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ADAPTING TO A CHANGING SKILLS DEMAND

SUPPORTING THE GREEN TRANSITION

NEW FORMS OF LEARNING
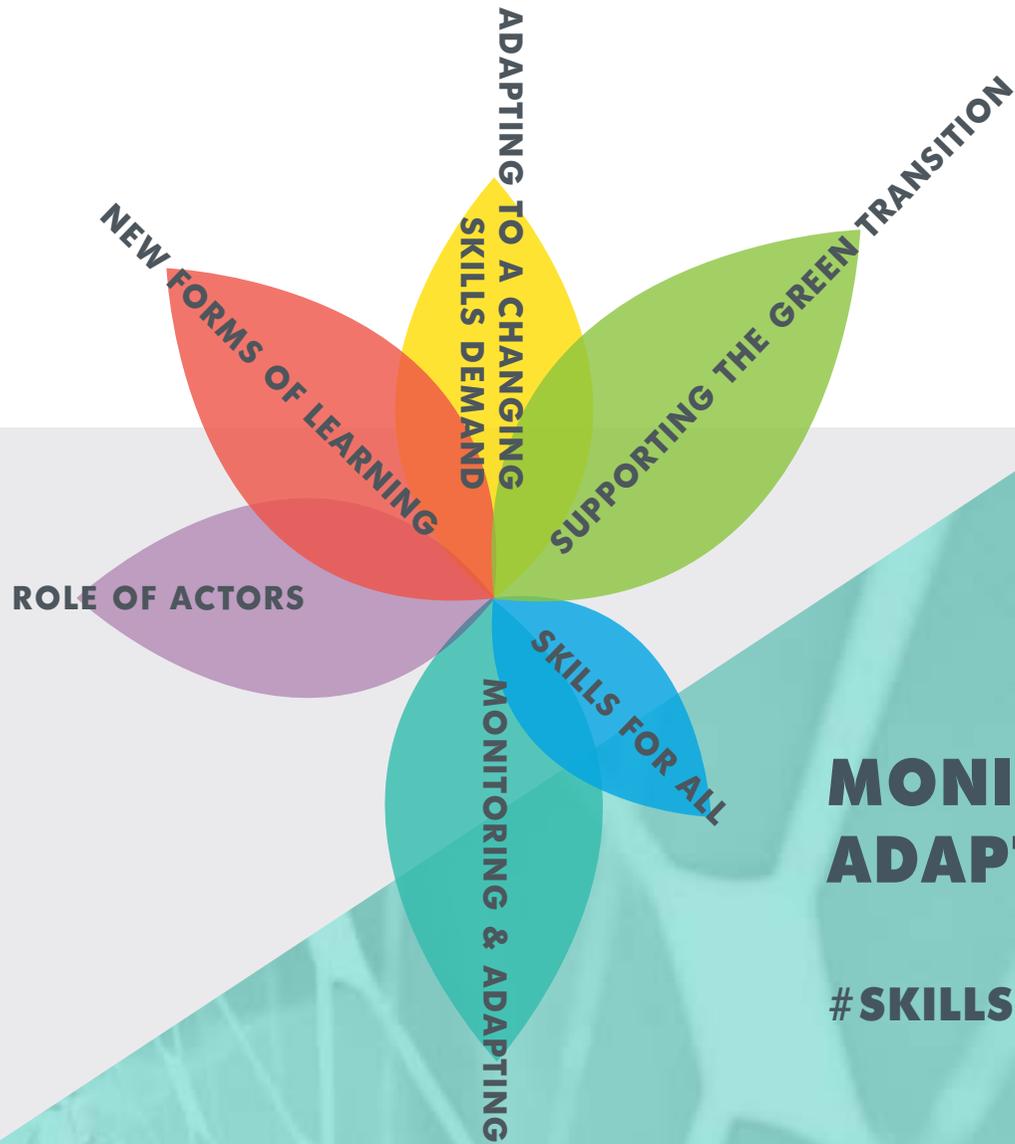
ROLE OF ACTORS

SKILLS FOR ALL

MONITORING & ADAPTING

BUILDING LIFELONG LEARNING SYSTEMS

Green   Inclusive   Digital

MONITORING & ADAPTING

#SKILLS4CHANGE

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[1], 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[2].

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 undertood as the regular collection, description and use of evidence on the progress of policies and the contet 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

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1 Sustainable Development Goal 4

2 EU Skills Agenda

regular evidence collection on the progress of a reform project or programme activity[3]. 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[4]. 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 of 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.

3 Definition based on Evaluation Handbook for Agencies, Performance Development Network, 2018

4 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.

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