



**BUILDING
LIFELONG
LEARNING
SYSTEMS**
Green Inclusive Digital



SKILLS FOR GREEN
AND INCLUSIVE
SOCIETIES IN THE
DIGITAL ERA

21-25 JUNE 2021

WE NEED TO CHANGE EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS...

We are at a turning point. The pace of change has accelerated enormously, pushed further by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our survival depends on acting fast to adapt and mitigate the effects of human activity on the environment.

Evolution becomes revolution, with deep impacts on our lives, jobs, studies and relationships, and at the same time bringing new reflection on what is actually most important for us as human beings – namely, building fairer and more sustainable societies. The green and digital transitions could be a driving force for a better future as they promise new opportunities for countries, communities, businesses and individuals.

These transitions require changes in values, mind-sets, attitudes and skills so that we can all be part of the change process, and contribute to and benefit from it. Change implies that we all become active learners. We need to be able to act differently as responsible citizens, consumers and producers. We need to learn how to continuously develop new competences and skills permitting us to make best use of evolving technologies and to keep up with changing workplaces and labour markets. We need to be able to manage career paths

and everyday life. In this fast-changing world, learning is a precondition for adaptation, resilience and personal growth.

At the same time the transition process brings new risks and vulnerabilities for those whose jobs will disappear or be profoundly transformed, as well as for those who are not motivated or have no opportunity to learn and adapt. These new vulnerabilities could reinforce existing social, economic and educational inequalities and lead to divided societies, jeopardising their cohesion and sustainability – unless action to address and mitigate inequalities is embedded in the transition process.

We have to recognise that creating a society of active learners is a massive effort.

The reality today is that participation of adults in training is still very low, in particular among people with low skills and in vulnerable situations. This includes the unemployed, people engaged in the informal economy or low productivity economic activities, populations in rural and more generally economically depressed areas, and ethnic minorities.



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The expectations of youth regarding what and how they learn, as well as the information they receive on learning and work opportunities, have not been met – as demonstrated by the results of a [recent UNICEF-ETF consultation of youth in the Europe and Central Asia region](#). Early dropouts among youth are persistent in many countries and are expected to increase due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Education and training systems are not prepared for the deep transformation of our societies, or to bring learning closer to people and counteract growing inequalities. They are based on standardised provision with limited flexibility to meet the learning needs of highly diversified populations of learners or rapidly evolving labour markets and social requirements. They primarily value learning in formal settings, recognising large chunks of skills and knowledge bundled into end-of-school diplomas and degrees while providing limited (if any) recognition of knowledge and skills acquired outside the formal education and training system. They are highly fragmented across formal, non-formal and informal forms of learning, creating rigidities in the progression routes of learners.

In order to support lifelong and life-wide learning for all, we need flexible and agile systems that make learning part of social and economic transformation. To meet this expectation we need a paradigm shift away from

an exclusive focus on formal education and training provision and one-size-fits-all solutions, towards lifelong learning systems that offer flexible and individualised pathways for each learner, combining learning in different settings, and that recognise the skills of people wherever they are developed.

This implies system change that embeds skills development and learning in broader social and economic development objectives and involves all aspects of learning – from teaching and learning practices, the organisation of provision and validation of skills that people develop through their lives, to new forms of partnerships among different actors, and new roles and responsibilities and funding mechanisms.

To achieve system change we need policies that create appropriate incentive structures for actors to adopt new mindsets and take new responsibilities, and enable providers to become 'learning institutions that continuously adapt to emerging needs and challenges.

...TO DELIVER **LIFELONG** **LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES** FOR ALL...

Effective lifelong learning systems are inclusive, ensuring access to high quality learning opportunities for all and equipping everyone with key and professional competences for career progression and a rewarding life. They need to empower individuals to discover, develop and invest in their potential, by fostering a learning culture where people are motivated and supported to learn throughout life. They must connect all actors, learners and learning environments.

A GOOD LIFELONG LEARNING SYSTEM IS EXPECTED TO:

- foster a culture of learning at all ages;
- motivate all people to learn and steer their learning processes throughout life;
- ensure that all people have access to good quality learning opportunities oriented towards green and digital economies;
- ensure that all people have the means – financial resources, time and information – to participate in learning; and
- make people's skills visible and recognised, independently of how and where they were developed.

Key features of a good lifelong learning system include:

EXPANDING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN DIFFERENT SETTINGS

Building inclusive lifelong learning systems requires a shift of focus from standardised education and training provision to meeting the needs and personal and professional interests of highly diversified populations of learners including youth, workers, job seekers and vulnerable groups.

