

# BUILDING LIFELONG LEARNING SYSTEMS

Green Inclusive Digital

#SKILLS4CHANGE

# AGENDA

## International conference

21-25 JUNE 2021

**Building lifelong learning systems:**

Skills for green and inclusive societies  
in the digital era

**ONLINE**

**ALL TIMES ARE CEST**



The Conference is organised by the ETF and UNESCO in collaboration with the ILO, the EBRD and UNICEF.

The Conference has a double objective:

- to create a forum for a joint reflection on national and international experiences in transforming education and training systems into lifelong learning,
- to confirm priorities for future cooperation in the area of human capital development against the backdrop of global developments and challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

## DAY ONE

MONDAY, 21 JUNE 2021

### Grand opening of the online gatherings in plenary 9.00 - 10.00

Setting the scene of the week ahead - thematic sessions  
Why is there a need for system change?

### Adapting to a Changing Skills Demand 10.30 - 12.30

Global trends are transforming the way we work, learn and live. What does this mean for people, and how can education and training systems help them develop the skills they need throughout their lives?

### New Forms of Learning 13.30 - 15.30

In the fast-changing world, people learn in different settings and learning environments. What conditions are required at system level to facilitate and encourage the development and implementation of more meaningful and engaging learning environments?

## DAY TWO

TUESDAY, 22 JUNE 2021

### How to manage change to make it happen?

### Role of Actors in Lifelong Learning Systems 9.00 - 11.00

Moving towards lifelong learning systems means rethinking the roles and responsibilities of the different actors in the system. What new tasks and accountabilities must governments, businesses and civil society assume in governing and financing lifelong learning?

### Monitoring and Adapting 11.30 - 13.30

Changing education and training systems requires sustained reform efforts. What mechanisms do we need to put in place to monitor whether our reforms are on track, and to adapt our approach accordingly?

## DAY THREE

WEDNESDAY, 23 JUNE 2021

### Well-performing systems: expectations and deliverables

### Skills for All 9.00 - 11.00

Ensuing a cohesive and fair digital and green transition means providing quality learning opportunities for everyone throughout their lives. How can we build lifelong learning systems that are inclusive by design?

### Supporting the Green Transition 11.30 - 13.30

Climate change and environmental degradation are among the major global challenges of our times. How can education and training systems support a fair and inclusive transition toward sustainable carbon neutral economies and societies?

## DAYS FOUR & FIVE

24-25 JUNE 2021

### High level event

Linking policy to experience: the role of the international community in the change process and key policy issues for the future

## DAYS ONE TO FIVE

21-25 JUNE 2021

### Ideas bazaar – experiential journey through the thematic areas

ALL TIMES ARE CEST

# BACKGROUND

## A global context of change

Our world is living through a period of profound change driven by technological progress, the proliferation of smart technologies in all domains of life, and the push towards the greening of economies. This is happening against a backdrop of growing inequalities, aging populations, migration, and disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Albeit at different rates, these changes affect all countries through global value chains, investment practices, new business models and production processes that modify labour market dynamics, employment relations, workplaces, and the very nature of work itself. They also affect how people manage their careers and lives, how they interact with others and contribute to their communities.

The green and digital transition creates new opportunities for countries, individuals and businesses. It also creates risks for those who are not ready to adapt. If they are to achieve a people-centred and inclusive transition, countries need to focus on reskilling and upskilling their citizens and preparing young people to make the best of emerging opportunities. In exposing large numbers of people to precarity, unemployment, and loss of income, and forcing many to seek new careers, the Covid-19 pandemic has injected a new sense of urgency.

But we are not starting from scratch. Investing in people is a recognised priority in the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development and the European Green Deal, with a focus on ensuring that change leads towards more people-centred, inclusive, greener, and prosperous societies. The European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness, and resilience (2020) highlights the primary role of skills in achieving broader economic and social objectives. Education and training systems are expected to accompany the change process by helping all people to develop skills, competences, knowledge and attitudes enabling them to cope with labour market transitions, realise their potential and



contribute to their economies and societies in this evolving context. The right of everyone to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning is the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

To meet this expectation, education and training systems will have to undergo a true paradigm shift away from an exclusive focus on formal provision and one-size-fits-all solutions, towards lifelong learning systems that can offer flexible, individualised pathways for each learner, combining formal and informal learning, hard and soft skills, and ready access to education and training opportunities throughout life. This shift must be as swift as possible, and also aligned with international commitments and good practice, which prioritise lifelong learning systems that are inclusive, equitable, and accessible for all, as well as being able to deliver 21st century skills for sustainability, competitiveness, social fairness, and resilience in the face of regional and global crises.

Admittedly, this is a complex task as it involves all aspects of education and training, from teaching and learning practices, organisation of provision, visibility of the skills that people develop throughout their lives, to new forms of partnership among different actors, with new roles, responsibilities and funding mechanisms. Change brings uncertainty, opportunity, and risk, which affect different people and communities differently depending on their readiness to adapt and innovate. A system change requires a sustained effort and agility to manage a non-linear transformation process, address resistance to change, absorb external shocks to stay on course, and accommodate the often conflicting interests of different actors.

## Learning from experience

The countries neighbouring the European Union – the partner countries of the European Training Foundation (ETF) - like all countries around the world, have embarked on this process of transforming their education and training systems to support

lifelong learning. Their national authorities have been devoting time and effort to adapting their systems and are now at various stages in implementing a variety of policies that aim at system change.

While their national reforms are increasingly embedded in the global context, each country has its own trajectory, its own experiences of implementation, and also its own local priorities that drive and sometimes impede change. These national experiences offer a unique insight and opportunity for mutual learning about what works in different contexts, and how to adjust priorities for future cooperation. How does the global imperative for change play out in local contexts? What are the typical impediments to change at national level, and what is needed for national reforms to drive genuine transformation towards lifelong learning?

Evidence indicates that, while there has been progress in adapting education and training systems along these lines, there is still a long way to go to ensure that all citizens are served, and their needs are met. In parallel, the COVID19 crisis has created new challenges and a renewed sense of urgency for education and training systems to move faster in their transformation processes by tapping into the potential of digital technologies, building on innovative practices, and promoting collaborative solutions to avoid disruption.

