In partnership with

Laboratoire de Recherches Economiques et Monétaires

Policy Brief

Strengthening A Safe and Equitable Workspace for Young Female Creatives in Senegal

Executive Summary

This policy brief is grounded in evidence from the Behind the Scenes (BtS) Senegal survey and mapping study, which focused on young female creatives working across selected subsectors of the creative economy. The findings paint a consistent picture of work that is largely informal and unstable. About 68% of respondents reported working in informal or short-term, project-based arrangements, often without written contracts or clear workplace rules. Interviews conducted as part of the BtS study show that many of these creative spaces, such as rehearsal rooms, studios, cultural centers, and small production units, operate without safeguarding policies, complaint procedures, or designated persons to handle workplace concerns. For young women entering the sector, this combination of informality and weak institutional structures translates into precarious livelihoods and limited protection at work.

The BtS study also highlights clear gender-related risks within these work environments. More than one in four female respondents (26%) reported having experienced gender-related harassment, while 24% said that gender influenced how tasks and roles were assigned in their workplace. Although women made up the majority of participants in the BtS Senegal study, particularly in performing arts, audiovisuals, design, traditional cultural expressions, and new media, over half reported that no formal reporting mechanism existed in their work setting, and only 45% were aware of any rules addressing discrimination or harassment. In practice, this means that legal protections such as the criminalization of sexual harassment under the Penal Code remain largely out of reach in the informal creative spaces in the Bts report. Taken together, the evidence reveals a gap between formal legal commitments and the everyday realities faced by young female creatives, pointing to the need for practical, sector-specific actions to make creative workplaces safer and more equitable.

68% of young female creatives work in INFORMAL, SHORT-TERM, PROJECT-BASED ARRANGEMENTS

Most work without written contracts or stable livelihoods.

Over 50% report NO FORMAL REPORTING MECHANISMS

1 IN 4 (26%) have experienced GENDER-RELATED HARASSMENT at work

24% state GENDER INFLUENCES TASK/ ROLE ASSIGNMENT in their workplace

Weak institutional structures directly translate **into disproportionate risks for women**

Introduction

Senegal has established a robust legal framework designed to ensure equality and protect workers' rights. The Labour Code lacks explicit harassment prohibitions, while the Penal Code only covers certain cases. This fragmentation appears to create enforcement barriers in informal creative workspaces. However, the vibrant yet often informal and project-based nature of the creative sector creates a significant gap between the law on the books and the reality for its workers, as these protections frequently fail to reach artists and cultural professionals who operate outside traditional employment structures. For instance, the National Labor Code (Law No. 97-17) explicitly prohibits gender-based discrimination. Despite this, the practical reality for women in the creative fields is extremely different. Within the BtS sample, 45% of young female creatives reported being unaware of any rules or procedures addressing discrimination or harassment in their workspace. Similarly, the Law on Parity mandates gender balance in public institutions, yet it has not dismantled the deeply ingrained gender specialisations and male-dominated environments that characterize many creative sub-sectors (World Bank, 2018).

More recently, the Letter of Sector Policy for Culture and Creative Industries (LPS CCI 2023) has acknowledged the urgent need for professionalization and social protection for artists. However, qualitative evidence from the BtS study documents persistent precariousness, limited safeguarding mechanisms, and exposure to harassment among young female creatives. This indicates that these policy intentions have yet to translate into effective protections within the creative workspaces examined (Diop, 2023). The core problem is not a lack of laws, but a systemic gap in adapting and enforcing them within the unique context of the creative economy. Evidence from the BtS Senegal study shows that the disconnect between Senegal's legal framework and the informal reality of creative work remains a fundamental barrier to achieving safer and more equitable working conditions for young female creatives.

Senegal's legal framework (e.g, Law on parity, Penal Code provisions) aims for equality but struggles with enforcement in unique creative settings.

LAW ON PARITY

Mandates gender balance in public institutions, yet it has not dismantled the deeply ingrained gender specialisations and male-dominated environments that characterize many creative sub-sectors.

ONLY

45%

are aware of ANY RULES ADDRESSING DISCRIMINATION.

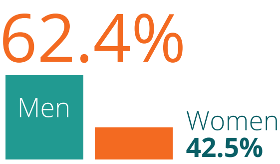
Policy progress: The LPS CCI 2023 acknowledges professionalization needs, but effective protections from artists remains elusive.

