

# **Working with education and training**

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## **Life-Long Education Gap**

The global skills gap is an education gap in its core. The lack in providing sufficient training is not only an issue at the start of a person's career but can persist as a life-long condition. The foundation for a solid skills set is laid as early as in primary school. Missing out on learning to read and write properly as well as a tendency to drop out of school at an early stage is one of the main causes for societies getting stuck with a low skilled workforce and long-term unemployment or underemployment starting in young age. Globally, an estimated 152 million young people, almost a third of all young workers, are paid less than USD 1,25 per day. In countries such as Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Ethiopia and Uganda working below the poverty line after starting with a low skills profile is a widespread phenomenon. While young workers can expect to get a pay-raise later on, the current minimum payment they receive leaves them unable to make ends meet, and will certainly not open possibilities to upskill their profile for better jobs.

Worldwide, over 70 million adolescents are not enrolled in school. In low-income countries up to 73 % of the labour force is illiterate and the average years of education can be as low as 1.2. Young people hold a disproportionate share of the 800 million living in informal urban settlements with difficult or no access to education. Even in those countries with high school enrolment, like in most of the European Union, 15% of young people do not get beyond lower secondary education. In Spain, at the moment the hardest hit country in Europe when it comes to skills gap of young people, one in three pupils drop out of school.

Those that make it to higher education encounter a university landscape that has got more expensive and difficult to access. Universities all over the world are fighting with the cut of funds. Governments are less ready to shoulder the intensive costs for teachers' salaries, heavy administration plus new technology. As a result, bricks-and-mortar universities have raised their fees. In the USA for example, the fees in private non-for-profit universities rose by 28% in 2012.

Public universities are 27% more expensive than ten years ago. The average cost a student in the USA has to spend on studying is now 10.000 USD per year.

After entering the job world, learning seems to come to a halt. In the Americas as a whole over half of the employers lament about a lack of talent, but less than 20% offer trainings or any upskilling measure to prevent it. Asia, who seems to be the most agile region when meeting the talent shortage, prefer constantly changing their recruitment strategies instead of creating a better skills portfolio of the available workforce through training. Germany, a country that has been in the forefront of adult education has dropped to 45% of companies offering training. In France, 40% of enterprises have significantly lowered their investment into training in recent years.

Since this life-long education gap is a multi-casual source of labour market failure, the remedy can only be found by addressing the different causes with the responsible partners. Employers are surely a main partner at all levels, so are education institutes and training providers. Public employment services can be a mediator in the partnership process of matching skills development with skills demand. Collaborative approaches have also gained ground in the capacity building of employment services in developing areas.

The recent WAPES survey among 73 public employment services shows that over 60% of respondents consider their partnership cooperation in general to be well or rather well developed. 63% still consider it a main priority for the next two strategy years to improve partnerships. The current level of partnering with training institutes in designing employment policies and programs for instance is indeed improvable at a level of less than half of the responding public employment services involving them.

### **Traditional Partnerships**

The policy framework for the general awareness of life-long learning seems to be in place. The UNESCO reports that 92% of their countries have laws and regulations supporting adult education. The implementation in practice is weak. One reason for that is the still low involvement of partnership structures to make the connection between education and employment one throughout the life cycle.

The WAPES survey suggests that there is still a considerable number of public employment services that have not implemented a basic partnership with education in their service portfolio. Over 15% of the 73 respondents do not offer any in-house skills training to their job-seekers, over 30% do not have any cooperation for external skills provision. When it comes to profiling the job-seeker's competencies, almost a quarter of the public employment services indicate that they do not relate the profiling to the up-to-date labour market chances. 80% of respondents decidedly offer vocational guidance to clients, but only for young people to accompany their labour market entry. After the job start, the labour market measures provided by the responding public employment services seem to focus rather on a "work-first" approach rather than on sidelining skills development for a life-cycle approach.

Active labour market policies are the most commonly used strategy worldwide to increase employability, mainly of "vulnerable groups". Since the majority of the workforce nowadays can be labelled vulnerable, it is short-sighted to try and solve labour market failures through the program of one sole institution, usually the employment entity. A successful identification, assessment and reach-out to the groups that need development to match skills demand, help them find a quality job and retain it, can better be delivered through a set of partnering labour market actors.

