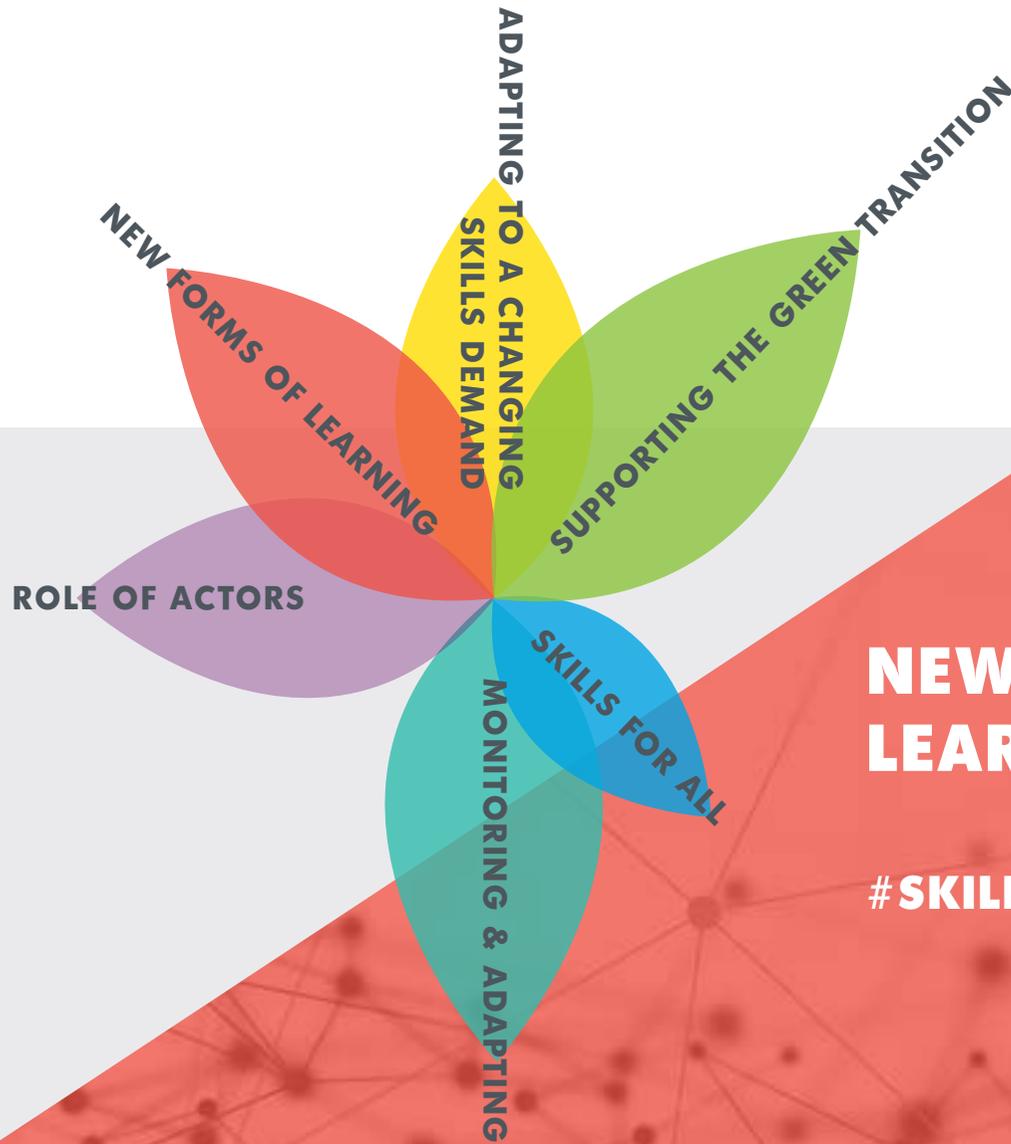




BUILDING LIFELONG LEARNING SYSTEMS

Green Inclusive Digital



**NEW FORMS OF
LEARNING**

#SKILLS4CHANGE

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)¹ 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 learning². 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 outcomes³.

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 handbook⁴ for innovative learning environments in 2017 and learning environments are also an important part of the 'OECD learning framework 2030'⁵. 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'.

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

² 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

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

⁴ OECD (2017), *The OECD Handbook for Innovative Learning Environments*, OECD, Paris

⁵ 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 developments⁶, as has the ETF⁷. 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.

⁶ 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

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



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