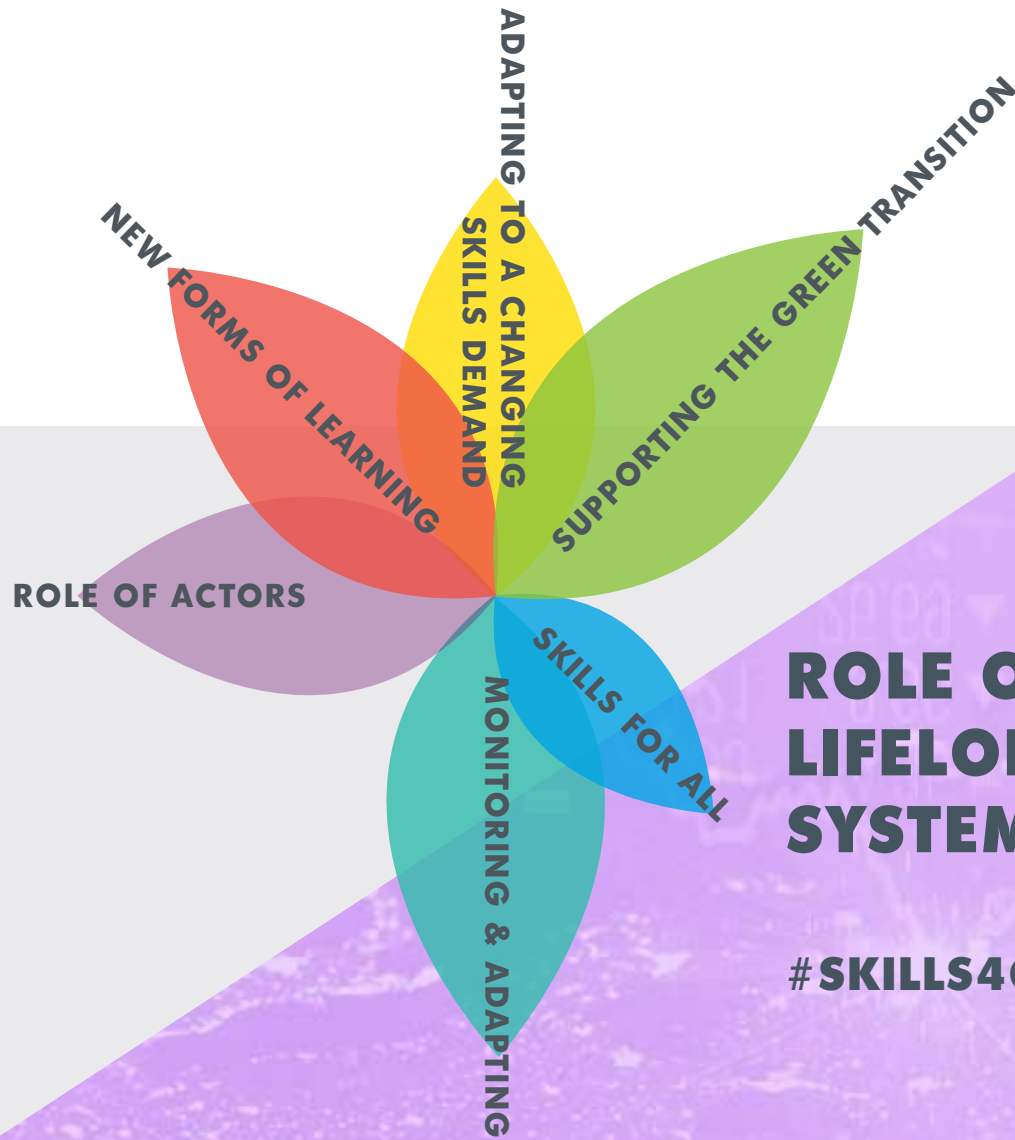




BUILDING LIFELONG LEARNING SYSTEMS

Green Inclusive Digital



ROLE OF ACTORS IN LIFELONG LEARNING SYSTEMS

#SKILLS4CHANGE

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.





**BUILDING
LIFELONG
LEARNING
SYSTEMS**

Green Inclusive Digital

-  www.etf.europa.eu
-  www.twitter.com/etfeuropa
-  www.youtube.com/user/etfeuropa
-  www.facebook.com/etfeuropa
-  www.instagram.com/etfeuropa
-  openspace.etf.europa.eu