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Press Release

United Nations: Better education not yet a springboard for many youth to move out of poverty

United Nations New York, 18 December: Today's young people are overall the best educated generation of youth in history. However, for many young people, the transition to adulthood is slowed down by poverty and their inability to find decent work, the United Nations finds in a new report issued today.

Investments in youth have improved in all regions over the years and young people's access to education has expanded, the *World Youth Report 2007 - Young People's Transition to Adulthood: Progress and Challenges* says. In many places where public sector education has fallen short, private education is on the rise. Many more young people, including girls, have completed basic education than ever before and many now have access to higher levels of education.

Lack of access to health, services, quality education hampering transition to adulthood

Yet, in all regions of the world, young people's transition to adulthood is affected by poverty. Because of poverty, and sometimes because of social and cultural constraints, many young people are excluded from accessing quality education, decent employment, health and other resources and services. School attainment varies by wealth in most countries around the world. And despite policies to provide free education in many countries, costs for books, uniforms and transportation are too high for many households.

In many parts of the world, young people have limited access to quality health care even though they face a more complex health environment. The lack of education and access to contraception lead to early pregnancies, which pose health risks and reduce the future opportunities of the young mothers. Increasing number of new threats to their health, especially the HIV/AIDS epidemic, have also added to the difficulties that youth experience in several regions, especially in Africa and in the transition economies of Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Forming one quarter of the working-age population, 15-24 year olds can be a key resource for development.

Because of their sheer size, but also because of their higher level of education, argues the *World Youth Report 2007* the 1.2 billion youth aged 15-24 years in 2007 who constitute 18 per cent of the world's population are an essential and critical part of the development process of our societies. Never before has this age bracket constituted such a large share of the overall population. Further, 15-24 year olds constitute 25% of the working-age population.

In addressing the challenges that youth face in making the transition to adulthood, the Report emphasizes that policymakers must focus not only on developing young people's capacities through greater investment in areas such as education, health and skills training, but they must also provide and protect opportunities for young people to participate in development as a matter of priority.

The Report particularly calls on all stakeholders to work towards eliminating discrimination against young women, to increase their access to education and literacy, including non-formal education, and to develop gender-sensitive programmes, including sexual and reproductive health services. It notes that improvements in girl's education have not translated into better employment opportunities for young women. Specific efforts must therefore be made to provide skills training for young women, to increase their employment opportunities and to remove gender wage gaps.

Informal sector jobs too often a first rather than last resort

With youth unemployment rates high in most countries, many young people turn to the informal economy where they work long hours, are paid low wages and lack social protection. While youth have benefited from globalization and related policy changes, they have also been victims of this process, the *World Youth Report 2007* argues. Contractions in labour markets associated with globalization often affect youth first because they are often among the last to be hired and the first to be fired.

Migration a way out for many

The report identifies migration as a common response for youth from developing regions. From Asia to Africa, Latin America and in the small island developing States, youth who have few local options are migrating in large numbers in pursuit of opportunities abroad. The *World Youth Report*, however, cautions that despite their development advantages over other world regions, many youth in developed market economies face unequal opportunities and prospects in various areas and that youth migrants in the region are often at the bottom of the inequality ladder.

The *Report* finds that regardless of the existence of pockets of successful youth with a migrant background who become well-integrated in developed market economies, the social inclusion of migrants remains insufficient. It poses many new challenges for sending and receiving communities which must be addressed by Governments and other stakeholders.

The *World Youth Report 2007 - Young People's Transition to Adulthood: Progress and Challenges* calls for policy makers to address as a matter of priority the obstacles that continue to limit youth participation in the development of their societies. The Report maintains that youth are not passively waiting for solutions to be handed to them; they are actively searching for solutions. Provided with an enabling environment that includes access to quality education, decent work opportunities and health care, youth can make important contributions to the advancement of a world for which they will be responsible for many decades to come.

For further information, please visit <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/wyr07.htm> or contact Patience Stephens, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, + 1 212 963 8390, stephensp@un.org or Franck Kuwonu, UN Department of Public Information, +1 212 963 8264, email: kuwonu@un.org.