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**Reforming technical and vocational education
and training: a gateway for building a skilled
youth workforce in the Arab region**



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Introduction

In light of the persistent presence of a youth bulge in the Arab region, youth empowerment has been a priority for Arab countries and policymakers. Countries have invested in their education sector and, as a result, have witnessed significant progress in expanding school coverage to unprecedented levels. Arab countries have also succeeded in diminishing the gender gap in education parity. However, the progress achieved in expanding access to education has not translated into increased employment. At present, youth in the Arab region register the highest youth unemployment rate in the world.

High unemployment can be attributed to a number of mutually interacting factors both on the demand side and the supply side of the labour market. In Arab countries, sluggish job creation has been further exacerbated by rentier economies, a pervasiveness of informal employment and conflict and instability in several countries. These elements are some of the key obstacles to the economic and social empowerment of young people in the region. While acknowledging that there is an urgent need to tackle the region's weak labour demand as well as the need to create jobs for young labour market entrants, this paper will focus on the supply side of employment and on building a skilled young labour force, well equipped for the requirements of a rapidly changing labour market.

More specifically, this paper examines technical and vocational training and education (TVET) in the Arab region and discusses its potential for empowering youth and reducing youth unemployment. To this end, the paper first provides a quantitative analysis of the situation of youth in the region by focusing on demographic trends, education and employment. It then discusses the potential of TVET for empowering youth as well as the challenges facing TVET in the region. The paper provides a brief policy survey and analysis of recently adopted policies in Arab countries and highlights some emerging promising practices. The paper concludes with a brief set of policy recommendations.

This paper adopts the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) definition of TVET, which “is understood as comprising education, training and skills development relating to a wide range of occupational fields, production, services and livelihoods. TVET, as part of lifelong learning, can take place at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels and includes work-based learning and continuing training and professional development which may lead to qualifications.”¹

The paper relies on both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. The data sources include World Population Prospects 2019, published by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA); the UNESCO Institute for Statistics; and the ILOSTAT database on labour statistics published by the International Labour Organization (ILO). In addition to the literature review, primary sources including relevant policies and strategies were surveyed. Throughout the text, the term Arab region refers to 22 countries including Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, the State of Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

¹ UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2014.

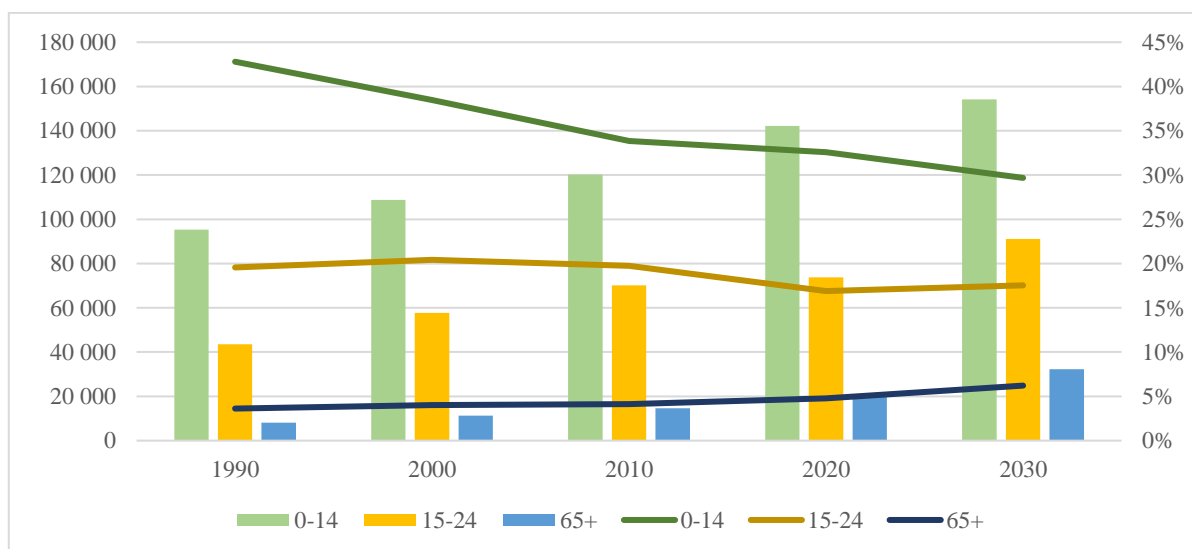
I. The Arab region and the demographic window of opportunity

The Arab region continues to be one of the most youthful regions in the world. It has witnessed a dramatic increase of the number of children and youth (defined as those below 24 years old) from around

139 million in 1980 to around 216 million today, making up about 50 per cent of the region's population in 2020. This number is projected to increase to more than 245 million by 2030.

Youth aged 15-24 years make up almost 17 per cent of the population of Arab countries, or close to 74 million people. Compared to children below age 14, the size of the youth population is expected to grow faster, reaching 91 million by 2030.² This variation can be explained by the change in age structures over the past few decades that has been mainly driven by decreasing fertility rates, which have fallen from close to five children per woman in 1990 to around three in 2020 (figure 1).

Figure 1. Number (thousands) and proportion (percentage) of children (0-14), youth (15-24) and older persons (65+)



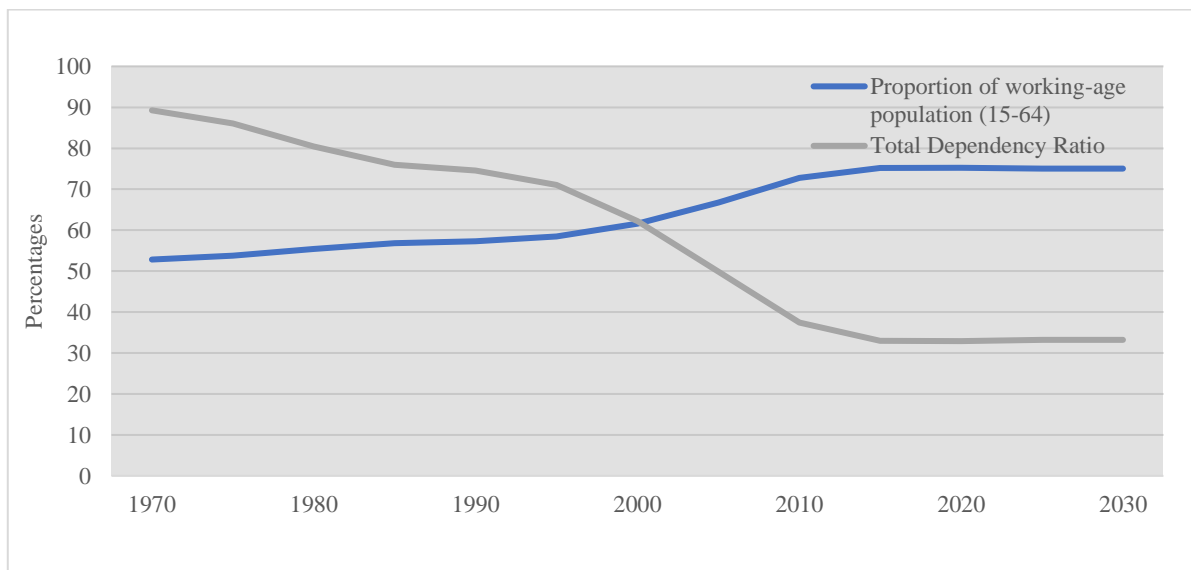
Source: ESCWA calculations based on United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), World Population Prospects 2019 database, online edition.

