Evidence-based youth employment policy in Senegal: Insights from the CAIPD

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Boosting youth employment is a priority for Senegal's development—and getting it right is crucial in the context of rapid demographic change. Each year, large numbers of young Senegalese enter the labour market with limited access to skills and decent jobs. Expanding access to high-quality vocational education and training programmes is essential to translate demographic growth into economic opportunity. Yet, effective action requires more than broad commitments. Robust evidence is needed to identify where youth exclusion is most severe and which training interventions deliver results. This brief highlights the work of the CAIPD (*Cellule d'Analyse d'Impact des Politiques de Développement*), funded by the Directorate for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs. CAIPD has combined local diagnostics, climate foresight and policy experimentation to strengthen youth employment outcomes.

Why targeting youth matters!

Reducing the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) has long been a central objective of Luxembourg's cooperation policy in Senegal. Investing in the human capital of young people is a social priority and a macroeconomic imperative, particularly in the context of profound demographic change. Like many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Senegal is experiencing a rapid increase in its working-age population along with declining fertility and mortality rates. This youth bulge is often described as a 'double-edged sword'. If young people are equipped with right skills and successfully integrated into the labour market, it generates a demographic dividend and drives economic growth. Conversely, if they face high unemployment, limited opportunities and persistent poverty, it can fuel social unrest and political instability, ultimately constraining long-term development prospects.

In this context, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) can play a central role—provided certain conditions are met (Silva-Vargas 2023). A growing body of evidence shows that well-designed vocational training increases individual productivity, improves employment prospects, and stimulates economic activity. The effectiveness of TVET critically depends on the quality of its implementation, certification, and complementary support such as mentoring and job placement. Our exploratory studies on Senegal suggest that, although access to TVET remains challenging, it leads to higher labour market participation—especially for women—and reduces informal employment (Cömertpay & Tenikue 2023). These results support Luxembourg's strategic focus on skills development.

However, resources are inevitably limited. Investing in every local area and type of training is neither feasible nor efficient. Improving the spatial targeting of interventions was therefore identified as priority of cooperation programme between Luxembourg and its partner countries. This requires answering a series of practical, interrelated questions: Which investments should be prioritised? Where are the needs most pressing? What types of training are most relevant, given the local economic structures, social characteristics, and current and future environmental constraints? Answering these questions requires good data, rigorous analyses, and tools that translate evidence into operational guidance.

Over the past three years, the CAIPD has been addressing these specific challenges in Senegal. It has developed a range of analytical tools designed to inform evidence-based, spatially targeted development policies, with a particular focus on youth employment and training. This approach combines the production of original data, new quantitative tools, and close collaboration with national institutions, ensuring analytical rigour and policy relevance. This policy brief demonstrates how the right tools and thorough analysis can help decision-makers transition from general policy goals to targeted interventions for greater impact.

Building the evidence base

The first and most important step in improving the effectiveness of cooperation policies was to establish a clear, detailed, and operational picture of NEET youth and TVET infrastructure across Senegal. Until recently, information on this group was often only available at a highly aggregated level, limiting its usefulness for strategic planning and day-to-day decision-making. Without granular data, it was difficult to identify priority areas, adapt interventions to local conditions or allocate resources where they are needed most. Providing this evidence base is essential to move from broad commitments to action.

Measuring NEETs at the sub-national level

Using data from the Enquête Nationale Emploi, conducted by the Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Démographie (ANSD), CAIPD contributed to expanding data coverage and generated new NEET estimates at subnational levels—department and, for the first time, departments—substantially improving analytical precision. As Figure 1 shows, there are significant departmental differences in the proportion of young people aged 15–29 who are NEET—hereafter referred to as the NEET rate. The highest NEET rates (above 45%) are concentrated in region of Matam, which stands out as the region most severely affected. Very high NEET rates (above 45%) are also observed in departments such as Podor (Saint-Louis region), Kébémer (Louga region), and Foundiougne (Fatick region). In contrast, the lowest NEET rates (between 20% and 30%) are found in departments such as Dakar (Dakar Region) and Thiès (Thiès Region). These urban centres are characterised by stronger labour markets, greater access to educational and training institutions, and more diverse economic opportunities.

Overall, the map highlights a clear east–west divide, with higher NEET rates concentrated in the northeastern and southeastern regions. In contrast, the western coastal corridor performs comparatively better. As discussed below, distinguishing between NEET rates and the absolute number of NEET youth reveals very different spatial patterns, with implications for targeted policies. These regional imbalances emphasise the need for spatially targeted youth employment and TVET policies.

and the supply of training. Regions with high NEET rates, particularly in eastern and southeastern Senegal as well as in parts of Casamance, remain significantly underserved, thus strengthening the case for geographically targeted TVET investments. Beyond descriptive mapping, georeferenced data also enables the quantification of supply-side constraints, such as distance to the nearest training centre. This is especially important for explaining limited TVET participation in rural and remote areas.