In a rapidly changing world learning takes place in different environments within and outside education institutions. In fact, learning outside education institutions – in the workplace, training centres, online, in (virtual) communities, or through social activities and a variety of other informal settings – is gaining in importance for both youth and adults.

Valuing and stimulating learning in different environments – indeed, making every place a learning place – brings learning closer to people and expands the availability of learning opportunities within the formal education and training system and outside it. Tapping into the potential of different types of 'providers' to innovate



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and cooperate in finding appropriate learning solutions that go beyond existing institutional settings, will facilitate the agility of lifelong learning systems and their responsiveness to the changing needs of learners.

CREATING MEANINGFUL AND ENGAGING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Motivating and engaging people in learning, in particular those who have negative experiences from the past, requires creating meaningful and engaging learning environments. A learning environment becomes meaningful when it offers relevant content linked to desired learning outcomes in an authentic context. A learning environment becomes engaging when it invites learners to participate, to explore, to collaborate, to make mistakes and to take ownership of their learning process in a safe and structured environment.

Creating meaningful and engaging learning environments requires a learner-centred approach, incorporating pedagogical methods (such as experiential learning, blended learning, game-based learning, embodied learning and social and collaborative learning) facilitated by a mix of different environments (in a school or training institute, at the workplace, online and in the community) to expose learners to real life situations. It also requires an enabling environment for innovation in teaching and learning, and investment in the professional development of

teachers and trainers, in order to bring about desired changes.

PROVIDING FLEXIBLE LEARNING PATHWAYS

A fully fledged lifelong learning system should have no dead-end educational pathways or barriers to access and progression. It must ensure the recognition and visibility of people's skills, no matter how and where they have been developed. Flexible and alternative learning pathways must build bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning.

This implies a shift from traditional, fragmented education and training provision – built on standardised content, delivered by one type of training provider to one type of learner, and leading to one type of diploma – towards flexible systems that recognise prior learning; allow learners to obtain new knowledge, skills and competence in smaller steps in line with their interests and needs; and embrace learning in different forms and settings.

Creating flexible learning pathways requires the organisation of education and training around learning outcomes (rather than curriculum content) that demonstrate what people know and are able to do. It also requires mechanisms for validating non-formal and informal learning, and instruments permitting the recognition of small chunks of knowledge as part

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of qualifications and micro-credentials. Qualification frameworks facilitate the creation of flexible learning pathways.

DEVELOPING DYNAMIC SKILLS SETS

Supporting people to adapt to constantly changing and complex living and working environments and to actively participate in society, requires the development of a broad range of skills and competences. These include technical skills that permit people efficiently to master and use new technologies. They also include cognitive and meta-cognitive skills as well as social and emotional skills that enable people to develop personally and socially, act productively in different environments and make shifts in their careers.

The skills encompass not just literacy and numeracy but also language, communication and entrepreneurship competences, as well as a full range of so called 'soft skills' including problem-solving, critical thinking, system thinking and skills related to creativity, collaboration, leadership and social empathy.

Digital skills and environmental awareness are becoming essential for the transition towards greener digital societies. Multiculturalism is gaining importance to promote the cohesion of societies and workplaces that are becoming increasingly diversified. And career management skills are necessary to deal with complexity and uncertainty in the labour market.

Development of cognitive and metacognitive skills as well as social and emotional skills is essential to preparing young people as well as adults to adapt and manage change. They have to present at every stage and sphere of lifelong learning – from early childhood education through all education levels and in formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts.

PROVIDING GUIDANCE TO NAVIGATE AND MANAGE CAREER AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

In a context of jobs changing, education and training provision getting more diversified and learning and career pathways becoming more personalised and complex, people need relevant, timely and easily accessible information and guidance to make informed decisions.

This implies the development of career management skills that enable people to manage learning, work and leisure as well as education and work transitions over a lifetime. It also implies availability of a national career development support system as an integral part of a lifelong learning system, ensuring outreach to a diversified population of learners – in particular those who need it most.

Career development support systems need to achieve a paradigm shift, from focusing on helping individuals to

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make educational choices in specific moments – mostly at the transition from initial education to employment – towards empowering individuals to construct careers along their life course, taking into account global and local realities and the diversified needs of people.

Career support systems need to follow a multi-channel approach to the delivery of services – from personalised, group and online provision to self-directed service offers – in order to meet the needs of diverse clients, and to increase access and quality. They need to make use of quality labour market information. They must leverage opportunities offered by information and communication technologies to fulfil new roles, but also support traditional services, in order to improve effectiveness and efficiency.