The demographic transformation of the region could hold great economic and development promise. Most countries, with the majority of the population moving into the working age group and decreasing dependency ratios, are on the cusp of witnessing a demographic dividend (figure 2).³ Their ability to reap the rewards of this demographic window of opportunity is largely determined by the extent of the development and empowerment of their children and youth today, who will form the future workforce. Unfortunately, most countries face significant challenges in this regard, including the availability of State resources to develop quality health and education services, in addition to elevated poverty levels that restrict the ability of families to invest in their children.

² ESCWA calculations based on United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), World Population Prospects 2019 database.

³ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2019.

Figure 2. Demographic dividend, 1970-2030



Source: ESCWA calculations based on World Population Prospects 2019, online edition.

The demographic dividend presents an opening for countries to focus their attention on youth empowerment.⁴ For example, as children and youth bulges start shrinking, governments have the ability to shift their focus from delivering education services to massive numbers of children and youth, to investing more in human capital development and quality of education. In fact, reaping the benefits of the demographic dividend hinges on the ability to develop adequate and quality education systems capable of responding to labour market needs and equipping youth with the necessary employable and lifelong learning skill sets that match labour market requirements. To reap the potential benefits of anticipated demographic dividend in many countries, governments must act now to ensure adequate human development and empowerment of all children and youth, both young girls and boys, who can transit into a state of productive adulthood, well-resourced to care for themselves and their dependents.

A. Education

Looking first at education, the enrolment of children in the Arab region in primary school is high and shows relatively small divergence between countries, albeit a higher variation for girls' enrollment (figure 3).⁵ Secondary and tertiary school enrolment are lower and less even, signaling disparities within the region, and in the case of tertiary education also a significant divergence between young men and young women, with young women reaching higher tertiary education enrolment ratios (figures 4 and 5).

⁴ Variation among Arab countries in terms of the time frame and the conditions necessary to reaping the benefits of a demographic dividend are vast. For more details and country-specific analysis, see UNICEF's MENA Generation 2030: Investing in children and youth today to secure a prosperous region tomorrow.

⁵ The analysis focuses on net enrolment rates in primary and secondary education, which takes into consideration only students in the theoretical age group for a given level of education enrolled in that level. In individual country-level analyses, in the case of countries affected by protracted conflict and/or forced displacement, it is advisable to consider gross enrolment ratios which consider all students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, and thus include early or late entrants and grade repetition.

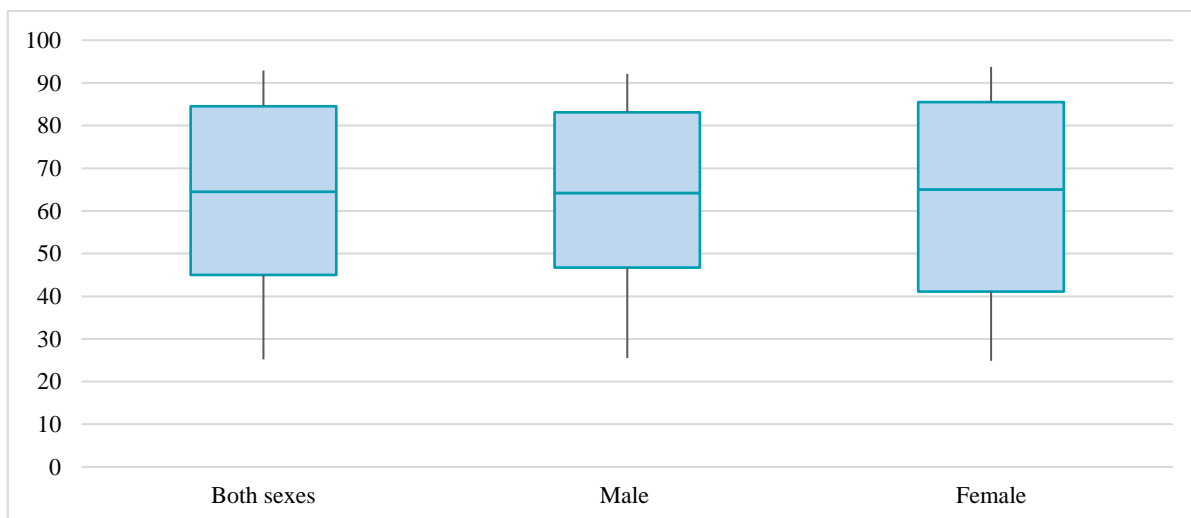
Figure 3. Net primary school enrolment rate (Percentage)



Source: ESCWA calculations based on United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Institute for Statistics data. Available at <http://data.uis.unesco.org> (accessed 18 June 2019).

Note: The figure refers to minimum, first quartile, median, third quartile, and maximum values. The figure uses the most recent data point available for each country, so 2018 for Djibouti; 2017 for Bahrain, Comoros, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, State of Palestine and the Sudan; 2016 for the United Arab Emirates and Yemen; 2013 for the Syrian Arab Republic; 2007 for Iraq; and 2004 for Jordan. For Algeria, the most recent data for both sexes are from 2017 and for male and female from 2016. For Saudi Arabia, the most recent data for both sexes are from 2014 and for male and female from 2012. For Tunisia, the most recent data for both sexes are from 2013 and for male and female from 2009. Data for Libya and Somalia were not available.

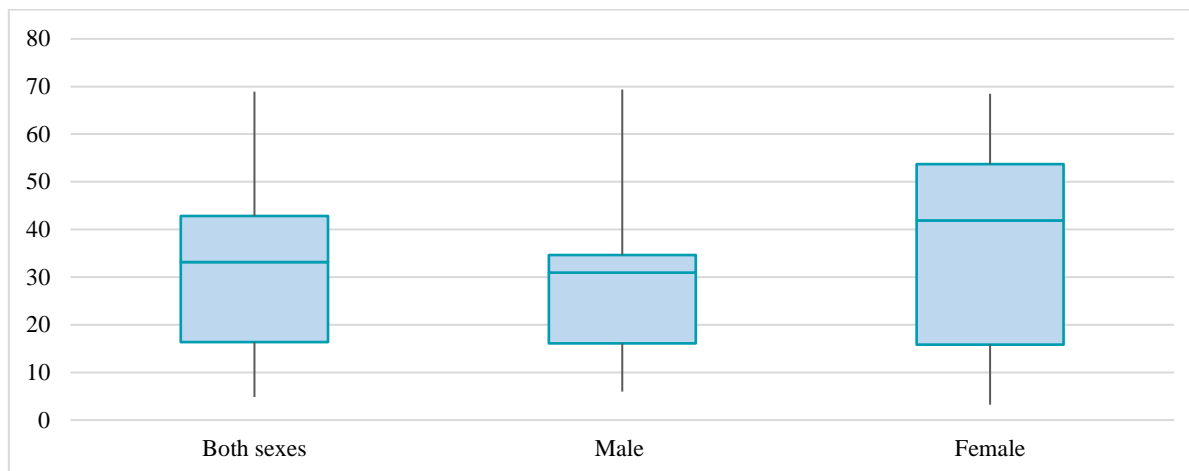
Figure 4. Net secondary school enrolment rate (Percentage)



Source: ESCWA calculations based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Available at <http://data.uis.unesco.org> (accessed 18 June 2019).

Note: The figure refers to minimum, first quartile, median, third quartile, and maximum values. The figure uses the most recent data point available for each country, so 2017 for Bahrain, Comoros, Egypt, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar and State of Palestine; 2016 for the United Arab Emirates and Yemen; 2015 for Djibouti and Kuwait; 2013 for Saudi Arabia and the Syrian Arab Republic; 2012 for Lebanon; 2011 for the Sudan; and 2007 for Iraq. Data for Algeria, Libya, Somalia and Tunisia were not available.

