

Shaping Skills and Lifelong Learning for the Future of Work



By Mounir Kleibo

The International Labour Organization (ILO), whose predecessor was founded in 1919, is the sole tripartite United Nations agency that brings together the tripartite partners of 187 member states – namely, governments, employers, and workers – to set labor standards, develop policies, and devise programs that promote decent work for all women and men. The unique tripartite structure of the ILO gives an equal voice to these partners to ensure that the views of the social partners (employers and workers) are closely reflected in labor standards and in shaping the policies and programs of governments. The main aims of the ILO are to promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection, and strengthen dialogue on work-related issues.

The ILO's work with tripartite partners in the context of skills and lifelong learning focuses primarily on three areas: linking training to current labor market needs and anticipating and building competencies for the jobs of the future; building quality apprenticeship systems and incorporating core skills into the training of young people; and expanding access to employment-related training in rural communities in order to improve livelihoods, reduce poverty, and equip women and men for work in the formal economy.

In that regard, the ILO helps its tripartite constituents foster a smooth transition to the new realities of the future world of work by assisting in the development of skills policies and systems linked to labor market needs, anticipating and building competencies for the jobs of the future, and supporting the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups in skills development. The ILO commits to

promoting the acquisition of skills and lifelong learning, competencies, and qualifications for all workers throughout their working lives as a joint responsibility of governments and social partners in order to address existing and anticipated skills gaps. In addition, it commits to paying particular attention to ensuring that education and training systems are responsive to labor market needs, taking into account the evolution of work, and enhancing workers' capacity to make use of the opportunities available for decent work.

The ILO resolution concerning skills and lifelong learning, endorsed by the 187 member states during the General Conference of the International Labour Organization meeting at its 109th session on



partners in building and improving skills and lifelong learning systems worldwide.

Among the greatest and increasing challenges that face skills and lifelong learning are the mismatches in today's labor markets that have many consequences for governments, employers, workers, and the future of work. A skills mismatch is defined as a discrepancy between the skills that are sought by employers and the skills that are possessed by individuals. Simply put, it is a



Photo courtesy of Irada Center, Gaza.

December 11, 2021, calls for shaping skills and lifelong learning for the future of work. The ILO has been mandated to give full effect to this resolution and to assist tripartite

mismatch between the available skills and the needs of available jobs. This means that education and training are not providing the skills demanded in the labor market, or

that the economy does not create jobs that correspond to the skills of individuals. The consequences of skills mismatch reach all levels of the labor market. In most countries, regardless of their stage of development, the ongoing social and economic transformations continue to raise one key question about the future of work: What will be the jobs of the future, and how do we solve the skills mismatch issue?

The jobs of the future and which skills they will demand is everyone's business: governments, employers, and workers all have a stake in skills mismatch. Governments need to adopt more relevant skills policies to develop the skills required by rapidly evolving labor markets; education and training systems will need to take advantage of new educational technologies and give greater attention to digital skills; enterprises and employers will need to make new investments to expand their involvement in educating, training, and reskilling workers to support economic growth; and, lastly, workers will need to proactively upgrade their skills or acquire new ones through training, education, and lifelong learning to remain employable.

At the individual level there are serious wage penalties, especially for overqualification, that eventually affect both job and life satisfaction. For example, you would assume that in developing countries, overqualification should not be a problem because of a lack of sufficient training opportunities. However, people receive training and are still unable to find a job that corresponds to their skill level, which means that they are not employed at their full productivity potential. In addition, skill deficiencies decrease

chances of landing a job altogether. For companies, skills mismatch has negative consequences in terms of productivity and competitiveness, which affects their ability to implement new products, services, or technologies. What is more, skills mismatch causes higher staff turnover and suboptimal work organization. Eventually, skills



qualifications will yield positive results in terms of employment insertion or wages. Yet, if skills mismatch is present, these expectations often do not materialize, which leads to returns on investment that are lower than expected.

Adequately shaping skills and lifelong learning for the future of work allows all stakeholders to adapt

mismatch leads to the loss of profits and markets. It's a sad story for individuals but also for enterprises.

