

Regional Fact Sheet

January 2013

Education in the Arab States

Progress towards the six Education for All goals in the Arab States

	Indicator	Arab States		World
		1999	2010	2010
Goal 1	Pre-primary gross enrolment ratio (%)	15	22	48
Goal 2	Primary net enrolment ratio (%)	77	86	91
	Out of school children (million)	8.4	5	60.7
Goal 3	Lower secondary gross enrolment ratio (%)	...	87	82
	Out of school adolescents (million)	5.2	3.7	70.6
Goal 4	Adult literacy rate* (%)	55	75	84
	literacy rate* (%)	89	92	90
Goal 5	Primary gender parity index	0.87	0.93	0.97
	Secondary gender parity index	0.88	0.94	0.97
Goal 6	Primary pupil-teacher ratio	23	21	24

* Progress is reported for the periods 1985/94 (left column) and 2005/10 (right column).

Despite progress, millions are still denied the chance to go to school

- In the Arab States, the primary net enrolment ratio increased from 77% in 1999 to 86% in 2010. Despite this progress, five million children of primary school age are still out of school.
- Yemen and Morocco are the two states most lagging behind. Yemen is one of the ten countries in the world with the most children out of school. Millions are also likely to be denied the right to education in countries that have suffered from conflict but do not report data, such as Iraq and the former Sudan.

- The gross secondary enrolment rate increased from 59% in 1999 to 69% by 2010. However, 3.7 million adolescents remain out of school.
- Despite improvements in adult literacy rates, the number of illiterate adults fell by just 3% between 1985-94 and 2005-2010 due to population growth. As a result, over 50 million adults are illiterate in the region, more than two-thirds of whom are women. Egypt is amongst the ten countries in the world with over 10 million adults unable to read or write.
- Saudi Arabia has made the greatest advance in women's literacy in the past decade in the world. As a result, 81% of women are literate compared with 57% a decade earlier, and the country is projected to be close to achieving the target of achieving a 50% improvement in adult literacy by 2015.



Once in school, many are not learning the basics

- Primary education is often not of sufficient quality to ensure that all children can learn the basics, with variations across countries in the region.
- In Algeria and Tunisia, for example, 98% of children make it to grade 4, but the percentage of those children achieving basic numeracy skills was 50% higher in Algeria. In Tunisia, almost 3 out of every 4 children make it to grade four but still cannot count.

The marginalized are being left behind

- Fewer girls than boys are in school. Alongside sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States has the widest gender gap, with a gender parity index of 0.93 in primary school and 0.94 in secondary school. Nine out of 15 countries with data have not yet achieved gender parity at the primary level.
- Gender disparities are further aggravated by wealth and location: In 2005 in Iraq, almost all children from rich households had been to school, whether boy or girl. But 34% of poor girls living in the South had never been to school, with 15% of poor boys in the region in the same situation.
- There are also wide inequalities in learning. In Qatar, for example, while around 35% of

rich boys and girls reach at least level 2 in maths, the same is true for only 10% of the poorest boys in the country, and only 8% of the poorest girls.

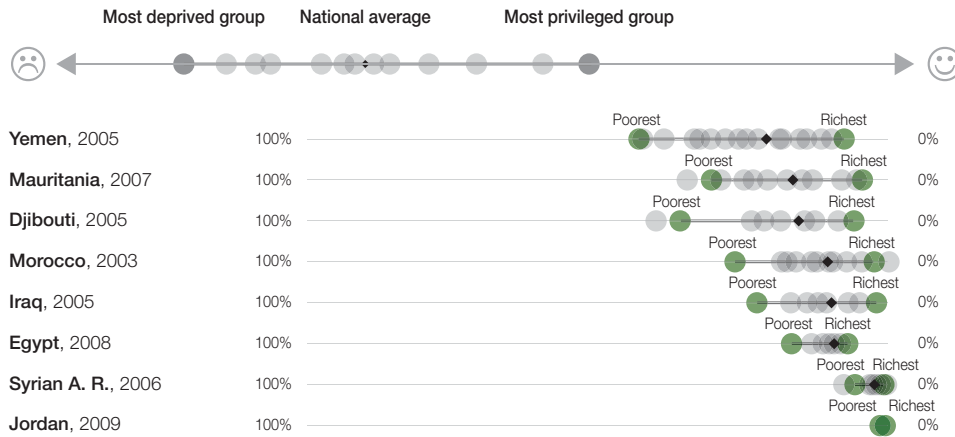
The Arab States show strong commitment to funding education, but costs can still be excessive for poor households

- The Arab States allocate 5.5% of GNP to education on average, a proportion that has not changed since 1999. This is still the second highest percentage of any region in the world after North America and Western Europe.
- There are, however, wide variations in spending within the region. Lebanon, for example, spends just 1.8% of its GNP on education while Tunisia has been spending as much as 6.6%.
- Poor households are often unable to cover the costs needed for education, particularly when they have to supplement for the low quality of schooling. In Egypt, it has been reported that some teachers withhold curriculum content during the school day, forcing students to attend private tutorials. Recourse to private tuition can reinforce the gap in the quality of education received by rich and poor households: the richest households spending for times more than poorest households on private tuition.