Figure 5. Gross tertiary school enrolment ratio (Percentage)

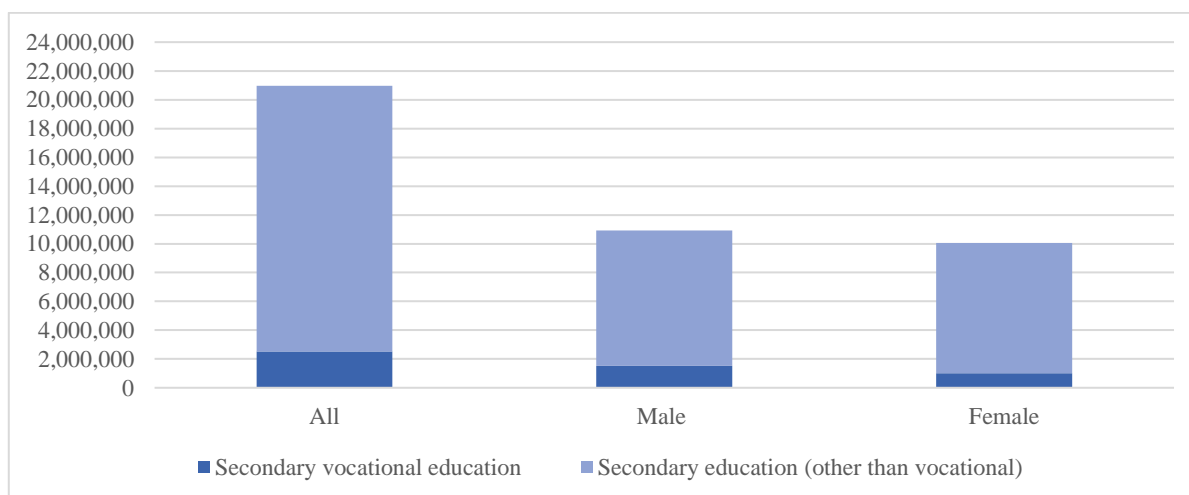


Source: ESCWA calculations based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics data (accessed 18 June 2019).

Note: The figure refers to minimum, first quartile, median, third quartile, and maximum values. The figure uses the most recent data point available for each country, so 2017 for Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine and Tunisia; 2016 for Egypt, Oman and the Syrian Arab Republic; 2015 for the Sudan; 2014 for Comoros; 2013 for Kuwait; 2011 for Djibouti and Yemen; 2005 for Iraq; and 2003 for Libya. For Lebanon, the most recent data for both sexes are from 2017 and for male and female from 2014. Data for Somalia and the United Arab Emirates are not available.

Students typically enroll in vocational programmes at the secondary level. In the Arab region, there are currently approximately 2.5 million secondary students participating in vocational education, constituting around 12 per cent of all secondary students. Vocational programmes are slightly more favoured by young men, as students enrolled in vocational programmes make up 14 per cent of all secondary male students, compared to 10 per cent in case of women (figure 6).

Figure 6. Number and share of secondary students enrolled in vocational programmes

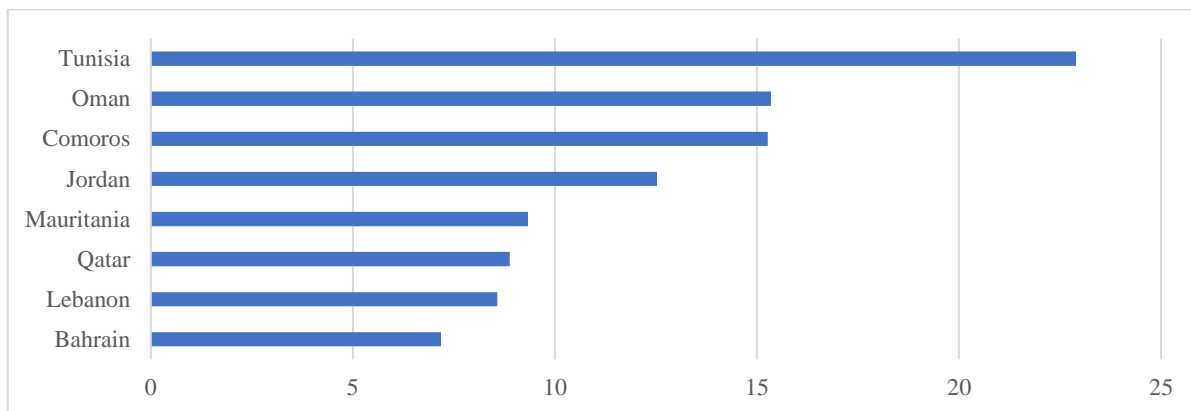


Source: ESCWA calculations based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics data (accessed 12 December 2019).

Note: The figure includes countries with available data in the last eight years. Algeria, Iraq, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and the Syrian Arab republic are excluded from the regional average. The figure uses 2019 data for Djibouti, 2018 data for Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar and the State of Palestine; 2017 data for Comoros, the Sudan and the United Arab Emirates; 2016 data for Tunisia and Yemen; and 2015 data for Kuwait.

Of the countries for which data is available, Tunisia, Oman and Comoros have the highest expenditure on education as a percentage of total government expenditure, reaching almost 22 per cent in case of Tunisia and around 15 per cent for Oman and Comoros, compared to 7 per cent in case of Bahrain on the low end (figure 7).

Figure 7. Expenditure on education as a percentage of total government expenditure (Percentage)

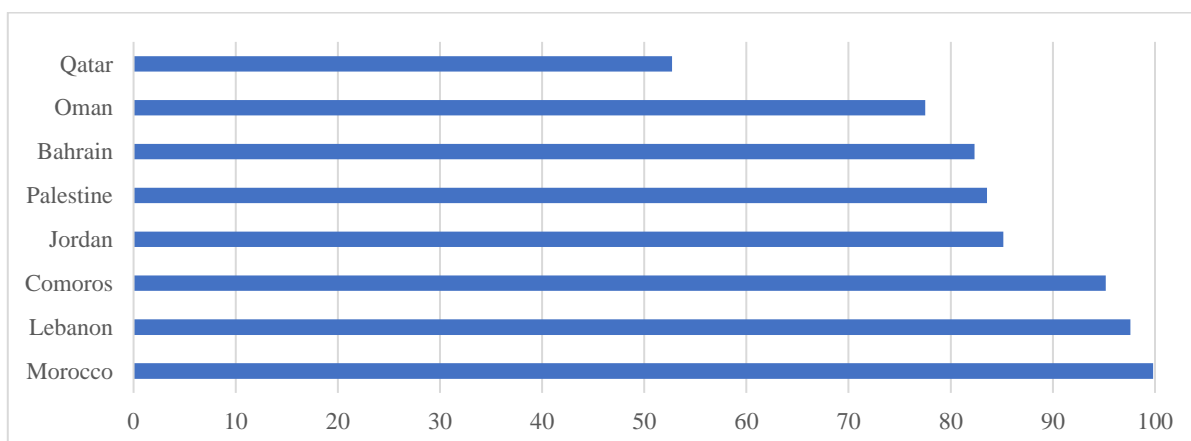


Source: ESCWA calculations based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics data. Available at <http://data.uis.unesco.org> (accessed 12 December 2019).

Note: The figure includes countries with available data in the last eight years. The figure uses 2017 data for Bahrain, Jordan, Oman and Qatar; 2016 data for Mauritania; 2015 data for Comoros and Tunisia; and 2013 data for Lebanon.

The distribution of these expenditures is equally important. Most public expenditure is allocated to staff compensation, exceeding 95 per cent in Morocco, Lebanon and Comoros (figure 8). These numbers could indicate that funds for increasing the quality and capacity of education systems may be insufficient.