Population **18.1 million: Nearly 75% under age 35,** CCIs are prime spaces for **innovation, expression and entrepreneurship.**

CCI GROWTH POTENTIAL

Opportunity: absorbing youth workforce.

LABOUR PARTICIPATION RATE



EMPLOYMENT RATE
Men's rate over double Women's **(19.8%)**

LIMITED ACCESS TO TRAINING: Institutions and Infrastructure concentration in Dakar, creating regional inequalities

Why Gender Equity Matters for the Creative Sector in Senegal

Senegal's cultural and creative industries (CCIs) are among the country's most important spaces for youth employment, innovation, cultural expression, and entrepreneurship. With an estimated population of 18.1 million and nearly 75% of citizens under the age of 35, the country has one of the youngest populations globally. This demographic reality creates both an opportunity and a challenge. While the creative sector has the potential to absorb large numbers of young people into meaningful work, existing gender inequalities limit the ability of women to benefit from these opportunities fully. Women account for 51.2% of the working-age population, yet their labour force participation rate remains significantly lower than that of men, standing at 42.5% compared to 62.4%. The employment gap is even more pronounced, with women's employment rate at 19.8%, less than half that of men.

Within the creative economy, these broader labour inequalities intersect with widespread informality, unstable incomes, and weak labour protections. Nearly two in five cultural enterprises operate informally, while 72.4% of creative workers rely on multiple income-generating activities to sustain themselves. This means that many young women creatives must combine artistic work with teaching, small businesses, digital freelancing, or temporary jobs in order to survive economically. As a result, creative careers are often characterized by uncertainty, irregular income, and limited social protection.

Findings indicate that women continue to face structural barriers in training, career progression, remuneration, leadership opportunities, and access to markets. Many training institutions and cultural infrastructures remain concentrated in Dakar, limiting opportunities for women outside urban centers. Women also encounter stereotypes that undermine their legitimacy in technical and leadership roles within music, audiovisual production, design, and digital creativity.

At the same time, the findings demonstrate that women are central contributors to Senegal's creative economy. Despite systemic challenges, young women continue to show strong ambition, innovation, and commitment to long-term creative careers. Their use of digital platforms, professional networks, and peer support systems demonstrates significant resilience and entrepreneurial potential.

Advancing gender equality in the creative sector is essential not only for protecting women's rights, but also for strengthening employment, economic growth, cultural innovation, and the long-term sustainability of Senegal's creative industries. Without deliberate investment in gender-responsive systems, the sector risks reproducing wider national inequalities rather than becoming a driver of inclusive development. Gender inequity in the creative sector is not only about representation, but also about access to economic security, professional recognition, and safe working conditions.

Gender Inequities in Senegal's Creative Sector: Forms and Dynamics

The study reveals that Senegal's cultural and creative industries are dynamic and expanding, yet remain shaped by persistent gender inequalities, precarious employment conditions, and weak institutional protections.

Gender Discrimination and Unequal Recognition

Women in Senegal's creative sector continue to face significant gender-based discrimination despite the existence of protective legal frameworks. Nearly one-third (30%) of women reported experiencing discrimination, while 24% indicated that gender influences how tasks and responsibilities are allocated within creative workplaces. Women reported being less trusted in technical positions and decision-making roles, while stereotypes continued to shape perceptions of competence and legitimacy. Even in environments described as generally respectful, subtle exclusion persisted through dismissal of women's opinions, unequal visibility, and restricted access to influential networks and opportunities. These findings contradict the provisions of Senegal's Labour Code (Law No. 97-17), which prohibits discrimination, as well as the Parity Law (Law No. 2010-11), which promotes balanced representation and equal participation of women and men in public and professional life.

Harassment, Sexual Pressure, and Unsafe Workspaces

Gender-related harassment emerged as a major concern within the sector. More than one in four women 26% reported experiencing harassment or gender related abuse. This included intrusive comments , coercive sexual advances , unwanted touching , pressure to spend time with male colleagues or supervisors , and retaliation following rejection of advances. These experiences suggest that harassment is embedded within broader power imbalances and informal workplace cultures.