Figure 1 — NEET Rates by Department and Spatial Distribution of TVET Centres, 2024
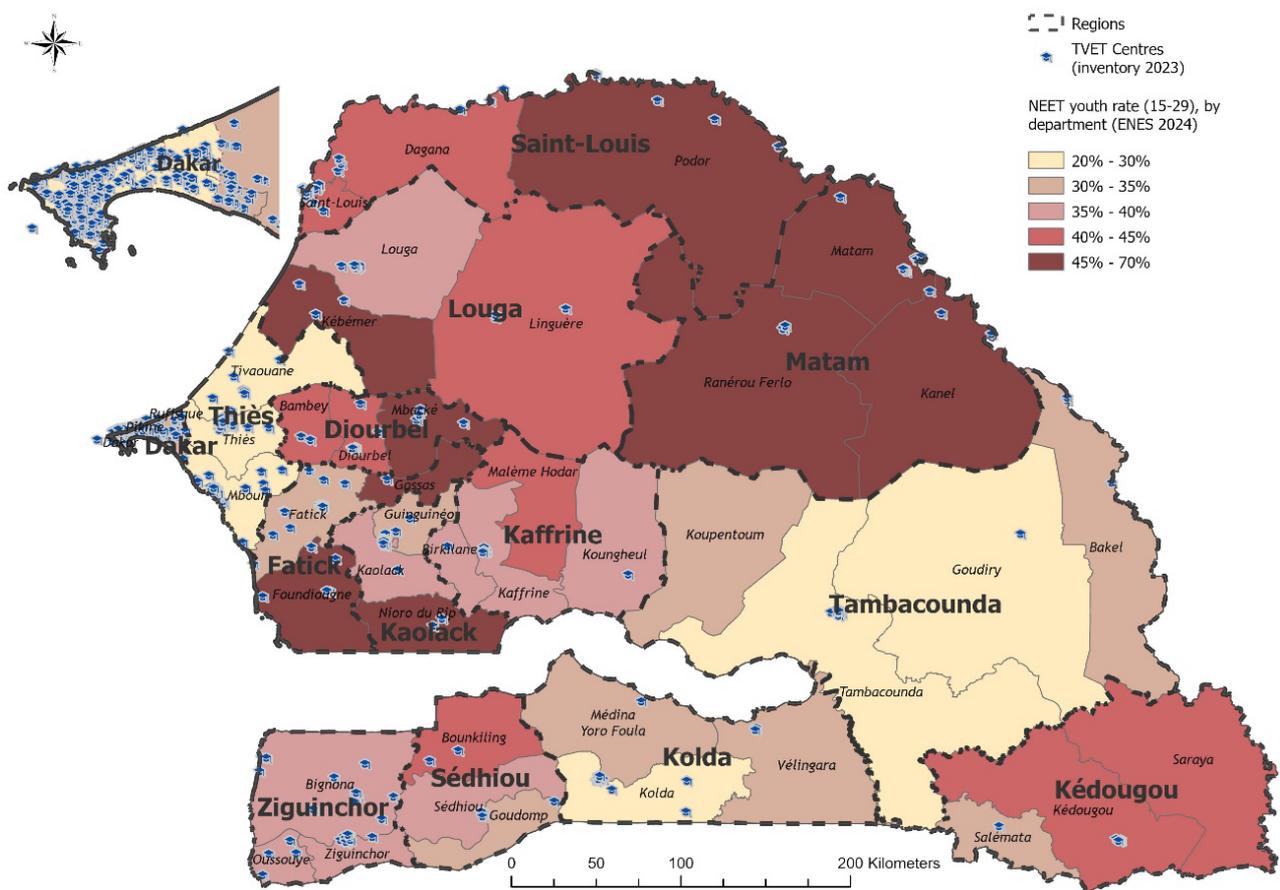
Mapping TVET infrastructure

In collaboration with ANSD, we also constructed a georeferenced map of Senegal's TVET infrastructure. Figure 1 also provides a detailed picture of the spatial distribution of training opportunities and highlights pronounced geographical inequalities in access. When NEET prevalence is overl with the distribution of TVET centres, clear and persistent spatial mismatches emerge between areas of youth exclusion

From regional patterns to municipal diagnostics

Policy diagnostics become more precise and policy-relevant when based on detailed local data. Understanding how youth exclusion manifests itself in different local contexts requires more detailed, municipal-level indicators. It is crucial for policymakers to move from regional averages to municipal evidence, as this aligns the scale of analysis with the level at which most interventions are designed and implemented. This enables more targeted

and contextually appropriate responses. To this end, we have constructed a municipal-level proxy for NEET using data from the 2023 population census. Due to data limitations, however, this proxy captures only the 'NEE' component (not in employment or education), as the census does not identify young people currently enrolled in vocational training. While this approach enables municipal-level analysis, an important advantage, it leads to a systematic overestimation of NEET rates, including young people in training.[1]

We used the proxy to construct two complementary indicators, which are illustrated in Figure 2. The first indicator shows the absolute number of NEET youth (aged 15–29) in each municipality (top panel of Figure 2). As expected, the highest concentrations occur in large, densely populated urban areas, most notably Dakar and its metropolitan region. Dakar alone has a population of around 4 million—approximately one-fifth of the national total—and consequently has a high number of NEET youth. Other urban centres, including Thiès, Diourbel (home to Touba) and parts of Kaolack, also feature prominently, reflecting their demographic weight and their roles as economic and internal migration hubs. In these municipalities, tens of thousands of young people may be classified as NEET, even when local NEET rates remain relatively moderate compared to the national average.