# THE CONFERENCE

## Theme and objectives

Bearing all this in mind, the overarching theme of the conference is system change for lifelong learning. By this, we mean the intentional process of modifying the structure, policies, incentives, and practices in education in ways that lead to fundamental and positive changes in the professional context, attitudes, values, and conduct of education participants and stakeholders to enable lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Specifically, the conference will discuss how education and training systems can become inherently adaptive to new challenges so that countries can achieve their commitments to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030 in line with the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4), while also serving the needs and expectations of today's learners, education professionals and providers.

Recognising that the discussion does not start from scratch, the conference has a twin objective:

- to create a forum for joint reflection on national and international experiences in transforming education and training systems into lifelong learning systems;
- to confirm priorities for future cooperation in the area of human capital development against the backdrop of global developments and challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

The conference will build on the wealth of evidence and insights that ETF partner countries have provided on their priorities and progress with system change during the fifth round of the Torino Process (the ETF's main instrument for periodic structured monitoring of policy progress and impact in its partner countries), as well as on the findings of a cross-country analysis of this evidence. The Conference will also draw on the findings of the UNESCO Global Monitoring reports.

Beyond that, the conference aims to draw on the hands-on experience of different actors who design, implement, innovate, and benefit from the outcomes of transformative change in education.

To this end, the conference will mobilise a wide range of actors: education practitioners, professionals, learners, private sector stakeholders, researchers, analysts, national policy makers and international cooperation partners, who can provide a perspective on system change from different angles, and share their own experience of policy and practice.

## Guiding questions

The conference builds on the general acceptance by national and international actors of the need to make a paradigm shift towards flexible lifelong learning systems that meet the needs of all and interact with the world around them. It also aims to bring the discussion forward by understanding how system change in education and training takes place, and what are the opportunities, risks and obstacles encountered by those involved in this change. In this way, the conference will address a series of questions for further reflection about solutions and pointers for the future.

These include: how to move away from the traditional focus of education reforms on formal provision, towards reforms aimed at creating lifelong learning systems offering flexible, individualised pathways for each learner? What are the justifications and targets for such a profound change in different countries, and do they differ between those who initiate, implement, and benefit from such reforms? What does the “post-change” world look like in terms of roles and responsibilities? What role for the traditional segments of education – VET, general education, tertiary education – in a lifelong learning system? Are these segments ready and willing to accept that role, and how might the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic affect that readiness? How to secure financial resources to make lifelong learning systems a reality?

The conference seeks to take stock of progress and impediments to reforms towards system change for lifelong learning by asking the following three questions:

1. What is the purpose of system change in countries, and how does it align with global developments, international expectations, and local needs across countries?
2. How to manage change to make it happen, specifically how to improve reform plans and implementation in support of genuine transformation to the benefit of all?
3. What are the features and deliverables of well-performing, lifelong learning systems?

The Conference will cover six thematic areas, organised in response to these three questions:

- **Adapting to a changing skills demand:** the focus will be on the implications of changing skills demand generated by emerging economic, societal, and technological trends for people and the education and training systems
- **New forms of learning:** the focus will be on the role of new forms of learning and the preconditions at system level to support these new forms of learning
- **The changing role of actors:** the focus will be on new forms of collaboration and the changing roles and responsibilities of different actors (public authorities, private sector, civil society, and international partners) in governing and financing lifelong learning.

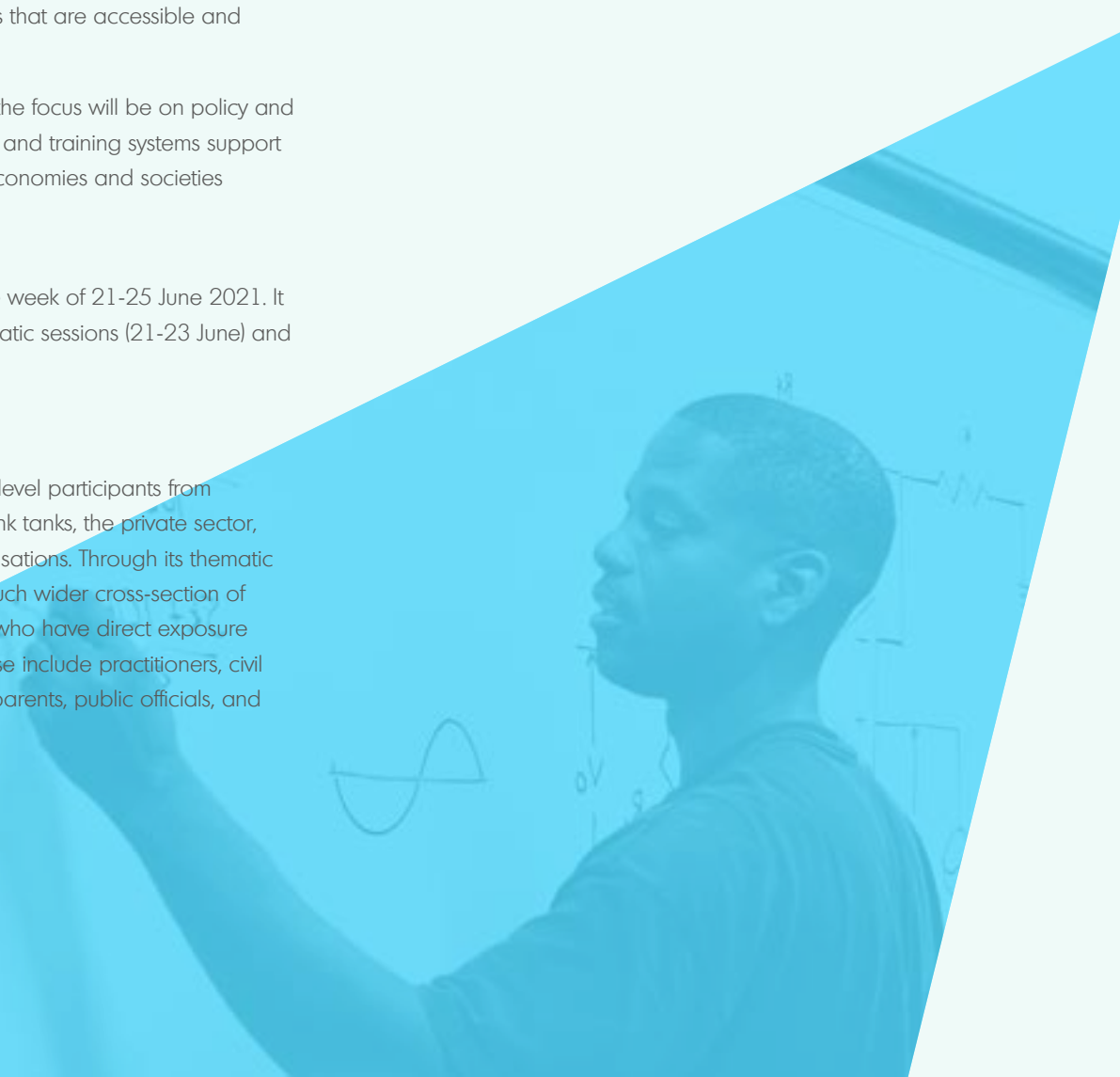
- **Monitoring and adapting:** the focus will be on how to monitor in view of confirming progress towards desired changes and agreed objectives, and the use of monitoring results for the calibration of reforms for change.
- **Ensuring skills for all:** the focus will be on building inclusive lifelong learning systems designed to provide opportunities for learning and gaining new skills that are accessible and beneficial to all potential learners
- **Supporting the green transition:** the focus will be on policy and practice to ensure that education and training systems support innovation and the greening of economies and societies