Egypt © UNESCO/Chris Stowers/Panos

Arab States. Percentage of 7-16 year olds who have never been to school by wealth are widest in Yemen, and narrowest in Jordan



Worldwide Inequality Database on Education www.education-inequalities.org

Our new interactive website shows the scale of education inequality within countries. It brings together data from Demographic and Health Surveys and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys.

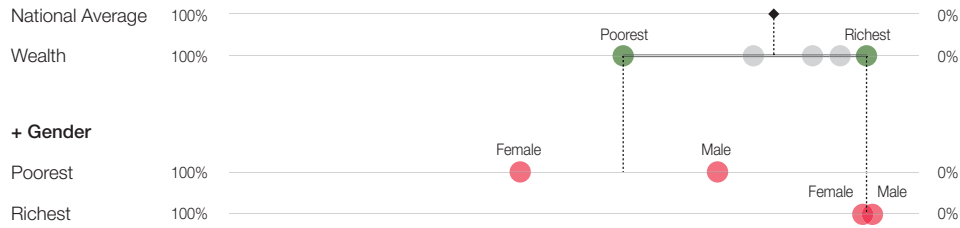
In Yemen, not only are wealth disparities wide, but they are further aggravated by gender disparities. On average, only 21% of 7-16 year olds in the country had never been to school in 2005, but this increased to 43% of the poorest in the country, and to 58% for the poorest girls.

In the Syrian Arab Republic, while wealth disparities are further aggravated by large regional disparities, the WIDE database shows that gender disparities are not as severe. In Aleppo, 33% of the richest adolescents were out of school in 2007, compared with 49% of the poorest adolescents.

Syrian Arab Republic. Almost 1 in 2 of poorest adolescents were out of school in Aleppo in 2007



Yemen. 58% of poor girls aged 7-16 had never been to school in 2005



Youth and Skills: Putting education to work

The long-term effect of neglecting education leaves a huge skills deficit among young people

- One in five young people in the Arab States have never completed primary school, and so struggle to find well-paid, secure work. This is equivalent to 10.5 million young people.
- Young people need at least a lower secondary education to have foundation skills to find work that pays a decent wage. In Mauritania, however, almost seven out of ten do not have foundation skills. The same is true for almost two thirds of young Moroccans and half of young Syrians.

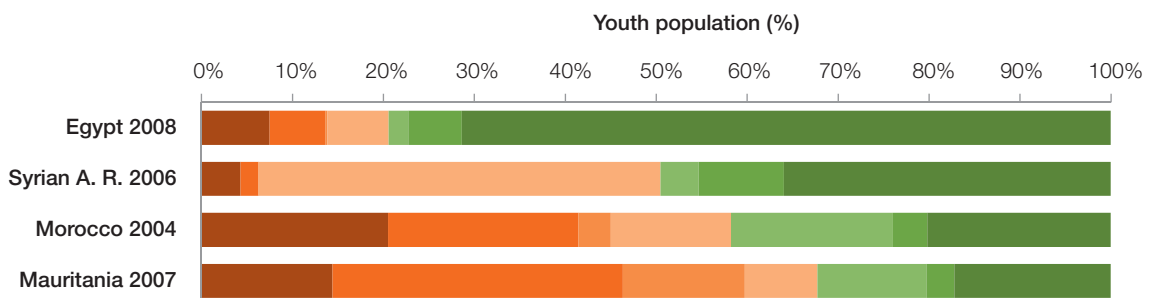
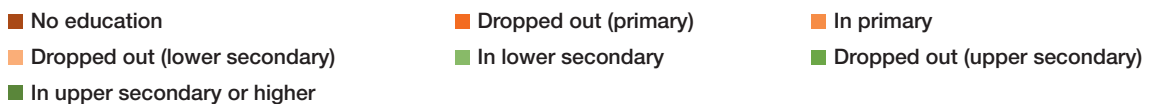
Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are least likely to have skills for decent work:

I was engaged to someone and he refused to let me complete my education, so I stopped.