Now, these partnerships do exist in a number of world regions, for example in Europe. They traditionally work in a tripartite setting. The liaison between employer's representatives, trade unions and the public hand has been paving a walkable way in creating and implementing labour market policies including adult education. Trade unions were strong in offering training for workers, but are facing severe budget cuts in the last years and have lost the recognition of their members. Employers are not always ready to be part of a policy making body that oversees education too, but are rather interested in the ready-to-use outcome of sound skills development.

The challenge in partnerships of interest groups can be that the lobbying factor might dominate the procedure of problem solving. The multi-stakeholder setting might represent a micro-political environment. In the United Kingdom for example the Confederation of British Industry has consistently lobbied the public authorities to secure good training without putting burden on employers, while

the Trades Union Congress has stressed the need for binding obligations on employers to provide training to workers. Like this, negotiations can impede an effective, partnership-based, life-long learning strategy. According to the European Training Foundation, trainings provided in this setting conventionally focus on short-term lay-off avoidance, integration training for people with low employability and incentives for employers. Little is left for a life-cycle approach.

Successful partnerships in education learn from the experience of the tripartite setting, also in those countries that do not have a tripartite tradition and are looking for building partnerships from scratch. It is important that also the training authorities, other than trade unions alone, have strong partnerships with employers and other relevant stakeholders involved in the process of life-long learning.

A more comprehensive and integrative approach of education and employment in labour market services has proven successful in the transition of pure class-room training to work practices. Not only the dual education system in countries like Austria in Germany but a better combination of learning in class and on the job has increased the positive impact on employment in OECD countries and in Latin America by up to 50% in recent years.

In order for a joint effort of partners working on education and employment to be successful, three factors are crucial.

### **Life-long learning starts early**

First, partnerships need to intervene early. An education that has the target to build employable skills for a lifetime, starts in primary school and needs a broad range of actors to roll it out.

Schools, in which principals and teachers work together on managing the curricula and can function autonomously, tend to produce better results. According to recent data, school systems that successfully provide foundation skills like literacy and numeracy have a cooperation of autonomous teaching professionals, public and private motivating parental interest and a sense of responsibility in the students themselves, in other words a whole community with a culture of learning.

Prof Andreas Schleicher, Director of the OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) notes that “in the highest-performing nations, students see themselves as the ones that own the learning.” Vietnam, who despite socio-economic challenges has been scoring very well in PISA strongly involve parents in the process of learning by asking for their opinion on teaching plans and offering common leisure activities for parents and pupils.

Extracurricular activities also help to build the next set of crucial skills, the *transferable* ones. Competencies like the ability to solve problems, communicate creative ideas, or demonstrate entrepreneurial talent might be better discovered and developed in a guided outdoor activity than in a “talk-and chalk” classroom situation.

Partnerships are crucial from the beginning of the learning life. Teaching adults does very little to make up for a poor school system and the skills foundation it is supposed to provide. Not only are basic competencies like literacy or numeracy missing, but also the awareness that skills are important to make progress in life. Someone who started off with a low education is less likely to see any advantage in getting further education and training when he/she gets older, than someone with more developed and trained skills. One of the reasons why evaluations of the impact of adult training are so difficult to read or even gather is that those that engage in trainings are more often than not already highly educated and skilled.

A main focus of partnerships fighting the life-long education gap should thus be to reach out to low-skilled groups and raise their awareness of the value of learning.

Technical and vocational skills, like laying bricks or using a computer, are usually those that are explicitly required in job vacancies, but can only flourish, if the basic skills have been developed in school. This is an evidence that also public employment services need to recognize, before they file a skills profile for any hard-to-place client.

Every young person needs to undergo a sound education of foundation and transferable skills to be prepared for employment. Then, after the base of lower secondary school, technical knowledge can be acquired in apprenticeships, which, if hosted by responsible employers with real skills demand in the training

field, efficient vocational schools, and an empowering employment service, are an entry ticket to the job market.

Partnerships for apprenticeships are functional if they address occupational coverage that is making sure the posts offered for apprentices are in a range of jobs in rural, regional and urban areas, enable gender equality and open pathways for disadvantaged groups. Quality systems for training providers and employers on-the-job offers need to be in place.