## Format and timing

The conference will take place in the week of 21-25 June 2021. It will combine a series of on-line thematic sessions (21-23 June) and a high-level event (24-25 June).

## Participants

The conference aims to gather high-level participants from partner countries, member states, think tanks, the private sector, EU institutions and multilateral organisations. Through its thematic sessions it also aims to engage a much wider cross-section of stakeholders from partner countries who have direct exposure to and stakes in system change. These include practitioners, civil society organisations, students and parents, public officials, and researchers.



## Thematic session 1:

### Adapting to a changing skills demand

**What skills do we need to cope with, manage and actively direct change? How can education and training systems support the development of new skills sets?**

All countries in the world are affected by global trends that are transforming their societies, economies and labour markets. However, the nature and intensity of this transformation differs from country to country, region to region and sector to sector. Working environments also differ substantially, depending on the technologies used, production processes and employment relations. How we shape the future will depend on where we stand now, but even more on the choices we make and the capacity we have to adapt, innovate and make best use of emerging opportunities while mitigating risks. The EU political agenda focuses on a fair transition to a digital and green economy, while enhancing economic resilience and ensuring social justice. Investing in people's skills stands out as the best safeguard in this transition, which requires greater flexibility, resilience and agility.

The transition to the new world of work must be both human-centric and tech-centric. Jobs and their composition are changing, with routine tasks becoming automated or replaced by AI. New jobs and new forms of work are emerging and, together with them, new ways of living. New knowledge is being produced more rapidly, and there is continuous pressure to turn that knowledge into new skills, new career paths, new business models and new lifestyles.

Given the high degree of uncertainty, individuals, institutions and businesses need to develop the capacity to deal with greater complexity and learn to become inter-dependent. The set of skills needed to face the challenges of work and life today have become more complex, and they will become even more complex tomorrow. Empirical studies and foresight exercises suggest that we are shifting towards less predefined job categories with broader skill requirements and towards ones that tap into the unique potential of individuals. We move towards a world where people will need to become worker-learners in a rapidly evolving landscape. With multiple and longer careers, lifelong learning will be crucial to strengthen an individual's employability and to accompany social advancements.

Competence requirements are changing, as more jobs become subject to technological change and digitalisation assumes a bigger role in all areas of work and life. New jobs in the low-carbon economy will require heterogeneous skills portfolios and a wider set of skills, with multi-disciplinary profiles gaining attention. For example, 'T-shaped' skills profiles are emerging, requiring individuals to combine core transversal skills (the horizontal bar) with the specific skills needed for a job (the vertical bar). There is also talk of "comb-shaped" profiles combining deep knowledge in multiple vertical areas. The EU has established a key competences framework comprising higher-level cognitive and socio-emotional

skills<sup>1</sup>, which aligns with a common set of so-called 21st century skills<sup>2</sup>. This indicates that we are moving towards a multidisciplinary range of skills combining technical skills and soft skills that people will need to succeed in the future.

Digital literacy and the ability to understand and apply technology to practical solutions is becoming a must across all jobs and all sectors, as well as life outside work. Environmental awareness will also need to become a core skill, alongside digital skills, as every workplace and job has the potential, and the need, to become greener. While people are being displaced by automation and artificial intelligence, they need to build on their ability to take advantage of uniquely human characteristics that cannot be replaced by technology. Common sense, problem solving, critical thinking, empathy and creativity will enable them to take advantage of technology and not lose out to it.

Rapid change creates a disconnect between the expertise that organisations need and that available in the labour market. It also generates skills gaps and fuels the growth of an alternative workforce, as businesses increasingly bridge the gap with short-term workers, freelancers, independent contractors, consultants, on-demand workers, and people working in side jobs. For this reason, learning to learn, entrepreneurial and career management skills are becoming increasingly important to boost resilience and the ability to adapt to volatility. At the same time, gathering information and monitoring skills demand help the adaptation to the new pace of change. This calls for gradual adjustments of methodologies, but also new tools and new methods of instant data collection and processing. A more agile and accessible information system would definitely facilitate informed decision-making by institutions, businesses and individuals.

<sup>1</sup> The eight competences as defined by the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning are: literacy; multilingualism; numerical, scientific and engineering skills; digital and technology-based competences; interpersonal skills and the ability to adopt new competences; active citizenship; entrepreneurship; and cultural awareness and expression.

<sup>2</sup> 21st century skills as defined by Unesco E2030: Education and Skills for the 21st Century are abilities and attributes that can be taught or learned in order to enhance ways of thinking, learning, working and living in the world. The skills include creativity and innovation, critical thinking/problem solving/decision making, learning to learn/metacognition, communication, collaboration (teamwork), information literacy, ICT literacy, citizenship (local and global), life and career skills, and personal and social responsibility (including cultural awareness and competence).