– young woman, Egypt

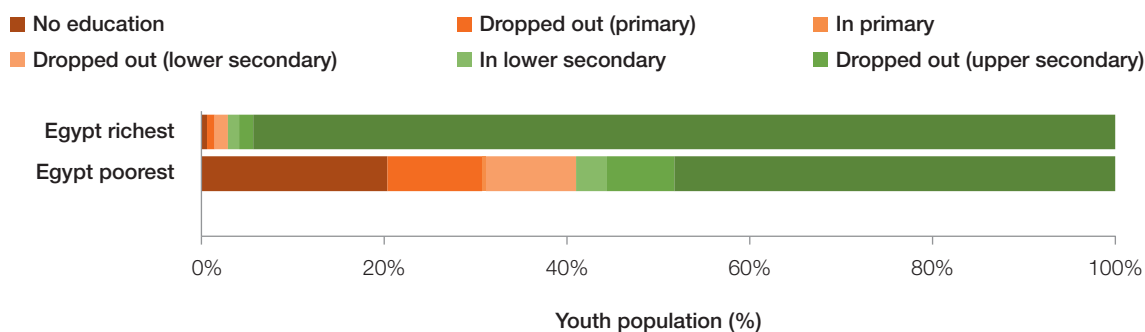
- Poverty is a barrier for many young people acquiring foundation skills for work. In Egypt, for example, while upper secondary school is almost universal among the richest, one in five of the poorest do not make it into primary school at all. The voices of these disadvantaged young people are rarely heard in the protests and social movements in the country which have lamented problems of high unemployment and corruption for educated young urban people. Their plight is far worse: they are trapped in work that pays below the poverty line with little hope for the future.

Education status of 15 to 19 year olds, by country, latest available year



Source: GMR team analysis based on UIS (2012)

Education status of 15 to 19 year olds by wealth in Egypt



Source: GMR team analysis based on UIS (2012)

- In addition, rote learning dominates teaching in poor communities, which often lack basic resources required for effective learning. In the 2007 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, 53% of Egyptian Grade 8 students failed to achieve even the lowest international benchmark in mathematics.
- While the vast majority of poor people in the world live in rural areas, poverty for young people in urban areas can be desperate. The differences between being rich and poor in one urban area in terms of having or not having skills can be huge. In Egypt, for example, 45% of the poorest 15-24 year olds in urban areas are without foundation skills, compared to just 3% of the urban richest.
- Overall, however, the poorest young people in rural areas are at a greater disadvantage than the urban poor. In Morocco, for example, 76% of the poorest young people in urban areas are without foundation skills, compared to 90% of the rural poorest.
- Of all socio-economic groups, young women are the most likely to lack foundation skills. In Morocco, while 18% of the richest 15-24 year olds never completed primary school, 83% of the poorest in the country have not, rising to 93% of the poorest females.

The lack of skills will affect the lives of young people forever

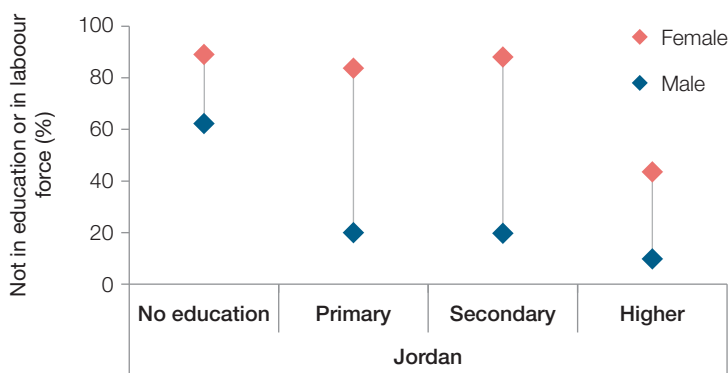
[A good job] is one that helps me to live honourably, not the one that would be spent on transportation and lunch at work and that is all.

– young woman, Egypt

- Without foundation skills, young people will either be unemployed or will be forced to take work earning nothing more than a poverty wage. In North Africa, 20% of youth are unemployed.
- Young people far more likely to be unemployed than adults. In the Middle East, youth unemployment stands at around 25% compared with 6% for adults. In Egypt, youth unemployment is six times as high as unemployment for older people.
- Many young people remain unemployed for years because of their lack of skills. In the Syrian Arab Republic, more than 70% of those unemployed had been in that position for over a year. In Egypt, 25% had been unemployed for more than two years.
- Some young people opt out of the labour market because they feel they have little hope of finding employment. They are classified as 'inactive' and so not counted in unemployment figures. If those who are discouraged from participating in the labour market were included, the unemployment rate would increase by one-quarter in Jordan, for example.