NEET rates and counts vary widely across regions and municipalities

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The second indicator shows the municipal NEET rate (bottom panel of Figure 2). As with the regional indicator, this shifts the focus from absolute numbers to the intensity of youth exclusion, independent of population size. This reveals a strikingly different spatial pattern, in line with Figure 1. High NEET rates are concentrated in eastern and southeastern Senegal, particularly in the regions of Matam, Tambacounda and Kédougou, as well as in several municipalities in Casamance, including Ziguinchor, Sédhiou and parts of Kolda. In some municipalities, NEET rates often exceed 60%, sometimes reaching 70–85%, despite their small populations. These figures suggest deep and persistent

structural issues, such as limited access to education and vocational training, weak or fragmented local labour markets, and geographical isolation. In contrast, Dakar and other major urban centres generally have lower NEET rates—often below 45%—despite having large absolute numbers of NEET youth.
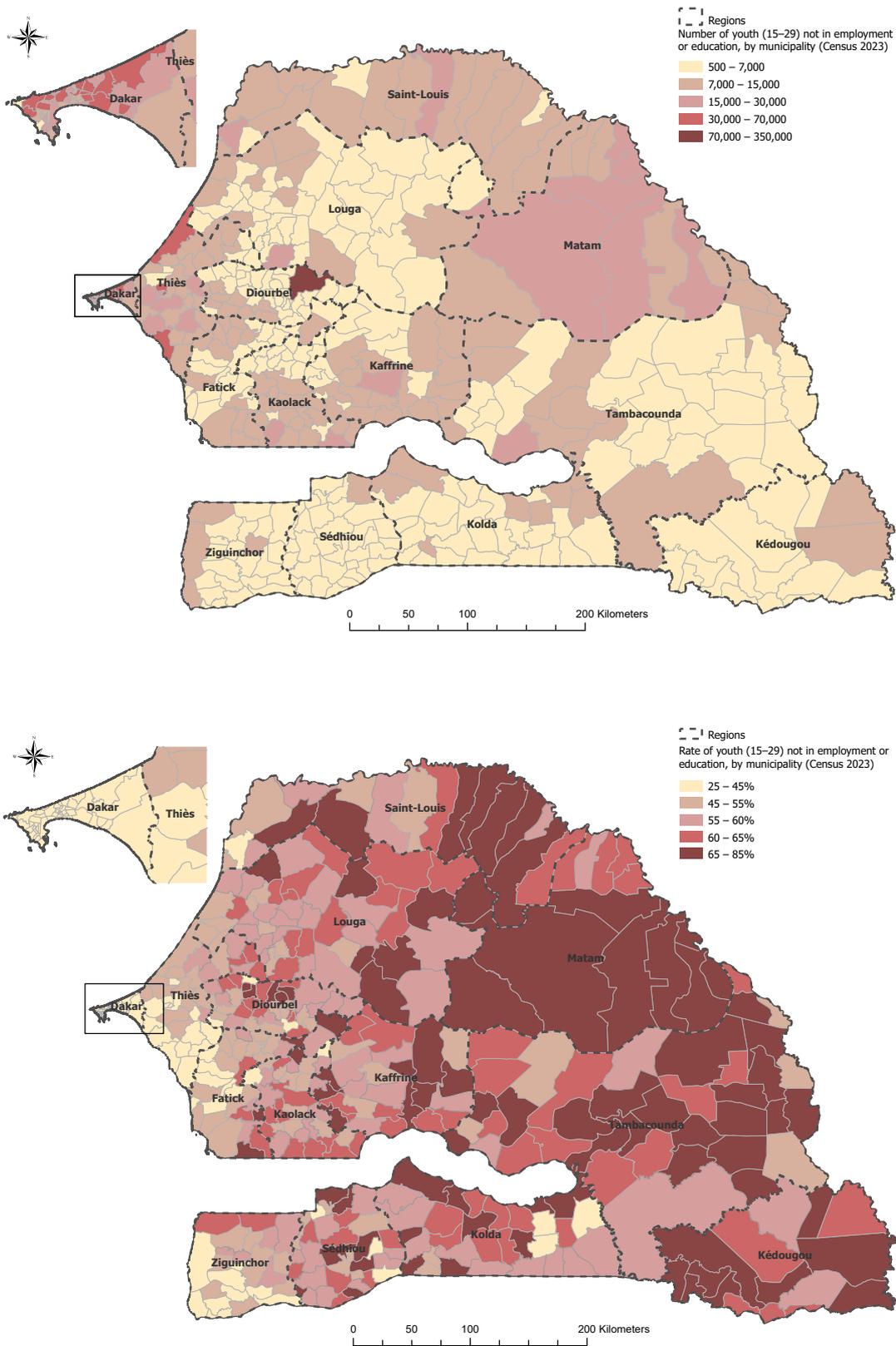
Spatial targeting of TVET: a decision-support tool

Together, the two panels of Figure 2 provide complementary insights for policy design. They show that municipalities with the largest NEET populations are not necessarily those experiencing the most severe forms of relative exclusion. This distinction highlights an unavoidable policy trade-off with direct implications for strategic policy choices and resource allocation. In order to reach the largest possible number of NEETs, interventions should target well-known urban centres, where population density and implementation capacity are often higher. However, if the goal is to address the most severe and long-standing forms of youth exclusion, efforts should focus on remote regions and smaller municipalities, where NEET rates are highest but income levels and institutional capacity are typically lower. In practice, an effective cooperation strategy will likely require a balanced combination of both approaches, reflecting trade-offs between efficiency, equity and regional development objectives.