Bearing all this in mind, we take up the challenge to reach the following objectives:

- **Stimulate common reflection and discussion on how education and training systems can accompany individuals throughout their lives in this new diffuse and dynamic environment.**
- **Bring the perspective of individuals on how to make the multiplicity of new profiles and pathways visible, recognised and supported by the learning system.**

The reflection will be guided by the perspective of individuals (learners) and designed as a process of discovery leading from information sharing, through involvement, towards engagement. It will embrace the following issues:

**Global trends are transforming the way we work, learn and live. What does the continuous and often non-transparent changing skills demand mean for individuals? How can education and training systems accompany individuals in developing the 'right' skill sets throughout their lives?**

- What new skill sets can enable people to cope with volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity?
- How can we make emerging skills demand and skills supply more transparent for better matching?
- What do individuals need from education and training systems to continuously update their skills?

## Thematic session 2: New forms of learning

### Lifelong learning: life satisfaction or life sentence?

We are all learners in today's world where smart technologies pervade every aspect of life, where technological progress influences the way we work and where we all face challenges such as the current pandemic and climate change. The current pandemic is forcing many people to reconsider their career choices or find new jobs. These developments influence not only what we need to learn, but also how, where and when we learn. Lifelong learning is increasingly important in enabling us to keep up with these developments.

While many of us are motivated to learn and interested in learning, this is not the case for everyone. Dropout rates in many countries show that many learners are pushed or pulled out of initial education and training and even more develop negative attitudes towards learning. For people with negative learning experiences lifelong learning might sound like a life sentence, so we need to be more adaptive to different learning needs and preferences at different stages of life to create new possibilities and ways of learning.

To achieve this, we need to create meaningful learning environments where people feel safe to learn and make mistakes and that motivate and engage learners to keep on learning.

Meaningful and engaging learning environments will foster positive attitudes towards learning and can incentivise people with negative experiences to engage in learning once again. We need to create such learning environments in initial education so that learners develop positive attitudes towards learning and are prepared for their future jobs and lives. Continuing education and training is no different and we need to incentivise people to keep learning throughout their lives.

### Meaningful and engaging learning environments

What do we mean by meaningful and engaging learning environments? First of all, the learning environment is more than just the physical space where learning takes place. It also has an organisational, pedagogical and content dimension. The OECD (2013)<sup>1</sup> speaks of the pedagogical core of the learning environment which comprises learners, educators, resources and content.



Learning environments become meaningful when they offer relevant learning content in an authentic context. Relevance in this case means offering knowledge, skills and competences that are required by the economy and society and are of interest to the learner. By authentic we mean learning contexts that resemble as far as possible people's potential future work and life situations. Real work contexts, in apprenticeships for example, are of course the most authentic, but authentic learning contexts can also be created outside an actual workplace. A mix of different environments is often needed to help learners acquire the desired learning outcomes. Learning can take place in the school or training institute, at the workplace, online and in the community.

The learning environment becomes engaging when it invites learners to explore, to try new things, to make mistakes, to collaborate and to take ownership of their own learning process. Learning environments should be responsive to individual needs, learning content and activities should be connected to each other and assessment aligned with the learning goals with a strong emphasis on formative feedback. In other words, a more student-centred approach is needed, incorporating pedagogical approaches such as experiential learning, blended learning, game-based learning, embodied learning and social and collaborative learning<sup>2</sup>. In many learning contexts these principles are not yet applied, but they underpin new ways of learning and can result in higher levels of motivation and better learning outcomes<sup>3</sup>.

We need to create systems that support the wider use of meaningful and engaging learning environments. In this strand we will explore which conditions foster these changes at system level.

## Context

Recent European policies emphasise the need for people to keep learning and developing throughout their lives and to build a culture of lifelong learning.

A key objective of the European Skills Agenda is higher participation of adults, and specifically low-qualified adults, in learning. Limited accessibility is often one of the factors that hinder low-qualified adults to participate. Keeping people motivated to learn is another aspect of this - low-qualified adults are more likely to have developed negative attitudes towards learning and therefore could be more reluctant to engage in learning activities. To encourage them to participate in learning activities learning environments with new approaches to learning that will provide them with a new and hopefully positive learning experience will have to be created. And this should happen at all levels of education if we want to build a learning culture and support learners to acquire relevant learning outcomes.

The interest in developing innovative learning environments is not limited to Europe, the OECD developed a handbook<sup>4</sup> for innovative learning environments in 2017 and learning environments are also an important part of the 'OECD learning framework 2030'<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, UNESCO-UNEVOC works on making learning more attractive and relevant for learners in their work in the BILT project, bridging innovation and learning in TVET and their work under the 'skills and innovation hubs'.

<sup>1</sup> OECD (2013), *Innovative Learning Environments*, Education Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris

<sup>2</sup> European Commission (2020), *Innovation and digitalisation. A report of the ET 2020 working group on vocational education and training*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg

<sup>3</sup> The *Creating New Learning literature review shows correlations between different innovations in teaching and learning and effective and cognitive learning outcomes and other effects*.

<sup>4</sup> OECD (2017), *The OECD Handbook for Innovative Learning Environments*, OECD, Paris

<sup>5</sup> OECD (2018), *The Future of Education and Skills, Education 2030*, OECD, Paris

Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic is shaping the use of learning environments. Learners and teachers have been forced to move to distance and online learning. The ILO, the World Bank and UNESCO have taken stock of these developments<sup>6</sup>, as has the ETF<sup>7</sup>. The question is how this experience will influence learning environments in the post-COVID era.

The creation of meaningful and engaging learning environments is also an emerging theme in ETF partner countries. Partner countries are working on modernising their VET systems by including the relevant skills and competences in qualifications and subsequently learning programmes. Countries are moving from subject-oriented curricula to modular and competence-based curricula where theory and practice are integrated. This shift to competence-based education and the integration of theory and practice requires the use of new pedagogical approaches and authentic learning environments. There is increasing emphasis on exposing learners to 'real life' experiences. Many of the ETF's partner countries are in the midst of this change, which requires a different way of organising and facilitating the learning process.

There is much emphasis on the role of work-based learning. In a growing number of countries, work-based learning is being incorporated more widely into curricula. But there are other ways of making learning meaningful and engaging. There are examples of projects in the ETF partner countries where links have been created with enterprises or the community, for instance, by working together with the local tourism board on the organisation of an event involving students from different programmes. In other projects, learners work on relevant topics such as recycling or alternative energy often developing both occupational and key competences at the same time. This is also reflected in projects conducted in the community where learners have to use their occupational skills in combination with key competences to complete their assignments.

