



## **Enabling Success: Supporting youth in MENA in their transition from learning to decent work<sup>1</sup>**

**Brief – May 2023**

**Ensuring a smooth transition for young people from education and learning to decent work and earning is a crucial development challenge for the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).** The majority of the youth generation must navigate a myriad of obstacles in their efforts to find meaningful employment with decent wages, working conditions, and clear pathways for career advancement. Over past decades, governments have introduced a range of policies and programmes aimed at addressing the transitions to employment. However, most of these efforts have been limited in scope and, in the aggregate, have not had much success in moving the needle on core development outcomes.

In May 2022, the UN-Arab States Issue-Based Coalition for Adolescents and Youth organized the **Regional High-Level Meeting on Young People’s Learning, Skilling, Social Inclusion and Transition to Decent Work**, bringing together representatives of Governments, private sector, trade unions, United Nations and development partners in dialogue with young people. The High-level Meeting concluded with a series of **commitments to work on reforming the learning and labour systems to ensure more effective and equitable outcomes for young people across the region.**

The report *Enabling Success: supporting youth in their transition from learning to decent work*, uses the most updated available evidence to shed light on the **precarious transitions from learning to earning faced by the majority of the young generations in the region, especially young women** (showing the lowest employment rate in the world, despite the impressive progress registered in girls’ participation to education over the last decades), **rural dwellers** and young people living in countries in conflict and **refugees**.

Large number of the **young employed in MENA work informally in low-wage jobs with limited benefits and job security or opportunities for career advancement**, all far below their expectations. Faced with limited opportunities, many developed a mindset of dependency and look to the State to provide solutions. Others end up migrating, even though this may not be their preferred course of action.

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<sup>1</sup> This Report “Enabling Success: Supporting youth in MENA in their transition from learning to decent work”, realized within the cooperation of the International Labour Organization – Regional Office for the Arab States, the UNICEF Regional Office for the MENA and the European Training Foundation, and prepared by a team at Legacy Social Development Advisory, led by Nader Kabbani. The report has been prepared as a contribution to High-level Meeting debate, and provides updated evidence on the transition from learning to earning in the region, identifying implications for reforms and providing recommendations to address this crucial aspect for the region’s equitable development and the economic growth



**Despite progress in school enrollments, learning outcomes remain weak:** students are leaving school with credentials but **without the knowledge and skills they need to succeed** and to have a smoother entry into the labour market, such as creative thinking, problem-solving and leadership skills. Especially worrisome is the quality of technical and vocational education and training.

Overall, across the region, there is a **general lack of career guidance and limited information available to support employment decisions**. Young people know little about the types of careers that might suit them and what jobs might be available when they leave school, and little about entry-level positions and wages.

**Several governments in MENA have or are undertaking fundamental reforms of their education and learning systems, but results – so far – have been limited or temporary.** TVET systems in the region suffer from a lack of resources, outdated equipment, curricula that do not reflect market needs, a lack of well-trained instructors, limited hands-on experience, and social stigma. Reform efforts in this domain has been limited in scope and scale.

**Governments have encouraged youth entrepreneurship as a way to help young people create economic opportunities** for themselves and for others. They have expanded the provision of entrepreneurship education, awareness-raising, enterprise support, and access to finance. **Despite these efforts, young people still find it difficult to start and grow a business.** One constraint is the widespread **lack of access to finance**. Another is that programmes supporting entrepreneurship generally only benefit privileged youth and are difficult to access for others.

The situation described in detail in the report represents a **new call for action:** time is of the essence. **Several global drivers of change are underway and will affect economic, social and environmental outcomes across the region and the world.** These include climate change, demographic change, urbanization, technological change and a transition to renewable energy. Each driver of change on their own represents an opportunity to develop better options for young people. Together, they call countries to adapt and invest in reskilling their workforce, creating the potential for rapid development and growth.

The Report identifies some **priority reforms and actions**, presented in form of **recommendations**.

First it is fundamental to have the basics rights, **long-term solutions must be structural**.

**Education reforms** should create environments that can accommodate **differential approaches to learning**, and determine the space for students to **develop critical thinking and enquiry**. Systems must become better able to **adapt to changing conditions**. **TVET must improve links to the labour market, engage the private sector in skills identification and delivery, and increase workplace learning.**



The national economies must **enable the private sector to grow and create jobs and should also increase support for youth entrepreneurship.**

Reforms should expand initiatives that **support internships, apprenticeships and on-the-job training.** Policymakers, youth, and businesses need **better information to make decisions**, through enhanced Labour market information systems, including the **expansion of career guidance services** to help youth identify the kinds of careers in demand that align with their aptitudes and preferences.

Another essential area of focus is the **improvement of the implementation of youth-oriented initiatives and organizations.** Governments must **increase coordination among public agencies serving youth.** The **implementation capacities** need to be improved too, while countries need to **update national youth policies and ensure that priorities are harmonized within national budgets.**

The **development of more human-centred and targeted services that support young people's transition, with input from stakeholders and beneficiaries,** is essential. These services should include **employability training, career guidance, job placement, subsidies for transportation and day-care.**

**Lifelong learning must be prioritized.** Change is coming more quickly than formal education systems can respond. Young people need to develop skills that will allow them to become better lifelong learners with the ability to access resources that support continuous education.