Figure 8. All staff compensation as a percentage of total expenditure in public institutions (Percentage)



Source: ESCWA calculations based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics data. Available from <http://data.uis.unesco.org> (accessed 12 December 2019).

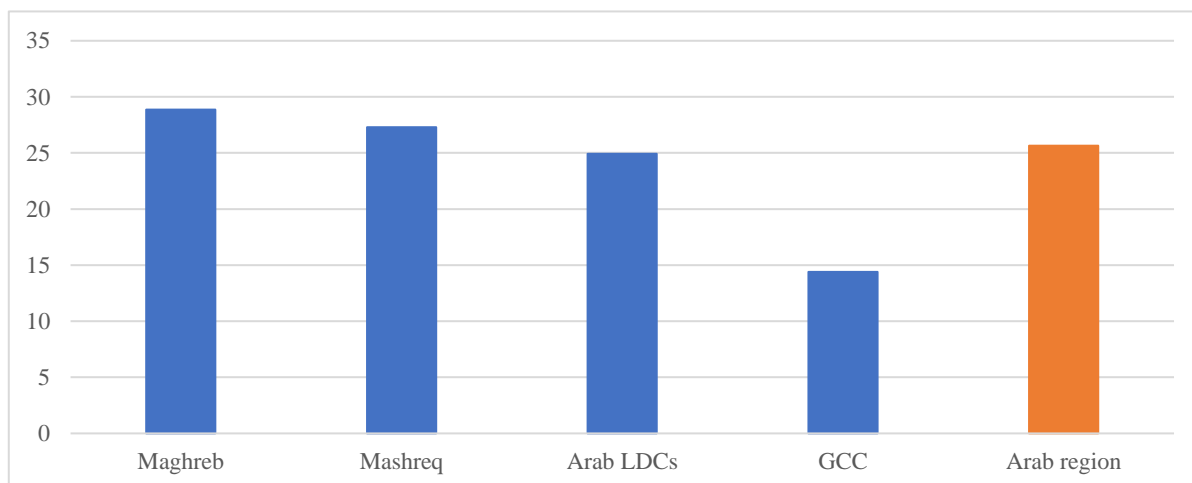
Note: The figure includes countries with available data in the last eight years. The figure uses 2018 data for Morocco; 2017 data for Jordan, Oman, Qatar and the State of Palestine; 2015 data for Comoros; 2013 data for Lebanon; and 2012 data for Bahrain.

Despite the significant progress witnessed in countries across the region, the education sector continues to suffer from structural difficulties including achieving geographical balance in service delivery between rural and urban areas, ensuring inclusion of all young people including persons with disability and providing quality education. The 2016 Arab Human Development Report found that inequality is widest in the education component of the inequality-adjusted Human Development Index, which may “reflect the inequalities in education systems that properly prepare only a small minority of youth with the adequate skills to meet the demand of labour markets, where most new entrants face a lack of opportunity”.⁶

B. Employment

The progress achieved in education has not been translated to increased employment.⁷ Unemployment rates especially among the youth are soaring and are currently the highest in the world, at close to 26 per cent on average and ranging between 14 per cent in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries,⁸ 25 per cent in Arab least developed countries (LDCs),⁹ 27 per cent in the Mashreq¹⁰ and 29 per cent in the Maghreb.¹¹ Unemployment also has a gendered dimension, as the unemployment rate of young women aged 15-24 years is 75 per cent higher than that of young men in the region (39 per cent compared to 22 per cent).¹² Higher education levels are not a guarantee against unemployment in the region, as reflected in higher unemployment rates among university graduates.

Figure 9. Youth unemployment rate (percentage), 2020



Source: ESCWA calculations based ILOSTAT data (accessed 13 December 2019).

⁶ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2016.

⁷ Samans and Zahidi, 2017.

⁸ Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

⁹ The Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen.

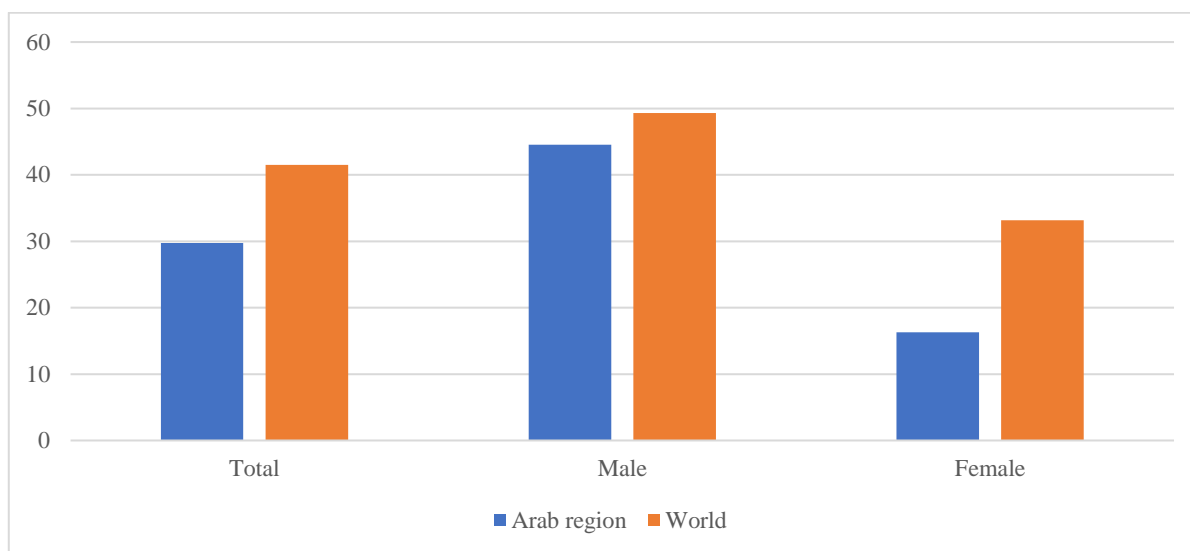
¹⁰ Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the State of Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic.

¹¹ Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia.

¹² ESCWA calculations based on ILOSTAT data (accessed 13 December 2019).

According to the definition of unemployment, only those that are part of the labour force and actively seeking a job are reflected by the unemployment rate. Therefore, the above average rates mask a gap that would be even more glaring regarding young women who, for a variety of different reasons, are left out of the workforce entirely.¹³ Evidence shows that the high educational attainment of women, which at the tertiary level is remarkably higher than that of men, has not so far been translated into an increase in their labour force participation. According to ILO estimates, only 16 per cent of the Arab region’s young women are part of the workforce in 2020, compared to 33 per cent globally. At the same time, 45 per cent of young men are active in the labour force in the region, which is relatively close to other parts of the world.¹⁴ Young women in the Arab region are thus less likely to enter the workforce than their peers in other regions and unemployment data show that if they do, they face more difficulties in finding adequate employment than men.

Figure 10. Youth labour force participation rate (percentage), 2020



Source: ESCWA calculations based ILOSTAT data (accessed 13 December 2019).

Another useful illustration of the challenge of the large numbers of inactive youth in the Arab region is the number of youths who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). NEET figures give a better idea of the potential scale of youth labour market entrants than youth unemployment figures, which only considers those actively seeking a job. Since NEET focuses on all young people who find themselves without work and disengaged from education, it can shed light on the challenge of transitioning from education to work.

