



Trade Union
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OECD Skills Summit 2018 & The OECD Skills Strategy Revision

Porto, 28-29 June 2018

The second OECD Skills Summit taking place in Porto, Portugal on 28-29 June 2018 is expected to deliver recommendations as part of the ongoing revision of the [OECD Skills Strategy](#) (on which 11 [National Skills Strategies](#) updates were already based, some of which included trade union inputs). The TUAC and its members appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the Summit and the revision going forward.

The TUAC welcomes this timely review and its focus on skills anticipation and on strengthening governance based on four pillars: whole-of-government approach, stakeholder engagement, high-quality and accessible information, and coordinated financing.

Quality formal education for all is a very important basis on which lifelong learning must be built. This basis needs to be stronger than before because of the probable soaring needs for re- and up-skilling. Workers are faced with numerous transformations in the labour market due to the ongoing digital transformation, the phasing out of carbon-heavy industries – along with demographic changes and changes to pension systems. Especially in this context, learning capabilities need to be developed across all age and social groups. Training must be part of just transition frameworks for working people to enable dynamic and rewarding career pathways. Policy makers and social partners need to strive to understand how the workplace really learns and how skills are being certified and used – also in regard to informal learning.

Policy silos need to be broken up to ensure that innovation and energy policies consider employment and skills aspects and vice versa. The same applies to ensuring policy coherence between OECD work on skills and training with the revised OECD Jobs Strategy, the Inclusive Growth Framework and the Going Digital Horizontal Project.

Enabling equal access to education and training; designing quality and future oriented programmes; ensuring effective and shared financing and implementation are crucial factors. They need to be led by governance systems that include both social partners and give legal rights and resources to trade unions to support workers at the national, sector and firm level.

Enabling access to education and training

All workers should have an equal chance to engage in lifelong learning. To improve educational attainment and skills acquisition, it is important that learners and workers have the opportunity and means to access quality training by:

- Investing in quality public education and in both initial and continuing vocational and professional training at and outside the workplace, aiming at achieving universal access for all age groups.
- Focussing on youth and women from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, especially given their high rates of unemployment and concentration in precarious work forms. Failure to tackle their marginalisation will lead to a lost generation and persisting gender inequalities.
- Granting training rights and accounts (including robust systems of recognition of prior learning), especially for workers who encountered out-of-work spells, NEETs and those in new forms of non-standard work.
- Ensuring affordable and subsidised training programmes for socially disadvantaged groups as well as wider investments in broadband networks and learning facilities.
- Financially supporting information and guidance systems – also those administered by trade unions – and expanding those to rural and segregated areas.
- Incentivising workers to partake in continuous training by ensuring that skills are properly recognised and rewarded, both with extra pay and certification, set in tripartite, multi-sector or sector-level collective agreements.

Designing quality and future oriented programmes

Much more emphasis needs to be put on quality when designing and re-adjusting skills policies and training systems. For example, a minimum of two years for all apprenticeships, a broader and larger curriculum and stronger rights to progress to a job should be promoted. A substantial element of work experience is as important to achieve better skills use, as is a long-term vision of skills needs for the future from fundamental competencies, to digital and to transversal skills:

- Any re-adjustment of occupational qualifications and curricula should be in consultation with social partners and teacher unions and be aligned with long-term labour market needs.
- Governments should scale up industrial policy on the national, regional and sector level to forecast skill demands and to agree on financing and training content needed to address skills mismatches and shortages.
- Transversal competences that equip workers for changing organisational structures through active learning and work-based training can be supported at the sector level via training centres and tailored courses.
- A culture of learning needs to be promoted that fosters both skills and competencies that have relevance in- and outside of workplaces.
- Training provision based on appraisal and certification (also of informal learning) can help elevate on-the-job and professional courses by identifying areas where workers need to improve that is then linked directly to training.

With regard to digital transformation, workers need more than a simplified focus on ICT and STEM skills, as much needed as they may be, especially from a gender perspective. Policy makers and social partners need to identify the actual competencies that are needed and encourage employer investment into such training. Trade unions have often been at the forefront of seeking changes to teacher training and professional development and are developing new approaches (see the Education International ICT Protocol). Governments, in preparing people for the future of work, should:

- Foster cross-disciplinary skills including foundational knowledge (basic numeracy and literacy skills), cognitive, and social skills.
- Promote enrolments in STEM and ICT related VET and higher education programmes, especially of women, and combine digital literacy training with notions of digital security and information literacy.
- Provide connectivity to all public learning facilities and invest in ICT training and support for teachers and instructors.
- Ensure that “Open Online Courses” used to deliver digital learning are affordable, accredited and licensed.

Ensuring effective, shared financing

No matter how ambitious skills policies are, most lifelong learning strategies are not taking off in terms of scale and reach. This is because too little energy has been invested in developing systems for financing such opportunities. Best practice examples of hybrid funding systems – built on public investments, duties for employers, but also incentives for them and workers – can provide useful guidance. Some fundamental principles need to be in place from the onset:

- Financing should be jointly carried out by governments and employers (and if applicable through tripartite or social partner funds) and not move towards training as an individual responsibility of the worker.
- Adult learning systems need to provide the right to paid educational leave and be supported by employer investments into on-the-job training. Specifically for vulnerable groups training needs to be free and/ or highly subsidized.
- Accountability criteria need to be in place for the disbursement of funds with oversight structures that involve various stakeholders, for example through social partner joint management of levy systems.
- Enhanced investment in qualified teachers and good equipment throughout the education system is the basis for a life-long learning society. Teachers and training instructors need to be on top of the competence development in their different subjects and specialisations. And re-skilling and up-skilling of workers will not be fast without prior re-skilling and up-skilling of teachers and trainers.

Moving towards inclusive and effective governance systems

One of the objectives of the OECD Skills Strategy revision is to strengthen the governance of skills system. Trade unions and employer organisations need to play a central role in decision making processes at all levels concerning skills policies. Evidence displays that when trade unions are involved in the governance of training systems, the reach to workers is greater. The role of trade unions and workers representatives,

including through works councils and learning representatives at the shop level, needs to be recognised and strengthened through adequate rights and resources. Tripartite national and sector education and training bodies also have a leading role in advising on new standards and framework criteria (including financing). Skills strategies therefore need to define rights and obligations of all stakeholders and ensure that workers are represented on all institutional bodies.

Trade unions are particularly well-placed to:

- Identify the education, training and other skill-development measures that workers need the most;
- Negotiate pay and working time for training;
- Raise their members' awareness of the availability of these measures; and
- In some cases, deliver some of these services directly.

Trade union functions in skills systems

