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Transitions from School to Work

UNICEF Technical Note

Acknowledgements

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Caption: Bodoor, 17 years old and in 12th grade in the Azraq Refugee Camp in Jordan, is preparing for her final exams. “I am lucky to go to school – many children didn’t get that chance. My favourite subject is science, specifically astronomy. I like space.”

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1. Purpose

In 2016, 263 million children and adolescents were out of school, representing nearly one fifth of the global population. Of these 61 million (23%) were of lower secondary school age and 139 million (53%) were of upper secondary school age¹ – with six out of ten children and adolescents not achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics.² This is linked to inequity in learning within education systems, with those children that are overage or with low learning outcomes most likely to drop out.

There is both a skills gap and a skills mismatch, with 71 million unemployed youth worldwide and 156 million young workers living in working poverty (less than \$3 a day). Three out of four young people not in education, employment or training are female, largely due to child care and domestic chores.³ These trends come at a time where the future of work is growing more unpredictable given the increasing but uneven impact of technology on the work force across both sectors and countries.⁴

Young people face particular disadvantage finding employment, compared to older workers. This includes a lack of labour market and job-search information and experience, as well as a mismatch between youth aspirations and labour market realities, with limited job led growth. Young people are often at the end of queue for jobs because employers opt for more experienced workers at the same wage level or for cheap labour by children, whilst labour market regulations that benefit working adults tend to disadvantage unemployed youth.

Young people may have fewer opportunities for self-employment and entrepreneurship because they lack business experience and access to finance. Finally, young people often lack organization and voice and are typically unrepresented in trade unions or employers' organizations with few channels through which to express their opinion.⁵

UNICEF's goal under the SP (2018-2021) is to improve the access, learning and skills of children from pre-primary to upper secondary age, particularly the most marginalized. To prepare children and adolescents for life, work, citizenship and life-long learning, UNICEF supports national governments and partners to systematically expand access to and strengthen systems to develop a breadth of skills, for all learners, across the life course, and through multiple learning pathways – formal, non-formal, on the job and community based.

The purpose of this paper is to provide guidance on how UNICEF can support government and partners to support adolescents to make a smooth transition from school to decent work. Skills development is a necessary, but not sufficient, component of such programming. Specifically, this Technical Note provides advice on:

- Barriers for young people in accessing and developing skills for work and making the transition to decent work;
- Programming principles to guide the design of UNICEF programming in the school to work transition area;
- Evidence-based strategies for smoothing the transition from school to work with a focus on improving the work outcomes for older adolescents and young people;⁶
- Tools and resources for developing programs and partnerships, including working with other UN agencies, to ensure continuity of services as the most vulnerable young people transition from childhood into adulthood;
- Case studies of UNICEF programs that have improved the skills and/or work outcomes of older adolescents.

For further background on the concepts and evidence base underpinning programming on the school to work transition, refer to [Unpacking School to Work Transition](#) (OGIP- Office of Global Insight and Policy/HQ, UNICEF, 2019). This paper been developed as a companion piece to the Technical Note, focusing on problem identification via a trends analysis and synthesis of evidence.

2. Improving transition to work for young people

2.i What is the school to work transition?

School to work transition and employability are interrelated concepts. In this paper, employability is defined as an individual's ability to secure and retain employment, to progress within the enterprise and between jobs, and to cope with changing technology and labour market conditions. It has a capability and an opportunity dimension i.e. (i) whether the individual has the skills demanded by the labour market and (ii) whether the individual can access employment opportunities that make optimal use of his/her skills (OGIP/HQ, 2019).

School to work transition is not linear, as young people may be studying while holding jobs, may go back to school after work, start off in irregular employment and then transition to regular employment etc. School to work transition should rather be seen as a process which enables young people to move from education to productive and decent work.⁷ The process can be broken down into two categories:

- **The process of preparing young people for transition** whereby young people have access to and can develop the skills (i.e. knowledge, competencies, attitudes and qualifications) required by the labour market to secure, retain and thrive in productive and decent employment, and adapt to the evolving economy.
- **The process of making the actual transition** whereby young people are able to smoothly access productive and decent work opportunities that make effective use of their skills.

Statistics on 'employment' can include formal wage employment, self-employment, unpaid family work and vulnerable employment in the informal economy. 'Productive employment' is considered by the ILO as employment yielding sufficient returns to labour to permit a worker and his/her dependents a level of consumption above the poverty line. 'Decent work' is a term used to describe work which is productive, delivers a fair income, and provides security in the workplace and social protection for workers and their families.

The ILO defines a successful transition to work as when a young person is settled in stable employment – defined as a job with an employment contract, written or verbal, lasting for 12 or more months (ILO, 2013 and 2015) or for those who do not have long-term wage employment, a job with a self-perception of continuity. In many countries, the majority of young people will be employed in the informal sector, they may not achieve this definition of stable employment.

2.ii Measuring the school to work transition

There are a number of indicators that can be used to measure school to work transition results, even for those young people who have not yet found secure employment. These can be used to assess the outcomes of interventions that have the objective of preparing adolescents for work.

How can we measure improved work outcomes?

Utilization of skills for employment, as measured by:

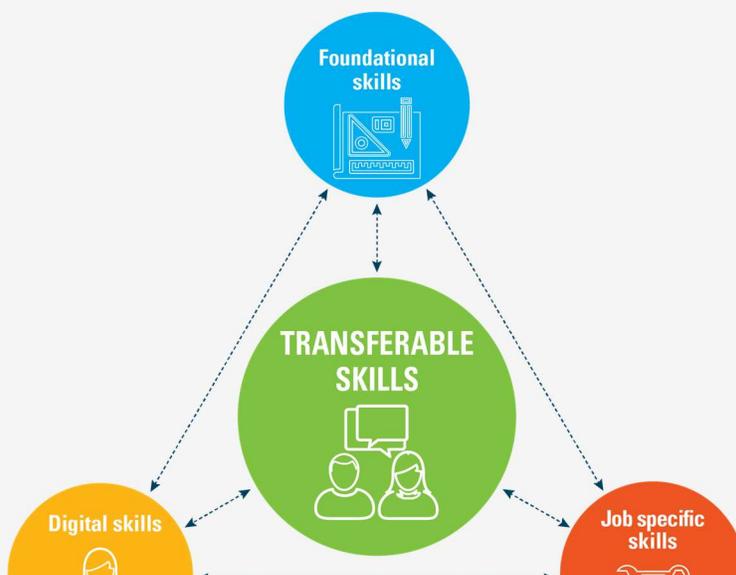


These may include the below, as illustrated.

3. What skills are needed for success in life and work?

For securing, retaining and thriving in work, young people need to develop a mix of foundational, transferable and technical and vocational skills. Increasingly digital skills are being demanded by employers. UNICEF supports national governments and partners to systematically develop a breadth of skills, at scale, across the life course and through multiple learning pathways – formal, non-formal, on the job and community based.

SKILLS:



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