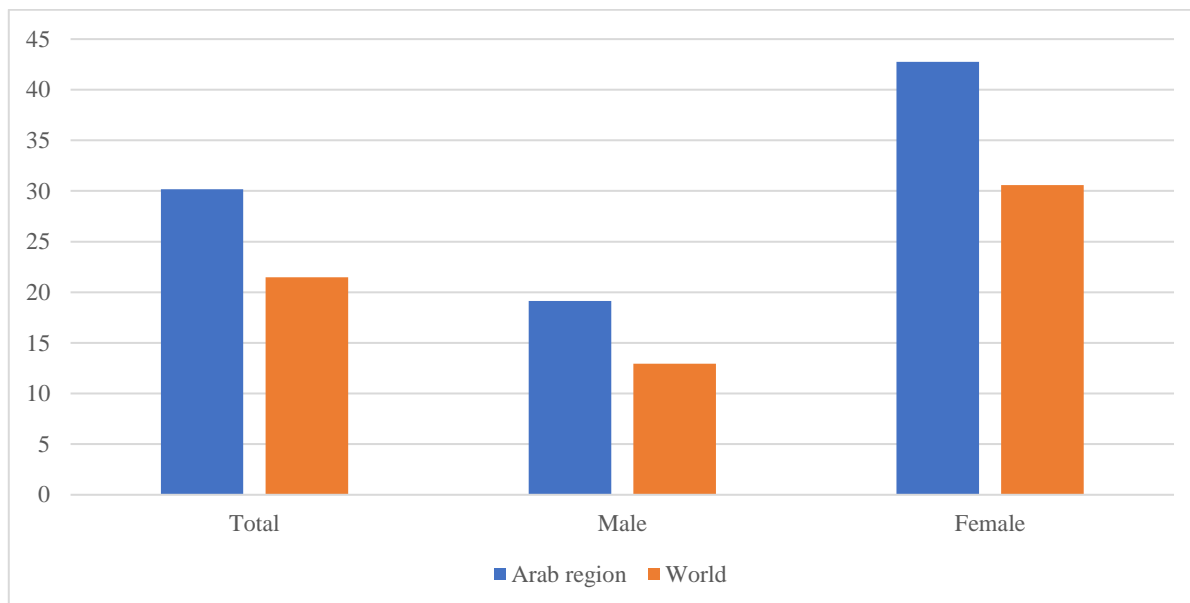
In 2020, the estimated number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) in the Arab region is 21 million, constituting close to one third of all youth, which is

¹³ According to the ILO Glossary of Statistical Terms the labour force refers to the sum of all persons of working age who are employed and those who are unemployed. Unemployed persons are defined as all those of working age who are not in employment, have been actively seeking employment during a recent specified period and are currently available to take up employment given a job opportunity. The labour force thus does not include persons of working age who are students, retired, taking care of children or other family members, or not seeking employment.

¹⁴ ESCWA calculations based on ILOSTAT data (accessed 13 December 2019).

significantly higher than the global average of around 21 per cent. There is a pervasive gender gap, with around 19 per cent of young men in the Arab region falling into the NEET group compared to close to 43 per cent of young women.¹⁵

Figure 11. Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) (percentage), 2020



Source: ESCWA calculations based on ILOSTAT data (accessed 13 December 2019).

Against this backdrop, boosting job creation is essential in the region. According to ILO estimates, the labour force of the region totals roughly 143 million workers in 2020, a figure that is expected to grow by almost 19 million by 2030. In addition, the labour market needs to absorb those currently unemployed. Given this expansion in the labour market and an unemployment rate of about 10 per cent, the Arab region needs to create more than 32 million additional jobs in the coming decade.¹⁶

On average, Arab countries only created around 2.3 million jobs annually between 2010 and 2020.¹⁷ Moreover, according to the ILO’s report on informality in the employment sector, around 69 per cent of the jobs in the region were in the informal sector, which is associated with lower productivity, income and security.¹⁸

The provision of adequate public sector jobs, which still constitutes a key aspect of the “social contract” in the region, has become increasingly untenable as a result of ongoing State reforms, shifts in bureaucracies and formidably high numbers of new entrants into the market. Job creation is further hindered by the weakness of the private sector, which often generates low-quality jobs in the informal economy, unattractive to many young people, particularly given the weak social protection platforms.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ International Labour Organization (ILO), 2018.

Vulnerable youth groups including young women, youth in rural areas, youth with disabilities, and refugee, migrant and displaced youth, who continue to face aggravated challenges accessing both the education services and the labour market.¹⁹

Large numbers of youth across the region are ill-prepared for the challenges posed by a fast changing job market, marked by automation, big data and artificial intelligence, among many other developments.²⁰ The fourth industrial revolution and shifts in job roles and occupational structures have resulted in the continuous need to match its demand for an adaptable skilled labour force that can operate in an increasingly globalized market.²¹

Today, the majority of Arab countries suffer from a mismatch between the skills offered by rigid and, in many cases, outdated education systems and curricula and the skills demanded by the job market. The mismatch is not limited to technical skills, but extends to life skills, which refer to personal and interpersonal skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, etc.²² The pervasive skills mismatch between job market needs and education, inadequate labour force skills and the lack of work-readiness has been flagged by firms in the region as detrimental to their growth and ability to hire employees.²³

Unless these challenges are urgently addressed, their implications will be far-reaching, deterring the region's ability to alleviate poverty and achieve progress towards sustainable development. It could also potentially lead to further social unrest as multitudes of young people suffer growing socioeconomic frustrations.

II. Making the case for quality TVET: a new model for skilled and employable youth

“The knowledge, skills and competencies imparted by education are generally understood as primary vehicles for the empowerment of individuals and the promotion of social and economic development [...]. Ensuring adequate and relevant technical and vocational education and training is central to responding to the diverse aspirations and needs of individuals and societies in a rapidly globalizing world.”

A/67/310, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, 15 August 2012.

Globally, TVET has been recognized as an effective instrument for empowering youth. It provides youth with employable skills sets and facilitates their paths to productive employment and

¹⁹ For example, across the Arab region economic inactivity ranges between 51 and 74 per cent among males with a disability compared to 18-33 per cent for males without disability. For more information, see the ESCWA publication, Disability in the Arab Region (E/ESCWA/SDD/2018/1).

²⁰ European Training Foundation (ETF) and World Bank, 2005.

²¹ Samans and Zahidi, 2017.

²² UNESCO defines life skills as “a group of cognitive, personal and interpersonal abilities that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others, and cope with and manage their lives healthily and productively.”

²³ United Nations, 2018.

work. In the Arab region, TVET could play a critical role in combating youth unemployment through fostering labour market integration and increasing opportunities for training and “upskilling”.

National efforts to further develop and reform TVET, especially in the context of achieving sustainable development, can have a significant impact and multiplier effect in encouraging economic growth, reducing inequality, particularly for the most vulnerable youth, and contributing to consolidation of peace.

The importance of TVET was also recognized in the 2030 Agenda. The fourth sustainable development goal reflected the global commitment to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all, including access to affordable and quality technical, vocational education (SDG 4.3). The 2030 Agenda embodies a transformative paradigm for thinking about development. It emphasizes a nexus approach that recognizes and addresses the interlinkages of the different facets of development. In line with this approach the 2030 Agenda also emphasizes the linkages between technical and vocational skills and employment and decent jobs (SDG 8). However, as shall be demonstrated below, TVET transcends education and employment and cuts across the five pillars of the 2030 Agenda: people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnership.

From an economic perspective, modernized, responsive and inclusive TVET contributes to building a knowledge-based society, which is a prerequisite for driving productivity, by providing a competitive edge in an increasingly demanding global economy and ensuring prosperity. Progressive TVET systems are closely correlated with the labour market in that they are shaped by the actual demand for vocational qualifications. They cover a wide range of occupations such as information technology and health care as well as the traditional trades and crafts. They foster a wide array of skills, including technical and occupational skills, entrepreneurship, innovation and technology and core business and personal skills, blurring the lines between TVET and general secondary and higher education.²⁴ This approach to hands-on education is in part a result of the changing labour and market trends that require a duality of academic education and formal training interventions to equip individuals with the mindset and skill set needed to succeed in today’s economy.²⁵ This approach is also vital for assisting youth with a smooth transition between TVET, higher education and/or the labour market/formal economy.