To help identify remote places where youth exclusion is severe, the CAIPD has developed analytical tools that transform granular data into practical decision-support resources. These tools go beyond the simple measurement of youth inactivity, situating NEET patterns within their territorial context. In collaboration with ANSD, we have created a comprehensive open municipal dashboard that identifies areas of severe youth vulnerability and persistent training supply gaps. Hosted on the ANSD open-access platform, the dashboard compiles over 150 indicators describing local conditions, including demographics, education, infrastructure, public services, and economic activity across all municipalities in 2023 (see https://macommune.ansd.sn). It provides a shared empirical foundation for evidence-based policy

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1 Census data on past training participation provides an upper estimate of this bias, which is around 11% nationally, with significant regional variation. The overestimation is smaller in Matam and larger in Dakar, reflecting differences in access to TVET participation patterns.

Figure 2 — Number (top panel) and proportion (bottom panel) of NEETs by municipality in 2023

Regions
Number of youth (15–29) not in employment or education, by municipality (Census 2023)

- 500 – 7,000
- 7,000 – 15,000
- 15,000 – 30,000
- 30,000 – 70,000
- 70,000 – 350,000

Regions
Rate of youth (15–29) not in employment or education, by municipality (Census 2023)

- 25 – 45%
- 45 – 55%
- 55 – 60%
- 60 – 65%
- 65 – 85%

Note: Data are obtained from the 2023 ANSD Census and processed by the authors.

dialogue and programme design. This collaboration has also strengthened national capacity in data management and applied policy analysis.

Building on this dashboard, the CAIPD developed a *Youth Vulnerability Index* that combines measures of youth exclusion with indicators of local training and job opportunities. The index integrates three key dimensions: (i) the local NEET rate, (ii) distance to the nearest vocational training centre, and (iii) the prevalence of local informal employment. Together, these factors capture the structural barriers young people face in accessing skills and decent work, providing policymakers with a concise and actionable measure of territorial disadvantage. Where informal employment is prevalent and training centres are distant, incentives and opportunities to invest in skills are limited. The focus therefore shifts from individual disadvantages to territorial constraints, which reinforces the case for the expansion of TVET to be targeted at specific locations.

Figure 3 illustrates this vulnerability index at a municipal level. A clear pattern emerges. Vulnerability is concentrated in eastern and southeastern Senegal, particularly in the municipalities of Tambacounda, Kédougou and Matam, as well as in parts of Casamance and along the southern border. These municipalities have limited training infrastructure, high informality, and restricted economic opportunities. By contrast, municipalities in western Senegal, particularly those around Dakar and along the coastal corridor, demonstrate lower vulnerability, reflecting stronger labour markets and better access to TVET.

Municipal diagnostics reveal structural barriers beyond headline NEET rates.

Crucially, the map also reveals areas of high vulnerability within regions that perform better overall. Effective TVET policy thus requires precise, municipality-level targeting. The youth vulnerability index consolidates multiple dimensions of disadvantage into a single transparent, policy-relevant indicator that informs intervention design directly. It enables decision-makers to identify municipalities where young people face the most severe accumulated barriers, and those where TVET investments are likely to be most effective. Beyond its diagnostic value, the index provides concrete operational guidance. It helps to identify priority locations for new vocational training centres, pinpoint

existing facilities that require expansion as well as municipalities where TVET investments should be combined with complementary measures, such as support for formal employment or mobility assistance.

Beyond where to invest: what skills for which futures?

Spatial targeting is a necessary starting point—but it is not sufficient. To generate lasting employment gains, youth policies must consider not only where training is delivered, but also the skills taught and the economic sectors they prepare participants for. Even well-targeted programmes can underperform if the content of the training is not aligned with local labour markets. Common sense suggests that skill requirements differ significantly depending on the context (urban or rural), average schooling levels, and local economic structure.

In urban areas, where education levels are higher and labour markets are more diverse, demand tends to focus on specialised, occupation-specific skills. Vocational training in sectors such as services, construction, mechanics, transport and digital services and energy offers strong returns. In such environments, certified TVET plays a vital role in bridging the gap between education and employment, particularly for young people who have completed primary or secondary education but are struggling to enter the labour market. Rural areas face different constraints. Educational attainment is often lower, labour markets are smaller and more informal, and economic opportunities depend heavily on natural resources. Effective training in these areas must therefore combine upgrading of foundational skills—literacy, numeracy, and basic technical competencies—with the development of locally relevant applied skills. Climate-resilient agriculture, agri-food processing, artisanal production and small-scale entrepreneurship are particularly important, especially when they are linked to local value chains and supported by access to resources, credit and markets.

