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One in twelve young people in Latin America and the Caribbean 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 Latin America and the Caribbean, over 8 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 almost one in twelve young people. Almost half of the population in the region 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 significant progress in enrolling children in school in countries like Guatemala, the Report shows that few are on track to meet the six Education for All goals set in 2000, and some are a long way 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. In Latin America and the Caribbean, almost 2.7 million children are still missing out on primary school and 1.7 million teenagers are out of secondary school, missing out on vital skills for future employment. There is also a learning crisis: around the world, 250 million children of primary school age cannot read or write, whether they are in school or not. In Nicaragua, for example, only 46% of this age group are expected to achieve a minimum level of learning.

“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.”

In richer countries, a lack of investment in young people’s skills has contributed to spiralling unemployment statistics. Of those in the labour market in Brazil, for example, nearly one in five is unemployed. In poorer countries, meanwhile, they end up trapped in jobs earning poverty line wages.

Poor young populations, urban and rural, are the most in need of skills training. In Colombia, for example, while most young people from rich households make it to lower secondary school, only around half from poor households get the same chance. In Latin America, a quarter of the urban population live in slums and the youth population in urban areas is larger than it has ever been and growing. The skills deficit for these young people is becoming urgent. In 2009 in Peru, a quarter of young people were neither in employment nor training or education.

The majority of the poor and least educated live in rural areas, however. In Brazil those living in rural areas are twice as likely to be poor as others, and around 45% in these areas have not completed lower secondary school. Young smallholder farmers need skills training to protect their crops against climate change, and cope with increasing land scarcity. Those not in farmwork urgently need training in business and marketing to find new opportunities. Such training can make a difference. In Mexico, the Programa Joven Emprendedor Rural y Fondo

de Tierras trained farmers in sustainable, profitable agribusinesses and, within a year, participants had increased their income by one-fifth.

Women are the most in need both in rural and urban areas. In urban Bolivia, for example, women are much more likely to be self-employed in the informal sector with no legal status, regulations or standard work conditions and low pay. They also face discrimination in pay in these informal jobs. In greater Buenos Aires, women in informal firms earned 20% less than men.

Investing in young peoples' skills is a smart move for countries seeking to boost their economic growth. The EFA 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.

Pauline Rose, director of the Report, said: *"For individuals and countries to prosper, education needs to prepare young people for work. There are some solid examples in Latin America of how that can be done. Successful programmes combining classroom training and work experience in the region are effectively paving the way between school and work. The only hold back is that they are expensive and not reaching enough of the young people in need. These success stories show we have the answer - now governments and donors need to find more funds to scale these programmes up so many more can benefit from their help."*

There is a dire need to increase funding to fix this skills deficit and 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 crisis for disadvantaged youth in poor countries.

New and emerging donors such as Brazil could do more to develop the skills of young people in developing countries worldwide, but must keep focussed on prioritising the needs of the disadvantaged. Replicating its own success in vocational training, Brazil has helped with skills development in African countries, such as Mozambique. However, it currently only spends just over 2 million per year in aid to the sector when it has the potential to reach many more poor countries with its resources.

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

1. 200 million young people around the world – the same number as the entire population of Brazil - 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 in poor countries 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.