TVET can positively contribute to promoting social equity by leveraging human capital. It can empower the economically disadvantaged by increasing their opportunities for employability and income (SDG 10.1), provided they are included in social protection platforms that are typically absent in informal employment. As some global practices attest, TVET can also contribute to the well-being of vulnerable groups of young people, particularly young women and persons with disability, and youth in conflict, by narrowing education and employment gaps, facilitating their socioeconomic inclusion, remedying existing inequalities, reducing risks of marginalization and breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty (SDG 5, and 8).^{26, 27}

²⁴ Marope, Chakroun and Holmes, 2015.

²⁵ World Bank, 2014.

²⁶ ILO, 2017.

²⁷ The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) 2006 highlighted the need to ensure persons with disability’s access to general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination (article 24), and to enable them to have effective access to technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training (article 27).

In addition to improving employable skills for vulnerable youth, TVET can encourage young people, particularly young men, to “buy into” peace processes by empowering them both economically and socially.^{28, 29} The 2015 Security Council resolution on Youth, Peace and Security ([S/RES/2250](#)) recognized the linkage between employment, vocational training, education, entrepreneurship for the youth and peace.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution on Youth, Peace and Security (Res. 2250) “stresses the importance of creating policies for youth that would positively contribute to peacebuilding efforts ... and provide youth employment opportunities and vocational training, fostering their education, and promoting youth entrepreneurship and constructive political engagement.”

The nexus of TVET and environmental issues is also materializing, as TVET systems are expected to equip young people with skills that spur economic growth while at the same time ensure environmental sustainability.³⁰ Green and blue skills that strike the balance between economic growth, sustainable patterns of production and consumption and sustainable use of environmental resources and ecosystems are required to help protect the **planet** and achieve SDGs 12, 13, 14 and 15.³¹ TVET can play an important role in this regard, particularly given its emphasis on specific sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing and construction, among others, that can have a heavy environmental footprint. Thus, it is of growing importance to make TVET more environmentally focused. Moreover, as countries move towards green and blue economies, there is a large potential for the creation of green and blue jobs, which will demand specific knowledge and skills that can be provided by TVET.³²

Successful experiences from countries across the globe showcase the importance of real **partnerships** for achieving effective TVET systems. The multi-pronged nature of TVET provides manifold intersections between education and employment and the often complex governance systems necessitate strong partnerships and effective coordination mechanisms between the public sector and the private sector and civil society. Regional cooperation is also required given the large scale intraregional labour migration.

III. Challenges facing TVET in the Arab region

The attractiveness of TVET to young people in the Arab region is still low compared to general education, as demonstrated in figure 6 above. These rates are striking when compared to countries with developed TVET sectors. For example, around one third of the population in countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have vocational, upper secondary degrees as their highest educational level achieved.³³

²⁸ Matsumoto, 2008.

²⁹ Johnson, Phillips and Maclean, 2007.

³⁰ UNESCO and International Center for Technical and Vocational Training (UNEVOC), 2012.

³¹ European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), 2013.

³² Marope, Chakroun and Holmes, 2015.

³³ OECD, 2013.

While general education has made significant strides in most Arab countries, several challenges have hindered the development of TVET. Despite variation across and within countries, some general challenges can be identified. The quality of service provision remains relatively low across the region, as a result of outdated curricula, absence of continuous professional development and poorly equipped schools. The poor coordination and collaboration between TVET and the private sector has lowered TVET responsiveness to the labour market, deepening the skills mismatch between the qualifications of TVET students and the needs of the labour market. Moreover, there are limited pathways connecting TVET with higher education for students wishing to do so.

TVET is also weakened by persistent negative social attitudes and perceptions linked to the stigma associated with academic failure and poor-quality provision that deter both young people from joining TVET programmes and employers from recruiting TVET graduates.

The unattractiveness of TVET is propagated by the perception that it is an underprivileged track for employment that would include low wage jobs, poor working conditions and prospects of informality.³⁴ While unemployment rates for TVET graduates (around 15 per cent) are almost half of that of university graduates (close to 30 per cent) in the Arab region, surveys indicate that the majority of TVET graduates are not employed in satisfactory jobs.³⁵

The impact of informality is exacerbated in the region due to its scale as well as the heightened vulnerability of informal workers, who are usually excluded from social protection systems in most countries across the region.³⁶

Consequently, in a region that faces difficulties in generating high-quality jobs, the message that is signaled to youth is “acquire the ‘right’ degree from the ‘right’ university and then queue for a public sector job.”³⁷

The fragmentation in planning and policy responses and weak coordination within government and between government and other stakeholders has hampered service delivery and limited the ability for systemic collaboration and coordinated responses to address those challenges. Furthermore, public expenditure on TVET reform is deemed insufficient in many countries.

“TVET is regarded as a second-class route for students, who continue to display clear preferences for academic and university education and public sector careers, even when this means almost certain periods of extended unemployment following graduation.”

Jordan, Education Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022, Ministry of Education.

Available at

http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Amman/pdf/ESP_English.pdf.

³⁴ The poor conditions and quality of TVET education are well documented in the World Bank Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER), Work Force Development Reports for MENA countries (available at: <http://saber.worldbank.org/index.cfm?indx=8&pd=7>) and the European Training Foundation (ETF), 2013. See UNESCO/UNEVOC, 2013.

³⁵ UNICEF and ILO, 2016.

³⁶ World Bank, 2014.

³⁷ World Bank, 2013.

IV. Relevant policy developments in the Arab region

Driven by an increasing awareness of the potential capacity of TVET in reducing unemployment and a growing awareness of the problems that this sector faces, countries across the region have paid increasing attention to developing TVET, focusing on the need to improve transition from education to the labour market, addressing the skills mismatch and developing skills required by changing job markets. Arab countries reaffirmed this position on several regional occasions, including in the 2013 Cairo Declaration which clearly reflected governments' commitment to prioritize job creation and "foster youth entrepreneurship [...] through training programmes, using formal and non-formal curricula, education, vocational and employment counseling, quality paid internships, [and] social protection."³⁸

Countries across the region are galvanizing efforts to reform TVET. A brief survey of the policies adopted across the region (table 1), reveals some interesting findings. Several Arab countries including Bahrain, Egypt, Djibouti, Jordan, Kuwait, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the Sudan, have acknowledged developing TVET education in their national development plans as a mean to empower youth, develop their education and labour sectors and strengthen the economy. Some countries stipulated the right to vocational education in their Constitution, including Algeria (article 65), Morocco (article 31) and Egypt (article 20).³⁹

The majority of the Arab countries have focused TVET development in general education and/or TVET-specific policies and strategies. However, some countries such as Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and the State of Palestine, included TVET development in other sectoral plans and policies, most notably the national employment policies.

A quick reading of the adopted policies also reveals similar patterns and focus areas that target building human capital. These areas include: developing a TVET governance system; improving its infrastructure; enhancing its pedagogical approaches; improving teachers qualifications and capacities; upgrading overall service delivery and accessibility; improving the linkages between higher education, vocational and continuing education; addressing the negative perception of TVET education both by students and employer; better engaging the private sector; building entrepreneurial and life skills; accommodating technological developments; and better alignment with labour market needs.