Online and digital activities can resemble authentic learning environments in the form of simulations and games, but can also be very useful for learning basic skills. Various countries started introducing online learning activities and blended learning to facilitate the learning process already before Covid-19.

The examples show that partner countries are working on creating meaningful and engaging environments, but there is also some way to go to create these learning experiences for all learners.

## Objectives and expected outputs

In this thematic session we will discuss the need to develop and implement meaningful and engaging learning environments and together we will try to answer the following question:

*What conditions are required at system level to facilitate and encourage the development and implementation of more meaningful and engaging learning environments?*

During the session we will share examples of meaningful and engaging learning environments. Based on these examples we will discuss the need for this kind of learning environments, and explore the conditions required to support the design and implementation of such learning environments. This discussion will lead to:

- A reflection on the relevance of creating meaningful and engaging learning environments.
- Identification of conditions that support the development and implementation of meaningful and engaging learning environments.
- Formulation of possible key messages to inform policies and actions to support the development and implementation of meaningful and engaging learning environments.

<sup>6</sup> International Labour Organisation and World Bank (2021), [Skills development in the time of Covid-19: Taking stock of the initial responses in technical and vocational education and training](#), ILO, Geneva

<sup>7</sup> European Training Foundation (2020), [Mapping Covid-19: An overview](#), ETF, Turin

## Thematic session 3:

### Role of actors in lifelong learning systems

Embedding vocational education and training into lifelong learning is a process that affects all aspects of the system. It thus involves all the people and institutions that contribute to developing human capital. This means all the state and non-state actors in the initial and continuing vocational education and training system. The state actors are public bodies, such as the ministries and sub-national authorities, government agencies for quality assurance and qualifications, education and training providers, with their principals and educators, centres of expertise on skills needs' assessment or curriculum development, pedagogical and teacher training institutes, and public employment and career guidance services. Non-state actors operating in the private sector or civil society are also essential

for skills development. They include, for example, social partner or chambers of commerce, employee expert centres, companies that are particularly representative of a sector as well as platform and gig economy employers, youth and adult learning associations, independent research centres, and other non-state bodies.

All these actors contribute to building lifelong learning and their role is changing along with the changes in the system. We will draw on the recent experience of partner countries to highlight real-life practice that shows the new demands that state and non-state actors are facing in a lifelong learning context, and discuss possible directions for the future.

#### The topics under discussion

Moving towards good quality lifelong learning for all can only happen through the engagement of all actors, including partners that are usually less involved in traditional education and training systems, for example civil society organisations. Lifelong learning calls for the establishment of new paths between education and training; flexibility of provision to address learners of all ages; recognition of non-formal and informal learning; comprehensive skills needs assessment, among other things. To make lifelong learning a reality, labour ministries need to expand adult learning; ministries of education need to eliminate educational dead ends that impede people's further learning; up-skilling and re-skilling also need to be accessible for platform and gig workers and in all



other instances where there is no regulated industrial relationship; lifelong guidance services should reach everyone regardless of their age.

Along with the roles of each institution or organisation, the switch to lifelong learning will change how they interact with each other. This raises a number of questions, such as who has leadership on a given policy area or part of the system; how is decision-making organised and who is involved; what is the power of initiative of the different actors; how are responsibilities and accountability distributed; how is feedback between the various parts of the system ensured; what is the subsidiarity and degree of autonomy of the actors; who steers the identification of solutions when failures and bottlenecks emerge?

The above arrangements are inter-dependent and together shape how a skills development system is governed and managed. In the conference, we are going to focus more specifically on the following issues:

**1. Creating partnerships for lifelong learning:** the adoption of a lifelong learning policy will entail new objectives for the system. As a result, state and non-state actors will need to explore new cooperation mechanisms, including new types of partnership. Ensuring the implementation of these partnerships will, in many instances, bring together actors that do not necessarily cooperate in a traditional education and training system.

**2. Ensuring resource mobilisation and higher-level outcomes:** namely quality training opportunities for all, regardless of age, prior education, or employment status. A lifelong learning system needs to mobilise financial resources on a much larger scale than a system covering only VET. This is because it needs to ensure a wider coverage of skills development, including non-formal and

informal learning at all ages. Non-financial resources also come into play, in particular the capacity of state and non-state actors to assume responsibilities for new groups of learners; to extend the mandate of existing institutions and build new ones; to manage co-financing from different sources; and to reinforce trust based on their respective accountabilities.

These two issues intersect the digitalisation and greening of economies, which are driving change. The ambition is that digitalisation and greening should benefit everybody in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and its commitment to fairness and social sustainability. Nevertheless, there are challenges in implementation. With the development of platform business models and the gig economy, the question of who is an employee and who is an employer is increasingly blurred. Who are the employers to build partnerships with? Do they view their jobholders as employees? Do they take responsibility for their skills? Who do we join forces with to realise lifelong learning in the green economy?

Given that these areas are rapidly evolving, it is important to explore how partnerships are generated and develop over time. Partnerships and resources for lifelong learning should not lose sight of people who have benefited the least from education and training, from globalisation of goods and labour markets, and from the digitalisation of the economy.

## Partner country actions, progress, challenges and needs

Lifelong learning requires an effort to be made to devise and implement coordination and cooperation mechanisms between actors, and to learn lessons from them, so they can be improved over time.

Between 2016 and 2020, the ETF's partner countries made progress in building consensus within government, and to some extent between government and non-state actors, around their policy visions for VET. However, countries have found it difficult to devise actor coordination and cooperation mechanisms for the practical implementation of their strategies.

Both the Torino Process national reports and the ETF assessment noted that the involvement of non-state actors is usually supported by international partners, more than by national stakeholders, raising questions about long-term sustainability.

Our progress monitoring showed that developing and implementing coordination mechanisms is more difficult than other processes, including agreeing a common vision. There are two general lessons from the ETF's analyses:

1. Most countries have a legacy of a highly centralised VET systems, whereby the move to forms of subsidiarity has created hybrid models of governance, with a mix of centralised decision-making and partial delegation of implementation. Second, centralised VET governance also carries a legacy of hierarchical relationships with limited room for inter-institutional and inter-actor trust.
2. To develop lifelong learning spanning formal, non-formal and informal learning, significant progress is required in hybrid models and inter-institutional trust. This is being promoted in the ETF's partner countries, and around the world, by the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals dealing with institutions and partnerships, i.e. SDG16 and SDG17. The targets involved are: develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels (target 16.6), and ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (target 16.7).

