

# DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES SENEGAL



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## About this report

This report was developed by the International Centre for Evidence in Disability at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, and the Global Research and Advocacy Group, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation.

The report aims to inform Mastercard Foundation's disability and inclusion programming and strategy development. It draws on in-depth qualitative interviews with young men and women with disabilities in Senegal, exploring their lived experiences related to education and employment. This report is a part of a series developed for each of the seven countries for this project *Disability-Inclusive Education & Employment: (1) Country brief: Senegal; and (2) Understanding the context: Senegal.*

## Contributors



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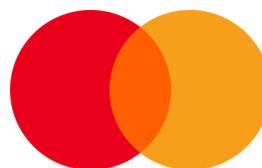
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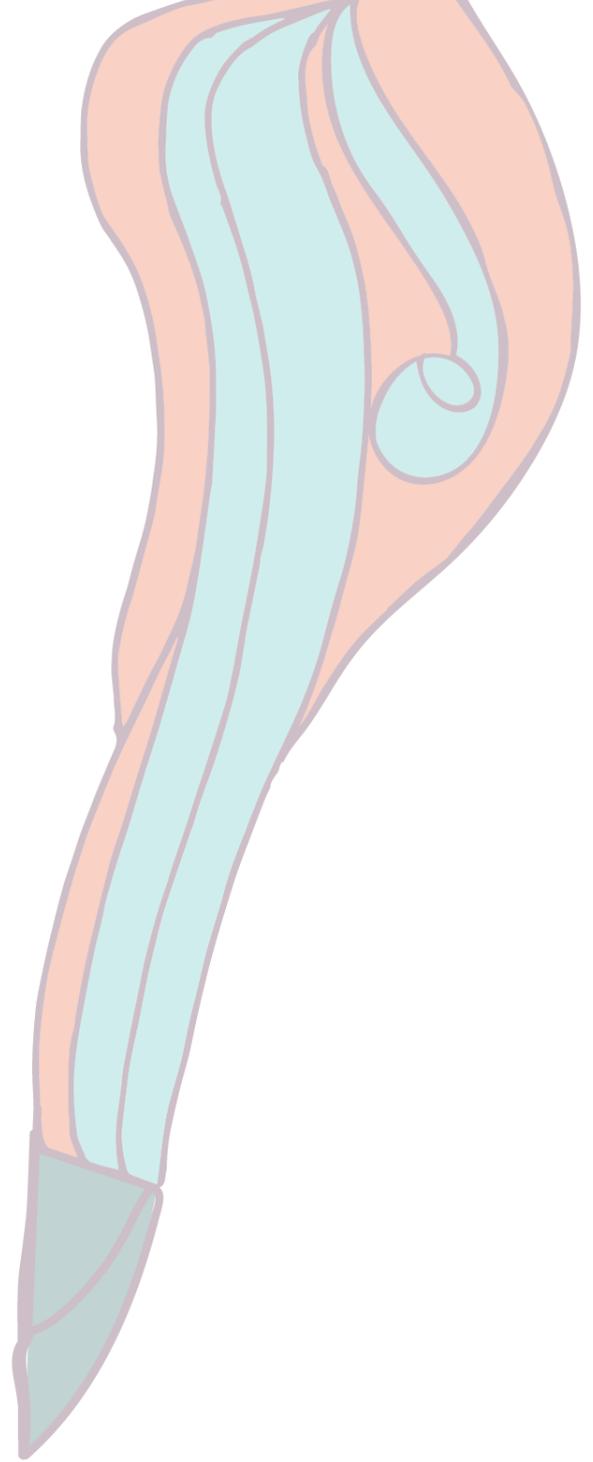
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# Disability-Inclusive Education and Employment: Understanding the experiences of young men and women Senegal

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## Executive Summary

- This research explored the lived experiences of young men and women with disabilities in Senegal through in-depth interviews with 30 young persons with disabilities. The study included a mix of participants with various disabilities (including physical, visual, hearing, psychosocial, and intellectual impairments, as well as albinism), aged between 15-35 years, based in urban and rural parts of Senegal. Participants were purposively selected to reflect varied access to education and vocational training, and employment in the agricultural and the digital sectors.
- Participants reported navigating numerous barriers to accessing appropriate, inclusive schools including distance, accessible transportation, negative attitudes from family members, and difficulties meeting the costs of education. These costs included school fees, books, uniforms, assistive devices, inclusive learning materials and support, as well as the opportunity costs associated with family members accompanying the students to school.
- Experiences of youth with disabilities during education were shaped by inaccessibility, lack of accommodations, and exclusionary teaching practices. Several youth also reported the benefits of inclusive and enabling environments created by supportive teachers, staff, and peers.
- Most young persons with disabilities faced challenges securing employment, including due to discriminatory hiring practices. Those in employment struggled with inaccessible workplaces and a lack of accommodations. Many young people needed support to develop their capacity, employability, and skills to improve their chances at successfully transitioning into employment.
- Youth with disabilities in the agricultural sector faced barriers related to their impairment, a lack of support for particular tasks, and financial challenges.
- Youth engaged in the digital sector reported limited training opportunities that were accessible, affordable, and appropriate for people with diverse support needs.
- Access to assistive products and to digital skills training were noted as facilitating factors in the context of both education and employment. Support from family members, friends, peers, and community members were also strong enablers of participation and achievement.
- Many youth participants had experienced stigma including negative attitudes and stereotypes, bullying, violence and abuse, and discrimination and exclusion in education and employment settings. Drivers of stigma included a lack of awareness of the capabilities of youth with disabilities, and misconceptions about disability.
- This study also explored the intersectionality of other factors with disability in shaping youth experiences of education and employment. Young women with disabilities experienced compounded discrimination as both disability and gender carry unique forms of marginalisation and stigma.
- The extent of voice and agency among the young people varied with the type and severity of their impairment, household factors, and family dynamics. Participants expressed a desire for increased representation and freedom to make independent choices related to their education and career path.

- There was a discrepancy between what youth with disabilities aspired to do, are confident doing, and the opportunities available to them.
- Recommendations arising from this work include strengthening educational institutions and teaching practices to better deliver inclusive education; improving policy implementation to increase the inclusion of persons with disabilities in education and employment; improving opportunities for young persons with disabilities to access financial support for skills trainings, the job seeking process, and start-up capital for small businesses; more efforts to create awareness and sensitise employers and communities to address drivers of stigma; wider availability of assistive products and digital skills; and wider range of interventions and financial support options to better match the aspirations of young persons with disabilities with opportunities.

Source: Humanity & Inclusion



# Introduction

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## About disability

According to the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) persons with disabilities include those who have “long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” [1]

Estimates suggest that there are 1 billion people (15% of the world’s population) living with a disability globally [2]. Persons with disabilities often experience barriers to accessing education and employment and this can cement cycles of poverty and exclusion [2, 3]. Globally, persons with disabilities also face marginalisation in other aspects of society [2].

Research in Sub-Saharan Africa shows that with the right support, persons with disabilities can achieve economic success. Investing in education and employment for persons with disabilities should be part of development efforts, as based on an economic rationale, as well as social justice [4].

## Disability in Senegal

As of 2021, more than 60% of the population of the 16.9 million people in Senegal were under the age of 25 [5-6]. The 2013 Population and Housing Census estimated that 2.1% of adults in Senegal have a disability. This is likely to be an underestimate, considering the World Report on Disability estimated 15% prevalence [2]<sup>1</sup>. Recent, publicly available data on disability in Senegal are limited. However, available evidence suggests that persons with disabilities in Senegal face barriers to education and employment including stigma and discrimination, inaccessible buildings and transport, and lack of access to assistive products [7-15].

## Disability policy context in Senegal

Senegal has established a favourable institutional framework, the broad orientations of which incorporate international commitments among other provisions to promote the rights of persons with disabilities. The Government of Senegal ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Optional Protocol in 2010 and established the *La loi d’orientation sociale pour les personnes handicapées 2010* (Social Orientation Law No. 2010-15 of 6 July 2010 on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities). It aims to ensure the full participation of persons with disabilities and their inclusion in Senegalese society, and to strengthen civil society organisations to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities. Senegal also adopted the National Community-Based Rehabilitation Programme (PNRBC) in 2006, which provides a legal framework for the effective integration of persons with disabilities and their protection.

Research done for Phase 1 of this project involving interviews with key stakeholders (including government agencies, Organisations of Persons with Disabilities, educators, and employers) revealed that while these provisions contribute to a more conducive environment for the inclusion of persons with disabilities, they have yet to be fully realised. This is in part due to limitations in disability data, funding allocation, and coordination between government departments [16].

<sup>1</sup> Disability is complex to measure. Differences in the way disability is measured and defined in different surveys may explain some of the variation in prevalence estimates. This includes the questions used, how they are asked and thresholds applied to define disability for the purposes of disability statistics.

# Introduction

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## Education in Senegal

Senegal has implemented the *Programme d'Amélioration de la Qualité, de l'Équité et de la Transparence du secteur de l'Éducation et de la Formation PAQUET-EF* (Programme to Improve Quality, Equity and Transparency in Education and Training 2018-2030) as part of a legislative effort to include persons with disabilities in education, by aiming to give all children the opportunity to access and complete primary education in Senegal. This strengthens the 2010 legislation mandating that children with disabilities have the right to free education in mainstream schools as close as possible to their neighbourhoods; however, this policy has yet to be effectively implemented across the country.

Formal education in Senegal is organised into four levels: preschool, primary, secondary (academic or technical/vocational), and higher education. Primary schools enrol children aged 7-12 and students complete six levels of education. Those continuing to secondary school can pursue either an academic track or a technical and vocational track. The majority of specialised schools for students with disabilities provide primary education for a wide age range, and are located in or near the capital city of Dakar. Evidence suggests that access to both special education institutions and inclusive mainstream education is severely lacking; however, robust data on education indicators specific to students with disabilities in both specialised schools and mainstream education in Senegal remains limited [11].

