



## Informing strategies to enhance the impact of youth employment policies and programs in Senegal

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### Key messages

**To improve youth employment outcomes in Senegal, the government should:**

- **Establish a centralized national observatory for employment and training to coordinate and harmonize existing programs.**
- **Integrate the national employment promotion strategy into a broader development framework aligned with the ten priority sectors identified in the country's second Priority**

### The policy context and issues of youth employment in Senegal

Youth employment has become an increasingly urgent issue in Senegal, driven by three key factors. First, the country's rapidly growing population is putting immense pressure on the labor market. With an annual growth rate of 2.5%, Senegal's population is expected to double every 25 years. Youth aged 15–34 already represent 35.7% of the population, highlighting the scale of the demographic challenge.

Second, the overwhelming size of the informal sector exacerbates the employment situation. Each year, over 200,000 young people enter the labor market, but limited opportunities in the formal sector push the majority into informal employment. Today, nearly 90% of young workers are in informal jobs, and 97% of businesses operate informally. These conditions often mean low job security, poor income, limited

access to benefits, and minimal prospects for career advancement.

Third, while Senegal has experienced sustained economic growth—including more than 6% annually between 2014 and 2018, with further growth projected due to offshore oil and gas extraction—this growth has not been inclusive. Many young people remain unemployed or are engaged in precarious work, underscoring the disconnect between macroeconomic performance and employment outcomes.

These challenges underline the importance of designing inclusive economic policies and employment strategies focused on formal job creation and skills development for youth.

### The study

Launched in 2021, this initiative aimed to conduct, in two phases, a comprehensive review of existing youth-employment policies and programs and their impact in Senegal. The researchers combined existing data and policy reviews with qualitative data to provide a more nuanced understanding of the policies and programs - see the "Methodology" text box below for more detail.

An initial review was conducted in 2021-2022, and the process was completed in 2024, with a follow-up review to assess progress and highlight changes in the design or implementation of these interventions

As a result of their initial review and as part of their follow-up review, the authors also identified two different options the government could consider to improve initiatives and outcomes related to the promotion of youth employment in the country.

## Key youth employment initiatives and progress made since 2021

Senegal has made notable strides in promoting youth employment, particularly with the launch of the Emergency Program for Youth Employment and Socio-Economic Integration in 2021. Backed by CFA 450 billion over three years, the program aimed to support over 500,000 youth through various initiatives structured around seven pillars:

1. Special recruitment initiatives
2. Community-based public works
3. A government-private employer agreement
4. Labor-intensive public investment projects
5. Apprenticeship training
6. Entrepreneurship and empowerment financing
7. A school uniform subsidy

Three main strategic axes structured the program's implementation: the creation of employment and entrepreneurship centers for youth and women as one-stop shops; the establishment of a database of public funding beneficiaries; and the development of performance contracts with implementing public structures.

Several tangible outcomes have been observed. The General Delegation for Rapid Entrepreneurship of Youth and Women (DER/FJ) expanded its financial and non-financial support. Between 2021 and 2023, it formalized over 8,700 businesses, trained more than 15,000 entrepreneurs, and disbursed approximately CFA 49.3 billion in nano and micro-credit.

The National Agreement Between the State and Private Employers for the Promotion of Youth Employment (CNEE) also saw its budget increase from CFA 1 billion to 15 billion. This allowed the transition from offering internship contracts to renewable two-year contracts and expanded its coverage to include agriculture and agribusiness.

Meanwhile, the Employment and Entrepreneurship for Youth and Women Centers (PEEJF) and Local Job Initiative Centers (CIEL) were reinforced. In 2022 alone, the PEEJF created nearly 20,000 job opportunities, and 1,742 new CIEL establishments generated over 8,300 jobs.

Table 1 below provides further details on job creation across sectors between 2021 and 2023.

Table 1: Number of employment opportunities planned and created, by sector, 2021–2023

Sector	No. created	No. planned
Education	4,628	5,000
Living environment	1,664	2,000
Cleaning	8,721	10,000
The environment	9,140	10,000
Socio-educational activities	349	500
AGETIP	2,899	2,000
Health	364	400
Security	6,000	6,000
Civic service	698	1,000
Tourism	162	200

## Key findings from the overall review

Despite significant progress since 2021, key challenges remain. Afrobarometer survey data from 2022 indicates that youth are more likely to be unemployed than older populations and continue to prioritize employment, crime, and economic management as top concerns. However, their participation in civic processes such as voting or community engagement remains limited.