## International developments

The 2020 European Skills Agenda and Council Recommendation on VET underline that mechanisms for partnership between the public and private sectors, third sector, providers, centres of expertise, and independent research centres are needed to attain high quality outcomes in terms of skills and employment, and to unlock financial resources. The European Skills Agenda notably proposes a Pact for Skills among state and non-state actors to commit and agree on high quality learning with specific targets for relevant groups of adults to be trained. The Pact can be adapted to different situations at national and sub-national level. A second example is the experience of Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs), i.e. entitlements to time and/or money that individuals can use for learning activities. Experience in this field is promising, but the tool needs to be much more widely used before any general conclusions about its efficacy can be drawn.

UNESCO's publication *Embracing a Culture of Lifelong Learning* (Unesco UIL, 2020) converges on the need for renewing actors and institutions' role, for example: schools and universities should change their mandate to be open to different forms of learning for people of all ages, and employers should view the workplace as a learning environment. It also calls for innovative financing schemes to achieve universality, given that both conventional government funding schemes and market-based principles have failed to mobilise sufficient resources to ensure access to lifelong learning for all. The OECD publication *Strengthening the Governance of Skills Systems* (OECD, 2020) points out that successful skills strategies depend on continuing collaboration between ministerial departments, agencies, non-governmental stakeholders and local actors across different tiers of government. It identifies four challenges that need to be met in order to strengthen skills systems: promote coordination, cooperation and collaboration across the whole of government; engage with stakeholders throughout the policy cycle; build integrated information systems; and align and co-ordinate financing arrangements.

## Issues for discussion

The key question for discussion is what cooperation models or public-private partnerships are needed to move to lifelong learning systems?

In addressing this question, we will cover the following issues:

- How do we nurture a common vision to guide state and non-state actors in shaping their partnership models in the lifelong learning system?
- What do these new partnerships look like? What motivates actors to work together? Has the Covid-19 pandemic provided useful lessons?
- How can we secure financial resources to make lifelong learning a reality? Who is going to contribute?

## Objectives and expected outputs

The specific outputs for this thematic session are:

- Bringing practitioners together to take stock of lessons learned from practical cases;
- A reflection identifying the conditions that support system change;
- Translation into the language of policymakers of the lessons learned by practitioners from their experience and their reflection on system change.



## Thematic session 4:

### Monitoring and adapting

Education and training today are under pressure to adapt to a context of far-reaching change. Digitalisation and automation, the ongoing transition to low-carbon technologies, production processes, and services, as well as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic create a demand for new and largely unanticipated skills. As a growing number of learners and workers see their career choices challenged, education systems are forced to open up and focus on reskilling workers in sectors at risk, as well as on ensuring that young people and adults remain employable in the new green and digital economy.

Across the ETF's partner countries, system change is taking place in response to these developments. A new generation of policies is emerging, driven by the ambition to transform education and training into a system that can cater for the changing skills needs of an increasingly diverse group of beneficiaries of all ages. The international community too is pushing for change through equally ambitious, new commitments prioritising inclusion, equity, accessibility<sup>1</sup>, as well as promoting new and better skills to enable people to thrive in a world that is more sustainable, fair, and resilient in the face of crisis<sup>2</sup>.

These changes are conceived and implemented in highly diverse, dynamic, and often unpredictable environments which are rich in opportunities, but also risks. Such environments require constant monitoring of progress to ensure that policy reforms remain relevant and on target. Monitoring in this sense can be understood as the regular collection, description and use of evidence on the progress of policies and the context in which they are conceived and implemented, in order to ensure that the intended changes remain relevant and achieve their goal.

What kind of monitoring systems can capture the pace, magnitude, and diversity of reforms in dynamic national, regional, and international environments while delivering reliable results on a regular basis about progress towards lifelong learning? How do we monitor reforms for lifelong learning, and do we already have these systems in place? If yes, are we using them properly? If not, how far are we from having them, and is our system change flying blind in the interim? And what is the place of international monitoring efforts in this context?

### Issues to be discussed

The cooperation between countries in the area of monitoring is based on the understanding that monitoring is a form of

<sup>1</sup> Sustainable Development Goal 4

<sup>2</sup> EU Skills Agenda

regular evidence collection on the progress of a reform project or programme activity<sup>3</sup>. The basis is a purposeful selection of qualitative and quantitative indicators that can provide information about the extent to which the activity is achieving its objectives<sup>4</sup>. The focus of monitoring in this sense is descriptive and draws on past periods. However the purpose is forward-looking, in that it delivers evidence that informs improvement for the future.

For many years, the ETF's partner countries have been devoting time and effort to monitoring and are at various stages of establishing (or upgrading) their monitoring arrangements in line with reforms and international commitments such as the monitoring of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The ETF is developing a new, Torino Process-based framework for monitoring system change towards lifelong learning.

Some countries invest in monitoring primarily to gather evidence on the day-to-day operation of their education and training systems; others do it for the more specific purpose of tracking various reforms to support system change, or for both purposes. The results of these efforts often go well beyond vocational education and training and feed into international data repositories, such as the UNESCO UIS database, the World Bank's WDI database, or the OECD's PISA database.

Nevertheless, each country has its own reform trajectory, needs, context-specific challenges, and solutions for monitoring change. These experiences allow us to take stock of what works in monitoring reforms, but also what is missing and needs attention, especially when it comes to creating opportunities for lifelong learning. Within this broader question, three areas invite reflection and will be the focus of the session on monitoring and adapting for system change:

### **1. What do we need to monitor to arrive at reliable judgements about success or failure of system change towards lifelong learning?**

This question invites a substantive discussion about reliability of monitoring against the backdrop of a new generation of more strategic and wide-reaching reforms that aim at creating opportunities for lifelong learning through system change. We will discuss how to ensure that the goals against which we are monitoring progress are properly captured by the monitoring system, and also how to define indicators of success that are shared and accepted by all actors and stakeholders.