Here again, a drafting and implementation of the apprenticeship curricula among the major stakeholder groups -employers, training providers, trade unions/chambers, parents and students being the main ones- is important for lasting employability.

In spite of the door-opener effect that a technical and vocational education may have on low skilled workers throughout their working lives, apprenticeships are still regarded as inferior to an academic background. In OECD countries apprenticeships are routinely offered for a determined period of the working career. In France only young people can get an apprenticeship, in the USA it is predominately a career path for adults that are in work for a while already. G20 countries with huge skills potential like India or Turkey do not recognize apprenticeship as a formal employment status, thus dis-incentivating students through humble pay and low reputation.

Starting to educate early definitely pays off. According to *The Economist* intensive pre-school and primary school programs save 7-10% costs in reduced crime and welfare spending.

### **The policy partner**

Second, employment and education partnerships are more successful, if they are abetted by policy measures. Apprenticeships systems like the dual education perform best in countries with a strong back-up of the national government and a coordination of the delivering entities in the regional and local areas. Policies can enforce the updating of qualification standards in apprenticeships, collect appropriate data about vocations, and subsidize areas with job scarcity.

The European Union is a strong supporter of life-long learning and has unified all their former learning programs like LEONARDO for job starters or COMENIUS, targeted at secondary schools, into one life-cycle program called ERASMUS plus. The unit for skills and qualifications, policy and multilingualism in the European Commission states that this approach will “increase the synergies between sectors of employment and education and achieve more strategic impact. The challenge will be to make the former programs that were operating in niches like schools work together. We provide 40% more budget than the sum of all programs before.”

To facilitate a long-lasting partnership on policy level that will set an example for member states and possibly other world regions, the EU has also build knowledge and skills alliances with employers, trainings institutes and other actors to strengthen the partnership and adjust learning curricula.

The European Social Fund (ESF), the main funding program of the EU to support employment has been used by many member states to design and introduce reforms in education and training systems to increase employability.

Together with the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), the European Commission is carrying out regular forecasting on skills demand with a special focus on bottleneck occupations and giving recommendations to education authorities which skills to train.

### **Learning with technology**

Finally, new technologies significantly boost education and make it more accessible for poorer countries and low-skills scenarios. YouTube, Google and Co. are a treasury of easy-to-find manuals. Just as book shops and music shops, universities and training institutes will give way to virtual learning. Massive open online courses (MOOCS) are already being used in leading universities lowering costs and bringing education to remote and less solvent areas. Even courses that are called “traditional” with more student-teacher-face time today almost always involve some use of digital resources.

Learning computers and robotics will not be able to replace the social capital and transferable skills that are generated by human contact, but they can blend

software and human intervention into a program that is more continuous and accurate in checking pupil's performance and at the same time allows students to self-drive their learning. The accessibility to a more blended kind of education, in which new technology is a partner, will be determined by internet coverage, not by money.

Public employment services are gearing up to this development too: For example in the Netherlands, where the fact that more than 90% of young people play computer games in average one hour per day is used to place learning strategies. The Dutch public employment services has created a set of games where young clients can create an avatar that needs to develop five basic skills to find a job. Virtual coaches and self-learning levels help along the way of the avatar's career. The number of users of this games services has been increasing constantly since its launch in 2013 through this reaching out to an important number of clients and bringing them closer to work.

However, the mainstreaming of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in public employment services still leaves room for upgrading. Over 30% of respondents in the WAPES survey state that their ICT support to services is not developed or rather not developed. 48 out of 73 public employment services in the world name the upgrade of ICT in their service portfolio as top-priority for the coming two years.

Today, technology is not yet encouraging as many low-skilled workers to participate in life-long learning as it could. Like in the last industrial revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century it takes time before the majority can benefit from innovation. Nevertheless, a combination of technology and a strategy to establish a learning culture among those that are far away from education can be a powerful way to upskill the world.

Employment partnerships that involve and coordinate life-long learning starting from an early age, policy support and the smart use of modern technology need to set up clear common objectives and a management structure that balances local/regional autonomy with centralized decision-making power.