In terms of enhancing TVET alignment with the labour market, some countries such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia emphasized the need to develop TVET in light of current as well as future labour market needs. Tunisia's National Development Plan (2016-2020) prioritized investment in infrastructure, innovation and technology and estimated that 400,000 new high-skilled jobs will be created and called for adopting a strategic vision in developing TVET to ensure skills are aligned with market labour needs. Lebanon launched its first labour force survey in 2018, which incorporated the need for and anticipation of certain skills, as evidence of the changing nature witnessed in the job market. Other countries, such as Egypt, prioritized the need to forecast job demand by adopting an integrated and effective labour market information system that allow for tracking and forecasting growth of different industries specializations, geographical distribution and demand for human resources.

³⁸ Cairo Declaration: Development Challenges and Population Dynamics in a Changing Arab World, 2013.

³⁹ Article 20 of Egypt's constitution states that: "The state commits to encourage and develop technical education and professional training and expand all types thereof in accordance with global quality criteria, in keeping with the needs of the labor market."; Article 31 of the 2011 Moroccan Constitution reaffirms the State obligation to mobilize resources to guarantee citizen's accessibility to TVET.

Some countries, including Djibouti and Jordan, focused on developing TVET as a means to empower youth, especially the most marginalized. Somalia's Education Sector Strategic Plan 2018-2020 highlighted the role of education including TVET in empowering youth at risk and protecting them from radicalization.

TVET-related policies in Arab countries

Country	Policy
Algeria	2016 Constitution
Bahrain	2015-2018 Education Sector Strategic Development Plan National Higher Education Strategy: Putting Higher Education at the Heart of the Nation, 2014-2024 The Economic Vision 2030 for Bahrain
Comoros	Plan de Transition du Secteur de l'Education 2017/2018 - 2019/2020 Technical and Vocational Training Development Strategy 2014-2019
Djibouti	Education action plan 2017-2020 Djibouti Vision 2035 The Accelerated Growth Strategy for Jobs 2015 - 2019
Egypt	Industry and Trade Development Strategy, 2016-2020. Ministry of Trade and Industry The Strategic Plan for Pre-University Education 2014 -2030 2014 Constitution Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS): Egypt Vision 2030
Iraq	The Iraq TVET Strategy, 2014-2023
Jordan	The Jordan National E-TVET Strategy 2014-2020 Jordan 2025 National Vision and Strategy The National Strategy for Human Resources Development (2016-2025) The National Employment Strategy (2011-2020) The National Youth Empowerment Strategy for the years (2017-2025)
Kuwait	Kuwait Vision 2035
Lebanon	National Strategic Framework for Technical Vocational Education and Training in Lebanon, 2018-2022
Mauritania	Programme National de Developpement du Secteur Educatif 2011-2020 (PNDSE II)
Morocco	National Strategy for Vocational Training for the period 2015-2021 Strategic Vision Projects 2015-2030. Ministry of Education and Technical Training National Employment Strategy 2015-2025 2011 Constitution
Oman	Sultanate Decree No. 48 of 2016 Establishing a National Training Fund and Setting out its System of Functioning.
State of Palestine	The Ministry of Labour Strategic Plan for the years (2018-2020) 2017-22 National Policy Agenda Vocational and technical education and training strategy (2010)
Qatar	The Second Education and Training Sector Strategy (ETSS), 2017-2022 Qatar Second National Development Strategy 2018-2022 (NDS) The Qatar National Vision (QNV) 2030
Saudi Arabia	Vision 2030 (2015) Strategic Plan for Technical and Vocational Training 2008-2030 (2011)
Somalia	Education Sector Strategic Plan 2018-2020. Ministry of Education, Culture And Higher Education
Sudan	Sudan TVET Policy - 2013 The Twenty-Five-- Year National Strategy (2007-2031)
Tunisia	Plan stratégique sectoriel de l'éducation 2016-2020 The Reform Of The National Vocational Training System. Guidance Document And Plan Of Operations 2014-2018 National Development Plan 2016-2020
United Arab Emirates	The Ministry of Education Strategy 2010-2020

Note: No relevant recent policies have been identified in Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

V. Promising practices from the region

As a result of the growing attention TVET is receiving across the Arab region, several promising practices have been identified. Below is a selection of those practices that highlight the development of TVET that address with future labour demands and have the potential to empower marginalized groups. This includes the importance of paying attention to the local context in implementation and using TVET as a means to promote entrepreneurship in the region.

The Abu Dhabi Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ACTVET) in the United Arab Emirates: Skills for the future

TVET is starting to offer a serious option for equipping youth with skills for the future. The Emirate of Abu Dhabi is utilizing TVET to build a national workforce that can effectively participate in the country's sustainable development. TVET is not only regarded as a way of supporting the employment of young people, but also as a tool to diversify the economy and to ground it in knowledge and innovation.

To ensure that TVET programmes are of good quality and aligned with labour market demands, the Abu Dhabi Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ACTVET) was established in 2010 and has been scaling up its activities ever since.

As a part of its Skills4life initiative, ACTVET offers students short courses in more than 20 technical and vocational skills during winter and summer school breaks, aiming to not only to enhance their skills but to give them a special chance to discover and develop a passion for new ones.

Since 2014, ACTVET has organized five consecutive TVET innovation weeks bringing together industry representatives, entrepreneurs, government leaders, policymakers, experts, researchers, teachers and students. The initiative aspires to bridge the gap between industry and educational institutes through encouraging partnerships and presenting best practices and lessons learned. In addition, it promotes TVET as a prospective educational and career path for youth.

The EmiratesSkills National Competition also serves a double purpose of showcasing the expertise of young men and women in the field of craftsmanship and technology, and inspiring students to embrace technical and vocational skills and consider careers based on new technologies.

Source: <https://www.actvet.gov.ae/en/Pages/default.aspx>.

Morocco: Cities of crafts and competencies

The case of TVET development in Morocco highlights the importance of linking TVET to the local job market as well as ensuring young people's accessibility to TVET across the country. Guided by the National Strategy for Vocational Education 2021,^a the TVET sector in Morocco is undergoing a profound transformation. The development of TVET in the country is closely interlinked with the Morocco's new development model, which anchors the potential for economic development in each of the country's 12 regions. Key economic sectors have been identified in each region, based on specificities and comparative advantage, around which the regional economy and value chain will be developed.

The new road map for the development of TVET,^b rolled out in April 2019, seeks to align the development of TVET with the key economic sectors identified in the respective region, in order to connect vocational education to the needs of the local labour market and support employability and employment creation. At the core of the road map is the creation of 12 dedicated campuses named the "cities of crafts and competencies" (Cités des métiers et des compétences) with a capacity of 34,000 to 40,000 students. According to the roadmap, each city of crafts and competencies will offer a different set of study programmes, based on the key economic sectors for the respective region. In total, 11 programmes and 449 specializations are foreseen, including tourism, health, industry, agriculture, fisheries, handicrafts, caregiving and domestic services, artificial intelligence and digital offshoring. The latter is seen as having

a major potential for youth employment and will be offered in every region. Each campus is planned to integrate several services, such as vocational education, language learning, entrepreneurial training, facilitation of internships in private enterprises, employment support, teamwork space, sports facilities and student accommodation. The 12 cities of crafts and competencies is planned to be launched in three phases from the beginning of school year 2021-22 to 2023-24.

Source: Presentation by Mr. Abdelaziz Laftaoui, Office de la Formation professionnelle et de la promotion du travail (OFPPPT), at the YEM Regional Workshop on Digital and Entrepreneurial Skills in the South Mediterranean, Beirut, 16-17 October 2019. See more at <https://www.challenge.ma/formation-professionnelle-ce-qui-va-changer-109766/>.