### **2. How do we monitor, so that various perspectives, subordinate developments, and stakeholder interests are considered in the monitoring process?**

The session aims to provoke a discussion about several issues concerning the process and methodology of monitoring. One of these issues is the need to set up an inclusive monitoring process that can ensure the legitimacy and acceptance of monitoring results across the board. Another issue is the integration of mechanisms for rapid adjustment of monitoring procedures without jeopardising the integrity and reliability of the monitoring system or the continuity of ongoing evidence generation efforts. Finally, the third issue is that of balancing between different evidence collection methods and types of evidence, as well as between national and international solutions and evidence gathering initiatives that may not be always aligned with each other.

<sup>3</sup> Definition based on Evaluation Handbook for Agencies, Performance Development Network, 2018

<sup>4</sup> See also: [Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-based Management](#), OECD, 2002

### 3. How do we use the monitoring results, what is their purpose?

Even the best monitoring system would be inadequate if its results were not used to inform decisions, guide improvement, and inspire further change. How can we ensure that the evidence delivered by monitoring is actually applied? Can the design of the monitoring system promote or hinder the meaningful use of results, and what is the role of proper communication in this? Finally, how can we design meaningful follow-up actions and distribute responsibility for them?

### Objectives and expected outputs

The discussion aims to raise awareness of the significance of monitoring in transformative policy contexts in education and training; find solutions to the challenge of monitoring lifelong learning in settings marked by diverse responsibilities, stakeholder interests, and priorities; and at reaching consensus on possible ways to track and verify the progress of reforms for system change.

The discussion should lead to a shared understanding of what key elements are required for the monitoring of lifelong learning: of systemic change towards new opportunities for lifelong learning, and of the functioning of lifelong learning systems in ways that take into consideration all thematic areas covered by the conference: the changing demand for skills, progress with new learning, new cooperation modalities, inclusiveness of opportunities, innovation, and the green and digital transition. The findings will contribute to the work of the international community on how to make lifelong learning a reality for the benefit of all. This also includes the work of the ETF on the new generation of monitoring which will succeed and enhance the Torino Process framework.



## Thematic session 5:

### Skills for all

The central topic of skills for all workshop is building lifelong learning systems that are inclusive by design. Such systems foster opportunities for learning and gaining new skills that are accessible and beneficial to all potential learners<sup>1</sup>.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has combined with pre-existing transformations, especially digitalisation, to test the resilience of people, companies and governments alike. Inclusive and well-performing education and training systems are required to cope effectively with such transformations and the vulnerabilities emerging in the post Covid-19 era. Such systems must be able to meet the expectations of learners and businesses and enable a successful twin transition to greener and digital societies in which no one and nowhere is left behind.

#### From skills development to fully fledged lifelong learning systems

### Where we are? What lies ahead?

In the education and training systems of the ETF's partner countries, as in those of many other countries around the world, there are gaps in providing relevant skills for all potential beneficiaries as well as areas of excellence. The groups most affected by school disengagement or limited access to further training opportunities are (a) learners from disadvantaged communities, such as ethnic minorities, rural or remote areas or low income households; (b) learners with special educational needs; (c) young people not in employment, education or training; (d) young people and adults with low educational attainment; and (e) children, young people and adults with migrant backgrounds. In addition, socio-economic

transformations render many professional qualifications and skills obsolete, leading to higher risks of long-term unemployment.

The results of the ETF's Torino Process<sup>3</sup> indicate that the ETF's partner countries have managed to narrow gaps in access and improve retention in education, particularly at primary and secondary levels. However, the quality of skills development remains a matter of concern in most transition and developing countries, and elsewhere. In addition, early school leaving and limited engagement of adults in education and training are important challenges in several ETF partner countries, as well as in some EU Member States. Early childhood education is underdeveloped, lack of which can lead to weak performance in initial education, while incomplete attainment of upper secondary education is a major barrier for access to and participation in further learning opportunities.

So far, the countries of the EU Neighbourhood and Central Asia have made efforts to address the fragmentation of education pathways and provide more opportunities for learning. Such efforts include further developing national qualifications systems, establishing quality assurance and accreditation procedures, and strengthening social partnerships covering both initial and continuing education. Several countries have also boosted upskilling and reskilling opportunities for jobseekers and workers. However, continuing education and training remains on the whole under-resourced.

<sup>1</sup> As reflected in the principles, priorities and targets set out in the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030](#) and the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), in particular providing lifelong learning opportunities to all and tackling inequalities in access to education and training

<sup>2</sup> European Training Foundation, [Key Indicators on Education, Skills and Employment 2020](#), ETF, 2020

<sup>3</sup> [Torino Process country assessments](#)

The substantial changes in skills demand brought about by the pandemic and the digital transition call for a clear prioritisation of skills development targeting a greater proportion of young people and adults. It also calls for solutions to help young people who have lost out on education during the lockdown, as well as students and recent graduates who have missed practical training, on-the-job learning and work experience.

The main challenge ahead is how education and training systems can encompass the growing multiplicity of learners and learning needs. A further challenge is how to make sure that the expansion and diversification of learning contexts is accompanied by efforts to make people's skills visible through validation and certification, while providing timely and relevant career guidance and other support services<sup>4</sup>.

## How to build inclusive lifelong learning systems?

More encompassing education systems must make the shift from ad hoc remedial interventions to holistic and timely ones fit for the needs of all learners. A fully fledged lifelong learning system means no dead-end educational pathways or barriers of access to and progress from one education level or profile to another. Successful lifelong learning strategies require support systems and social services, as well as wage-setting mechanisms that reward continuing development of skills, leading to upward labour market transitions. A lifelong learning system that is inclusive by design entails policy coherence and carefully crafted coordination of various action strands. It also means closing loopholes in regulations or eligibility criteria that can prevent those most in need from benefitting from learning opportunities.

The pandemic has accelerated and intensified the transformation of societies and economies. Education and training systems must not lag behind. Several challenges lie ahead for all ETF partner countries:

- Reaching all potential learners through a multi-actor policy design and delivery;
- Making learning pathways more flexible;
- Establishing well-defined skills certification and recognition procedures regardless of the modality or place of delivery;
- Motivating and guiding learners to engage in and complete skills programmes;
- Putting skills at the heart of recovery efforts in the post-pandemic period.