For countries and regions, skills mismatch can increase unemployment and affect competitiveness and attractiveness to investors, which translates into lost opportunities on the pathway to productive transformation and job creation. Public or private resources are invested in training with the assumption that achieved

to the changing world of work. For enterprises, such measures provide a strategic competitive advantage for productivity and innovation. For societies, they create opportunities for economic transformation, job creation, inclusiveness, democracy, active citizenship, and sustainable growth. A new generation of skills

and a lifelong learning ecosystem need to be jointly developed and implemented by governments and social partners to ensure a just and inclusive transition to a future of work that contributes to sustainable development in its economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Such an ecosystem should be part of an integrated approach to the creation of decent jobs for all, reinforcing the supply-side pillar of functioning labor markets to complement the demand-side pillar and match interventions. The system should be accessible to all, with a specific focus on women, people in precarious employment, and all disadvantaged and vulnerable groups

In the Palestinian context, the latest labor statistics produced by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics show that the unemployment rate among labor force participants (15 years and above) in the first quarter of 2022 was about 25 percent, while the total underutilization of labor was about 33 percent, according to the revised International Labour Organization Standards (ICLS-19th). Unemployment remains dramatically high for young people and women, and the situation is especially dire in Gaza, where young men face an unemployment rate of 58.8 percent, compared with an even a bleaker situation for young women who face an almost incomprehensible unemployment rate of 91.1 percent.

A major factor that contributes to the increasing rate of unemployment has to do with school education. According to a study by the World Bank published in March 2022, in upper secondary schools, Palestinian students need to decide which educational track to pursue. By Grade 10, students must choose

Youth Sharek Forum celebrates International Decent Work Day with the International Labor Organization and the Palestine General Federation for Trade Unions at Kufor Ni'meh Youth Village. Photo courtesy of Irada Center, Gaza.

between pursuing an academic track or technical vocational education and training (TVET) track. The overwhelming majority (97.6 percent) choose the academic track, as TVET carries with it a cultural stigma in Palestinian society and is associated with a lack of academic success. Through its Education Sector Plan (ESP) and aligned donor support, the Ministry of Education is engaged in improving TVET quality and aims to gradually change this associated stigma. By Grade 11, students in the academic track need to further choose between academic streams. Most students (65 percent) and particularly the poorer performers, choose the humanities stream for several reasons, which include the following: (a) they are unprepared for the STEM stream, lacking the necessary mathematics, science, digital knowledge, and skills; (b) they have received limited career guidance and not enough opportunities to identify, explore, and nurture their talents and interests in the sciences; and (c) they are discouraged by the relatively high scores required in the examination that concludes secondary school (*tawjihi*) and enables them to enter into higher education institutions. This result is an increasing skills mismatch.

Another significant challenge that contributes to the increasing rate in unemployment among college graduates is posed by the current employment context, particularly among youth, and increasingly weak formal economic activity among women. This is compounded by the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic throughout 2020–2022.

In an attempt to address this major labor market challenge in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT),

the tripartite partners launched the Palestinian National Employment Strategy 2021–2025 (NES) that aims to “achieve full, productive and freely chosen employment for jobseekers, particularly youth and women.” The strategy was launched at the OPT’s first National Social Dialogue Conference, held in Ramallah, March 3 to 4, 2022, with financial and technical support from the ILO.

In essence, the NES addresses inadequate productivity in economic production sectors; improves performance of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) systems; supports the establishment of active labor market policies and programs, including the creation of self-employment opportunities for both men and women; and encourages private investment in priority production sectors to restructure the Palestinian economy and rejuvenate the agriculture, industry, and tourism sectors.

While the role that education and training systems can play in the OPT to address labor market challenges is crucial, these institutions are frequently constrained by supply-driven approaches; limited capacity; poor quality; an inability to fully address gender, equity, and equality issues; and a general lack of financial, human, and material resources. In addition, skills

development policies, systems, and resources in the OPT need to be urgently developed and strengthened to meet current and future challenges. In that regard, social dialogue among tripartite partners holds the key to shaping education and training systems and improving the links between education and training and the world of work to ensure that the benefits of structural change are shared fairly. Although the challenges will vary across the contexts in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, education and training systems all over the OPT should share a common imperative, namely to rethink, adopt, and implement the organizing principle of unified skills and lifelong learning for education and skills development – with social dialogue playing a significant role at all stages of the development and implementation of such policies and programs.

The renewed imperative for lifelong learning aims to better prepare for the future Palestinian individuals, businesses, and society by meeting the learning needs of both young persons and adults in all sectors of the economy, in all branches of economic activity, and at all levels of skills and responsibility.

The high percentage of unemployed youth who have obtained secondary and higher education indicates that higher education is not enough in itself to enter and remain in the labor market, particularly among females. Despite improved educational performance in the OPT, reforms are in desperate need of acceleration.

