



## First regional edition of UNESCO GEM Report highlights urgency for countries to protect the right to education of migrants and refugees in the Arab States

*Doha, November 21* – The first regional edition of the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report published by UNESCO is being launched at the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) in Doha today. The Arab States *Migration, displacement and education: Building bridges, not walls* Report analyses the impact of these population movements on education systems in the region and presents a series of urgent recommendations to protect the education rights of those on the move.

The Arab States is the region most affected by displacement, which has slowed down its education progress relative to the rest of the world. The gap between the Arab States and sub-Saharan Africa in those enrolling in primary education has more than halved in the past 20 years. Over the same period, Central and Southern Asia has overtaken the Arab States in enrolment rates at the lower secondary level and the gap is rapidly closing at the upper secondary level too.

*“There is no doubt that the Arab States are facing a unique challenge to provide an inclusive education. Regardless, displaced children and youth do not leave their right to an education behind,”* reminds Manos Antoninis, Director of the GEM Report at UNESCO. *“Policy makers must put themselves in their shoes. Expecting refugees to travel with school certificates is unrealistic, for instance. They must ensure their policies fairly reflect displaced persons’ needs.”*

**Internal displacement:** Five of the twelve countries with the highest percentage of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the world are in the region. A lack of paperwork, language challenges, and security risks are the largest barriers to their education.

In Iraq, 42% of internally displaced children and youth attended formal education, compared with 73% of non-displaced children. The small number of Arabic-language schools and questions over the recognition of qualifications from schools in the Kurdistan Region hinder access.

Teachers in internal displacement settings are often not paid nor effectively trained. In Yemen, in Houthi-controlled governorates, teachers have not received their salaries since 2016. Many displaced children require psychosocial support, including 13% of Syrian internally displaced children in 2018, yet teachers rarely receive training to know how to respond to the challenge.

**International displacement:** One third of the world’s refugees are in the Arab States, with 6.7 million from the Syrian Arab Republic alone. Despite an overwhelming response in the five countries hosting Syrian refugees, however, 39% of Syrian children are still not in school.

The lack of birth or school certificates can be a barrier to school access. In Lebanon, Syrians have to prove their refugee status and that they have completed primary school to go to secondary school. Jordan and Iraq have dismissed this requirement and let all enrol without certification.

Despite an admirable commitment to inclusion, many refugees are still schooled in parallel systems, which are unsustainable in the long term, especially without better funding. Jordan and Lebanon adopted double-shift school systems as the only realistic immediate solution, but require funds to support teachers and prepare for an eventual end of the second shift. Over half a million Palestine refugees are educated by UNRWA, which works in close alignment and cooperation with host governments to ensure the smooth transition of students into national systems. Other refugee populations are in segregated systems. Sahrawi refugees in Algeria have a separate education system and curriculum. Malian refugees in refugee camps in Mauritania still follow the Malian curriculum.

*“Mass displacement is a global problem that requires international support, yet not nearly enough is being done to share the responsibility”, continued Antoninis. “Lower- and middle-income countries continue to take on much more than their fair share and this can no longer be acceptable. Refugees out of school in the region should point their fingers at international donors. Unmet promises are unacceptable.”*

**International migration:** Gulf Cooperation Council countries have the highest immigration rates in the world. However, in all countries but Bahrain, migrants have to pay fees to attend public schools. Private, parallel school systems, where students study their home or some other international – but not their host country – curriculum are the norm. The private education sector is expected to double its value within six years to US\$26.2 billion by 2023.

To improve integration, some countries in the sub-region have made moves to teach Arabic to migrant students, but the effectiveness of these initiatives has not been assessed. In 2017, two-thirds of Arab youth reported speaking more English than standard Arabic in their daily lives.

**Internal migration:** The flow of migrants in cities often leads to residential segregation, slums being the most visible manifestation in low- and middle-income countries, where education is often lacking. In Iraq, 13% of the population live in 3,700 slums where there are almost 2,200 uncompleted schools. One quarter of households in Cairo’s informal settlements say that secondary schools are located too far away.

**The Report has 7 key recommendations:**

1. Protect the right to education of migrants and displaced people
2. Include migrants and displaced people in national education systems
3. Understand and plan for the education needs of migrants and displaced people
4. Accurately represent migration and displacement histories in education content
5. Prepare teachers of migrants and refugees to address diversity and hardship
6. Harness the potential of migrants and displaced people
7. Support education needs of migrants and displaced people in humanitarian and development aid.

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For more information, please contact Haneen Shaer [h.shaer@unesco.org] +447561137543

**Notes to editors**

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