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Almost four million young people in Central Asia and Central and Eastern Europe 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 Central Asia (CA) and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), almost 4 million people aged 15 to 24 have not even completed primary school and need alternative pathways to acquire basic skills for employment and prosperity. A third of the population in CEE and almost a half of the population in CA is under 25-years-old. Worldwide, one in eight young people is unemployed; a 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 progress in enrolling children in school in countries like the Mongolia, the Report shows that few are on track to meet the six Education for All goals set in 2000, and some, such as Albania, are lagging behind.

The Report looks in depth at youth skills, one of the least analysed of the six goals. 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 these two regions more than one million children and over 1.5 million teenagers are out of school missing out on vital skills for future employment. There is also a learning crisis: around the world, at least 250 million children of primary school age cannot read or write, whether they are in school or not. For example, in 2009, more than three quarters of poor boys and girls failed to achieve the minimum benchmark of learning outcomes in Albania, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and the Republic of Moldova.

“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. One fifth of poor urban young people in Moldova, for example, have not completed lower secondary school. These disadvantages are felt particularly acutely for Roma children in Europe: only around 7% of Roma children aged 14 to 18 are enrolled in secondary education in Romania, for example. In urban areas, the youth population is larger than it has ever been and growing. 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.

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 farm work 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. A quarter of young women in rural areas in Tajikistan, for example, have less than a lower secondary school education. Even in

Turkey, a middle income country, the rural gender gap is wide – 65% of young women do not complete lower secondary school, compared with 36% of young men. The lack of skills will impact on the future of these women’s lives forever.

This is a problem felt in developed countries too. The *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* calculates that 160 million adults in rich countries do not have the skills to write a job application. In Hungary, over a third of 16-25 year olds cannot even achieve the lowest level in problem solving skills which would enable them to adapt easily to changing work environments and evolving technologies.

Pauline Rose, director of EFA Global Monitoring Report, said: *“Education and skills for young people are the key to Central Asia and Central and Eastern Europe’s future development. Yet millions of young people in the regions have not completed primary education, and millions more have never been to lower secondary school. First and foremost, these young people must be given another chance to learn basic skills such as reading, and skills in relevant trades. Only then can they fulfil their potential and achieve their aspirations.”*

Investing in young peoples’ skills is a smart move for countries seeking to boost their economic growth. The *Education for All Global Monitoring 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 Central and South-Eastern Europe, one in five young people are unemployed; they are more than twice as likely to be unemployed than adults. 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 Report calculates that an additional US\$16 billion is needed annually to attain universal primary education by 2015. Another US\$8 billion would ensure universal lower secondary 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. 4 million young people in Central Asia and Central and Eastern Europe 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 with young people around the world, or to find out more about the report, please contact:

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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.