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Twenty percent of young New Yorkers out of school and out of work

UNESCO report shows high school drop-out rates and lack of job skills among young New Yorkers

The tenth Annual Education for All Global Monitoring Report published by UNESCO shows that 12% of young people are dropping out of secondary school in New York, and are left without vital foundation skills for work. This has contributed to one fifth of young people aged 17-24 years being out of school and unemployed. These young people urgently need an alternative pathway to learn skills which are directly applicable to the labour market so they can find gainful employment and boost the economy.

Skills needed to find decent work are learnt at primary and secondary school. However, about a third of the 173,000 young people in New York, who are out of school and work, lack a high school diploma. Over the entire region of Northern America and Western Europe, there are more than half a million adolescents of lower secondary school age who are not in education. Those without this education, and who have not had a stable job by age 25 years, face sharply diminished chances of enjoying financial stability over their lifetime.

“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.”

A long-term effect of leaving school early is adult illiteracy; the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* estimates that almost 160 million adults in rich countries do not have the skills they need to write a job application. In the United States alone, the Report quotes an OECD survey showing one in five adults scored the lowest level in literacy and one in four in numeracy. The survey calculates that scoring at this level leaves an adult eight times more likely to be unemployed than an adult who scored level 4 or 5.

The poor and disadvantaged are the most likely to have low literacy and numeracy skills and lack the ability to find decent work. In a PISA survey taken in the United States in 2009 by OECD, almost all students from the wealthiest backgrounds scored above minimum levels in mathematics. Fewer from the poorest backgrounds, and only 57% of the most disadvantaged girls achieved these scores. Indigenous populations have far lower literacy skills too. More than twice as many American Indian and native Alaskan adults scored below basic levels on literacy than white Americans.

The Report calculates that investing in skills training and education is a wise investment, especially in times of economic downturn. Indeed, for every \$1 invested in skills and education in developing countries, \$10-\$15 is raised in economic growth.

The report recommends investing in apprenticeships and internships to teach young people skills that are relevant to their country's needs. In New York already, the Mayor, Michael Bloomberg, has initiated a programme aimed at re-engaging young people who have dropped out of school and equipping them with skills for work. The Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and Young Adult Internship Program (YAIP) target vulnerable youth – the poor, disabled and homeless – with paid internships, workshops and counseling. About 30,000 young people should benefit from these projects this year. Of those who have completed the Youth Adult Internship Programme, so far, at least half have found work, are back in school or are continuing further training.

Pauline Rose, Director of the EFA Global Monitoring Report said: *“Creating jobs on its own is not going to stop youth unemployment. Young people still need the skills to do them. Competitive economies like America’s need young people to join their workforce with skills that are adaptable to the workplace, experience in doing a job and an ability to keep up with changing technologies. More needs to be done to reach young people at risk of leaving school early by making education more relevant to the world of work, such as through apprenticeships. Failing to invest in the potential of young people who want nothing more than to find a good job is a wasted opportunity for growth. Young people’s frustration will grow if something is not done urgently.”*

This youth skills deficit is being felt all over the world. The *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2012* calculates that one fifth of young people aged 15 to 24 years in all developing countries around the world have not even completed primary skills and lack skills for work. While this skills crisis is adding to unemployment rates in developed countries and cities such as New York, in developing countries, unskilled young people are being trapped in working poverty for life. Globally, one quarter of all young people earn no more than \$1.25 a day.

The 2012 EFA Global Monitoring Report calls on donors to sustain support to education to ensure that it prepares young people adequately for work. The Report calculates that it would cost \$8 billion – only \$2 billion more than the cost of the Presidential election this November – to send all young people to lower secondary school in poor countries to learn vital skills for work and boost their economies.

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

1. Young people, especially the disadvantaged, need a second chance to learn foundation skills.
2. Young people need good 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 translate easily to the work place. Apprenticeships are a proven way to provide a bridge between school and work, but need to be provided on an equal basis to all young people.
4. \$US8 billion is needed to ensure all young people go to lower secondary school in poor countries. Governments as well as donors and the private sector must help fill the financing gap. The US\$3 billion currently being spent by donors for students to study in their countries must be redirected back to core skills.