CREATING AWARENESS AND INCENTIVES FOR PEOPLE TO ENGAGE IN LEARNING

Limited awareness of the benefits of learning, shortage of time and lack of financial resources are all factors that prevent people from engaging in learning. To address these factors we need to ensure there are appropriate incentive structures and accompanying measures that support people – in particular those who need it most – to engage in learning. We also need consistently to deal with gaps in training availability and relevance, as well as take-up of learning opportunities.

More flexible and tailor-made solutions to upskilling and re-skilling, for example individual learning accounts, can ensure financial resources and motivate individuals to make active decisions about learning. Targeted campaigns about lifelong learning can create higher awareness of its benefits and the learning opportunities available, particularly among people with low education attainment or lacking motivation to engage in continuing training. Social as well as employment services can facilitate and direct people towards learning opportunities.

The pandemic has accelerated structural changes across economic sectors and more people are subject to various forms of labour market and social transitions. The conditions for access and entitlement to (re)training should embed the needs and expectations of a growing multiplicity of learning beneficiaries.

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...STARTING WITH AMBITIOUS NATIONAL REFORMS AND INVESTMENTS...

At a policy level, countries are making efforts to introduce elements of lifelong learning systems such as adult learning strategies, qualification frameworks, outcomes based qualifications, attention to key competences, validation of prior learning, training for job seekers, better mechanisms for inclusive governance, and closer cooperation among actors. The results of the ETF's 2018-2020 Torino Process show that supporting lifelong learning is a strategic priority of education and training policies in ETF partner countries.

In parallel, there is a plethora of innovative practice in companies, training providers and regional and local initiatives driven by private or public actors, NGOs or international cooperation partners that create opportunities for lifelong learning and nurture a dynamic for change.

Still, building fully fledged lifelong learning systems remains a long-term goal requiring sustained effort and agility to manage a non-linear transformation process, address the comfort zones of actors, absorb external shocks to stay on course, and accommodate the often conflicting interests of actors.

The following actions may help to achieve steady and quick progress towards building lifelong learning systems:

SET SKILLS AS A PRIORITY IN DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Looking towards the post COVID-19 recovery, countries are reviewing strategies and plans, incorporating the requirements of the green and digital transitions. These can be national development strategies and plans, or for specific economic sectors or regions, or for specific policy objectives – for example, the development of small and medium enterprises, the digital economy, inclusion etc. Skills development and lifelong learning have to be at the heart of those strategies.

To successfully implement these strategies it is essential to understand changing skills demands by generating appropriate intelligence in order to anticipate skills gaps, plan actions that build skills among youths, and support the upskilling and reskilling of adults. This is particularly important for regions or sectors that are to be heavily affected by national or international greening policies, to support the restructuring process and ensure a fair transition.



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MOBILISE THE PRIVATE SECTOR

A proactive attitude among companies is essential in formulating skilling requirements and delivering training, also in cooperation with other training providers. A proactive attitude can create a positive dynamic in adapting education and training provision that often cannot keep pace with rapid change.

Innovative and dynamic companies in sectors that are particularly affected by greening policies or are rapidly changing their production processes and business models due to technological change, are already involved in skilling their staff and suppliers. But the majority of companies – in particular small and medium enterprises – are neither fully aware of the benefits of training, nor do they have the capacity to do so. It is important to create incentive structures and support mechanisms to ensure inclusive and active participation by companies in building lifelong learning systems.

CREATE STRONG COOPERATION AND SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIPS AMONG ACTORS

In a complex environment such as lifelong learning there are multiple actors contributing from different angles to formal, non-formal and informal learning. Managing the change process effectively requires that actors share a vision and work together towards a common objective, shaping agreements and recognising the benefits of sharing responsibilities.

Making lifelong learning an integral part of social and economic development needs to be based on sustainable partnerships among state and private sector actors and civil society at different levels – national, regional, local and sectoral – to co-create solutions that actors would not attain alone.

Fruitful partnerships build around a common purpose and objectives, and focus on outcomes and benefits for people. They require careful design and need to be intentionally initiated, sustained and reinforced. They build on motivation – a strong foundation – and provide space to forge new and diverse practices, consolidate existing capacities and create new ones for sustainable change.

Private and public actors and stakeholders rarely cooperate in traditional education and training systems. Now it is imperative that state and non-state actors explore avenues to develop lifelong learning, experiment with new cooperation mechanisms including new types of partnerships, and draw lessons.

ENSURE LEADERSHIP

Lifelong learning is a public good and public sector leadership is crucial in steering the system towards higher level outcomes – namely, skills for people and sustainable benefits in terms of social cohesion, fairness and quality employment.