The policy lesson is clear: one-size-fits-all training strategies are unlikely to succeed. Skills policies must be adapted to local realities and evolving economic conditions. This need for differentiation is even more urgent in the context of climate change, which is already reshaping economic opportunities across Senegal. For many young people in rural areas, sustainable self-employment and resilience in the face of

Figure 3 — Municipal youth vulnerability as measured by the index
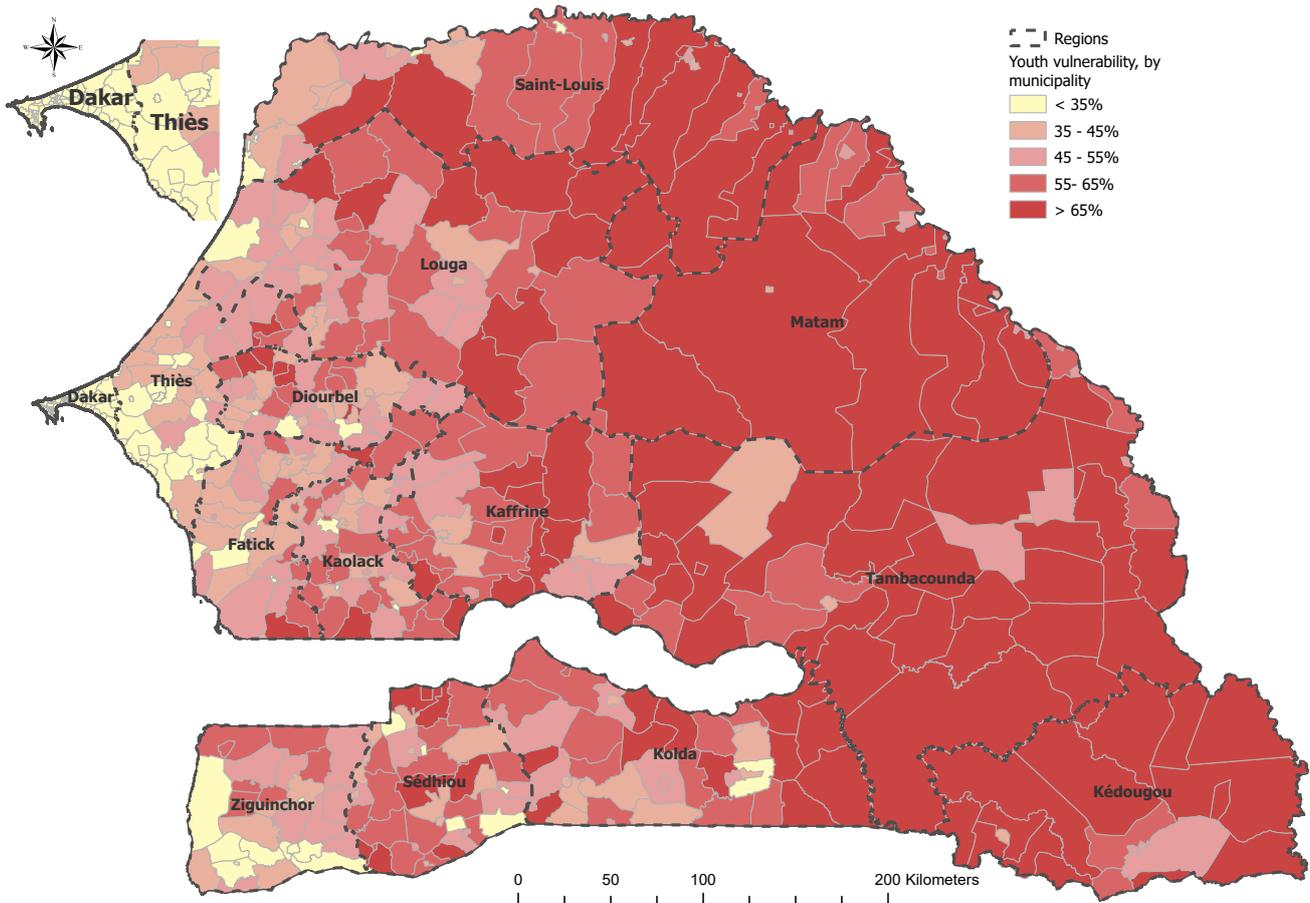
Note. Map based on authors' own computation using data from the 2023 Census.