## Issues to be discussed

The workshop will explore the key ingredients to improving the inclusiveness and relevance of education and training in a learner-centric and lifelong perspective. Key questions for reflection are:

- What are the main challenges to effective and inclusive skills development today?
- What instruments should be in place to ensure that we do not leave anyone behind, with particular emphasis on the early identification of vulnerabilities and support measures?
- How should education and training systems adapt to ensure flexible learning pathways and visibility of skills for all, with particular emphasis on young people and vulnerable adults?

<sup>4</sup> As per the priorities and instruments set out in the [European Skills Agenda](#) and the [Osnabrück Declaration 2020](#) on vocational education and training as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies.

## Objectives

By sharing experience and practice from ETF partner countries, EU Member States and internationally, the workshop aims to:

- Identify **key challenges and emerging risks** for inclusive lifelong learning systems in context of demographic, socio-economic and technological change;
- Clarify the **preconditions for and features** of education and training systems that ensure full access to and participation of all potential beneficiaries with a positive impact on employability, career progression and social inclusion;
- Select **key messages** to inform policies and action to support the shift towards learner-centric lifelong learning systems that are inclusive by design.

## Thematic session 6:

### Supporting the green transition

Climate change, environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity are among the major global challenges of our times. They are already having an impact on livelihoods and societies. The 2030 Agenda with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) invites action to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. The Paris agreement of 2015 highlights the need for countries to implement ambitious climate action based on the best available science to drive **economic and social transformation**.

The European Green Deal (EGD)<sup>1</sup> is the European Union's latest contribution to climate action. It is a new growth strategy for moving towards a resource-efficient, sustainable economy ensuring that "no person and no place is left behind". It strives for a just transition towards climate neutrality by 2050. The EGD increasingly guides all internal EU policies including the New European Skills agenda, the VET recommendation, the Osnabruck Declaration and the Council resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (2021-2030). These all recognise that the rapid shift towards a climate neutrality and the digital transformation change the way we work, learn, take part in society and lead our everyday lives. Young people need to be well prepared and adults need to up-skill and reskill to adapt to these changes.

The EGD also guides the European Union's external policies and instruments. Through a series of tools (policy and regulatory work, green investments, budget support, green budgeting and procurement, fiscal reforms, research and innovation, education,

and engagement with the private sector) these put environmental and climate action at the centre of cooperation. For example, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)<sup>2</sup> includes a target to spend 25 % of its 2021-2027 budget on action supporting climate objectives.

In the countries where the European Training Foundation works, there is awareness at policy level of the importance of environmental protection, efficient use of natural resources and sustainability. In nearly all of them, sustainability is one of the objectives of national development strategies of equal importance to macro-economic stability and a good business environment. Issues of sustainability also feature in sectoral development strategies, in particular for economic sectors requiring major investment or subject to state regulation (e.g. transport, energy, mining), as well as sectors considered important for the economy e.g. agriculture, tourism or construction. At the same time there is an increasing awareness amongst the business community of the new opportunities that the greening of the economy creates, combined with increasing consumer demand for eco-friendly products and services.

The strong policy drive towards sustainable economies and societies has a series of implications for education, training and skills. First, it requires education and training systems to make citizens aware of the environmental impact of their actions and enable them to act as responsible citizens, consumers and producers. Second, it drives continuous innovation in technologies,

<sup>1</sup> [The European Green Deal](#)

<sup>2</sup> [the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument \(NDICI\)](#)



production processes, products and services, and business models across all sectors of the economy (construction, energy, transport, agriculture, manufacturing, etc). Third, new technologies and production processes change the way traditional occupations are performed and create new occupations requiring new skills and knowledge. Fourth, it generates a dynamic of job creation and job destruction that requires upskilling and reskilling large numbers of people. And last but not least, the transformation process requires a strong interaction between the education and training system and its environment ensuring that skills development empowers economic, technological and social change.

The countries where the ETF works have started efforts to make education and training more adaptive to the emerging needs of the green transition. A number of countries have started developing environmental awareness among students in the formal education system. In Ukraine, for example, environmental awareness is one of the ten key competences to be developed at all levels of education including technical and vocational education and training (TVET). In Serbia, developing awareness for sustainability, protection and preservation of nature and environment and ecology-related ethics is mandatory, and dedicated teaching and learning materials (the Green Pack) are provided to schools of all types and education levels. In Turkey, environmental awareness is part of its educational vision 2023, and green skills are part of the modernised TVET curricula, including specific skills for certain occupations. Georgia has developed a strategy for environmental education for sustainable development, including a dedicated module to be integrated in all TVET curricula. Other measures include e-learning courses for teachers and students, and sector specific modules.

Other developments include: reviewing occupational profiles and qualifications and developing new ones emerging from the greening of production processes and products; designing

new training programmes developing both soft and technical skills; updating the content of training programmes for traditional qualifications; setting up mechanisms for identifying changing skills demands related to green jobs; providing training to update the skills of adults already working in certain sectors or innovative businesses and/or of people seeking employment in them; and enhancing the capacity of training providers to design and deliver relevant training programmes. In general, skills relating to the greening of economies are coming increasingly to the fore, as countries modernise their qualifications and training programmes.

However, the above developments are still in their infancy and small scale or sporadic. They mainly concern informal training and focus on skills development in certain economic sectors. Supporting the green transition and benefiting from the opportunities it brings will require more systemic and rapid action on a far larger scale.

## Issues to be discussed

The strong policy drive towards climate action and sustainability makes accompanying the green transition one of the expected outcomes of a well-functioning lifelong learning system. Education and training systems must ensure that all citizens have the opportunity to develop skills, competences and attitudes that enable them to use natural resources responsibly both as consumers and producers and participate in technological and non-technological innovation.

The key issue for discussion under this strand is **how education and training systems should adapt to accompany the green transition?** In particular we will explore the following questions:

1. What does the green transition mean for education and training systems? And where should we see adaptation and change?

2. What are the mechanisms of adaptation and change? And who are the change makers?

3. How do we move from ad hoc actions to full scale interventions and system change that accompany effectively the green transition?

## Objectives and expected outputs

The objective of the discussion is to share experience from policy and practice in adapting education and training systems to the needs of the green transition and draw lessons learnt for further policy development.

The discussion will lead to the identification of:

- Key components of change to enable education and training systems to accompany the green transition;
- Drivers and preconditions of change; and
- Policy priorities to support change





# BUILDING LIFELONG LEARNING SYSTEMS

**Green Inclusive Digital**

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