^a Available at <http://www.fcs.ma/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Strate%CC%81gie-Nationale-Formation-FR.pdf>.

^b Royaume du Maroc, « M. le Ministre présente devant Sa Majesté le ROI Mohammed VI que DIEU l'Assiste, la feuille de route relative au développement de la formation professionnelle et à la création des « Cités des Métiers et des Compétences ».

Lebanon: Empowering women and serving vulnerable groups

TVET can be used to provide skills that are lacking in a country and, at the same time, empower vulnerable people. In Lebanon, a country that is ageing quickly and with little infrastructure to care for its elderly and support ageing in place, an innovative initiative was launched by the Institute for Development, Research, Advocacy and Applied Care (IDRAAC). Implemented in collaboration with Alzheimer's Association Lebanon, the project aims to provide free training to women to become qualified caregivers for persons living with Alzheimer's.

As the vast majority of patients with Alzheimer's disease live at home, families are often under great pressure to reconcile caregiving and other responsibilities or to cover professional nursing expenses. The project responds to the double need of the families of affected persons and to the need women with few skills in search for employment. In the first phase, women from diverse demographic and socioeconomic groups were recruited based on their motivation. During the second phase, they received theoretical and practical training, including in a nursing home and daycare centre. During the last stage, the women were supported in finding employment as certified home caregivers.

After a successful first cohort, the project is expected to be scaled up and expanded to also recruiting men in light of the growing demand for their services.

Source: Presentation by Mr. Georges Karam, Program Director, IDRAAC, at the graduation ceremony of the “Empowering Women in Lebanon through Vocational Training and Job Creation to Respond to the Needs of Older People” project, Beirut, 20 June 2019. See more at <http://www.idraac.org/home/community-services/community-services/recent-community-projects/empowering-women-in-lebanon-through-vocational-training-and-job-creation-to-respond-to-the-needs-of-older-people>.

Jordan: Empowering refugees through TVET

In light of massive influx of Syrian migrants and refugees to Jordan as a result of the protracted conflict in their country, and very high unemployment rates for migrants as well as the host community, several initiatives were launched to equip migrants with skills that match the labour market needs.

One such initiative aims to provide migrants and refugees with the opportunity to participate in accredited vocational training programmes. Known as the “QUDARA Resilience for Syrian Refugees, IDPs and Host Communities in Response to the Syrian and Iraqi Crises”, the project collaborates with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and public sector training providers. In cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and other stakeholders, QUDRA ensures that the programmes meet labour market needs.

The short (1- to 3-month) trainings allow migrants to quickly gain the qualifications needed to join the labour market. They focus on providing trainees with on-the-job skills that can immediately be put to use. Given that migrants and refugees can only access specific job fields, the training programmes target the

available fields and are nationally accredited at the semi-skilled level, to enable trainees to obtain a work permit. QUDRA and its partners also provide career counselling and assist in job placements.

Source: QUDRA. Available at <https://www.qudra-programme.org/en/about-qudra/>.

TVET promoting entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurs, start-ups and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) drive 96 per cent of the world economy. In the Arab region, people have largely positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship.^a There is a growing trend in countries across the region to mainstream entrepreneurial skills in technical and vocational education and training initiated by government, NGOs and donors.

In Egypt, for example, the Ministry of Trade and Industry and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) sponsored *Imkan*, a project that aims to improve youth employability and entrepreneurship in upper Egypt. The project focuses on reforming curricula to strengthen entrepreneurial learning outcomes for vocational education and training (VET) schools and working with local partners to build the skills of the youth.

Tunisia is putting effort towards mainstreaming entrepreneurial learning in across all levels of TVET. Several ministries, in partnership with the European Training Foundation, developed a national charter defining entrepreneurial learning for VET and are currently developing action plans to implement the charter.^b

In Jordan, most policies and strategies, including the National Strategy for Human Resources Development (2016-2025), emphasize the importance of focusing on building entrepreneurial skills through TVET. To fulfill this commitment, several governmental institutions and NGOs have collaborated in recent years to sponsor innovative initiatives. For example, *INJAZ*, in partnership with different ministries and international organizations, has lead the Entrepreneurship and Employment Programme, which targets students in universities and colleges throughout Jordan.

^a International Telecommunications Union (ITU), 2019.

^b OECD, 2018.

VI. The way forward: key recommendations

This paper highlighted the considerable potential of TVET for empowering youth in the region and creating better bridges with the labour market. Significant policy developments and emerging promising practices indicate that countries are gradually recognizing the importance of investing in TVET to develop skills and prepare youth for a better future. Based on the literature review and the policy analysis presented in this paper, some policy recommendations can be made.

Improving the quality of TVET provision

Developing the quality of TVET in the Arab region was identified as a priority in most relevant policies adopted in Arab countries. To address this priority, serious efforts are required to develop the policy framework governing TVET, further professionalize its administration, boost the qualifications of teaching personnel, improve school infrastructure, update the curriculum in light of changing labour market and improve the recognition and certification of TVET. Achieving quality TVET requires substantial budget allocations in national planning and across sectors. Focus should be placed on enhancing the vocational pathway through better integrating TVET in general education, establishing linkages with higher education and introducing career counselling for students is also needed. Finally, recent research has emphasized the need for incorporating life skills in general as well as TVET education to build a holistic set of skills for students that include technical as well as personal skills to better prepare them for school-to-work transition.

Increasing access to TVET programmes

In addition to better integrating TVET in general education, it is crucial to increase access to quality TVET programmes, particularly for marginalized youth, young women, migrants, youth in rural areas and youth with physical or learning disabilities. Access to TVET is equally important for ensuring lifelong learning as individuals during different stages of their career could require training (such as for people transitioning between jobs, people in prolonged periods of unemployment or people who were forced to migrate). To this end, it is crucial to enhance collaboration between public and private TVET providers to optimize outreach and accessibility.

Changing social attitudes to promote TVET

There is a need to focus on changing the prevailing stereotypes and perception of TVET as an underprivileged track that is associated with academic failure and has low prospects for gainful employment and decent work. Some countries have embarked on this process through reforming the general education curriculum and textbooks to propagate positive attitudes towards TVET. Other practices could include implementing campaigns to improve perceptions of TVET targeting youth in primary, secondary and tertiary education level as well as employers, career counselors, and lifelong learning programmes.

Strengthening partnerships with the private sector and other local actors

To improve TVET responsiveness to the labour market and address the existing skills mismatch, it is crucial to strengthen the coordination and collaboration between TVET and the private sector. It is imperative for TVET to become demand driven by aligning with labour market needs. Accordingly, proper assessment of labour market needs in terms of skills is a first step which is currently lacking in many Arab countries. Adopting labour market information systems is also important in this regard to ensure information is accessible, updated and relevant.

Including industries, local actors such as grass root organizations and the private sector in bodies governing TVET is also important to ensure active engagement of the private sector, improve employability of students, increase competitiveness of companies and develop community-based solutions. Strengthening partnerships also entails encouraging non-governmental partners to develop innovative programmes and initiatives to provide targeted training for youth as well recruit TVET students.

Enhancing cooperation between different stakeholders

Given the multiplicity of stakeholders involved in TVET governance, including government ministries (such as the ministry of education, industry and labour), service providers (including public and private schools, centres, etc.) and the private sector, there is a strong need for cohesive and integrated planning that reshapes “top-down” policies based on evaluation received on existing TVET initiatives and programmes to allow for agility and continuous improvement in light of fast changing job markets as well as knowledge tools.

It is also necessary to establish mechanisms for coordination and collaboration at the local and national levels between the different actors. Such measures will ensure the engagement of different actors in developing TVET as well as the optimization of resources, particularly given the limited funding available for TVET in most countries.

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