increasing environmental risk are more important than traditional wage employment (Gubert and Blanchard 2024; Burzynski 2024).
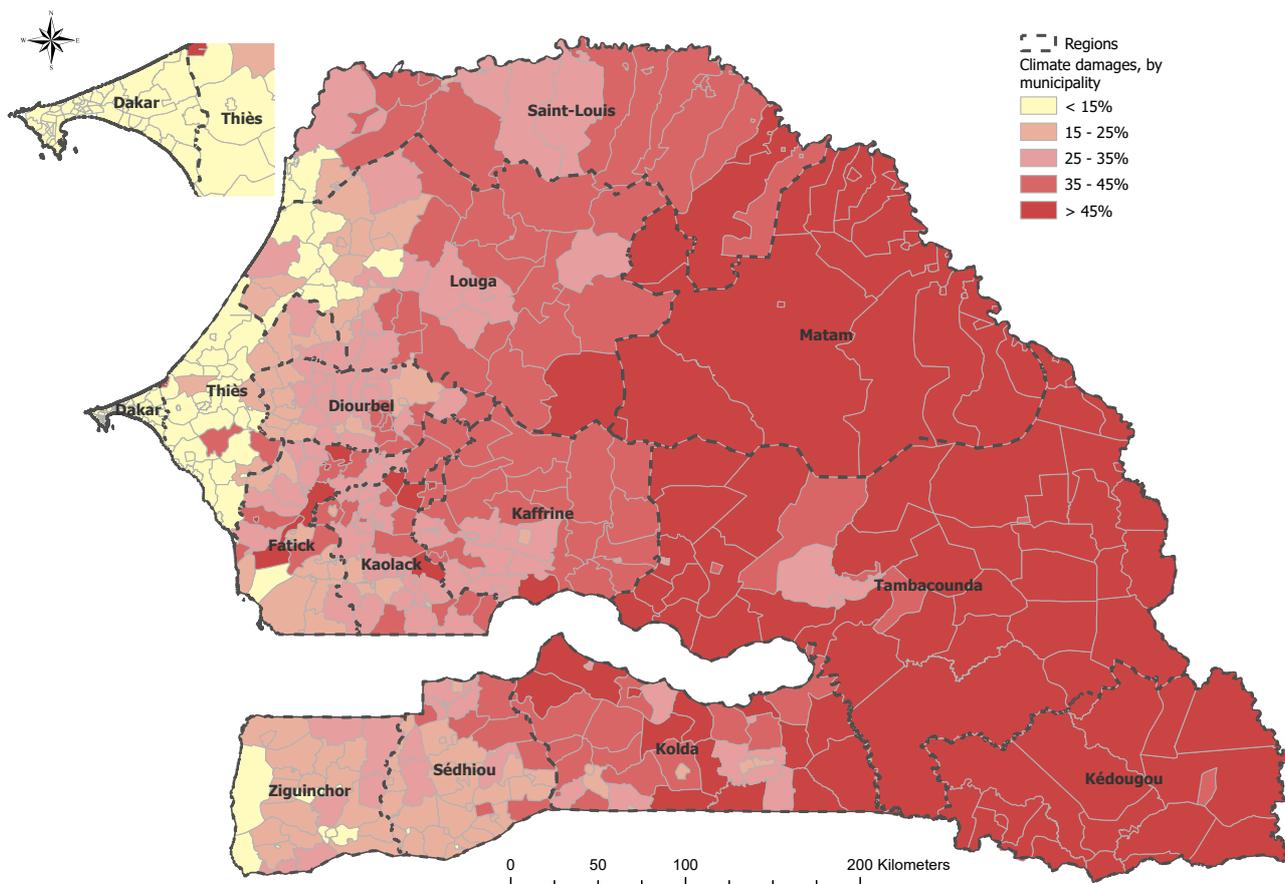
Building a climate damage dashboard

To support climate-informed policy design, the CAIPD contributed to the development of the CliC:ME dashboard (see https://clicme.liser.lu). This open-access, interactive platform provides forward-looking, spatially detailed projections of the socio-economic impacts of climate change. Rather than presenting abstract global scenarios, CliC:ME translates official climate projections into concrete indicators at the level of municipalities that can be used directly for policy planning and investment decisions.

The dashboard estimates the economic damage associated with rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns and extreme weather events, while also assessing the implications for inequality, poverty and human mobility. Through intuitive maps and visualisations, it displays the projected impact on economic output, income distribution, poverty rates and climate-induced migration at a municipal level.

By identifying areas most likely to experience severe negative effects, such as declining agricultural productivity, increased exposure to climate shocks, and rising out-migration pressures, the dashboard makes future risks visible today. This enables policymakers to anticipate and mitigate climate-related vulnerabilities rather than responding to them after losses have occurred.

Figure 4 — Municipal climate vulnerability (predicted GDP per capita loss in 2050)

Note. Map based on authors' own computation using the CliC:ME dashboard.

Anticipating climate damages

CliC:ME projections reveal significant reductions in average income per capita in Senegal by 2050, with losses intensifying in the following decades. These impacts arise from multiple, overlapping climate pressures—including rising average temperatures, more frequent and intense heatwaves, sea-level rise, flooding and, most critically, recurrent droughts during key growing and harvesting seasons. Even after accounting for household adaptation strategies, including internal and international migration, significant economic losses persist in many parts of the country.

Again, Figure 4 reveals a pronounced east–west divide in the projected impacts. The eastern and southeastern regions, particularly Tambacounda, Kédougou and Matam, face the greatest income losses, often exceeding 40–50% of real GDP per capita. These areas rely heavily on agriculture and livelihoods based on natural

resources, making them especially vulnerable as climate change disrupts existing production systems. In contrast, western and coastal regions, including much of the Dakar corridor, experience more moderate losses due to more diversified economies and lower exposure. Nevertheless, areas of high vulnerability also emerge in parts of Casamance and central Senegal.