Current disability-disaggregated data on the inclusion of young persons with disabilities in Senegal is lacking. However, available evidence indicates that young persons with disabilities are less likely to have completed primary school compared to their peers. A similar trend is seen for secondary school, although overall completion levels are low for people with and without disabilities [16]. To better understand these trends, there is a need for robust up-to-date disability-disaggregated education data Senegal (see [here](#) for an in-depth discussion on the variation in existing data in our Phase 1 report).

## Employment in Senegal

There are a number of provisions related to improving disability-inclusive employment, including a 15% employment quota and mechanisms to co-finance 50% of salaries for persons with disabilities in partnership with private employers. However, our Phase 1 study indicated that the implementation of these disability-related employment policies and laws is weak [16]. Strategies for implementation is lacking, and dissemination of policy is limited, meaning that many government officials do not know their obligations and what is required. Further, accountability structures are lacking to enforce implementation. For example, no institution takes responsibility for ensuring that the 15% employment quota is met, and this specific quota appears unrealistic given barriers to the education and training upon which employment is predicated. Moreover, many of the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for policy implementation are generalised, without a specific focus on disability, which impedes disability inclusion across Senegal [16].

## About this study

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This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of young men and women with disabilities in Senegal, highlighting barriers, facilitators, gaps, and opportunities regarding their inclusion in education and employment. This research involved in-depth interviews with 30 young people with various disabilities (including physical, visual, hearing, psychosocial, and intellectual impairments, as well as albinism), aged between 15-35 years, based in urban and rural parts of Senegal.

Regarding education, we collected data from youth with disabilities currently in formal education (secondary, tertiary, and vocational), those who had received some formal education but not working, and those not in education and not working. In terms of work, the research focus for Senegal included disabled youth engaged in the agriculture and digital sectors.

Further details of methods, and breakdown of participant characteristics are provided in the Appendix.



Source: Humanity & Inclusion

# Findings

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The findings of this study are presented in five parts: (1) education; (2) transition from education to employment; (3) experiences in the agricultural sector; (4) experiences in the manufacturing sector; (5) reflections on cross-cutting issues that shape the experiences of young persons with disabilities in Senegal. Case studies are provided throughout the report, to portray stories of selected youth participants (all names and identifiers have been replaced to preserve confidentiality and privacy).

## EDUCATION

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According to our Phase 1 research, the strength of the *La loi d'orientation sociale pour les personnes handicapées 2010* (Social Framework Act No. 2010-15), implementation was said to be lacking in the context of education. The Ministry of Education was criticised for lacking coherence and synergy linking policy objectives, actions, and budget allocation to support inclusive education. While 25% of Senegal's budget is allocated to general education, there is no available data on the amount allocated specifically to inclusive education [8].

Inclusive education is where learners with disabilities are in classes together with learners without disabilities in mainstream schools. This differs from special education where learners with disabilities may attend some or all classes separate from nondisabled learners. Typical issues with special education schools are that they may be of poorer quality, while inclusive education, if not implemented well, may include learning material or teaching method are not adapted to suit a learner's impairment [17].

In Senegal, implementation of inclusive education policies is limited, largely because government investment is insufficient for schools and education institutions to acquire necessary accessible learning materials or assistive products to help students with disabilities learn. This leaves the financial burden of procuring assistive products and other accessible learning materials on students and parents. (See our Phase 1 report [here](#) for an in-depth analysis).

Out of the 30 interview participants, six had never attended school, three had stopped in primary school, and 12 had attained secondary or tertiary education. A few young people reported having dropped out of school or that they did not currently attend school. Where possible, we highlight the ways in which their access to and experiences differ by their level of education.

## Access to education

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Findings in this section are presented according to key stages along the journey to accessing education including: (i) identifying schools and other educational institutions; (ii) enrolling; (iii) paying for education; and (iv) reaching schools and other educational institutions.

### Identification and enrolment

The process of identifying and enrolling young persons with disabilities into schools varied with type and severity of impairment, socioeconomic factors, availability or proximity of schools, and the level of education. Most students reported that decision-making around which school to attend was dictated largely by parents or other family members.

*"It was my father who brought me there and explained the situation to the manager. He told them that I had vision problems because of my albinism. The manager had agreed to help me but when he left it couldn't continue." (Male, 25-35 years old, has albinism)*

Very few participants reported having decision-making power over where to attend school which was said to be a major frustration for the young people who had their own preferences related to school enrolment.

*"My father had previously heard about this school, but he didn't want me to go to the French school. To tell the truth, he couldn't accept that children called me 'the albino' in the street and that I fought back. He didn't want me to go to school at all. I would only go to the Quranic school next door and come home. I decided to go to school, and I rebelled. I went on a total strike by refusing to eat. It was then that he enrolled me in this private school and never agreed to let me attend public school, even when I was in [College]. It was then that I realised that tuition was very expensive. So, I told him I'd rather go to public school."  
(Female, 25-35 years old, person with albinism)*

Starting education in a mainstream school was common, but learners with disabilities were sometimes moved to special education schools better suited to their needs.

*"It was a bit complicated because I had a physical disability in my arms. It was difficult to find a school adapted to my disability. So, it was at the [detail removed] that I took my first steps. It was quite complicated. Already to be able to write, to adapt, it was quite complicated. But with time, understanding, they were very professional. They took the time I needed to be able to integrate me into the school environment. So, I'd rather go to school than stay at home."  
(Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

For most participants, identifying appropriate schools was largely dictated by proximity to their neighbourhood or cost. For many, this meant attending mainstream schools near their home and sacrificing the inclusion and accessibility of a special education school.

*"My father suggested that I enrol in a nearby school. He went to see the principal of the high school in [detail removed], he explained it to him and the latter accepted without any problem."  
(Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

Many participants reported being refused by school administration due to their disability, which narrowed their choices of which schools to attend.

*"Every time my parents took me to public schools, when they see my disability automatically, they refuse to take me into their schools."  
(Female, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

The participants highlighted that many mainstream schools are often unaware of accessibility needs within their facilities and do not provide adequate support to students. Furthermore, interviews indicated that accessible facilities and reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities are typically insufficient in mainstream schools.

The participants reported navigating numerous barriers whilst trying to identify and enrol in appropriate, inclusive schools including distance, transportation, and negative attitudes from school administration. However, one of the foremost barriers highlighted in the data was the prohibitive cost of education, which we explore in the next section. Ultimately, interviews suggest that much more targeted support is needed to help young persons with disabilities navigate key transition points—both into, and through education systems—and to identify facilities that accommodate their specific needs.

## Paying for education

Young people described the overwhelming economic burden of education, particularly inclusive education, as a central barrier preventing them from accessing appropriate education institutions, or any education institution at all. Very few participants reported receiving subsidised tuition and fees during their education.

*"No, I don't get a discount. There are no distinctions at school. Everyone pays the same amount." (Female, 25-35 years old, person with albinism)*

Participants cited the high cost of transportation, tuition and fees, scholastic materials like books or uniforms, the opportunity cost (e.g. loss of wages for time spent away from work) of family members accompanying the students, assistive devices, and inclusive learning materials and support. These factors make it less likely that children with disabilities will attend school than their non-disabled peers. Some participants were able to secure scholarships or sponsors to fund their education, but this was not the case for the majority of young people.

*"After graduating from high school, I contacted our [detail removed] president. He told me, 'You can come to Dakar, we'll manage it.' That's how I came to be. Until then, he's in charge of everything, otherwise I wouldn't have been able to do anything. He's the one who pays for the training since I was in my first year until now." (Female, 25-35 years old, person with albinism)*

Source: Humanity & Inclusion



## Reaching schools and other educational institutions

Participants also provided insights into challenges associated with transportation and reaching appropriate schools.

*"It was at the beginning that I had difficulties related to travel. But now it's fine, I'm managing it, because the buses we have help us in a lot of things." (Female, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

Specific obstacles vary by impairment, but the young people reported mobility challenges, a lack of affordable or accessible transport options, and requiring assistance from a caregiver to access education institutions.

*"Maybe transportation to school. At that time, if I had an electric wheelchair or whatever, I could have come and gone without any problems, without making as much effort, because the recovery time and this fatigue was holding me back on a lot of things." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

Other young people described experiencing limited support from friends and family because of the opportunity cost of accompanying students to and from school, or due to negative attitudes. In the next section we will delve further into how these and additional factors shape young people's experiences throughout their education.

### Cisse

Cisse is a 29-year-old man with a visual impairment who is currently studying to be a lawyer. Cisse and his visually impaired classmates do not have to pay tuition at his law school, which greatly supports his studies and career goals. Unfortunately, the environment can be challenging in terms of accessibility and accommodations. The infrastructure in and around the university is inaccessible and dangerous for the visually impaired.

Cisse also reports difficulties competing academically with his sighted classmates, especially because he is unable to access the university library. Books and other learning materials are not translated into braille. Instead, Cisse has to rely on excerpts from books that he can find online or on verbal explanations in his lectures, which impacts his ability to compete with his peers. He relies heavily on his computer for notetaking and studying, as well as text-to-speech software to overcome accessibility challenges. Cisse is lucky to be one of the few visually impaired students to access this technology. Cisse hopes to use his law degree to advocate for improved awareness and disability inclusion in Senegal, but worries he may not be able to get a job after graduation.

## Experiences during education

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For those youth with disabilities in Senegal who successfully navigated access to educational institutions, their experiences during education were shaped by three main factors: (i) accessibility and accommodations; (ii) teaching practices; and (iii) enabling or exclusionary environments. These are in addition to the other cross-cutting enablers and challenges reported under Reflections.

### Accessibility and accommodations

Accessibility and reasonable accommodations are an essential component of inclusive education, as well as a fundamental human right for persons with disabilities, yet they are often inadequate, inappropriate, or entirely non-existent. The participants' experiences varied by their type and severity of impairment, as this dictated the nature and level of accommodation or support required to effectively learn and participate in school. In the following section, we breakdown the needs and gaps identified within each impairment group.

