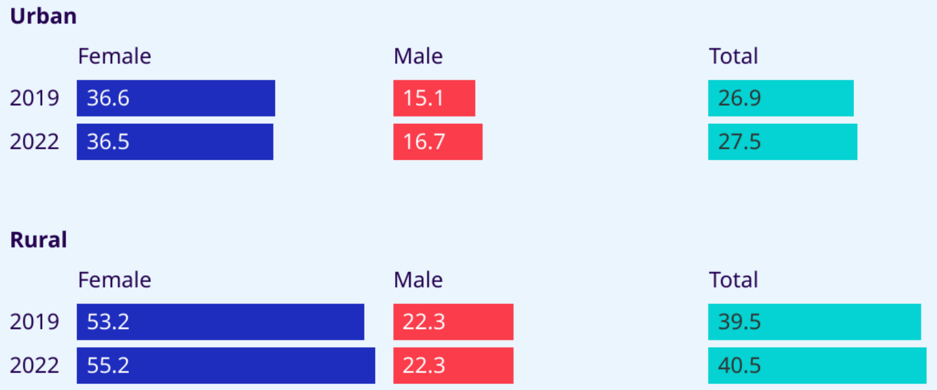
Note: Youth is defined as young people aged 25-29 when analysing educational attainment. Educational attainment is defined here based on the ILO aggregation of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) designed to produce a simple classification of individual educational attainment which is comparable across countries. Broadly speaking: **Basic** educational attainment corresponds to the completion of primary or lower secondary education; **Intermediate**, to the completion of upper secondary education; and **Advanced,** to the completion of tertiary educational studies.
Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/

3.4 Urban-Rural location

Globally, across all country income levels, NEET rates tend to be higher in rural areas compared to urban ones. This pattern holds true in Senegal. In 2022, NEET rates among youth were considerably higher in rural areas than in urban areas – especially for young women (figure 8). For instance, in 2022, more than half of rural young women were NEET, compared to 36.5 per cent of urban young women. Young men's NEET rates are lower overall, but likewise higher in rural areas than urban areas at 22.3 per cent and 16.7 per cent, respectively. The gender gap is also wider in rural locales: rural young women's NEET rate exceeds rural young men's by an enormous margin of 32.9 p.p., whereas in urban areas the female–male NEET gap of 19.8 p.p., though still large, is somewhat smaller.

Between 2019 and 2022, NEET rates may have risen slightly in both rural and urban areas. As a result, the rural–urban NEET differential remains pronounced. These observations point to the need for targeted rural interventions – from improving rural education access (especially for girls) to promoting rural employment opportunities – as part of any comprehensive youth employment strategy in Senegal.

Figure 8. NEET rates of young people (aged 15–29) by geographical location in Senegal by sex, 2019 and 2022 (percentage)



Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/

4. Summary and conclusions

Senegal's economy has maintained stability and steady growth over the past two decades, providing a solid foundation for improvements in youth employment outcomes. The country's annual GDP growth has averaged well above population growth since 2000, and recent years have seen particularly robust expansion (7.9 per cent in 2025). The economic recovery from the COVID-19 shock was relatively quick. In parallel, extreme working poverty in Senegal is low; the rate declined from 66.0 per cent in 2000 to 17.2 per cent in 2025, close to the global average of 7.9 per cent and far below the SSA average of 40.1 per cent. At the same time, the service sector is the largest employer overall and is particularly dominant for women of all ages, including youth. Both agriculture and services are overwhelmingly informal: nearly 99 per cent of youth jobs are informal.

Despite some progress, educational attainment remains low in Senegal relative to the SSA average. Primary school completion is only about 52.7 per cent, and fewer than one in three youths completes lower secondary. While girls have made notable gains, even outperforming boys at some education levels, the overall education level of the workforce is a constraint.

Nearly half of all young women in Senegal face particularly high NEET rates – roughly double the NEET rate of young men. This gender gap remains one of the highest in the region. Social norms, care responsibilities, and limited job options contribute to women's low labour force participation.

Vulnerability, as measured by NEET status, is also stark when considering youth with disabilities and those in rural areas. Young people with disabilities in Senegal have NEET rates dramatically higher than their peers – for young women with disabilities it approaches 66 per cent. The gap between youth with and without disabilities has grown between 2019 and 2022, underscoring an urgent need for inclusive policies. Similarly, rural youths – especially young women – show much higher inactivity and lower employment rates than urban youths.

In contrast to some other countries, NEET rates in Senegal decline with higher educational attainment – especially for young women – indicating that education generally improves young people's prospects of avoiding inactivity. Young women with secondary or tertiary education, while still facing difficulties, are less likely to be NEET than those with only primary schooling. For young men, education has a flatter effect on NEET rates (which are relatively low across the board). Encouragingly, educational participation among youth has been rising, which should gradually reduce NEET rates if matched by sufficient job creation for the more educated cohorts.

In conclusion, Senegal has achieved notable successes – including low working poverty and rising educational participation – but it continues to grapple with entrenched youth employment challenges: pervasive informality, high female inactivity, and stark disparities by gender, disability, and location. Addressing these issues will require a comprehensive approach that combines investment in education and skills with efforts to stimulate job creation in the formal economy, alongside targeted support for the most vulnerable youth groups.

Senegal's stable growth and low working poverty provide a solid foundation for youth employment; however, challenges remain. Nearly all youth jobs are informal, female participation is low, and disparities persist by gender, disability, and rural location. To create decent and productive employment, policies could focus on formal job creation in labour-intensive sectors (agro-processing, manufacturing, services, green economy), align education and vocational training with market needs, promote female and disability-inclusive labour force participation, support youth entrepreneurship through credit and incubators, and strengthen local value chains and social protection. Together, these measures can reduce NEET rates, close gender gaps, and foster structural transformation.

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