

**Embargoed 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012**

## **Over one quarter of young people in South and West Asia 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 South and West, over 91 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 more than a quarter of the region's youth population and the greatest number of unskilled young people of any region in the world. One half of the population in South and West Asia is under 25-years-old. Worldwide over an eighth of 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 impressive progress in enrolling children in school in countries like India, 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. In Pakistan, despite there being over 3 million fewer children out of school today than in 1999, over 5 million are still without an education; 63% of whom are girls. The Report shows that few countries in the region 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. This is unlikely to improve anytime soon. In South and West Asia, about 13 million are still missing out on primary school and 31 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.”

In richer countries, a lack of investment in young people's skills has contributed to spiralling unemployment statistics. Already, by 2020, 57 million jobs will be needed in South and West Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States just to stop unemployment rates rising above current levels. 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 urban areas, the youth population is larger than it has ever been and growing; more than one third of those living in urban areas in the region live in slums. Often they end up in informal labour without standard work conditions and earning little more than \$1.25 per day. In India in the mid-2000s, there were an estimated 10 million street vendors in the country.

The majority of the poor and least educated live in rural areas, with vast numbers concentrated in rural South and West Asia. Young smallholder farmers need skills training to protect their crops against climate change, and cope with increasing land scarcity. The average size of a farm in India can feed only six people. 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. Marginalised in education, they are left them disadvantaged for life. In the Islamic Republic of Iran only around 3% of women in rural areas without secondary school earn over \$2 a day, compared to almost 60% of men with the same level of education.

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. Some countries in the region are catching on. India aims to train 500 million of its poor urban youth by 2022 in six month courses and apprenticeships run by the private and private sector. Afghanistan is running accelerated learning courses for those who missed out of schooling and need another chance to learn skills.

Pauline Rose, director of EFA Global Monitoring Report, said: "Education and skills for young people are the key to future development in South and West Asia. Yet millions of young people in the region have not completed basic education, and millions more have never been to lower secondary school. These young people, especially women and the rural and urban poor, are not equipped to join in on the ambitions in some Asian countries for building strong IT and knowledge based economies. First and foremost, they must be given another chance to learn basic skills such as reading, and skills in relevant trades. Only then can countries make the full use of young people's potential. "

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 reach 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. But the Report calculates that the cost of one Nepalese student studying in Japan, for example, could pay for as many as 229 young people to have access to secondary education in Nepal. These funds could be better spent addressing the skills deficit for disadvantaged youth in poor countries.

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

1. Over 91 million young people in South and West Asia 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](mailto:k.redman@unesco.org) on +33(0)602049345
- Marisol Sanjines (New York) [m.sanjines@unesco.org](mailto: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.*