In complex systems, leadership is diffused at different levels. Companies are leaders when they act upon skills needs and provide training to their employees. Civil society shows leadership in reaching out to people in difficulty or with special needs. Notwithstanding distributed leadership, state leadership is important to create a common vision, steer the change process, create enabling institutional settings for effective engagement of actors, ensure continuity in dialogue and implementation, maintain momentum, and keep things on track.

Leadership is therefore more than being able to delegate or entrust someone else with a task or a project. Rather, it is about nurturing and encouraging the initiative of the multiplicity of actors, ensuring synergies and steering towards the delivery of policy outcomes.

BUILD CAPACITIES AND LEARNING INSTITUTIONS

As countries proceed with new mechanisms and institutional settings – redefining the mandates of existing institutions, building new ones and reviewing institutional arrangements based on partnerships and joint responsibility – new capacities are needed by all actors to participate effectively and to deliver lifelong learning.

Public administrations, regional authorities, professional bodies and training providers need continuously to develop their technical, operational and communication capacities to innovate, implement and work with others. Delegating or sharing responsibility is not enough to achieve results. Actors need to get ready to take new responsibilities, manage new processes and mechanisms, and build trust. They need human and organisational capacities to do so. People need to become active learners – and institutions need to become active learners too.

SECURE FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Funding is important to mobilise learners, companies and providers to engage in lifelong learning. Public funds need to be used efficiently and effectively, including to incentivise providers to create relevant training opportunities and directing individuals to training that is useful for them. Appropriate mechanisms should help link funding to desirable learning and employment outcomes.

Public funds are insufficient to support the massive efforts required for lifelong learning. Although key responsibility for citizens' learning opportunities continues to rest with the state, mobilisation of funds from all those who benefit from learning is also necessary. Companies and individuals need to contribute in accordance with their

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possibilities, within clear equity targets and criteria. Public funds can also be used to leverage private funds and multiply the funding available for training.

There are experimental instruments that can achieve these objectives. Training funds can create a pool of resources for training in all companies, including small and medium enterprises. The financial sector has started playing a role in directing funds towards investment in skills, often leveraged by public policies. New financial products are still in an experimental phase, but there is potential that should be encouraged together with lessons learned through evaluations.

MONITOR AND ADAPT

In a context of rapid change and policy adaptation, it is paramount to ensure that reforms in education and training – a sector in which change is costly and affects a multitude of participants and beneficiaries – move in the intended direction.

Monitoring system change requires evidence that plots the course of transformation and also, importantly, helps to ensure that stakeholders and beneficiaries trust that change is on the right track. It is important to set up monitoring processes that are inclusive and ensure the legitimacy, acceptance and use of monitoring results.

Monitoring is not just a tool for verifying progress after an agenda has been set, but can also be a catalyst for change in that policy agenda. For that to happen, we must revisit the place of monitoring in the policy cycle. Usually it is at the end of things, after actions have been implemented. Monitoring ought to be moved ‘forward’, to when the policy agenda is being set.

The choice of areas in which countries want to monitor system performance, change and progress towards lifelong learning can inform the choice of areas that reforms focus on – areas that matter in making lifelong learning a reality to the benefit of all potential learners. In the same vein, the purpose of monitoring must be forward-looking, delivering evidence that informs policy today and contributes to improvements in future.

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...SUPPORTED BY INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIP...

The global challenges the world is facing can only be addressed through international cooperation and action. Agenda 2030 calls for a collaborative partnership among countries and stakeholders to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). COVID-19 has demonstrated how collaboration and sharing across boundaries can support countries to address challenges and find solutions.

Each country is committed to ensuring that all its citizens have access to quality education, training and lifelong learning by 2030, as demanded by SDG4. And all countries are striving to find solutions based on their needs, capacities and means.

We are all – countries and international organisations alike – in a learning process, trying to understand the transformative changes taking place in our societies and economies, the new challenges and opportunities facing education and training, and how to build lifelong learning systems that enable all citizens to be part of and benefit from change.

International cooperation, building on long experience, has an important role to play in supporting countries' efforts and accelerating system change using different

channels. Policy dialogue and assessments of progress, achievements and needs are instrumental in setting common objectives and goals for subsequent investments in education and training.

Sharing data and information, peer learning activities, creating global networks of practitioners, common projects for developing hands-on experience, and targeted capacity building actions are all important to progress together. This reminds us of the need to learn from the experiences of all countries in order to achieve a rich diversity of ideas and solutions, also taking into account local contexts. Countries and development actors need to continue efforts to coordinate better and work more closely together to support national policies.