These findings have direct implications for youth employment policy. In municipalities facing severe climate-related losses, training strategies must explicitly promote adaptation and resilience. This involves promoting climate-resilient agricultural practices, sustainable land and water management, renewable energy and diverse income-generating activities. In these contexts, TVET programmes must equip young people for a rapidly changing economy, not just today's.

Climate damages and youth vulnerabilities

Figure 5 reveals a striking correlation between areas where young people are highly vulnerable today, and areas projected to experience significant income losses due to climate change by 2050. Each bubble represents a municipality where young people already encounter significant obstacles in terms of employment, education and training—precisely the areas that are expected to experience the most severe climate-related economic disruption. Therefore, climate change is likely to exacerbate existing disadvantages, deepening territorial inequalities and further limiting opportunities for vulnerable young people.


Climate exposure overlaps with youth vulnerability in eastern and southeastern Senegal.

The graph also conveys important information about scale. Bubble size reflects the current number of NEET youth in each municipality, while diamonds indicate regional capitals. While regional capitals have larger NEET populations in absolute terms, municipalities facing the most severe combined challenges are often small, remote settlements located in the top right-hand corner of the graph. Around 35% of municipalities have

a high youth vulnerability index (above 0.5) and are expected to experience income losses of over 30% of GDP per capita. These areas are primarily concentrated in the eastern and southeastern regions, where livelihoods depend heavily on agriculture and natural resources. In many of these municipalities, infrastructure for TVET is sparse, and distances to training centres are considerable, further constraining access to skills.

Under these conditions, equipping young people with transferable and adaptable skills is essential in order to enable them to respond to shifting economic realities and access opportunities beyond their immediate locality. However, it is neither feasible nor efficient to establish training centres in every affected settlement. Instead, evidence supports a strategic territorial approach involving the development of training hubs in selected intermediate towns and secondary cities with residential facilities. These hubs should offer curricula aligned with climate adaptation priorities, including drought-resilient agriculture, climate-smart agribusiness and diversified livelihoods that are less dependent on climate-sensitive sectors.

Figure 5 — Comparing youth vulnerability and predicted climate damages across municipalities
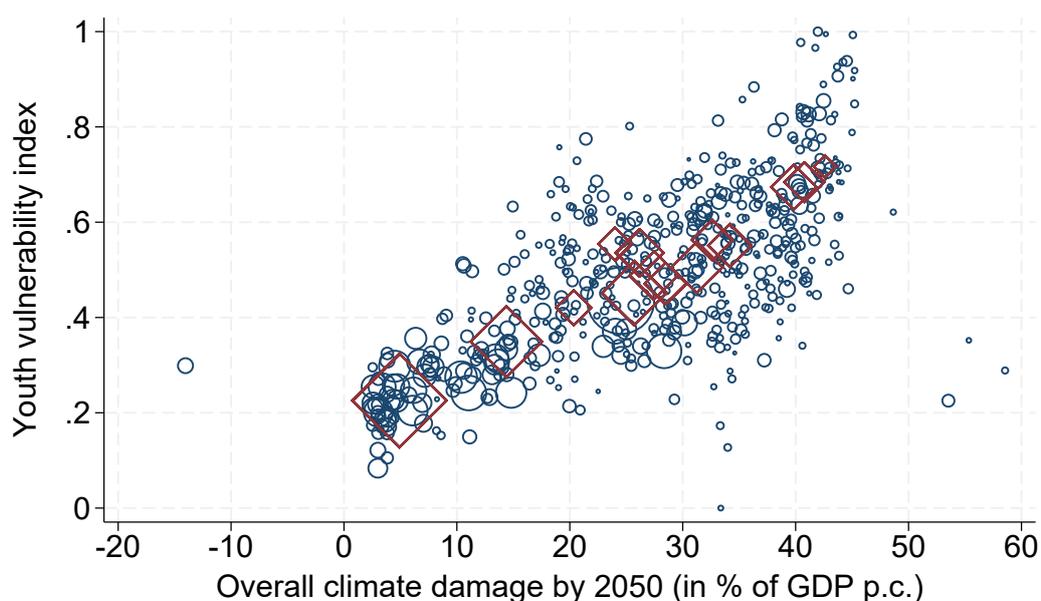
Note. Map based on authors' own computation using the CliC:ME dashboard. Bubble sizes are proportional to population.

From local diagnostics to pilot interventions

Our analysis goes beyond merely mapping youth vulnerability and provides strategic guidance on which skills to prioritise. However, even the most rigorous territorial and sectoral analysis cannot fully predict the performance of specific policy instruments in practice or how young people and their families will respond to them. To address this, the CAIPD complements its local diagnostics with randomised controlled trials (RCTs) that evaluate specific interventions aimed at increasing participation in vocational training, particularly among young women who encounter additional social and economic obstacles. In this way, the CAIPD shifts its focus from identifying priority investments to determining which instruments most effectively translate those investments into sustainable employment outcomes.

