




WHY DO WE EXIST?

CHALLENGES
OF YOUTH EDUCATION
AND UNEMPLOYMENT



Why Do We Exist?

Challenges of Youth Education and Unemployment

In the Arab region

- Educational attainment is lower than the global average at all levels
- Graduates are unprepared for the workforce
- Youth unemployment is higher than the global average

Over two-thirds of the population in the Arab region is under the age of 30, with youth between the ages of 15 and 24 constituting up more than half of the youth population.¹ Since the early 2000s, the Arab region has made remarkable strides in secondary and tertiary enrollment, with impressive progress towards gender parity.² However, major challenges in the region persist and include lack of access to quality education, below average secondary school completion rates, and high rates of unemployment. An unprecedentedly large number of youth are at risk.³

Though considerable progress in school enrollment has been made, major challenges in educational attainment remain as more than 16.2 million children, adolescents, and youth of primary and secondary school age are out of school as of 2019.⁴ Despite improvements in gender parity in educational attainment, according to UNICEF, one in every five children in the MENA region is out of school and female students are 1.5 times more likely to be out of school.⁵

Additionally, lower secondary (grades 6-9) and higher secondary (grades 10-12) completion rates in the Arab region are lower than the global average. In 2019, the lower secondary completion rate for the Arab region was 70%, while the global rate was 76%;⁶ tertiary enrollment was 34%, falling short by about 6% from the global average.⁷

A 2019 Brookings' report on youth employment concluded that the quality of education in the Arab region does not adequately prepare youth, including those who completed their education, for the world of work.⁸ Too many young men and women find themselves graduating with a skills gap, which leaves them unqualified for, or unable to succeed in, the current labor market.⁹ The Arab youth unemployment rate is the highest in the world, at almost 23%, compared to the global rate of 13.7%.¹⁰ The unemployment rate is also noticeably high among female youth, estimated at around 42%.¹¹

The ongoing political instability and humanitarian crises in the region, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic, have exacerbated the challenges facing Arab youth, but opportunities for youth to secure a prosperous future remain. With the right educational opportunities and support, youth can and will drive growth and sustainable development of the Arab region. The Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education (AGFE) was established to help elevate livelihoods of Emirati and Arab youth through education.