

OECD Skills Outlook 2019 – TUAC Secretariat Assessment

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The [OECD Skills Outlook 2019](#) is a well-timed report highlighting the need for governments to support workers in acquiring additional competencies for the digital transformation. With 14% of jobs across the OECD facing a high risk of being automated and many more already undergoing substantial changes – not at least due to more fragmented value chains and new digital economy business models, new skills and competencies will be needed. As the TUAC had stressed before, education and training systems are not ready to take on such a re-training and up-skilling challenge. Lifelong learning is a noble goal – however, at present public systems are lacking funding, are regionally not evenly spread and employer engagement is weak. 11% of workers want, but cannot take up, lifelong-learning due to time- or financial constraints ([source](#)). New OECD data also shows that moving workers from one job to another because of automation would cost 1-5% of GDP – considering mostly only training-related mobility measures ([source](#)).

The Outlook sets out to present avenues to meet this challenge both in education settings as well as through lifelong learning. In doing so, it relies on technology itself. It emphasises the need to bridge “technology gaps” to provide equal access across regions, age groups, income levels and ethnic backgrounds. The OECD recommends adopting a “whole-of-government” approach, breaking down administrative silos to coordinate policy interventions related to education, the labour market, tax, and research and innovation – in line with the soon to be released revision of the Skills Strategy. In the governance of education and training, social dialogue and collective bargaining need to be emphasised as tools towards achieving outcomes that are more equitable.

The TUAC particularly commends the following outcomes of the report:

- Emphasis on the role of education in teaching values, and skills to combat cyberbullying and excessive use of digital technology among younger generations
- Explicit mention of trade union (and employer) involvement in migration policy, lifelong learning, labour market policies and institutions, and tax policies.
- The insightful “scoreboard” outlining the preparedness of OECD countries to make *“skills to benefit from digitalisation, digital exposure, and skills-related policies to make the most of digital transformation”*
- The estimates of the cost of training efforts, which could help mobilise government action.

TUAC Recommendations

The fact that trade unions have a role in training workers is mentioned several times, but without details (unlike in the recent OECD report and booklet on adult learning). In fact, the concept of “collective bargaining” is never invoked. In a 250+-word report, at least one section should clearly lay out the role of unions in governing, co-financing or directly

providing training, and supporting worker transitions within and across industry sectors. Like unions, firms also have a responsibility to help their workers acquire digital skills, and the report acknowledges this but provides few details on the how. While governments are responsible to provide public education, TVET courses and general training, they should also hold firms accountable to upskill workers rather than laying them off and passing that responsibility on to the state.

Additionally, the report's confidence in MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) and open education should cause some concern; such courses often leave out those who need motivational support and are no substitute for in-person instruction.

Finally, the TUAC would like to see more emphasis on learners, teachers and worker data privacy, social dialogue, and the potential for inequalities resulting from the digital divides.