Priority areas of action include: the development of digital skills and use of digital technologies to facilitate lifelong learning; ensuring inclusiveness and addressing the needs of vulnerable groups and local communities; understanding changing skills demands – in particular focusing on specific economic sectors; developing skills that support the green transition; and investing in teachers and trainers and their professional development.



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...WITH THE ETF'S CONTINUING COMMITMENT

THE ETF WILL CONTRIBUTE TO THESE AMBITIOUS GOALS IN THREE DIRECTIONS

 **The first** direction is to accompany partner countries in the change process towards inclusive-by-design lifelong learning systems that support the skilling requirements of fair green and digital transitions. This means a stronger focus on fair green and digital transitions as a key driver for system change and for opening up education and training systems.

 **The second** direction is to expand the horizon of the ETF's work on skills development, to help make change a reality by supporting countries and stakeholders to build strong and solid partnerships across different sectors of the economy. This means engaging with a broader range of stakeholders – companies, communities, training providers and civil society organisations – and focusing on priority sectors that are strategic as regards greening, digitalisation and inclusion in partner countries.

 **The third** direction is to promote and build change in strong cooperation with all our partners and stakeholders to ensure impact-driven policies.

The ETF is pursuing these three directions of work through a stronger policy advice function, supported by a solid monitoring framework on progress towards lifelong learning systems and an innovation-driven investment in knowledge development based on co-creation and partnerships.



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The European Training Foundation (ETF) and UNESCO, in collaboration with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the International Labour Organisation and UNICEF, organised an international conference on **'Building lifelong learning systems: skills for green and inclusive societies in the digital era'**, held virtually from 21-25 June 2021.

THE CONFERENCE HAD TWO PRIMARY OBJECTIVES:

- to reflect on international experience of how to transform traditional education and training into lifelong learning systems; and
- to reconfirm priorities for future human capital development cooperation and accelerate change.

It set out to learn together as a community, bringing different discussions on education, training and skills to the table from different perspectives – economic, social and educational – and tapping into the experience of a wide cross-section of stakeholders (practitioners, civil society organisations, youth, public officials and

researchers) from ETF partner countries and EU Member States as well as international organisations and EU Institutions. This learning could inspire common future work that would catalyse and accelerate change.

The conference was organised around a series of thematic sessions with stakeholders who have direct experience with and interests in system change towards the green and digital transitions, and lifelong learning. Their discussions kicked up ideas, best practices and suggestions for policy and action that were discussed at a high-level event addressing national and international decision-makers, multilateral and international organisations, think-tanks and the private sector.



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THE THEMATIC SESSIONS FOCUSED ON:

-  adapting to changing skills demands;
-  new forms of learning;
-  the role of actors in lifelong learning systems;
-  monitoring and adapting to change;
-  ensuring skills for all;
-  supporting the green transition.

THE CONFERENCE TACKLED THREE KEY ISSUES

- Why do we need system change and, linked with that, what kind of skills do we require for the future that align with global developments, international expectations and local needs across countries?
- What are the features and deliverables of effective lifelong learning systems?
- How can we actively direct and manage change? More specifically, how can we improve reforms and their implementation in order to achieve genuine transformation that benefits all?

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BUILDING LIFELONG LEARNING SYSTEMS



KEY FEATURES OF A GOOD LIFELONG LEARNING SYSTEM INCLUDE

- A** Expanding learning opportunities in different settings
- B** Creating meaningful and engaging learning environments
- C** Providing flexible learning pathways
- D** Developing dynamic skills sets
- E** Providing guidance to navigate and manage career and learning opportunities
- F** Creating awareness and incentives for people to engage in learning



HOW CAN WE ACTIVELY DIRECT AND MANAGE CHANGE?

- A** Set skills as a priority in development strategies
- B** Mobilise the private sector
- C** Create strong cooperation and sustainable partnerships among actors
- D** Ensure leadership
- E** Build capacities and learning institutions
- F** Secure financial resources
- G** Monitor and adapt

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INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION ACTIVITIES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING



Sharing data and information



Peer learning activities



Global networks of practitioners



Common projects for developing hands-on experience



Targeted capacity building actions

PRIORITY AREAS FOR INTERNATIONAL ACTION ON LIFELONG LEARNING



Develop digital skills and use of digital technologies



Ensure inclusiveness and address the needs of vulnerable groups and local communities



Understand changing skills demands



Develop skills that support the green transition



Invest in teachers and trainers and their professional development

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