Students with physical and mobility impairments described facing barriers related to inaccessible infrastructure such as a lack of ramps and lifts, difficult terrain between buildings, and challenging distances from home to school.

*"During those times, there weren't many schools that had ramps [...] To get to the top, you had to climb the stairs. Sometimes the students raced to climb the stairs, in this case you did it slowly to avoid being hurt but there were no ramps." (Female, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

In some cases, it caused injury and harm to youth with disabilities.

*"The road is not as well laid out so that blind [people] can move around without difficulty. Recently, I fell into a sewer that I couldn't avoid. At this level, accessibility to the faculty is a real problem, whether in the buildings or in the library." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

The young people also reported numerous issues accessing toilets and washrooms in both lower levels of education and throughout higher education.

*"No, the accessibility of the toilets was not adapted for persons with disabilities. But after that, we manage. I think when people build the establishments, they don't really have that mentality, that culture. There are not many persons with disabilities who go on to higher education. So, I think that's mainly why infrastructure doesn't take that into account too much." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

The inaccessibility of infrastructure in schools often forced the young people to rely on friends and classmates for help.

*"It was difficult, I didn't go to the toilet in the school because I couldn't access it. There were stairs and it was a bit narrow. The courtyard, too, was sandy. At break time, everyone went out except me, because it wasn't accessible. Otherwise, I wouldn't go beyond the small courtyard. To eat, I send someone. Sometimes, what helped was that you had understanding classmates who helped and assisted you." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

Participants urged for increased attention to infrastructural accessibility in education in Senegal, as this proved to be an issue even in special schools and training centres hosting large numbers of students with disabilities.

*"They must already take into account that today, in a world where disability is a present thing, the construction of establishments must take into account those with physical impairments, in order to better help them, support them and promote their integration." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

In addition to physical accessibility issues, the participants also highlighted the inaccessibility of learning materials and a lack of reasonable accommodations made by educational institutions to enable and support the diverse needs of students with disabilities, such as those with sensory impairments. The young people described feeling held back academically because of the lack of accommodations in school.

*"The environment and the conditions in which we operate are a blockage. This means that my sighted classmates are always ahead of me in my studies. When I compare myself to others, I see that my disability becomes a weakness, because I can't access the university library. It's not a lack of motivation but it's related to a vision problem. There are a lot of things that are not accessible to us." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

Young people with visual impairments highlighted the lack of access to books and learning materials in braille, forcing them to search for excerpts of textbooks online or lectures. One participant reported that this severely limited his ability to conduct research and gain the full scope of knowledge his peers are receiving.

*"There are no braille books in the library. As a result, we are satisfied only with the excerpts from books that we find on the internet and the explanations of the teacher. For example, in our faculty, the professor asks us to research, but we all have difficulties in finding these books." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

Very few participants reported receiving accommodations or accessible learning materials, particularly in mainstream schools. Those who did receive this type of support were largely those enrolled in special schools such as *Institut National d'Education et de Formation des Jeunes Aveugles*, INEFJA (the National Institute of Education and Training of Young People with Blindness).

*The materials we use are very rare, it's called grid and the sound point. Most of the time, it is imported into Europe. It is the INEFJA that provides us with these materials free of charge, in partnership with Belgians and French. But sometimes we have shortcomings."*  
(Male, 18-24 years old, has a visual impairment)

While it is encouraging to see cases of good practice at special schools such as INEFJA, the majority of students with disabilities do not have access to schools that cater specifically to their impairment type or can obtain resources from abroad. The data highlight the vital need for increased access to appropriate learning materials, as well as improved accountability and enforcement around reasonable accommodations in mainstream schools in Senegal.

## Teaching practices

The young people interviewed reported experiences of negative attitudes and exclusionary teaching practices from teachers and school administration. These negative experiences had a significant impact on participants' learning opportunities, ability to compete academically with peers, and their confidence moving forward in education.

*"I had the skills to succeed. When we did the departmental tests, I was among the top three or five. I had confidence in myself until that day, I thought I was going beyond that level. I had dreams, I thought I would study and become a doctor, make my dreams come true. But that day they clipped my wings."* (Male, 25-35 years old, person with albinism)



Students with visual and hearing impairments described persistently being denied seats in the front of their classes that would enable them to see and hear more clearly. Even after numerous attempts explaining their impairment to teachers and lecturers, they were still forced to sit in the back of their classes. For several participants, this problem eventually led them to drop out of school or university, exhausted from the continual fight for simple adjustments and unable to effectively learn the material.

*"It's the lecture halls that bother me the most. Because as a person with a disability, you have no choice but to sit in front when the seats are occupied. It's only at the back of the lecture halls that you can sit. And people don't understand the idea of letting you sit in front of it and they tell you it's none of their business. And when you sit in the back, you can't understand the teachers' explanations." (Female, 25-35 years old, has a hearing impairment)*

Some young people also experienced discrimination from teachers around entry to examinations and appropriate class placements, which can have a longstanding impact on their educational and professional advancement.

*"The biggest challenge is to pass the Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA) exam. I thought I could apply because there were a lot of my sighted classmates to whom I was giving explanations about the tests. In the end, they succeeded. Maybe we have the same level. Unfortunately, they are luckier than I am. It's because of my disability that means I can't do the competition." (Male, 25-35, has a visual impairment)*

One participant recounted being denied appropriate class placement which escalated into a physical altercation with a teacher and, as a result, led to the young person dropping out of school permanently.

*"My teacher refused to enrol me because he said the class was already full. I told him I couldn't accept that, because I had the average to pass. There are classmates who had averages of 3 out of 10 while I had an average of 6 out of 10. I wouldn't agree to go back to CM1 [lower level]. He refused, telling me to resign myself or to go and redo the CM1 class. I told him I wouldn't. He took my bag, he threw it outside and he told me to get the hell out of here. I got angry, I threw a stone at him. He took an iron chair to hit me with. People intervened to separate us. That's why I didn't continue in school. I dropped out of school for good." (Male, 25-35 years old, person with albinism)*

As is evident throughout the entirety of this report, negative attitudes, and the marginalisation of young persons with disabilities is a fundamental issue extending through all aspects of participants' lives and compounding multiple forms of discrimination. Addressing these attitudes is a crucial step toward improving the lived experience and quality of life for young people inside and outside education.

## Enabling and inclusive environments

While many participants experienced countless challenges during their education journey, several also described the profoundly positive impact of support from peers and teachers in fostering an enabling learning environment. Particularly in mainstream schools where disability support is inadequate, most students rely on friends, classmates, and teachers to overcome academic challenges and fill in learning gaps.

*"It was a great relationship. I got along well with the students, I was the only person with albinism in the school, we played together, we laughed sometimes the students would touch my skin and tell me my body is beautiful. The teachers were my friends. There was one who was very good friends with me, he would help me and call me every time he had breakfast." (Male, 25-35 years old, person with albinism)*

A few students attending mainstream schools reported good experiences with peers and teachers, as well as the positive awareness raising and sensitisation that can occur when students with disabilities are integrated with non-disabled classmates.

*"My experience at school has allowed me to have sighted classmates in middle and high school, but also has allowed those who have never been with blind people to be able to talk with us. It was something exceptional for them to be around us. Practically we didn't have any difficulties because they helped us a lot." (Male, 18-24 years old, has a visual impairment)*

It is important to highlight that although peer support can enhance a disabled learner's experience by helping address lapses in accessibility and teaching practices, the responsibility of ensuring inclusivity ultimately lies with the education providers. Findings from this research indicate that disability sensitisation and increased awareness to create inclusive and enabling environments in schools could vastly improve education experiences for students with disabilities. Increased enforcement, accountability, and awareness is needed in Senegal to foster substantive disability inclusion in education.



Source: Flickr/Josiah Brown

## TRANSITION TO EMPLOYMENT

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The young people described varied experiences while transitioning from education to employment, with most expressing difficulties.

### Challenges securing employment

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The majority of young people cited barriers around accessing employment opportunities and information, discriminatory attitudes from employers, lack of transportation to the workplace, and difficulty proving their skills and qualifications. The young people also reported discrimination in the recruitment and interview process.

*“Yes, there are. Mostly in employment. When you are looking for work, your application will not be accepted. You consciously know that it's because of the disability even if he doesn't tell you directly, you understand that it's the fact of being a person with albinism, and having deficient vision that is the reason for your rejection.” (Female, 25-35 years old, person with albinism)*

From the beginning of this transition, the young people faced obstacles like difficulty accessing information about job vacancies, a lack of mentorship to navigate the job seeking process, and harmful assumptions being made about their capabilities.

*“The hardest thing about this country is looking for a job as a person with a disability. It's very complicated. Because many people believe that you don't have the right skills. However, to know if the person is competent or not, you have to put him to the test so that you can know if what he was telling you is true or not.” (Female, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

### Diarra

Diarra is a 31-year-old man with albinism currently working in the field of healthcare. He has participated in several trainings through an OPD for people with albinism, including carpentry, poultry farming, computer science, and video editing. He enjoyed his most recent training in video editing and poultry farming, but he was forced to drop out due to financial constraints and the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, the OPD covered the cost of the video training, but part way through the funding ran out and Diarra wasn't able to continue. He also couldn't afford a computer of his own to practice or use his skills. Aside from the financial challenges, Diarra learned many useful skills and had a good experience with the trainer. He says the experience gave him more confidence, as well as equipped him with more knowledge on how to use the internet and various technology. While he is now working in healthcare, Diarra hopes that more funding will become available and he can finish the video editing training and use his digital skills in the future.

Difficulties obtaining employment opportunities were cited as a major source of mental, emotional, and financial stress for the young people. Those who successfully completed some form of education and training also described struggling with the weight of family expectations around employment, despite the immense discrimination and exclusion from opportunities.