The findings likely represent a conservative estimate due to normalization of abuse, fear of losing professional opportunities, and the absence of safe reporting systems. Participants also described unsafe and poorly secured creative spaces lacking basic infrastructure and safety protections, particularly in temporary production environments and informal workspaces. Such conditions contradict Senegalese occupational health and safety regulations requiring employers to provide secure and healthy working conditions. The study further exposes important legal and institutional gaps. Although sexual harassment is recognized under Article 319 bis of the Penal Code, workplace harassment is not comprehensively addressed within the Labour Code, while "moral harassment" lacks a clear legal definition and enforcement framework.

Economic Precarity and Unequal Pay Dynamics

Employment conditions within the creative industries are characterized by high levels of insecurity and economic vulnerability. Although 68% of women reported working full-time in the sector, many described relying on multiple income-generating activities, including performance, teaching, tailoring, digital content creation, and artisanal work, to sustain their livelihoods. These conditions undermine the objectives of the Lettre de Politique Sectorielle des Industries Culturelles et Créatives (LPS-CCI), particularly commitments related to professional integration and social protection, while also conflicting with Labour Code provisions on fair remuneration and decent work.

Gender influences tasks

24%

and responsibilities and allocation.

24% reported that gender influences workplace opportunities and responsibilities.

68%

work full-time but rely on multiple income generating activites (teaching, tailoring, digital creation)

26%

More than one in four (26%) experienced harassment, including sexual pressure, and power

Embedded in **informal** workplace cultures and **power imbalances.**

STRATEGIES FOR VISIBILTY & INCOME

- Digital Platforms,
- Peer Network,
- Collaboration & Support Systems

Unequal Access to Opportunities: Highlighting financial barriers, geographical concentration in Dakar, mobility challenges, and the need for non-traditional educational pathways.

Resilience, Adaptation & Emerging Risks: Showcasing the strategies women use for success, such as digital platforms and peer networks, alongside the growing threat of AI automation in creative fields.

45%

Weak Awareness & Limited Operationalization of Rights: Illustrating the gaps in legal knowledge, including the statistic that only 45% are aware of anti-discrimination rules, and the resulting difficulties in seeking redress

Another major issue concerns remuneration transparency. While many women did not explicitly identify themselves as underpaid compared to male colleagues, nearly one-third reported observing wage disparities within the sector. Informal payment arrangements and the absence of standardized contracts created widespread uncertainty regarding whether compensation was fair. The findings, therefore, suggest that the challenge extends beyond unequal pay itself to include the lack of transparent systems capable of identifying and addressing inequities.

Unequal Access to Training and Professional Opportunities

The study also identified major inequalities in access to training and professional development opportunities. Participants highlighted financial barriers, the high cost of specialized creative education, and the concentration of training institutions in Dakar. Women outside the capital faced additional mobility and accessibility challenges, while the absence of diploma-free pathways limited entry opportunities for creatives from non-traditional educational backgrounds. These barriers contribute to unequal career progression and reinforce exclusion from higher-paying and more technically specialized sectors of the industry.

Resilience, Adaptation, and Emerging Risks

Despite these challenges, women demonstrated strong resilience, professional ambition, and commitment to long-term careers within the creative sector. Digital platforms, peers networks, collaboration, and collective support systems emerged as important strategies for visibility, survival, and income generation. However, emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) were also identified as a growing threat to low-income creative work. Women freelancers engaged in graphic design, photography, and digital content creation were perceived as particularly vulnerable to income loss and market displacement due to the automation of low-cost creative tasks.

Weak Awareness and Limited Operationalization of Rights

The findings further reveal significant gaps in legal awareness and policy dissemination. Only 45% of women reported awareness of rules and protections related to discrimination, while many expressed uncertainties regarding their rights and available reporting mechanisms. This reflects weak operationalization and limited communication of labour protections and gender equality laws within the creative sector, reducing women's ability to seek redress and protection when violations occur.

What these findings mean for Senegal's Creative Sector

The findings point to a fundamental contradiction within Senegal's cultural and creative industries. On one hand, the sector is vibrant, innovative, youth-driven, and increasingly recognized as an important contributor to employment and economic growth. On the other hand, the professional realities of many young women creatives remain shaped by insecurity, exclusion, and weak institutional protection. This means that the sector's current growth model risks reproducing existing social inequalities rather than promoting inclusive development.

One of the clearest implications of the findings is that creative talent alone is insufficient to guarantee sustainable careers for women. Instead, success within the sector is strongly influenced by access to networks, training opportunities, safe workplaces, transparent remuneration systems, and professional recognition. In highly informal environments where contracts, governance structures, and reporting systems are weak, women face increased exposure to exploitation, exclusion, and economic instability.

