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Twenty percent of young people in the Arab States fail to complete primary school and lack skills for work

The tenth Education for All Global Monitoring Report, *Putting Education to Work*, reveals the urgent need to invest in skills for youth. In the Arab States, over 10 million people aged 15 to 24 have not even completed primary school and need alternative pathways to acquire basic skills for employment and prosperity. This is equivalent to one in five of the region's youth population, rising to one in four in Iraq. More than half of the population in the region is under 25-years-old. Worldwide, one in eight young people are unemployed; one quarter are trapped in jobs that keep them on or below the poverty line. As the effects of the global economic crisis continue to be felt, the severe lack of youth skills is more damaging than ever.

Despite significant progress in enrolling children in school in countries like Morocco, the Report shows that few are on track to meet the six Education for All goals set in 2000, and some, such as Yemen, are a long way behind. Along with Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States have the worst rate of girls to boys in school of any region in the world. The Report looks in depth at one of the least analysed Education Goals on youth skills. It shows that young people need the skills taught at primary and lower secondary school to find decent jobs. This is unlikely to improve anytime soon. In the Arab states, about 5 million are still missing out on primary school and almost 4 million teenagers are out of secondary school, missing out on vital skills for future employment. There is also a learning crisis: Worldwide, 250 million children of primary school age cannot read or write, whether they are in school or not.

“We are witnessing a young generation frustrated by the chronic mismatch between skills and work. The best answer to the economic downturn and youth unemployment is to ensure that young people acquire the basic skills and relevant training they need to enter the world of work with confidence,” said Irina Bokova, the Director General of UNESCO. “Many youth, and women in particular, need to be offered alternative pathways to education, so that they gain the skills to earn a living, live in dignity and contribute to their communities and societies.”

Poor young populations, urban and rural, are the most in need of skills training. In urban areas, the youth population is larger than it has ever been and growing. In Egypt, one in five of the poor have not been to primary school at all. Yet for the richest in the country, upper secondary school is almost universal. Those without foundation skills often end up in informal labour, with no legal status, regulations or standard work conditions. Frequently, this leaves them trapped in work earning below the poverty line. Only 5% of Egyptian young women living in urban areas who have not completed secondary school earn more than \$2 per day, compared with almost 80% of urban young men with the same amount of education.

The majority of the poor and least educated live in rural areas, however. Many young farmers facing land scarcity and the effects of climate change lack even basic skills needed to protect themselves and stay afloat. Those not in farmwork urgently need training in business and marketing to find new opportunities and reduce the obligation of migrating to cities in search of a job.

Women are the most in need both in rural and urban areas. In rural Morocco, for example, 93% of young women do not have the skills learnt at lower secondary school. The lack of skills will impact on the future of these women's lives forever. In Jordan, over 80% of young

women with only primary education were not even included in the numbers of those unemployed because they were not actively seeking work, compared with 20% of young men.

Pauline Rose, director of EFA Global Monitoring Report, said: “The Arab Spring has brought the world’s attention to the frustrations of university graduates unable to find jobs that meet their aspirations. Yet millions more young people in the region have not even completed lower secondary school. These young people, many of them women, who are confined to low-paid, unstable work, do not have the chance to exert political or media influence. They are often neglected in policies set out to fix problems in education and work. Governments and donors must target the most disadvantaged as they tackle unemployment and education in the future.”

Investing in young peoples’ skills is a smart move for countries seeking to boost their economic growth. The Report estimates that every \$1 spent on a person’s education, yields US\$10-US\$15 in economic growth over that person’s working lifetime.

In richer countries, a lack of investment in young people’s skills has contributed to spiralling unemployment statistics, often far worse for youth than adults. In the Syrian Arab Republic, for example, where 280,000 adolescents are still out of school, more than 70% of young people were unemployed for at least a year in 2008. In poorer countries, meanwhile, they end up trapped in jobs earning poverty line wages.

There is a dire need to increase funding to fix this skills deficit and find funds to dramatically scale up alternative pathways for training. This year’s *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* calculates that, on top of the US\$16 billion needed annually to attain universal primary education by 2015, it would cost US\$8 billion to achieve universal lower education. Reallocating aid could help fill the funding gap. US\$3.1 billion of aid to post-secondary education never reaches the educational systems of developing countries as it is used to fund foreign students in donor countries. These funds could be better spent addressing the skills deficit for disadvantaged youth in poor countries.

One of the main beneficiaries of a skilled workforce, the private sector, presently contributes the equivalent of 5% of total official aid to education. These contributions do not always reflect government’s education priorities, however, and are often more closely aligned with corporate business priorities. Large amounts of funding go to tertiary education, for example, though only a minority of children make it to that stage and most still lack basic skills.

Recommendations: It is time to take action to support skills development for young people.

1. 200 million young people need to be given alternative pathways to learn foundation skills.
2. All young people need quality training in relevant foundation skills at lower secondary school
3. Upper secondary curricula should provide a balance between vocational and technical skills, including IT, and transferable skills such as confidence and communication which are indispensable for the work place.
4. Skills strategies must target the disadvantaged: particularly young women and urban and rural poor.
5. \$US8 billion is needed to ensure all young people attend lower secondary education. Governments as well as donors and the private sector must help fill the funding gap.

The 2012 edition of the Report follows the launch on 26 September of “Education First”, an initiative driven by U.N Secretary General Ban Ki-moon who stressed the importance of rallying all stakeholders to overcome the obstacles to achieving “quality, relevant and transformative education.”

“Our shared goals are simple,” said the Secretary-General on that occasion. “We want all children to attend primary school and to progress to secondary school and relevant higher education that will help them to succeed in life and live as engaged and productive global citizens.”

-ENDS-

For interviews, photos, case studies, videos, b-roll, quotes taken from focus groups in Egypt, or to find out more about the report, please contact:

- Kate Redman (Paris) k.redman@unesco.org on +33(0)602049345
- Marisol Sanjines (New York) m.sanjines@unesco.org + 1 646 201 8036
- or visit the GMR [press page](#)

To download the report and other relevant materials: <http://www.efareport.unesco.org>
Twitter: **#YouthSkillsWork**. A tweetchat will be taking place on October 16 to discuss the findings of the report.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

The EFA Global Monitoring Report is developed annually by an independent team and published by UNESCO.