*“You know, in general, we see a young blind person who, after his training, finds himself unemployed. Your whole family expects you to find a job after two or three years of training. This is a problem that needs to be solved. As people say, ‘Teach me how to fish instead of giving me fish.’” (Male, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

Participants emphasised the gap between educational attainment and securing gainful employment. Many of the young people interviewed reported successfully completing high levels of education or skills training, yet the majority were unable to find a job.

*“For me, it doesn't exist. For example, when it comes to youth employment, non-disabled people are taken into account more than disabled people. It's like you're not part of this society. And this is the case with all the companies that exist in Senegal, and there are still young disabled graduates who are unemployed. I don't think we're being considered. There are a lot of students with disabilities who are on the streets.” (Female, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

## Challenges retaining employment

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Participants illustrated two central challenges during employment that often impact the longevity of employment, including transportation issues and difficulty completing internships and trial periods.

### Transportation

Transportation problems to and from work emerged as a major barrier for young persons with disabilities.

*“It would have helped me to have a means of transportation that would allow me to get to work without difficulty and on time. Because sometimes, when you want to take a taxi, as soon as he sees you with your wheelchair, he doesn't stop or to avoid taking you he charges you an extraordinary price. I would like to see some means of transportation to help us.” (Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

Transport barriers include a lack of accessible transport options, long distances to work, and the cost associated with transport that is appropriate for diverse impairments and needs.

*“In the morning, it's hard to leave because people rush into the buses and I couldn't do it, it's hard for me to get a car, and I'm tired, I'm late all the time. I'm leaving here at 9am when my schedule was 8am. I was always reproached for being late.” (Female, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

## Internships and trial periods

Another barrier to obtaining long-term employment highlighted by participants is employers requiring unpaid internships or trial periods, often without any accommodations or disability support, before offering paid positions.

*"I know the rights I have there, but I can't claim them now, especially since I'm on an internship. But if I'm hired after those six months, I'd be in a better position to claim those rights. Because sometimes he does things that are abnormal, but I can't speak out at the risk of having my file set aside." (Female, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

Most of the young people interviewed reported struggling with internships and trial periods due to cost barriers like transport and a lack of accommodations. However, a few participants described gaining useful skills during their internship, or being offered a paid position after the trial period.

*"Yes, he called me because he knew my skills and he saw my activism. He called me for a three-month internship with him, to see what area I would be more competent in and would like to work in. And when I came, he offered me the field of health so that I could assist the sick in the hospital, since I know how to read and write, I could guide the people with albinism, help them and bring them to the hospital so that they follow the therapeutic route correctly. That's how I learned, I got experience." (Male, 25-35 years old, person with albinism)*

Although internships have the potential to provide beneficial opportunities for skills development, work experience, and professional connections, it is important to recognise that the ability to complete an unpaid internship is often dependent on socio-economic factors, like being able to afford transportation or cover the opportunity cost, as well as the level of support provided by the employer. These experiences also differ greatly based on the type of impairment, as some young people cannot prove their capabilities without adequate workplace accommodations, which are often denied during trial periods.

*"In my work, sometimes I need someone to help me communicate with others. But my colleagues who can't understand my language aren't open to helping me in that sense, so I'm forced to fall back on one of my [deaf and non-verbal] peers who knows how to decipher my language." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a hearing and speaking impairment)*

The data suggests that significant work needs to be done regarding the transition from education to employment for young persons with disabilities. Participants advocated in their interviews for more inclusive and accessible recruitment processes, provision of workplace accommodations and support, as well as increased awareness of the skills, qualifications, and capabilities of young persons with disabilities among employers. They also recommended pushing for more opportunities for young persons with disabilities to develop their capacity, employability, and skills to improve their chances as successfully transitioning into and retaining employment.



## Vocational training

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Participants indicated that Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes have the potential to provide valuable skills and improve both employment opportunities and quality of life for young persons with disabilities. However, the data illustrates that the intention of TVET and the actual impact are often misaligned. Despite the common assumption that vocational training is the best alternative to schools that lack sufficient disability inclusion, the young people reported that TVET centres in Senegal often have the same accessibility, transport, and accommodation issues found at other schools.

There are two primary TVET centres in Senegal that were highlighted by participants. The Estel Centre in Dakar provides programmes centred on empowerment, autonomy, social inclusion, and professional integration for young people with intellectual disabilities and cerebral palsy. They run vocational training (e.g. market gardening, ceramics, screen printing, cooking, sports) as well as wider wellbeing activities (e.g. relaxation and massage) and supporting digital training. Additionally, INEFJA provides training in telecommunications, brush making, and weaving for those with visual impairments.

*"I've gained knowledge and I can do a lot of stuff outside of what I do where I work. I would have liked it to have been better improved to allow other disabled people to benefit from it, more, because these are suitable jobs for people like us." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

While many participants found vocational training to be engaging, informative, and good quality, they also cited financial challenges paying for tuition and transportation.

*"I've done four trainings. Training in carpentry, training in business, training in poultry farming and one in video editing. I had started the video editing course, but I couldn't finish it due to lack of means." (Male, 25-35 years old, person with albinism)*

Several young people also reported challenges proving their qualifications due to a lack of documentation like a certificate or diploma to show they completed a course in TVET.

*"I think the issue of a diploma is problematic because the centre does not issue a diploma and it does not make it easier to find a job. I also think that we should support these kinds of centres so that they can better deal with the concerns of disadvantaged people." (Female, 18-24 years old, has a psychosocial impairment)*

Technical and vocational training might offer alternative and helpful education opportunities for some students with disabilities; however, it is essential that these programmes implement the same accessibility, accommodation, and financial supports needed in traditional places of education. In addition, unless the problem of unemployment and discriminatory hiring practices are improved, there remains a severe lack of opportunities for young persons with disabilities to use the skills acquired in TVET.

## EXPERIENCES IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

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Agriculture is a dominant economic activity in Senegal, accounting for 16.5% of the national GDP, accounting for almost 30% of jobs in 2021 [17]. However, due to several factors including the country's location in the drought-prone Sahel region, Senegal relies heavily on food imports. Organisations such as the World Bank have remarked upon the potential for growth in this sector [18].

Three participants were sampled to provide deeper insight on experiences of persons with disabilities working in the agriculture sector in Senegal. The analysis on experiences of young persons with disabilities in agriculture shed light on three key insights, including challenges based on impairment type, the need for start-up capital and other financial support, and the need for training opportunities.

### Malik

Malik is a 29-year-old man with albinism and a visual impairment. He works in agriculture cultivating and harvesting groundnuts. Malik was forced to drop out of school because of problems with low vision and negative attitudes from teachers in school. He enjoys his work in the agriculture sector, which he has been doing for 15 years now. As a farmer, he faces challenges working in the sun for long hours due to the sensitivity of his skin, as well as problems caused by his visual impairment while working in the fields.

To mitigate difficulties, Malik uses sunscreen and glasses. He hopes to grow his business selling groundnuts, but he needs financial support for fertiliser and equipment. Malik experienced stigma and discrimination in childhood and school, but now he has a good relationship with his family, neighbours, and community. He lives with his wife, works with his father in the fields, and helps his two younger brothers who also have albinism.

## Challenges related to type of impairment

In undertaking agricultural work, challenges described by participants include difficulties in laborious work (like fetching water) for people with physical impairments, and in overseeing state of produce and poultry, for people with visual impairments. For these tasks, they are supported by family members.

*"There are difficulties related to moving around in the fields, knowing that sometimes I can put my feet where I shouldn't. This can lead to damage." (Male, 25-35 years old, person with albinism)*

One participant with albinism described challenges working under the sun for long hours, in addition to those related to low vision.

*"Apart from vision problems, you know there are different categories of albinism. There are persons with albinism who can't last long under the sun, a few minutes later there are marks on the body, a lot of redness." (Male, 25-35 years old, person with albinism)*



Source: Dr. Alexey Yakovlev/Flickr

## Needs

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Analysis of youth narratives highlighted two ways in which youth with disabilities may be supported in the agricultural sector. These are in addition to cross-cutting enablers like assistive products that are detailed under Reflections.

### Training

The importance of training in the agricultural sector was evident in the data. All participants expressed a desire to learn more, either to get started or to scale up. Several young people were aware of available trainings but did not have the resources to participate.

*"Yes, I would like to do the fruit and vegetable processing training. I've always wanted to do it but never had the opportunity. There is also the training in agriculture and animal husbandry that I never had the opportunity to do. I love to discover. These modules are very important, especially for fruit and vegetable processing. Even if you don't have the financing, it's possible to buy vegetables and do it yourself." (Female, 25-35 years old, person with albinism)*

One participant emphasised the benefit of the training she received in both developing her skills in agriculture, but also dispelling her family's doubts around her capability to train and work in agriculture.

*"I have gained knowledge. Especially during my training in agriculture. My family was sceptical about this training and wondered if I would be able to do it. I told them that in order to find out, I had to go there to discover this training. Because in life, in order for you to know something, you have to set out to discover it. But to tell the truth, it was good." (Female, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

*"Many people think that disabled people are incapable. While we are the first class of blind people to go into the agricultural field. And since you can never be educated enough and I've always had a passion for agriculture, I thought this was an opportunity for me to take part in this training." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

Overall, the findings indicate that for youth with disabilities, undertaking work in agriculture is stymied by access to funding, rather due to functioning constraints associated with specific impairments.

### Financial support

The data highlighted how financial support could address many of the challenges faced by young persons with disabilities working in agriculture. It could help create interest and retain those who enjoy farm-based work. With financial support, young people could source the appropriate tools and equipment to scale up their endeavours.

*"I need help from the state to get seeds, machines like injector pads that can fertilise the soil and kill pests, people who support me so that I can work better. We all aspire to make progress. If I had funding, things would get better." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

Some participants also reported needing better support with the labour-intensive tasks, which may be addressed by obtaining better machinery or being able to hire appropriately skilled people to assist them. The young people also cited the need for financial support to purchase technology that could enable them to scale-up and modernise their business.

