

The twin challenges of child labour and youth employment in the Arab States



International
Labour
Organization

A new ILO report, *The twin challenges of child labour and youth employment in the Arab States*, highlights the distance the Arab region must still travel to eliminate child labour and ensure decent work for young persons.

The number of **children trapped in child labour remains high in many of the Arab States** while at the same time young people across the region are faced with high levels of unemployment and a dearth of quality jobs.

Many of the Arab children in child labour must also log very long working hours each week, increasing their exposure to workplace hazards and reducing their time for other activities.

The **adverse impact of child labour on children's education** in the Arab States and therefore on their future prospects: children in employment are much less likely to attend school than their non-working peers, underscoring the barrier that child labour poses to the goals of universal basic education in the Arab region; those child labourers that do manage to attend school lag behind their non-working counterparts in terms of grade progression – an indication in part of poorer school performance.

The youth unemployment rate in the region is the highest in the world. Over 28 per cent of all economically active 15-24 year-olds are unable to find jobs, more than twice the global average. The **youth unemployment rate in the region is almost four times higher than the rate for adults**, suggesting that youth face unique barriers to finding jobs, above and beyond general labour market forces faced by youth and adult workers alike.

At the same time, only 30 per cent of 15-24 year-olds in the Arab states, and 13 per cent of Arab female youth, are in the labour force, **the lowest labour force participation rates in the world.**

Job quality is also a concern. Many of those who are employed must make do with low-quality, informal sector jobs without written contracts and the benefits associated with them.

While youth literacy rates are high, feedback from employers suggest that **young people in the Arab States lack job-relevant skills**, exacerbating the employment challenges they face. The best-educated Arab youth appear to have the greatest difficulties securing work, undoubtedly affecting incentives to continue in education.

While the specifics differ from country to country, many of the general policy priorities for addressing child labour and the youth decent work deficit in the Arab States are common.

Progress against child labour requires:

- **continued investment in quality education** as a valid alternative to child labour;
- **greater “second chance” learning opportunities** for children whose education has already been compromised by child labour;
- an **adequate social protection floor** in order that families do not have to resort to child labour as a household coping strategy;
- greater societal **awareness of the dangers of child labour and the benefits of schooling** in order for households to make informed decisions concerning their children’s time use; and
- **strengthened legislative and policy frameworks** to guide action, and greater institutional capacity to ensure their effective implementation

Addressing decent work deficit facing youth requires a **special focus on vulnerable youth and on female youth** whose labour force participation is extremely low. Policy priorities in this regard include:

- continued **investment in technical vocational education and training** (TVET) systems to effectively meet skills requirements;
- better formal **mechanisms for linking young job seekers with employers** with suitable job openings, in response to the over-reliance on informal networks and family contacts in seeking jobs;
- **greater youth entrepreneurship opportunities** as a demand-side strategy for expanding job opportunities for unemployed or underemployed young persons; and
- improved **statistics and information on the youth employment situation**, to help guide action and monitoring progress.

The situation of children and youth in Syria since the outbreak of the war is beyond the scope of the current report. Clearly, however, the massive social disruptions, population dislocations and state-breakdown associated with the on-going political violence in the country have had a devastating impact on the country’s children and youth, and measures to mitigate this impact are urgently needed.

Urgent measures, above and beyond those listed above, are also needed to protect children and youth in the countries beyond the borders of Syria that have been affected by the crisis. Reports suggest that child labour among the refugee populations is a growing concern, as schools have struggled to accommodate refugee children and refugee families have fought to make ends meet. At the same time, many refugee youth have been left languishing at a critical time in their development, their education and training interrupted and without access to decent jobs in their host countries.

International Labour Organization – Regional Office for the Arab States

ARESCO Centre - Justinien Street - Kantari
P.O.Box 11-4088 Riad Solh 1107-2150
Beirut - Lebanon
Tel : 00961-1-752400
Fax : 00961-1-752405
Email : beirut@ilo.org

Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch – International Labour Office

4, route des Morillons
1211 Geneva 22
Switzerland
Tel : +41 22 799 8181
Fax : +41 22 799 8771
Email : fundamentals@ilo.org
www.ilo.org/fundamentals