One of the most critical issues is the fragmentation and lack of coordination among public employment programs. No single institution is universally recognized as responsible for coordinating or monitoring youth employment interventions. Even key ministries like the Ministry of Employment, or the Ministry of Youth are not consistently fulfilling this role.

Current efforts tend to operate independently, with different programs pursuing their own goals and timelines. This undermines strategic coherence and often emphasizes quantity over quality—focusing on the number of supported projects rather than aligning interventions with national development priorities or economic structures.

## Recommended policy options

To improve coherence, efficiency, and impact, the authors propose two strategic policy options:

### Option 1: Integrate Youth Employment into PAP 2A Priority Sectors

This approach aligns youth employment strategies with Senegal's second Priority Action Plan (PAP 2A), which focuses on ten sectors including food, health, pharmaceuticals, industrial platforms, digital transformation, tourism, air transport, urban planning, housing, and social protection. This model draws from international experiences (e.g., China's phased development strategy) and emphasizes demographic and educational policies to enhance employability.

### Option 2: Establish a National Employment and Training Observatory

Building on the gains of the Emergency Program, this centralized observatory would coordinate all youth employment initiatives, collect labor market data, anticipate future skills needs, and guide vocational training and policy development. It would function similarly to Mali's observatory and serve as a national hub for monitoring, evaluation, and strategic alignment.

## Stakeholder evaluation of policy options

Table 2 below summarizes the results of the comparative evaluation of the two options by select stakeholders (see Methodology text box above). The stakeholders considered four criteria that are commonly used to assess policymaking options—equity, efficacy, social acceptability, and political feasibility—and ranked the options on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 representing the best mark (Excellent) and 1 representing the worst mark (Poor).

Table 2. Stakeholders' evaluation of the policy options

Criteria	Option 1	Option 2
Equity	4.3	4.1
Efficacy	3.2	4.4
Acceptability	3.5	3.7
Feasibility	4.7	3.9
Average ranking	3.9	4.02

Source: Authors' own calculations.

Note:

Option 1: Integrating the national employment promotion strategy in a development strategy that covers the 10 priority sectors identified in PAP 2A

Option 2: Establishing a national observatory for employment and training

In the end, both options were rated highly - option 2 received a slightly higher average ranking (4.02) than Option 1 (3.9) - suggesting that both are viable and potentially complementary.

## Methodology

The study combined policy and document reviews with qualitative data to assess the effectiveness and evolution of youth employment initiatives.

The methodology included:

- A comprehensive desk review of national and international reports, policy documents, and household survey data.
- Collection and analysis of qualitative data, through a total of:
  - 12 focus group discussions with youth, including women, people with disabilities, refugees, and returned migrants, both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of public employment programs.
- 175 key informant interviews with stakeholders from various levels of government, civil society, labor inspection services, and youth leaders
- A selected group of stakeholder representatives also evaluated two alternative policy options using four standard decision-making criteria: equity, efficacy, social acceptability, and political feasibility.
  - These included 5 program managers, 3 youth leaders, 2 labor inspectors, and 1 civil society representative.

## Policy roadmap

Effective implementation of these recommendations requires a coordinated, multi-agency approach. Establishing a national observatory would empower the Ministry of Labor to oversee and align youth employment programs. Meanwhile, integrating youth employment strategies with PAP 2A would enable sectoral ministries—such as Agriculture, Industry, and Technology—to embed employment objectives within broader development plans.

Close collaboration among ministries, including Education and Youth Affairs, is essential to align training programs with emerging labor market needs. Local governments and private sector partners also have a key role to play in creating targeted, sustainable job opportunities.

Together, these reforms would help Senegal move toward a more inclusive, coherent, and impactful youth employment strategy.



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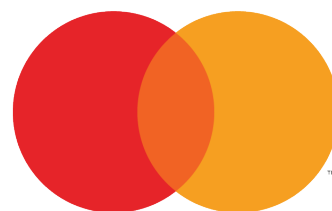


### The 'What Works for Youth Employment in Africa' initiative

This paper was produced in the context of the What Works for Youth Employment in Africa: A review of existing policies and empirical analysis in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation. It was a three-year initiative that ran between 2021 and 2024 to create a knowledge base of youth employment and related social development policies to inform policy and practices. The views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Foundation, its staff, or its Board of Directors.

For more information about this initiative, please visit:  
[www.pep-net.org/programs/youth-employmentt](http://www.pep-net.org/programs/youth-employmentt)

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