*"I would like to have a computer that will help me with the calculations, the cash register with the receipts, the output of reports and other documents related to the inventory." (Female, 25-35 years old, has a psychosocial impairment)*

Participants also emphasised the need for start-up capital to invest in their own small business.

*"I would like to be able to have any kind of support that would be beneficial to me to allow me to move forward and start my own business." (Female, 18-24 years old, has a psychosocial impairment)*

These needs described by youth with disabilities highlight clear gaps to which programmes could respond, to promote their interest and engagement in the agricultural sector.



Source: Benaissa S/ILO

## EXPERIENCES IN THE DIGITAL SECTOR

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The digital sector in Senegal is described as a key driver of the national economy, with ambitions to promote its growth from 6% of the GDP to 10% by 2025, creating almost 35,000 jobs in the sector [19]. This is framed by the 'Digital Senegal 2025' Strategy linked to the government's overarching Emergent Senegal Plan, indicating a clear commitment to advancing this sector [20].

Our Phase 1 study found that there has been increased funding and investment in digital activities for youth with disabilities as well [16]. Much of this attention is the result of persons with disabilities' desire to gain skills that will help them enter the job market, and digital skills were noted to increase access to opportunities. However, there is a need for more training opportunities and greater availability of equipment that will help persons with disabilities engage in the digital space, including accessible computer technologies.

Four participants were sampled specifically to provide deeper insight on experiences of persons with disabilities with training or interest in working in the digital sector in Senegal. Additionally, several participants completed training in digital skills through their education and TVET courses. Insights from their interviews are also included in this section.

Analysis of youth narratives highlighted three ways in which youth with disabilities may be supported in the digital sector, including training opportunities, reasonable accommodations, and increased financial support. These are in addition to cross-cutting enablers like assistive products that are detailed under Reflections.

### Faruk

Faruk is a 27-year-old man with a physical impairment. Faruk was born with his disability and was lucky to grow up with a supportive family that encouraged him to study, pursue his interests, and play wheelchair basketball. He attributes his self-acceptance and sense of empowerment to his family, as well as an inclusive and supportive social environment growing up. Faruk used to use a manual wheelchair to travel to and from school, which was extremely difficult and exhausting. He attended a special school for students with disabilities with good learning support, but still struggled with inaccessible infrastructure like stairs, a lack of ramps, and inaccessible toilets.

Faruk currently works in the digital and IT sector doing computer maintenance. His primary challenges are primarily financial and include a lack of access to a personal computer, poor internet connection, and problems with inaccessible or expensive transportation. Faruk is involved in local politics and hopes to improve advocacy and awareness for young persons with disabilities in Senegal.

## Training opportunities

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The data suggests that young persons with disabilities in Senegal are knowledgeable about and have access to many opportunities for training in the digital sector, particularly through special education schools and inclusive training centres. All participants reported tremendous benefits of receiving opportunities for digital and IT trainings, describing these as pivotal in securing employment.

*"In the digital age, computer literacy is becoming essential to be able to work or do research. In practice, public institutes are equipped with technological infrastructure." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

Several participants were successful in obtaining employment after training in fields like telecommunications and computer science, including some young people who were able to start their own businesses.

*"I also did a training course in computer science at the Association of Disabled People of Senegal. They told me 'since you're no longer studying, we should sign you up for training.' I said okay. They paid for the taxi, they went to register me. But I've always believed in myself. I studied until the end and started my own business, then I went into marketing. All this I did in the centre." (Female, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

The young people emphasised that the digital sector holds immense potential for persons with disabilities who may have struggled to work in sectors that demand more physical labour or present other impairment-related challenges that are now lessened through access to technology.

*"I've gained knowledge, and I can do a lot of stuff outside of what I do where I work. I would have liked it to have been better improved to allow other disabled people to benefit more from it, because these are suitable jobs for people like us. (Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

Participants also highlighted the importance of digital literacy and skills in helping young persons with disabilities access information about educational opportunities, as well as the use of technology to search and apply for jobs.

*"Among us are blind students who are proficient in computer tools. With computers, they are able to build files and do research in order to have a better understanding of the courses. Thus, we can say that computer science allows us to develop our skills and know-how. As far as employment is concerned, computers make it possible to write letters and send letters." (Male, 18-24 years old, has a visual impairment)*

While the digital sector presents new possibilities for young persons with disabilities, in order for them to navigate and seize these opportunities, digital skills trainings must be accessible, affordable, and appropriate for people with diverse support needs.

## Accessibility and accommodations

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As with other educational endeavours, young persons with disabilities in the digital sector often face barriers related to their impairments. This often stems from inadequate consideration of accessibility needs and insufficient efforts in making reasonable accommodations to support their full participation. Despite considerable challenges, several participants reported positive experiences of support from trainers to overcome impairment-related difficulties.

*"In computer science, sometimes there are certain manipulations that were complicated for me. This is the case when you need to press two keys on the keyboard simultaneously, such as CTRL and ALT. As a result, I had to call the teacher most of the time, to tell him that I had trouble pressing the keys. He explained it to me, and I understood how it worked. Then he'd press the keys for me. He made me understand that it's a bit complicated, that we can't find a solution here because computers are not adapted to my situation." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

Young people who were given sufficient support reported benefiting greatly from their experience studying digital skills.

*"It was good, really it wasn't difficult to sign up, because it's a digital solidarity service reserved in a way for persons with disabilities. It wasn't difficult at all, just like with accessibility, you can access the toilets, the rooms, there's the ramps and everything." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

While many participants described positive experiences during their training in terms of accommodations and support, financial barriers were highlighted as a significant issue preventing young persons with disabilities from participating or completing their course.

## Financial support

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The young people cited financial challenges as being one of the foremost barriers to completing training and securing employment in the digital sector. These include financial constraints around transport, paying training fees, and purchasing a computer or laptop with which to practice and use digital skills.

*"I didn't have a computer when I was training in video editing. When you do this kind of training, you have to have a machine so that you can do lessons at home if you come home. You have to be able to edit a video, practice what you've learned. That was what I was missing. We also had to pay the teacher every time he came to give us lessons at the Foundation. But as time went by, we didn't have the funds to do it." (Male, 25-35 years old, person with albinism)*

Transportation to and from training was also a major barrier, with few cases of transport expenses being paid by the institution or facilitators of the training courses.

*"I did the training for 2 years and 4 months. Because UNFPA had stopped paying for transport. They were the ones who provided transportation at the end of each month. But then they stopped." (Female, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

Participants also described overarching funding problems affecting training centres or particular courses, as well as experiences of exploitation.

*“At the very beginning, he promised us diplomas after the training. Then they promised that they would open a call centre to allow us to work. But at one point, they wanted to force each of us to look for a sponsor in order to get funding. Somehow, they wanted to exploit us for personal gain. In addition, it was not easy to endure transportation difficulties because being a woman and living with a disability.” (Female, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

Overall, the data indicates that providing training opportunities and financial support (covering fees for course, food, and transport), and reasonable accommodations could facilitate young persons with disabilities to thrive in the digital sector.

Source: Goethe Dakar/Flickr



## REFLECTIONS

Described below are reflections on cross-cutting factors that shape the experiences of young persons with disabilities in Senegal.

### Assistive products

Assistive products are equipment or devices that enhance an individual's functioning in education, work, and daily life. The table below shows the type of assistive products used by the study participants, noting that this study did not involve assessing the need (or unmet need) for assistive technology.

Impairment type	Number of participants	Assistive products used
 Physical	5 (Of these, 3 had mobility difficulties )	Wheelchair = 2 Walking stick = 0
 Visual	5 (Of these, 5 could not see at all)	Glasses = 3
 Hearing	5 (Of these, 4 could not hear at all)	Hearing aid = 0

### Fatima

Fatima is a 21-year-old woman with a physical impairment who is currently in her first year of studying law. At the university, she often struggles with inaccessible infrastructure like a lack of ramps, lifts, and inaccessible toilets. She also faces difficulties accessing and affording transportation. Fatima uses a manual wheelchair provided to her by an OPD, but she needs an electric wheelchair. An electric chair would give her more independence, as she currently relies on other people to help her move around. Unfortunately, electric wheelchairs are very expensive and most persons with disabilities in Senegal can't afford them. Fatima says she sometimes experiences negative attitudes when she is forced to depend on other people for help. Having access to an electric wheelchair would allow her to move more freely and avoid encounters where she has to ask others for assistance. In the future, she hopes to work as a lawyer and have the resources to buy an electric chair. She believes young persons with disabilities in Senegal primarily need more financial support to achieve their goals and aspirations.

## Variation in access

Access to assistive products varied greatly across participants. Some young people had no access to assistive products and others discontinued use over time due to faulty products. However, the central theme throughout was the exclusionary cost of purchasing, replacing, and upgrading appropriate assistive technology. A limited number of participants reported receiving appropriate and effective assistive products. Some products were provided through government programmes, education institutions, or other non-governmental organisations.

*"I've never had a problem with my chair. Maybe it was getting the power chair that was a bit difficult, but I was always lucky enough to have a chair. Sometimes, the school offers it to you, or a partner or the association, but there are other people who have a real problem with having a wheelchair." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

Many participants had limited or no access to necessary assistive products due to access barriers, a lack of awareness, or because assistive products were too expensive.

*"I don't have any devices, but if I did, it would help me a lot. Because when I'm in front of you and I speak, you hear me. But if I'm from behind, I can't hear when I'm being spoken to. I need a device to hear what is being said behind me." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a hearing impairment)*

In addition, the young people highlighted a lack of technology and accessible learning materials needed by students with disabilities in education and employment.

*"Recently, we have received support from the [detail removed] who have given us endowments for braille sheets and computers. During the distribution, some of the students did not receive computers. In addition, the quantity of braille sheets was not enough for us either. They also gave us a braille printer to be able to print some documents, because before we had to go to Thiès to transcribe the documents into braille and come back to [detail removed]." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

## Prohibitive cost

The prohibitive cost of assistive products and technology was reflected in the data as one of the biggest barriers for young persons with disabilities. Participants' needs and the cost of products varied by impairment type but remained a prominent theme in the majority of interviews.

