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Youth employment issues are a major concern for many countries because they have negative effects on the welfare of young people, and may also adversely affect economic performance and social stability. This is the first Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) evaluation of the World Bank Group's support to countries trying to address youth employment issues. The World Bank lending portfolio for youth employment is relatively small, although components of programs appear in 57 countries. Most projects include interventions in skills development and school-to-work transition. Half of the projects include interventions to foster job creation and work opportunities for youth. The International Finance Corporation (IFC) has a broad approach to job creation. Between FY01 and FY11, youth employment was not specifically targeted, except in the Middle East and North Africa region and in a small number of other interventions. IFC invested USD 500 million to 50 investment operations and 18 advisory services to education. Although youth employment is addressed in the education, social protection, and labor strategies, it is not recognized as an issue in most country strategies - even where youth unemployment is serious. Youth employment is a multisectoral issue, but few youth employment projects are implemented by multisectoral teams. Evidence on what works in youth employment is scarce. Known factors that contribute to success are a comprehensive approach including participation of the private sector, monitoring and follow up of individual participants, and complementary interventions, such as combined training with job search and placement assistance, rather than isolated interventions. In high-unemployment environments, wage subsidies, skills training, and job search support are of little impact; and demand-side interventions are needed. Strong diagnostics are important to design interventions for youth in low-income areas. The Bank's few impact evaluations on youth employment examine short-term effects, find limited positive results, and do not calculate the cost-effectiveness of interventions. The evaluation makes two recommendations: (i) apply an evidence-based approach to youth employment operations, and (ii) at the country level, take a strategic approach to youth employment by addressing the issue comprehensively, working across World Bank Group teams, with governments and other donors. There is a critical need to strengthen evidence-based feedback loops to the strategic planning process.