- Women make up the majority of these. In Jordan, for example, 80% of young women who dropped out after only completing primary school are not seeking work, compared to 20% of young men in the same situation.
- Young women who are looking for work are more likely than young men to face a long wait. In Egypt, less than one-quarter of 15- to 29-year old young women are actively looking for work. Of these, three-quarters were still looking for work five years after they began their search. This suggests that the statistics often mask the impact of the opportunities in the labour force rather than personal life style choices.

In Jordan, many young women are not even seeking work



Source: Understanding Children's Work (2012)

- Discrimination in education and training continues through into the workplace for young women. In Egypt for example, young men in urban areas who have completed secondary school are five times more likely to earn over \$2 a day than young women with the same level of education.
- Even if educated, young women are still confined to lower paid work than less educated young men. Only 8% of Egyptian young women in rural areas who have completed lower secondary school will earn over \$2 a day; compared to over 60% of young men who have not even completed that level of education but do earn more than \$2 per day.

Need to bridge the gap between secondary schooling and the workplace

Even if young people have the opportunity to attend secondary school, many leave without having acquired relevant skills needed for the workplace. In addition to foundation skills in literacy and numeracy, young people need transferable skills such as problem-solving, communication and critical thinking, as well as skills to work in particular occupations. There are, however, some successful examples of bridging the gap between school and work:

- **Apprenticeships to tackle the skills-work mismatch:** In 1994 the Egyptian Government set up a dual system of school-and work-based technical education. Students spent two days a week at school and four days in a company. By 2009, the initiative included 76 technical secondary schools and 1,900 companies providing training in 32 trades to 13,000 students. The programme has continued to expand, almost doubling its intake in 2010. About 30% of graduates immediately found a job, while 40% continued further studies in higher education.
- **Providing career guidance in schools:** The INJAZ Al-Arab programme offers a framework for local partnerships between schools and enterprises in twelve countries in the Middle East and North Africa. In Lebanon, volunteers from leading companies go to secondary schools to share their professional experience and teach courses on job-seeking skills and business ethics, as well as advanced programmes on economics and entrepreneurship. The programme increased by 33% the share of students who felt confident about their ability to manage a job interview successfully, compared with students who had not attended the programme. More than 600,000 beneficiaries have been reached through INJAZ Al-Arab since 2004, and the programme in Lebanon is being scaled up to reach all secondary school students.

Second chance programmes urgently need to be scaled up and to target the disadvantaged

Although I haven't completed my education I need a chance. We want to work and give something good to the country.

– young woman, Egypt

Many youth employment programmes in the region target more highly educated youth, who have been better able to exert media and socio-political influence. In Morocco, for example, around 90% of young women and 50% of young men are neither in school nor in work. Among the unemployed, 80% have less than secondary education. Yet policy interventions tackling unemployment have tended to focus on the 5% who have reached tertiary education. This is in contrast to similar programmes for unemployed youth in Latin America which have successfully targeted the poorest and least educated. There are exceptions:

- **Training funds can reach large numbers of unemployed youth:** Tunisia's National Employment Fund, established in 1999, has reached over 100,000 beneficiaries annually. The fund aims to improve the job chances of young people who lack primary education or have not completed secondary school. They are offered opportunities via on-site training programmes, vocational apprenticeships, as well as receiving loans to set up small businesses. The training fund is supported by the government budget, with an earmarked tax contributing resources, making it more sustainable than many other training funds.
- **Some philanthropists are supporting young people to get skills for work:** The Sawiris Foundation has been active in supporting youth skills in Egypt since 2001. Its Yalla Neshtaghal in Ready-Made Garment programme is training 900 young people over 18 months, with graduates receiving a recognized qualification. In addition, Education for Employment is a network of affiliated foundations working in many countries aimed at supporting unemployed and disadvantaged young people.

Some programmes in the region are also having success in reaching some of the 10.5 million young people lacking foundation skills, but these need to be dramatically scaled up:

- **Targeting second chance programmes to address discrimination:** The Ishraq programme in Egypt provides a positive example of increasing young women's possibilities for skills development. Launched in 2001, the programme gives young Egyptian women a second chance in education, and also works with parents, boys and community leaders to allow girls greater freedom to seek education and enter the world of work. Of participants who took the government literacy examination, 92% passed, and 69% of participants who completed the programme entered or re-entered the formal school system.
- **Second chance programmes with tutoring help overcome disadvantages:** In Jordan, Questscope, an international NGO, has run a second-chance education programme since 2000, targeting youths who missed out on education or dropped out. The programme provides 24 months of accelerated learning, together with tutoring, to enable graduates to re-enter the formal education system or have access to loans to start a microenterprise. More than 7,000 youth have participated. About 98% of those who sat the 10th grade proficiency test at the end of the programme passed and were able to continue with formal education.

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