Young people with physical and mobility impairments reported facing cost barriers for products like crutches and wheelchairs.

*"I wanted to have an electric wheelchair. Because I know that if I have an electric wheelchair, I would be able to get around easily without depending on someone." (Female, 18-24 years old, has a physical impairment)*

Young people with sensory impairments described the high cost of support services, products, and software. For example, participants with visual impairments reported needing expensive services and technology like personal readers, E-readers, and text-to-audio software, which are almost never provided through education institutions or the workplace.

*"Yes, there are, but they are expensive devices. For example, there is a device called Braille Dish that helps a lot in writing but is extremely expensive. I think it costs between 6 and 8 million francs." (Male, 18-24 years old, has a visual impairment)*

In order to improve access to assistive products, more work must be done to diminish cost barriers, especially for those most vulnerable to poverty.

### Inappropriate or ill-fitting devices

Several participants reported receiving assistive products that were ill-fitting or not suitable, limiting benefits or in some cases risking causing harm.

*"I was walking with the help of a device, but it was difficult to walk with it. It hurt a lot. I hid it in the living room, and when I came back, I put it back on. And then one day my mom asked me why I wasn't wearing the device. I explained to her why. Since then, I don't wear it anymore. (Female, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

One recurring theme throughout this research was poor access to appropriate, effective, and functional hearing aids. Nearly all participants with hearing impairments reported either not receiving hearing aids, receiving them but discontinuing use because they were ill-fitting, or finding that the hearing aids made their impairment worse.

*"I have difficulty hearing because I don't have a hearing aid. In addition, I have to write in order to be able to communicate. I used to use a hearing aid from the Ministry of Health, but it no longer works." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a hearing impairment)*

These narratives highlight the vital need for better overall access to technology and products, improved awareness among young persons with disabilities in rural areas, and assistive products which are accessible, affordable, and effective.

## Digital skills

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Many participants described the positive impact of digital literacy in giving them increased independence, lessening difficulties related to their impairment, and providing opportunities to progress in education and employment. However, this participant pointed out, these skills are limited by access to technology like computers.

*"Today, with the advancement of technology, we are able to read electronic documents on our computers. As far as I am concerned, I take my classes on my computer because it is very difficult to write in braille. Not only does this take a lot of time, but it can also create a sound noise that can disturb other fellow students." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

As mentioned in the section on employment in the digital sector, the participants made it clear that young persons with disabilities in Senegal are eager to develop their digital skills and training opportunities are largely available.

### Financial barriers

The primary barrier young people face in accessing training and using their digital skills for both education and employment are financial, including transportation expenses, training fees, and the high cost of smartphones, laptops, and computers.

*"Among us, there are visually impaired people who don't have computers. As a result, they are unable to do research properly." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

The data underscored the importance of digital literacy to enable young people to conduct research and access information about a variety of issues affecting their lives.

*"This technology can help in several areas, for example. It allows us to apply for job opportunities, to do research in the fields they want to evolve." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

The young people interviewed reported using their digital skills to research education programmes, apply for jobs, learn about their rights, and better understand their health.

*"This training has allowed me to be able to use the internet properly and to be able to carry out all the useful research I want to do on the internet, especially related to my health." (Female, 25-35 years old, has a psychosocial impairment)*

There was an evident appetite for training opportunities in digital skills, as many reported its benefits to improve their chances of success un education and employment.

## Digital platforms

One interesting insight that came out of interviews in Senegal was the ways young people are using applications on their phones and laptops to develop and grow small businesses. Participants working in both agriculture and the digital sector reported using apps to market and sell their products.

One participant described running her small business almost entirely through WhatsApp, including posting updates about available produce, communicating with customers, and organising local fruit and vegetable deliveries.

*"I use the WhatsApp status, when I have an order, whether it's powdered products or other, I make the delivery and then I get my money back. By the way, I have a sister who is in Morocco, who also helps me with advertising." (Female, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

This participant also uses a text-to-voice app on her phone and laptop to easily communicate.

*"With the age of new technology, blind people today are able to use communication tools with ease. You just need to know how to read and write in French to make good use of it. Through this app, one can even learn English." (Female, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

Participants reported using apps like Facebook, Pinterest, and others to market their goods and services. It is evident from the data that new technology and digital skills can have a profoundly positive impact on young persons with disabilities when they are given the resources, training, and technology to effectively apply their knowledge and creativity.



Source: icannphotos/Flickr

# Stigma

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Participants described experiencing stigma and in many aspects of their lives, including from family members, peers, teachers, prospective employers, and the community at large. Below, we outline the ways in which stigma affects education and employment, highlighting key forms of stigma that young persons with disabilities often experience including (i) negative attitudes and stereotypes; (ii) bullying and violence; and (iii) discrimination and exclusion.

## Negative attitudes and stereotypes

For some young persons with disabilities, negative attitudes are experienced first within their own family. Negative attitudes from family can encompass things like refusing to pay schools fees, overprotection resulting in isolation, and harmful stereotypes around capability.

*"It's education and it's complex. Because even I experienced it with part of my family. Not this one, but cousins of my mother, my father. You clearly feel that the affection they have for you is not similar to the affection they have for others." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

Negative attitudes in the home often increase the likelihood of domestic violence, abuse, and neglect.

*"They are understanding, they don't have a problem with my disability. But at first, my father had a hard time understanding what it was all about. Sometimes he thought I was purposely not hearing what he was saying and not responding to him. Afterwards, he would hit me because of it. It was my mother who made him understand that it was beyond my control, that I couldn't hear it properly. That's how this disability happened to me. But since my dad figured it out, he's behaved well with me." (Female, 25-35 years old, has a hearing impairment)*

## Sia

Sia is a 31-year-old woman with a visual impairment. While Sia feels supported and well-treated by her family and husband, she has experienced many forms of stigma throughout education and employment. In childhood, Sia faced barriers enrolling in schools near her house because the administration refused to admit a visually impaired student. She's also experienced exploitation from trainers, negative attitudes from community members, and discriminatory hiring practices while searching for employment. Sia said that educational institutions and employers should make an effort to improve accessibility and raise awareness to teach others the importance of respecting the needs and differences of persons with disabilities in Senegal.

## Bullying, violence, and abuse

In addition to negative attitudes at home, the young people interviewed also experienced bullying from peers, teachers, and school administration. These often cause students to live in fear, suffer low self-esteem and isolation, and prevents their participation in both the classroom and extracurricular activities.

*"I had a hard time participating in the training because the people I found here before were doing bad things to me. They beat me and made me do household chores." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a hearing impairment)*

Other forms of bullying include use of derogatory language, harassment, being demeaned, and suffering physical or verbal abuse from peers and community members.

*"At work, this has happened to me many times. Some see you, come up to you, and realise you have a disability; You ask them what you want, and they tell you that they prefer to go to the other agent. It's hard, but we accept it." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

## Discrimination and exclusion

Discrimination and exclusion based on disability is a pervasive form of stigma highlighted by many of the participants. In the interviews, young people reported discrimination and exclusion in education, employment, social spaces, and in daily life.

*"We see stigma every day. People are not the same, here you are marginalised and isolated, even where you live sometimes you are not even involved." (Female, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

## Drivers of stigma

Understanding the drivers of stigma towards persons with disabilities can highlight ways to address it, to better include young persons with disabilities in education and employment. Lack of awareness about disabilities continues to frame it as contagious, or punishment, attaching shame to persons with disabilities.

*"It's ignorance in my opinion. When you're aware of certain things, you don't behave a certain way. Those who live with you understand your situation more than those who don't live with you. And it is after their regrettable actions that they admit to having behaved badly." (Female, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

Several participants described the practice of families hiding their children with disabilities, while others described own experience of being excluded based on these fears. Participants with albinism detailed painful experiences related to spiritual myths.

*"You know, sometimes we [people with albinism], people need our organs: hair, fingers, arms, ears, even our clothes. There are some who need it because they are told that if you take the clothes of a person with albinism and make sacrifices, your wishes will be granted. It once happened to me that someone needed my hair. He asked about me in the village. Luckily people knew and warned me early on." (Female, 25-35 years old, person with albinism)*

Lack of awareness about persons with disabilities as being capable in education, work, and in contributing to the community plays a key role in limiting opportunities.

*"I think maybe it's a lack of knowledge, a certain ignorance as well. For me, it's a lack of respect for persons with disabilities. We tell ourselves that this person is in a wheelchair, he can't do anything on his own and we don't consider him." (Female, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

The data illustrated that negative attitudes and stigma can influence access to education and employment opportunities, exposure, and relationship-building within the wider community, and one's sense of confidence and self-acceptance. Therefore, the work of changing attitudes must begin from the family level and permeate up through the highest levels of society.



## Support structures

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Despite the intense stigma and discrimination persons with disabilities continue to face, the young people also shared encouraging examples of support from family, friends, teachers, and community members that made a significant impact in their life.

### Family

Family support was said to make a fundamental difference in the lives of many young people, most commonly by helping them achieve personal aspirations and giving them a sense of belonging.

*"They give me moral support, psychological support, and an extraordinary affection that helped me because when I was younger, when I went out in the street, I sometimes had people laugh at me and I would come home quite sad. But the family was always cheering me up. And that support hasn't changed." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

This participant demonstrates the powerful effect of family support on self-acceptance and resilience, even in the face of discrimination and stigma in the wider community.

*"In my case, my disability doesn't limit me too much because I was born into a family where they understood very early on that disability is not a bad fate and that we can live with. So, I was brought up in the sense that just because I'm disabled doesn't mean I have to be limited. My family has always taught me how to get by." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

While positive attitudes should ideally begin within the family, participants also emphasised the powerful impact of positive support and empowerment from friends and peers.

