

Project Overview

Closing the Skills Gap Initiative

April 2017

The World Economic Forum's Closing the Skills Gap Initiative is a collection of regionally focused projects that bring together business, government, civil society, and the education and training sectors to reduce unemployment and to address skills gaps in Africa, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and the United States. The initiative supports a lifelong learning approach to developing the foundational, technical and employability skills required for a "future-ready" workforce. It aims to reskill 1 million people directly by 2018 and 5 million people by 2020.

Closing skill gaps and promoting future-ready education and training

The Issue

It is now well-recognized that the disconnect between education systems and labour markets, coupled with technological disruptions, is creating instability and insecurity to the livelihoods of many. Governments are under increasing pressure to find solutions, including by involving the private sector in change efforts, although few are able to act rapidly and few work in close collaboration with private sector actors to reform education systems.

Businesses are initiating their own rapid skilling, upskilling and reskilling of their workforces or, more broadly, in their communities, although few are able to affect systemic change alone.

Objectives

The Closing the Skills Gap Initiative serves as a platform to focus fragmented actions within one overarching mission to gather business commitments that address future-oriented skills development, while at the same time supporting constructive public-private dialogue on urgent and fundamental reform of education systems and labour policies to prepare workforces for the future of jobs.

The initiative is particularly focused on building skills in Africa, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), through the Regional Skills workstreams of the project, and in the United States.

Specifically, the Closing the Skills Gap Initiative aims to:

- Close skills gaps in respective regions and contribute to the global goal of equipping people with employability skills
- Develop and champion a common agenda for action informed by knowledge and insight products
- Engage the private and public sectors in broader, long-term reform of education and training systems to prepare for tomorrow's jobs



Core Activities

The Closing the Skills Gap Initiative focuses on the following components: business action, knowledge development and multistakeholder dialogue. The activities under these project components include:

1. Business Action

Leading companies operating in Africa, Europe, MENA and the US tackle the jobs and skills challenges in their respective regions by making public measurable commitments to train, upskill and reskill the current and future workforce. The World Economic Forum will help guide companies to design and align their interventions through a “menu” of business actions, informed by key insights on what is required to transform education and training systems and manage the transition into the world of work. These commitments will be broadly disseminated through the Forum network to magnify their impact. One million people are expected to be directly reached by January 2018 and a target of 5 million has been set for January 2020.

2. Knowledge Development

The project compiles the latest knowledge and insights on the topic to help leaders take informed decisions and to help shape the public narrative. In addition to the global *Human Capital Report*, the project compiles region-specific insights. Regional Future of Jobs studies for Africa, MENA and Europe will be made available to project stakeholders in 2017. Building on this work, companies will be able to share case studies and data to provide additional insights and concrete examples of successful action.

3. Multistakeholder Dialogue

The project strives to accelerate the future-proofing of education and training systems by convening leaders from business, government, the education and training sectors, and civil society through both face-to-face and virtual meetings/workshops. These dialogues provide an opportunity for sharing successes and developing proposals for stakeholders to drive reforms in education and skills that equip the workforce for tomorrow’s jobs.

Transforming education ecosystems and preparing for the new world of work*

KEY ACTION AREAS	PRIVATE SECTOR ROLE	PUBLIC SECTOR ROLE	MULTISTAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE
1 A new deal on lifelong learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively support staff in continual professional development through in-house/ external training Incentivize re-education and training among current staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aligning micro- credentials with national standards and qualifications framework Offer opportunities for lifelong learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop recommendations on how to incentivize and provide opportunities for lifelong learning
2 Digital fluency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop digital literacy and ICT among current workforce through online learning platforms and short-term training (“boot camps”) Reinforce requisite technology skills with current students and educators through work-based learning and externships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support ICT infrastructure and access in educational institutions Mandate ICT and digital literacy in teacher training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop ideas to teach digital literacy and computational thinking in 21st-century education systems Better teaching with education technology
3 Early and ongoing exposure to the workplace and career guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner up with educational institutions to provide mentorship and career coaching for graduates Offer work-based learning programmes for current students (work exposure, internships, apprenticeship) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusion of work-based learning as a graduation requirement in higher education and vocational training Partner with private sector on skills accreditation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building the case for future “return on investment” in workforce preparation Convince stakeholders to increase public-private cooperation efforts to tackle the issue
4 “Future-ready” curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner with local educational institutions to ensure that curricula development is informed by market-demand for skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aligning micro-credentials to national standards and qualifications framework Create framework for continuous curriculum review and updating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing a mechanism to include a broad base of stakeholders in national curricula development

*Note: This table draws on insights from leaders and experts who engaged in the World Economic Forum’s Dialogue Series on Shaping the Future of Education, Gender and Work. The key action areas are in ascending order of priority for private- and public- sector engagement and are non-exhaustive. They are meant to serve as an initial guide for stakeholder action.

Communities Involved

Companies, governments and organizations are core stakeholders in the project and will be engaged through:

Project Board: The core leadership body guiding the scope and direction of the Closing the Skills Gap Initiative is the Project Board. It consists of chief executives from the relevant Industry Governors (IT Industry at present), Regional Business Council (Africa, Europe and MENA at present) and System Initiative Partners for Education, Gender and Work.

Working Group: Relevant members of the RBC and Industry Governors will appoint a senior executive or representative to their respective industry or region Working Group. The members of the Working Group will participate in virtual meetings to regularly assess the progress and collaboration across the project component areas. Additionally, the Working Groups will be responsible for ensuring alignment with the vision, gathering information, providing feedback to stakeholders and driving progress against the project plan.

Value for the Private and Public Sectors

Private Sector:

- Take concrete action to prepare a “future-proof” skilled workforce and mitigate against workforce redundancy
- Build a global network of like-minded businesses to share best practices, scale existing skills initiatives and engage the public sector at the highest level
- Set the public narrative on education, training and workforce issues, and gain visibility as thought and action leader

Public Sector:

- Gain insight from the private sector on the skills needed for the jobs of the future
- Leverage an impartial platform to solicit ideas from leaders and experts to reform education and training systems and key workforce policies
- Explore private sector solutions to workforce preparation that can be integrated in formal education systems
- Access to media and other dissemination channels to showcase innovative public sector projects, policies, and ideas on education and skills

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