The study demonstrates the need for stronger governance systems capable of protecting women's rights while supporting professionalization across the sector. This includes establishing enforceable anti-harassment mechanisms, sector-wide codes of conduct, safe reporting channels, and transparent remuneration standards. Without such systems, women remain vulnerable to abuse, retaliation, and unequal access to opportunities.

The findings also highlight the urgent importance of decentralization. The concentration of training institutions, funding opportunities, and cultural infrastructure in Dakar continues to disadvantage women living in other regions, particularly those facing financial or mobility constraints. Expanding regional creative hubs, training centers, and support structures is therefore essential for improving equitable access to the sector.

Another major implication concerns data and accountability. The absence of standardized contracts, administrative wage data, and gender-disaggregated monitoring systems make it difficult to measure inequalities accurately or track progress over time. Strengthening data systems through agencies such as the National Agency of Statistics and Demography is therefore critical for evidence-based policymaking and accountability.

The findings also suggest that technological change, particularly AI, could deepen inequalities if left unregulated. Many women creatives rely on low-cost freelance digital work that is increasingly vulnerable to automation. Without protective policies, AI may compress incomes further and intensify economic precarity for already marginalized groups.

Ultimately, the study shows that achieving gender equality within Senegal's creative sector is not simply a social justice goal. It is an economic and developmental necessity. A more inclusive sector would strengthen innovation, expand employment opportunities, improve cultural production, and enhance the long-term resilience and competitiveness of Senegal's creative economy. Senegal's creative economy requires structural reform, not isolated short-term interventions.

Policy and programmatic recommendations

Recommendations

The recommendations from this study point to the need for a coordinated, multi-actor reform agenda to address structural gaps in Senegal's cultural and creative industries. Across all pillars, the central challenge is the weak translation of existing laws and policies into enforceable protections within creative workspaces. Addressing this requires aligned action across government ministries, sector associations, training institutions, funding bodies, and oversight agencies.

1. ***Strengthen income security and professional transitions***. The Ministry of Culture and Historical Heritage should establish a Fee Stabilization Fund to cushion creatives against income shocks, enforce minimum pay standards in publicly funded projects, and improve pay transparency. This should be supported by the National Agency of Statistics and Demography through regular gender-disaggregated data collection on employment, wages, and workplace conditions. The Ministry of Labour, Social Dialogue and Relations with Institutions should develop portable social protection systems for freelancers, including health and maternity coverage. The Ministry of Youth and Employment and the Ministry of Vocational Training should strengthen structured pathways linking training, internships, mentoring, and employment. Parliament should expand legal protections on harassment and discrimination to explicitly cover informal creative workspaces.

2. ***Promote safe and fair workplaces.*** The Ministry of Culture and Historical Heritage, together with sector bodies such as Association des Métiers de la Musique and Société Sénégalaise du Droit d'Auteur et des Droits Voisins (SODAV), should develop a Safe Creative Workspaces Charter and sector-wide Codes of Conduct addressing harassment, equal pay, and conflict resolution. These actors should also introduce parity targets and mentoring systems for women creatives. Studios, hubs, and production companies should adopt mandatory safeguarding systems and obtain CCI Safe Space certification, while public funding from the Ministry of Finance and Budget should be conditional on compliance with these standards. Confidential reporting systems must be established to support freelancers and informal workers.

3. ***Improve skills and market access.*** Universities, vocational institutions, and training centres should open non-restrictive entry pathways and expand micro-certification systems that validate informal learning. Development partners such as the Mastercard Foundation should align funding with governance and inclusion standards while investing in regional incubation hubs outside Dakar. The Ministry of Youth and Employment should also lead rights-awareness initiatives for young creatives.

4. ***Address Artificial Intelligence (AI).*** The Ministry of Digital Economy, the Ministry of Culture, and Parliament should develop a governance framework protecting creative labour from displacement and ensuring fair remuneration. Sector associations should issue ethical guidelines on AI use, while training institutions integrate digital literacy into all programmes.