### Friends and peers

The data illustrated that support from friends and peers had a range of benefits including creating a sense of belonging, lessening impairment-related barriers, and reducing the impact of stigma.

*"I had great problems with my vision. If it wasn't for my friends, it would have been more complicated; I would wait for them to finish writing so I could borrow their notebooks and once I got home, I would copy." (Female, 25-35 years old, person with albinism)*

Peer support was also instrumental in filling the financial, emotional, and mental void left by unsupportive families, teachers, and employers. It is important to note that this support is not a replacement for equality, reasonable accommodations, and disability inclusion in society and institutions. However, the findings point toward the immense potential of peer support networks to improve awareness, attitudes, and quality of life for young persons with disabilities in Senegal.

## Belonging with other persons with disabilities

Many of the young persons with disabilities are actively involved with OPDs or associations linked to special schools like the INEFJA. The participants reported the positive impact of engaging with other persons with disabilities, encouraging one another, and increasing visibility within their communities.

*"If we take the example of the [detail removed] region, we can say that thanks to INEFJA, this population has a better understanding of visual impairments. This is not the case in other areas such as [detail removed] where blind people stay at home doing nothing. That is why I said earlier that we should multiply centres like INEFJA in other regions of Senegal." (Male, 18-24 years old, has a visual impairment)*

Participants working or volunteering with OPDs also described the positive impact of engaging with people who understand disability and the challenges they face, and building relationships that are encouraging and empowering for the community.

## Intersectionality

How, where, and in what ways young persons with disabilities are included or can participate in education and employment varies greatly based on factors like gender, location, severity and type of impairment, and other aspects of identity. It is important to examine this intersectionality to better understand and support their inclusion.

### Gender

Women with disabilities experience compounded discrimination as both disability and gender carry forms of marginalisation and stigma. The data highlighted that young women with disabilities face unique challenges such as gender-based violence, unique needs related to reproductive health, and socio-cultural expectations that differ based on gender.

In Senegal, it is common for women to live with their husband's family and uphold traditional gender roles around domestic work. Several young women with disabilities described discrimination, isolation, and hurtful assumptions from their husband's family members because of their disability.

*"Even when you get married in a house, the other family members think you don't know how to cook. They say, 'Does the albino know how to cook?'" (Female, 25-35 years old, person with albinism)*

Young women also described unique challenges around reproductive health issues, which continue to be a taboo subject that is difficult to discuss with partners or family.

*"As a married woman living in the in-laws' house, it's sometimes a bit complicated for me, regarding sex and treatments that hurt. And it's not always that you're able to tell your husband about it." (Female, 25-35 years old, person with albinism)*

Participants also described exclusion from family and community due to stigma around pregnancy and divorce, the burden of which often falls on women rather than their male partners. This is compounded by harmful ideas that women with disabilities should not have children.

*"My family excluded me because I got divorced and on top of that I had a child now."  
(Female, 25-35 years old, has a psychosocial impairment)*

Sexual and gender-based violence is also a major concern for young women with disabilities and can be perpetrated by family, community members, or those in positions of authority. The risk of gender-based violence varies by impairment and other factors, as women with disabilities face unique vulnerabilities. The interview data included evidence of sexual violence experienced by a woman with a psychosocial impairment perpetrated by a family member.

Gender-based violence and sexual abuse is a recurring theme across all seven countries included in this study. The data reflects the need for significant efforts around the understanding, prevention, and response to sexual and gender-based violence for women with disabilities.

## Type of impairment

The type and severity of impairment can impact a young person's experiences. Those with more severe impairments experience disproportionate discrimination, and more barriers to participation in education and work. Moreover, the visibility of a person's impairment can influence how they are perceived and treated by the community.

*"It is only after seeing the certificate from my hearing test and the receipt for the amount of the device that was prescribed to me that they come to understand that I have a disability. But if I show up to them without papers, they don't accept my disability." (Female, 25-35 years old, has a hearing impairment)*

Young people with invisible impairments described the burden of constantly proving their disability to peers, teachers, and employers. On top of navigating accessibility challenges and inhospitable environments, the young people were also tasked with convincing others of their need for support.

*"In high school, when I finished first or in the top five of the class, some students would make fun of me by telling me that I was pretending to have a disability because if I did, I wouldn't make it that well in school." (Female, 25-35 years old, has a hearing impairment)*

The visibility of impairments is complex with specific difficulties and forms of stigma attached. For some young people, such as those with albinism, the visibility of their impairment can cause increased stigma and negative attention. For others, the lack of visibility adds an additional burden around securing medical documentation to prove their need for support and unique experiences of discrimination.

## Voice and agency

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The extent of voice and agency among the young people varied with the type and severity of impairment, household factors, and family dynamics. Participants reported being forced to attend schools that were not their first choice, working jobs out of obligation or necessity rather than free will, and restrictions from parents around participation, job seeking, and routine life decisions. Many of the young people expressed immense frustration with feeling ignored by family, community, and society.

*"No, they don't even consider us, because we are not present in the decision-making bodies. I understood it when I started to go to certain bodies, you will never see their decisions take into account our situation. It is up to us to make our advocacy." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

Despite these challenges, there were several examples of young persons with disabilities playing crucial advocacy and leadership roles in OPDs, associations, or local politics, which not only developed their self-belief in their voice and agency, but also made significant contributions to their communities.

*"There's a lot going on in the country and persons with disabilities aren't there. For example, at the town hall of [detail removed], I had to be a municipal councillor for the town hall to be equipped with ramps, and yet I am not the only one to access the town hall. But when I arrived, that was the first point I made. A disabled person may one day be a minister, a member of parliament or whatever." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

### Amina

Amina is a 28-year-old woman with a physical impairment as a result of childhood polio. Amina is married and a mother of three young boys. After acquiring her disability at the age of nine, Amina enrolled in a special school for students with physical impairments and later completed a training course in computer science. She has volunteered with various OPDs and was appointed as president of the disabled women's association. Amina is passionate about advocacy and raising awareness, particularly for vulnerable children with disabilities in Senegal. While she is passionate about creating a change, she says that a lack of financial resources is the central barrier to achieving her goals. Amina believes that more attention needs to be paid to providing scholarships for students with disabilities, as well as combating negative teaching practices, discrimination, and isolation of children with disabilities in the home. In five years, she hopes to be involved in disability activism at the international level and advocate for better accessibility, inclusion, and living conditions for persons with disabilities.

Many young people expressed frustration over the lack of autonomy, independence, and decision-making power experienced in their daily lives. One visually impaired participant reiterated the struggle for young persons with disabilities trying to make independent decisions about their education and career, as well as facing negative attitudes and assumptions about their capability.

*"Many of our classmates have missed out on schooling. As a result, they are forced to stay at home and do nothing until adulthood, because they do not know that a person with a visual impairment can study like others. This can be seen as a lack of political will on the part of the state. They had to raise awareness among the population at INEFJA so that it could help the visually impaired to access not only education, but also employment." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

While it was encouraging to see some positive examples of young persons with disabilities exercising their voice and agency, it seems closely linked to their ability to get an education, work, and earn an income. This indicates that a focus on their economic empowerment is key to promoting their agency, voice, and participation in society.

*"Sometimes I go out and I see young people who tell me that it's because of me that they started as a street vendor. If there had been this kind of communication, if it had been much more aggressive and frequent, I think that the inclusion of disabled people in social, professional and even sporting life would have been much faster and more radical. But the pace is quite slow and we need to work on it, a lot even." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

Many of the participants work hard to serve as an example for other young persons with disabilities, illustrating the importance of representation and positive role models within the disabled community.



Source: Benaissa S/ILO

## Aspirations and opportunities

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The data indicated a gap between young people's aspirations and opportunities available to them. Most participants described wanting more training opportunities and education, as well as needing funding as start-up capital to expand their work. Notably, both are linked to financial challenges. While this may be a common barrier to the nondisabled population too, it is likely to be particularly challenging for persons with disabilities who face extra costs of disability and are on average poorer.

*"I'm counting on my job as an eyewear optician to get back into my business and be able to be independent. I intend to relaunch the business I know, i.e. optician, eyewear and I would like to set up my own business." (Female, 18-24 years old, has a psychosocial impairment)*

There was a strong preference for establishing their own businesses. The analysis indicated that this may be tied to a desire to be independent after having relied on family or difficult employers and peers. Self-employment can also mitigate negative assumptions around capability the young people face while navigating the job-seeking process.

*"Maybe it's a lack of information and ignorance because in Senegal the first thing you think when you see a disabled person is the precepts of the 'marabout' [witch doctor] They're set up on that. They don't think that disabled people can do anything else, and yet they are capable of doing things that you yourself couldn't do." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

Aspirations varied greatly, ranging from wanting to be doctors, counsellors, lawyers, and small business-owners. Those who had experienced exclusion had goals to simply be given an opportunity to prove themselves.

*"Currently, since I don't have opportunities to strengthen my computer skills, I dream of having my doctorate in law and being a good lawyer." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a visual impairment)*

Many participants also expressed a desire to engage in advocacy, policy, and activism to improve the situation of persons with disabilities in Senegal.

*"I am the vice-president of the association. At the same time, I am a city councillor. I have proclaimed myself a representative of vulnerable groups, not to mention persons with disabilities, because we are forgotten about many things. I am fighting for everything we are entitled to." (Male, 25-35 years old, has a physical impairment)*

It was clear that young persons with disabilities have the passion and potential to achieve their aspirations; however, this requires substantial societal change. With increased support, awareness, and opportunities, these young people are more likely to live up to their potential, and fulfil their aspirations.