Addressing financial and informational barriers for young women

The first RCT, conducted in partnership with J-PAL Europe, aims to increase the participation of young women in vocational training in Dakar, an area with a large NEET population. The study targets sectors in which women are underrepresented, but which offer good job prospects, including traditionally male-dominated fields such as mechanics and electrical work.

Recognising that enrolment decisions are shaped by both individual preferences, household dynamics, and social norms, the intervention provides both information and financial support. Participants and their families receive targeted information about employment prospects, earnings potential and the social implications of working in these sectors, based on the experiences of former female trainees. This addresses concerns relating to job quality, marriage prospects and gender norms that often discourage participation.

Experimental evidence complements diagnostics by testing interventions that mitigate participation barriers.

Financially, eligible women are offered subsidised access to training at ASAFIN, a well-established Dakar-based vocational training provider specialising in technical fields. The level of subsidy is determined using a willingness-to-pay exercise to ensure that the support provided reflects actual financial constraints rather than arbitrary assumptions. The evaluation tracks key outcomes, including training uptake and completion, employment trajectories, and broader measures of economic empowerment.

The first cohort, which began in November 2025, revealed significant real-world implementation challenges, such as labour market fluidity and difficulties in sustaining participation. These challenges are central to understanding the effectiveness of TVET. These lessons directly inform adaptive recruitment and mobilisation strategies for subsequent cohorts, thereby strengthening the research design and its practical relevance for policy.

Unlocking local opportunities in Casamance

The second RCT, conducted in partnership with the University of Ghent and local partners, shifts the focus from financial constraints to youth agency and opportunity recognition in Casamance—one of the regions identified by our spatial analysis as being highly vulnerable. Rather than increasing the supply of training, this intervention tests whether improving young people's ability to recognise and act on local economic opportunities can enhance employment outcomes in environments with structural constraints.

Between November and December 2025, 800 young people were enrolled in a baseline survey—400 in Ziguinchor and 400 in Kolda. In January 2026, half of these participants were randomly selected to attend a structured, one-day workshop designed to help them identify viable local opportunities, set realistic goals and develop concrete action plans for employment or self-employment. Follow-up phone calls one month later reinforced learning and encouraged practical implementation. A second survey, scheduled for April 2026, will assess participants' employment status, job-search behaviour and engagement in income-generating activities. This design allows for rigorous impact evaluation. The study will generate critical evidence on whether relatively light, information-based interventions can complement infrastructure investments and improve youth employment outcomes in regions where access to traditional TVET remains limited.

Research informing smarter cooperation policies

In conclusion, over the past three years, CAIPD has strengthened the evidence base that informs Luxembourg's TVET-centred cooperation policy in Senegal. Through the combination of detailed local data, thorough analysis and close collaboration with national partners, CAIPD has developed decision support tools that facilitate more targeted and strategic policymaking. CAIPD's sustained engagement with the Directorate of Cooperation demonstrates a clear commitment to using scientific evidence to maximise the effectiveness and long-term impact of development assistance.

A key lesson is that effective targeting requires an understanding of where and how to intervene. Municipality-level analysis reveals significant territorial disparities. In large urban centres such as Dakar, Thiès, Diourbel and parts of Kaolack, the challenge lies in the scale of the issue. These cities have the highest number of NEET youth, yet financial, informational and social barriers prevent many, especially young women, from accessing available training. Ongoing RCTs therefore test practical measures to increase participation in, and completion of, urban TVET programmes.

Targeted approaches are essential to reach vulnerable youth in remote regions.

In contrast, smaller, more remote municipalities, particularly in eastern and southeastern Senegal, face structural constraints, such as limited training infrastructure, high informality and weak economic bases. Here, the priority is to stimulate demand and expand access through strategic territorial investments and innovative delivery models.

These disparities are further intensified by climate change. Municipalities that are already experiencing high levels of youth vulnerability are expected to suffer the greatest income losses by 2050, primarily due to recurrent droughts that affect agriculture. Even when accounting for migration responses, significant economic damage is expected in Tambacounda, Kédougou, Matam and parts of Casamance. The combination of youth exclusion and climate exposure necessitates forward-looking, climate-informed TVET strategies.

The evidence points to the need for a differentiated approach. Urban investments should continue to focus on occupation-specific skills aligned with diversified labour markets. In rural regions with high vulnerability, cooperation should prioritise strategic training hubs in intermediate towns. These hubs should be equipped with residential facilities and curricula centred on climate adaptation, including drought-resilient agriculture, sustainable resource management, renewable energy and diversified livelihoods. These hubs could be supplemented by mobile and modular delivery models supported by digital tools to improve access in sparsely populated areas. Testing such approaches through randomised controlled trials (RCTs) in rural contexts would further strengthen policy learning.

Across all settings, transferable skills remain essential. Preparing young people to adapt to different sectors and locations will be crucial as Senegal's economy evolves under demographic and environmental pressures. Taken together, the tools and evidence generated by CAIPD provide Luxembourg Cooperation with a coherent framework for evidence-based decision-making, enabling smarter prioritisation, better programme design and impactful, resilient youth investments.

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