5. ***Governance and monitoring must be strengthened.*** A coordinated mechanism led by the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Finance and Budget, and the Ministry of Youth should harmonize funding and accountability systems. The Direction Générale de la Culture and the statistical agency should lead national monitoring using gender-disaggregated indicators on pay, safety, participation, and inclusion.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that while Senegal's cultural and creative industries offer important opportunities for youth employment, innovation, and artistic expression, they remain marked by persistent gender inequalities and structural vulnerabilities affecting young women creatives. Women continue to experience discrimination, harassment, unequal recognition, insecure working conditions, and limited access to training, professional networks, and transparent remuneration systems. These challenges are intensified by widespread informality, weak institutional protections, and limited awareness of existing legal rights and reporting mechanisms. At the same time, the study highlights the resilience, creativity, and long-term professional ambition of women working within the sector. Many women have developed adaptive strategies through peer support, digital platforms, entrepreneurship, and diversified income-generating activities. However, resilience alone cannot compensate for systemic inequalities and inadequate governance structures. The evidence points to the need for a more coordinated and gender-responsive creative sector ecosystem grounded in accountability, safety, transparency, and inclusion. Strengthening legal protections, decentralizing opportunities beyond Dakar, improving access to training and financing, and establishing safer and fairer work environments are essential for transforming the sector into a sustainable space where talent and creativity, rather than gender, determine opportunity and success.

References

Diop, A. (2023). *Precarious creativity: Labor conditions in Senegal's cultural sector*. Dakar University Press.

Observatoire des Métiers de la Culture. (2022). *Genre et protection sociale dans les industries culturelles au Sénégal* [Gender and social protection in the cultural industries in Senegal]. Annual Report.

Gouvernement du Sénégal. Plan Sénégal Émergent (PSE) *Plan d'Actions Prioritaires.* 2024–2028.

Republic of Senegal. (1997). Labour Code (Law No. 97-17). Dakar: Government Printer.

Republic of Senegal. (2016). *Stratégie nationale pour l'équité et l'égalité de genre* (SNEEG 2016–2026). Ministère de la Femme, de la Famille et du Genre.

World Bank. (2018). *Land rights and gender inequality in Senegal*. World Bank.

World Bank. (2022). *The creative economy in West Africa: Informal, innovative, and interconnected*. World Bank Group.

Ministère de la Justice. (2020). *Loi n°2020-05 du 10 janvier 2020 modifiant le Code pénal.*

Ministère du Travail. (2020). *Référentiel de contrôle pour les Inspections du Travail.*

ILO Convention 190 (not yet ratified by Senegal).

Disclaimer:
This brief was produced in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily represent those of the Foundation, its staff, or its Board of Directors.

Acknowledgement

The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), Africa Regional Office, provided overall leadership and stewardship of the Behind the Scenes (BtS): Young Women and Gender Inequities in Africa project, including its conceptualization, strategic direction, coordination, and implementation oversight. The Implementation of the project was made possible through the collective efforts of individuals and institutions committed to advancing safer, more inclusive, and equitable creative industries across Africa. We extend our deepest appreciation to the young women creatives, artists, cultural practitioners, policymakers, industry stakeholders, and community actors who generously shared their experiences, reflections, and expertise throughout the research and engagement processes. Many participants spoke with honesty and courage about the opportunities and challenges shaping their professional and personal lives. Their voices and lived experiences form the foundation of this evidence and continue to inform the project's vision for meaningful change within Africa's cultural and creative sectors.

We are especially grateful to the Country Principal Investigators, Youth Researchers, field mobilisers, and institutional partners whose commitment and professionalism made the successful implementation of the study and related activities possible. We acknowledge the valuable contributions of the Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) in Ethiopia, the University of Rwanda, the University of Cape Coast in Ghana, the University of Lagos in Nigeria, LAREM in Senegal, and ICRW teams in Uganda and Kenya. Their collaboration strengthened the project's participatory and youth-centred approach to evidence generation and engagement.

We also appreciate the support provided by government institutions, creative industry associations, civil society organisations, and academic partners that contributed to consultations, validation processes, and dissemination efforts across the participating countries.

This report was developed with support from the Mastercard Foundation.

DISCLAIMER

Portions of this document were developed with AI-assisted tools. All content was reviewed, edited, and approved by the author(s), who remain responsible for it.

Authors

Roger Philbert Dusabe, Everlyne Kalea, Ousmane Faye, Venantius Bbaale Kirwana

Laboratoire de Recherches
Economiques et Monétaires

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

In partnership with

mastercard
foundation

University of Lagos

Organization for Social Sciences
Research in East and Southern Africa

University of Rwanda