Skills and lifelong learning are fundamental enablers of decent work, productivity, and sustainability and can raise the value and output of labor, empower the lives of workers, and enrich the Palestinian communities. For many individuals, skills and lifelong learning will provide the key that allows them to pursue their interests and aspirations, access the labor market, and escape from poverty and social exclusion.



Photo courtesy of Irada Center, Gaza.

The call on improving the performance of TVET systems in the OPT is to further invest in human capacities and in institutions of work to shape a fair, inclusive, and secure future with decent work for all. This call has assumed even greater importance in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, and skills development is prioritized in the NES to ensure that all people benefit from the full potential of technological progress and other drivers of change so that no one will be left behind.

Strengthening TVET to meet labor market needs is a key priority for the NES and the Labour Sector Strategy 2021–2023. In 2021, over 76 TVET centers – including 58 managed by the Ministry of Education (vocational and industrial schools) and the Ministry of Labor (vocational training centers) – and 200 educational and cultural centers provided TVET services in the OPT. Yet the TVET landscape remains very fragmented, with limited private sector involvement. Enrollment is low, and the training offered is often perceived to be of poor quality. A national TVET council, set up in early 2021 by Decree Law No. 4 of 2021, has been mandated to coordinate TVET management, formulate and review TVET policies and regulations, complete the development of a National Qualifications Framework, and host a national TVET fund. Guided by these instruments and conclusions and the evolving knowledge base, the ILO will provide technical support and policy advice to its constituents on skills policies and system reforms, skills anticipation, and skills for social inclusion, among others.

Several policy options are possible in the short- to mid-term to underscore the importance of TVET

and facilitate youth integration in the Palestinian labor market. These options include the acceleration of TVET development already provided through labor development programs offered by the ministries of education, higher education (MoHE), social development, and labor (MoL) as well as government strategies. The aim is to shift Palestinian education systems from teaching and learning to lifelong learning by (a) expanding the TVET system and opportunities, particularly at the university level, including the establishment and development of TVET institutions; (b) addressing TVET system shortfalls that lead to low educational outputs; (c) upgrading TVET curricula to include life and nonvocational skills and work-based learning; (d) providing capacity building to TVET schools and staff to develop work- and competency-based education by, inter alia, upgrading facilities, expanding schools, increasing enrollment rates, and building partnerships between schools, TVET colleges, and the private sector to design and implement work-based learning programs; (e) supporting the MoL and MoHE to bridge institutional, legal, and financial gaps to ensure full National Qualification Framework implementation and application (this should include the submission of professional skills certificates, the recognition of prior learning and current competencies, and efficiency standards of skills as essential components to implement the National Qualifications Framework); (f) promoting education management information systems as education planning tools and monitoring the importance of education outcomes; and (g) aligning educational outputs with labor market needs through partnership

with private entrepreneurial establishments in manufacturing, agriculture, banking, and information and communications technology to experiment with developing a continuing TVET program and use it to inform curriculum development at TVET institutions.

Measures must promote training and retraining systems and programs to provide youth with labor market skills; deliver training programs on occupations most in demand in partnership with the private sector; and encourage and integrate entrepreneurship and cooperative education within formal and informal education and training programs. Furthermore, linkages must be strengthened between education, training, and work by providing professional information and vocational guidance to youth in and out of school. Access must be provided to the workforce through appropriate education and training, as this is vital for socioeconomic development. Across sectors, a workforce with inadequate education and training for the labor market not only risks increasing unemployment rates, but also undermines any potential for economic growth.

Skills development, quality education, and lifelong learning for employment and decent jobs are integral also to the political commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the ILO's contribution to it. Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all – from early childhood to higher education and from general to vocational education and training (VET). The ILO will intensify its effort to increase and

share knowledge on good practices, including through South–South and triangular cooperation, to address the challenges that constituents face in the areas of skills development and lifelong learning. This includes up-to-date research, policy evaluations, innovative means of data collection and analysis, peer learning, and knowledge creation, sharing, and dissemination, including the forecasting of skills needs. To this end, the ILO will continue to work closely with its tripartite partners along with the newly established Palestinian TVET Commission and other UN and active players to increase the number of young people and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship.

Mounir Kleibo is the Special Representative of the ILO Office in Jerusalem. His expertise spans the spectrum of higher education administration, productivity enhancement, institution building, and human capacity development, including communications, public affairs and relations, and advocacy for social justice and workers' rights.

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