



Economic inclusion and social protection to reduce poverty Youth economic inclusion through decent rural employment

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The issue

Young people are driving innovation in agri-food systems and have a key role to play in achieving global food security and nutrition. The current COVID-19 crisis has brought both new challenges and opportunities for young innovators working to transform the agriculture and food sectors. Prior to the crisis the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region already had youth unemployment rates of 22.5 percent (2019 ILO modeled estimates), nearly double the global youth unemployment rate. In the coming period, school to work transitions are expected to be prolonged especially for young women and youth unemployment will intensify as the economic slowdown manifests in fewer employment opportunities. Lack of asset ownership or social protection coverage for young men and women will drive up youth poverty rates, especially in rural areas. Rural youth are facing high rates of injuries on farms and agricultural settings: training youth on safe and sustainable agricultural practices and value chain is key to reduce child labour and promote an environmentally and socially sustainable agriculture. In addition, young entrepreneurs who have been paving the way for e-agriculture and innovation in the region with dynamic new ag-tech start-ups will come under intense pressure. With even less access to capital and a weak business environment, many ag-the and agri-food small and medium enterprises led by young people will not survive the downturn.

Rural youth across the region are in dire need of high-quality training and education opportunities that are linked to labour market demand. School-to-work transition for adolescents in rural areas is very challenging, between early involvement into precarious or exploitative work, and difficulties to secure a stable employment. For these young people, COVID-19 has been a huge blow. Due their relatively limited access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) infrastructure including broadband, smartphones and laptops a large portion of rural youth have been left out of online education and the booming digital economy. Unable to migrate, many young people and even under-age children have resorted to working in low-wage informal jobs, jeopardizing their long-term prospects for economic inclusion and decent employment. Young women in rural areas are more likely to engage in unpaid labour and early marriage and face gender-based violence.

The action

In order to achieve the objective of helping young people whether the effects of the global health and economic crisis and continue to generate innovative ideas to transform the agriculture and food sector, the following outputs are proposed:

- 1 Strengthen and expand ag-tech innovation and business ecosystems in NENA countries by supporting regional incubators and accelerators serving youth-led

Budget

USD 3 million

Time frame

2021–2023



Related FAO Policy Briefs

- [Migrant workers and the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- [Impact of COVID-19 on informal workers](#)
- [FAO Policy Brief on Rural Youth and the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)



micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in agriculture and food value chains.

- 2 Establish an emergency fund for young ag-tech entrepreneurs to keep afloat established and proven market viable business at risk of shut down due to the economic impacts of COVID-19.
- 3 Support digital literacy and access to ICT tools among young men and women as well as access to high-quality e-courses on green jobs and e-agriculture targeting youth audiences in English, Arabic and French.
- 4 Strengthen youth engagement in food system transformation by supporting youth organizations and regional youth networks and linking them to sources of funding, information and other opportunities.
- 5 Design and implement economic inclusion programmes supporting poorest and most vulnerable youth, combining social protection benefits, access to finance, technical and vocational education and trainings (TVET), coaching and additional interventions according to their needs and projects.

Expected results

- 1 Increased decent employment opportunities for rural youth, including adolescents, through MSMEs and economic inclusion programmes.
- 2 Reduced number of youth-led agri-businesses going bankrupt due to the impacts of COVID-19.
- 3 Rural youth have increased ability to engage in the digital economy and access online training and education to improve their employability early on.
- 4 Young people mobilized and empowered to support agri-food system transformation.

Programme links

The programme is aligned to the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (UN IANYD) Statement on COVID-19 and Youth, the Committee on Agriculture Rural Youth Action Plan (RYAP), the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Policy Brief on Rural Youth and the COVID-19 Pandemic and the UN Decade for Family Farming Regional Action Plan for the NENA region. It is linked to the Integrated Country Approach to boost decent jobs for youth in agri-food systems.

Partnerships

This programme will work with members of the Issue-based Coalition on Youth in the Arab Region including the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the World Bank and the International Labour Organization (ILO). Other key partners include the World Youth Forum, the UN: NGO Youth Group, Mediterranean Climate Heroes, Future Agro-Challenge, the World Bank, International Telecommunications Union (ITU), Agrytech, Hassad, Young Professionals for Agricultural Development (YPARD), Climate Smart Agriculture Youth Network (CSAYN), Enactus, local universities and national youth civil society organizations.

Country focus

Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia and West Bank and Gaza Strip

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