

Conference Report



OECD Global Forum on Local Development 27 - 28 May 2026

Global Trade, Local Opportunities: Jobs, Skills and Entrepreneurship Across Borders

Introduction: The OECD Global Forum on Local Development brought together policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and business representatives to discuss how regions can navigate an increasingly uncertain world. Across two days, discussions centred on the implications of geopolitical tensions, demographic change, digitalisation, artificial intelligence (AI), labour shortages, and the green transition for local development. While topics ranged from cross-border cooperation to public employment services and from place branding to entrepreneurship, a consistent message emerged: resilience depends on strong local partnerships, investment in students and workers and their skills, and the ability of regions to adapt to rapid economic and social change.

The forum also demonstrated the value of international cooperation and peer learning, providing a platform for exchanging experiences and learning from diverse local development practices across countries and regions.

Day 1

The first day focused on how regions can build resilience amid geopolitical, economic, demographic, and technological change. A recurring theme was that local development increasingly depends on collaboration across borders, sectors, and levels of government.

Cross-border cooperation was presented as a powerful tool for regional development, particularly in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine, with Maastricht being the location of the conference. Speakers argued that borders should be viewed as opportunities rather than barriers, enabling shared approaches to education, labour markets, sustainability, and innovation. Trilateral initiatives between the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium were highlighted as examples of how regions can jointly develop talent, strengthen social cohesion, and create economic opportunities.

Workforce transitions emerged as another major theme. Speakers stressed that labour markets are being reshaped by demographic change, digitalisation, and AI. This requires stronger systems for upskilling and reskilling workers and closer cooperation with educational institutions and employers. Young people were repeatedly identified as a priority group, both in terms of preparing them for future labour markets and ensuring they remain engaged in regional development.

Several discussions addressed the impact of geopolitical uncertainty on local economies. Regions are increasingly seeking to strengthen resilience through diversification, talent development, strategic investment, etc. Cooperation between government, universities, and

businesses was presented as a key success factor, alongside efforts to strengthen local capacities and reduce dependence on vulnerable supply chains.

Across all sessions, participants highlighted the importance of collaboration, adaptability, and local leadership. Successful regions were described as those that bring together governments, educational institutions, businesses, community organisations, and citizens around a shared vision for the future.

Day 2

The second day focused primarily on labour markets, skills development, public employment services (PES), and the role of entrepreneurship in supporting local economic development.

A central theme was the growing importance of PES. During one key session Ms Amandine Moignard, Executive Secretary of WAPES, shared a preview for the *World of Public Employment Services 2026* publication, in collaboration with OECD and IDB, to be launched on 9 June at the



IDB Headquarters in Washington D.C., USA. The book contains the analysis of over 70 PES worldwide, and states that PES can play an important role in supporting labour market transitions by enhancing skills and employability, connecting employers with talent, and ultimately boosting productivity, competitiveness, and economic resilience.

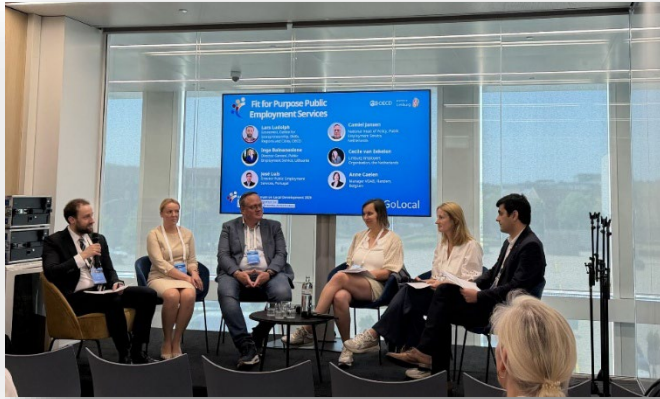
From left to right: Ms Maria Teresa Silva Porto (IDB), Ms Christine Juen (Austrian PES), Ms Amandine Moignard (WAPES) and Ms Amal Chevreau (OECD).

Photo Source: WAPES

Co-panelists Ms Maria Teresa Silva Porto (IDB Senior Specialist - Labor Markets and Social Protection) and Ms Christine Juen (AMS Head of Communications and OECD LEED Committee Chair) agreed that PES are becoming key actors in helping societies respond to labour shortages, demographic change, digital transformation, and economic shocks. To do so effectively, they must become more agile, locally connected, resilient, and capable of anticipating future skills needs.

Another session delved deeper into the question: how can PES become more adaptive? Featuring four of WAPES's members, the panel discussed balancing digital innovation with human support, lifelong learning and the importance of partnerships.

Digital transformation featured prominently throughout the discussions. Speakers emphasised that technology alone is not enough. Successful transformation depends on institutional capacity, integrated systems, data sharing, staff development, and strong governance. AI was presented as a valuable tool for improving labour market matching, guidance, and service delivery. Participants consistently stressed that human support remains indispensable, particularly for vulnerable job seekers and those furthest from the labour market, whom PES are increasingly seeing as their clients, as unemployment in OECD countries remains relatively low.



From left to right: Mr Lars Ludolph (OECD), Ms Inga Balnanosiene (Lithuanian PES), Mr Camiel Jansen (Dutch PES), Ms Anne Caelen (Flemish PES), Ms Cecile van Eeken (Limburg Employers' Association) and Mr José Luis (Portuguese PES).

Photo Source: WAPES

Skills development and lifelong learning were recurring themes. Speakers argued that traditional education systems are still largely built around the idea that learning ends with obtaining a diploma, while modern labour markets increasingly require continuous learning and multiple career transitions within one's lifetime.

Several sessions highlighted the importance of local partnerships. Effective labour market policies depend on cooperation between employment services, municipalities, employers, educational institutions, and community organisations. Examples from across the world demonstrated how integrated service models, regional work centres, and sector-based partnerships can help address skills shortages, improve workforce transitions, and support people facing complex barriers to employment.

The final discussions focused on creating opportunities for SME's and entrepreneurs in an increasingly uncertain global environment.

Speakers highlighted the need to strengthen entrepreneurial ecosystems, support SMEs, encourage innovation, and reduce dependence on vulnerable global supply chains. AI, technological innovation, and stronger connections between businesses, educational institutions, and young people were viewed as drivers or building resilience. At the same time, participants stressed that Europe must do more to encourage entrepreneurship, facilitate cross-border cooperation, and help local businesses access information, networks, talent, and finance.

Overall, the second day reinforced the message that resilience, adaptability, and collaboration are becoming the defining requirements for successful local development. Whether discussing labour markets, public services, education, technology, or business development, speakers consistently emphasised the importance of investing in people, building strong local partnerships, and preparing proactively for a rapidly changing future.



This report was written by: Ms Emma Monster, Project Manager at WAPES.

The OECD session was attended by: Ms Amandine Moignard (Executive Secretary), Ms Nicole Clobes (Consultant) and Ms Emma Monster (Project Manager).

Photo Source: WAPES

For more information, please visit: the [OECD website](#) and [the Forum event page](#).