## Recommendations

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This study has built on findings from past phases of this research, highlighting several areas for change to promote inclusive education and employment for young persons with disabilities in Senegal. These include:

### Improving access to education and vocational training

- Build the insitutional capacity of school to foster better inclusion for individuals with a diverse range of impairments by investing in human resources, inclusive learning tools, assistive technology, and structural accessibility requirements.
- Improve advocacy and awareness of government support and programmes for young persons with disabilities to ensure funding reaches and benefits those who need it.
- Train teachers and school directors to identify children with disabilities, create disability-inclusive environments, and sensitise staff to the unique needs of students with disabilities.
- Raise awareness among students on disability to reduce bullying, violence, and stigma.
- Create peer-to-peer support groups, both specifically for disabled students and integrated groups, to cultivate positive connections and belonging.
- Invest more resources in mental health support, counselling, and psychiatry services in schools to improve stress, anxiety, and other challenges among students with disabilities.

### Improving access to employment

- Provide opportunities to gain post-secondary skills for the labour market by strengthening the capacity of vocational and technical training institutions and making them more inclusive and accessible.
- Strengthen policy implementation by developing monitoring frameworks to inform and enforce inclusive employment policies.
- Implement policies and programmes to support young persons with disabilities in the agriculture and manufacturing sectors and ensure they are inclusive.
- Increase access to digital skills for young persons with disabilities to improve their opportunities in formal and self-employment.
- Improve stakeholder engagement to address employment needs of young persons with disabilities and provide avenues for experiential learning.
- Identify specific gaps in skills and competencies of young persons with disabilities and improve access to opportunities to acquire and develop these skills through apprenticeships and training.
- Improve coordination between schools, training centres, and employers to ensure accountability and increase successful transitions into employment.
- Provide an 'integration subsidy' to disabled people who are involved in entrepreneurship to increase opportunities for self-employment and cooperative business among persons with disabilities.

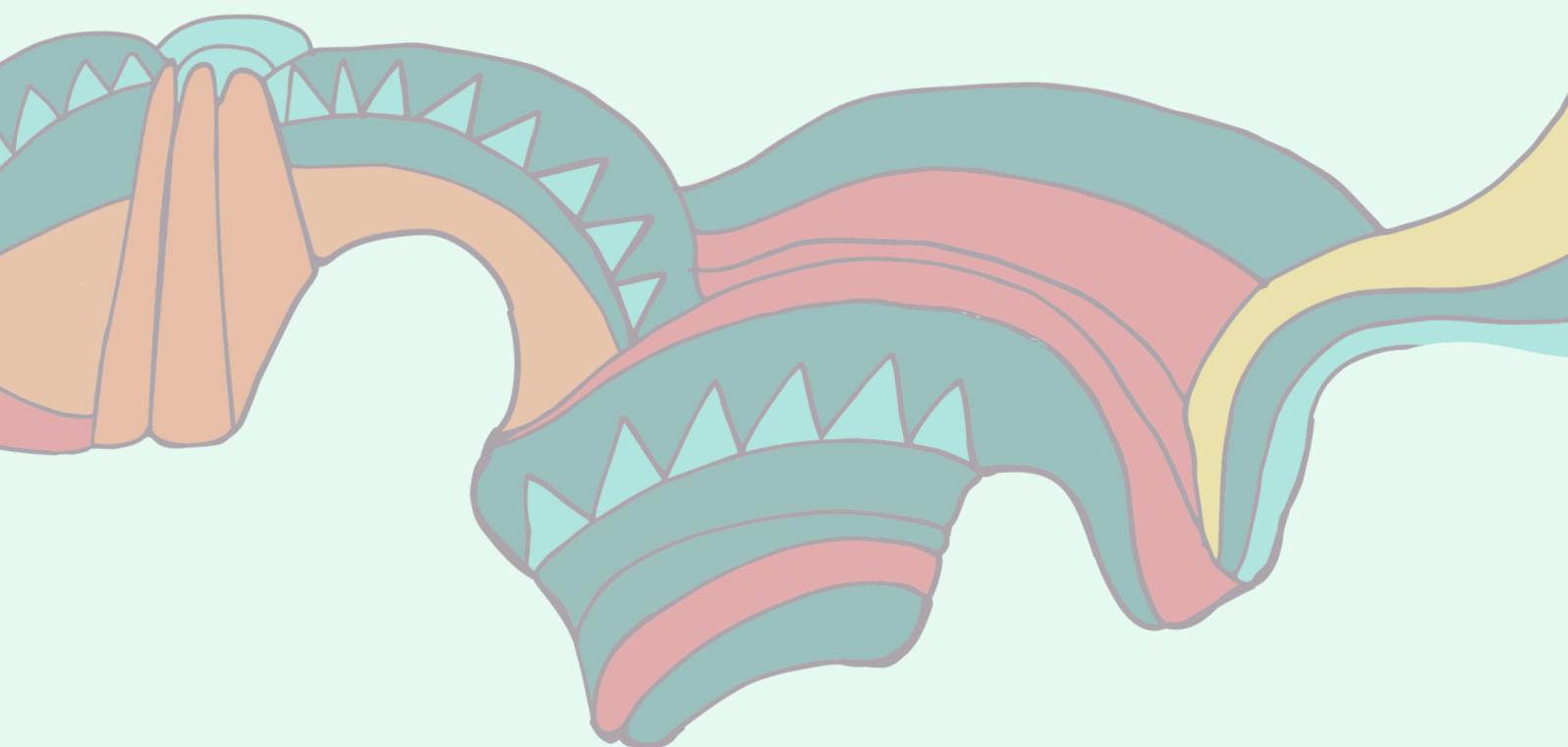
### For general programmes and policies

- Advocate for disability inclusion to be mainstreamed in all programmes targeting the education and employment of young people.
- Develop tools and enforcement mechanisms to assess, measure, and improve disability inclusion in policy and programmes.
- Document and showcase successful initiatives for and by persons with disabilities to instill societal confidence, combat stigma, and incentivise further action.

- Strengthen child protection mechanisms to address sexual violence, forced labour, and domestic abuse of young persons with disabilities, particularly for those most vulnerable and isolated.
- Increase financial support for families of young persons with disabilities to offset the economic burden of disability, education and transport costs, and improve access to assistive devices.
- Improve opportunities for young persons with disabilities to access financial support for skills trainings, the job seeking process, and start-up capital for small businesses.
- Create stronger mechanisms for the implementation and enforcement of the 15 percent employment policy, and critically assess the limitations, gaps, and aims of the policy.

### **For researchers**

- Improve coverage and utilisation of up-to-date disability-disaggregated data in both rural and urban settings to better understand the needs, risks, and challenges faced by young persons with disabilities in respect of education and employment in Senegal.
- Investigate underlying factors related to health and quality of life for young persons with disabilities that may hinder their access and utilisation of education and employment opportunities.
- Explore, test, and evaluate potential programmes and interventions to address the priority information gaps, needs, and risks identified in existing literature to improve quality of life and disability rights Senegal.
- Document the process of implementation of all initiatives aimed at promoting and strengthening the inclusion of disabled people in education and employment in all regions of Senegal.
- Identify promising and best practices for deconstructing prejudice, stigma, and discrimination and develop interventions to address negative attitudes toward persons with disabilities.
- Include researchers with disabilities in the research process to ensure it is aligned with the needs, priorities, contexts, and lived experience of persons with disabilities in Senegal.
- Draw on existing and new research to develop effective training curriculum and resources to strengthen inclusive policies and programmes.



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## Appendix: Methodology

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This report is based on in-depth qualitative interviews with 30 young men and women with disabilities to explore lived experiences around education and employment. For education, we collected data from youth currently in education (secondary, tertiary, vocational), those who were educated but not working, and those not in education and not working. For employment, the research focus was the agriculture sector and digital sector, selected in discussion with the Mastercard Foundation.

### Qualitative data collection

The interviews were conducted by three research assistants (Diatou Sonko, Mouhamed Lamine Touré, Talla Niasse), among whom one was a young person with disabilities. They were led by Salif Camara, Field and Survey Specialist (FSS) at GRAG, who monitored data quality and progress. Prior to data collection, the research team participated in training workshops (jointly with other country teams) facilitated by LSHTM that covered ethical protocols, interview techniques, maintaining data quality, and in-depth discussion of topic guides. Draft topic guides were pilot-tested, and research teams participated in feedback workshops after conducting at least one pilot interview. Topic guides for the interviews were developed in discussion with the broader project team, Mastercard Foundation and Youth Advisory Groups comprising youth with disabilities based in Uganda and Ghana. Interviews were conducted in Ouolof and French between September to December 2022.

Ethical approvals for the study were obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the National Ethics Committee/Comité National d’Ethique pour la Recherche en Santé au Sénégal (CNERES). All participants were provided with information about the study and written informed consent was obtained before the interview. Interviews lasted between 20-90 minutes. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and were audio-recorded after informed consent was given by the participant. Interview recordings were transcribed in French by Diatou Sonko, Mouhamed Lamine Touré, Talla Niasse, Salif Camara, and translated into English by the GRAG Team for deep analysis.

After data collection and transcription, the researchers participated in a data analysis workshop held in Uganda with other East African country teams to discuss approaches to coding and analysis. A coding scheme and codebook were developed based on the study objectives and emerging themes. Transcripts were coded using the Atlas.ti software and analysed thematically.

Participants were identified in collaboration with local disabled persons organisations (DPOs) in Dakar and through snowball sampling. The following table below provides a breakdown of participant characteristics.

Table 1. Breakdown of participant characteristics

		Male	Female
<b>Age</b>	15-17 years	0	0
	18-24 years	4	6
	25-35 years	11	9
<b>Impairment type</b> (Note: Some participants had multiple impairments, therefore these totals are different from actual total)	Physical	2	3
	Visual	2	3
	Hearing	4	1
	Psychosocial	3	2
	Intellectual	2	3
	Albinism	2	3
<b>Education</b>	Currently in education	5	6
	Educated but not working	1	3
	Not in education, not working	0	0
<b>Employment</b>	Working in Agriculture	2	1
	Working in Digital	3	1
	Working in other sectors	4	4
<b>Location</b>	Urban	11	10
	Rural	4	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>



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