

Closing the Skills Gap

Project Overview

The World Economic Forum's Closing the Skills Gap project aims to create global and national platforms to address current skills gaps and to reshape education and training for the future. The project brings together business, government, civil society and the education and training sectors to shape coordinated action and address skills gaps through multistakeholder collaboration at the global and national levels. By 2020, the Closing the Skills Gap project will empower 10 million individuals through partner skilling, reskilling and upskilling efforts.

The issue

It is projected that 35% of the skills demanded for jobs across industries will change by 2020.¹ Education and training systems need to keep pace with the demands of labour markets, which are challenged by technological disruption, demographic change, shifting business models and the evolving nature of work.

Governments are under increasing pressure to find solutions, including by involving the private sector in areas where changes are required. Few governments, however, are able to act rapidly and collaborate with private sector actors to reform education and training systems. On the other hand, businesses are initiating their own programmes aimed at skilling, upskilling and reskilling their workforces (and more broadly, communities), although few are able to effect systemic change alone.

Objectives

The Closing the Skills Gap project serves as a platform to focus fragmented actions within one overarching mission to address future-oriented skills development. At the same time, it supports constructive public-private collaboration on the urgent and fundamental reform of education systems and labour policies to prepare workforces for the future of jobs.

The project builds on existing partnerships established through the Forum's New Vision for Arab Employment, the Africa Skills Initiative, and the Europe Skills Initiative.

Specifically, the Closing the Skills Gap project aims to:

- Support and strengthen private-sector leadership and public-private collaboration on education and labour

reform at the global and national levels

- Improve insight into, and knowledge about, how talent is currently developed and deployed, forecasts, and avenues to inform a common agenda for action
- Gather new business commitments to skill, reskill and upskill 10 million people by 2020

Core Activities

The Closing the Skills Gap project focuses on advancing the following components: Global and national-level action, knowledge development and business commitments. The activities under these project components include:

Global and national-level action

The project will establish an Informal Global Alliance of relevant leaders and experts to facilitate global knowledge exchange on education and skills. The group will ensure that all efforts in the project are aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which seeks to “Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning”.

A network of national-level “task forces” will be set up to advance public-private collaboration to close the skills gap and prepare for the future of work. Each task force will bring together leaders from business, government, civil society, and the education and training sectors to accelerate the future-proofing of education and training systems at the national level. In late 2017, South Africa was launched as the first pilot country, and up to five countries will be selected in 2018. These will inform a strategy for the future scale-up of activity.

¹ World Economic Forum, The Future of Jobs: Employment, Skills and Workforce Strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, 2016.

Knowledge and insights

The project compiles the latest knowledge and insights on the topic to help leaders take informed decisions and to shape the public narrative. In addition to the *Global Human Capital Report*, the project compiles region-specific insights on the future of jobs and skills. Building on this work, companies will be able to share case studies and data to provide additional insights and examples of successes.

Business commitments

Leading companies are asked to make public measurable commitments to train, upskill and reskill the current and future workforce. The Forum will help guide companies to design and align their interventions through a “menu” of business actions, informed by 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.

A target of 10 million people has been set with the aim of securing business commitments designed to empower individuals through skilling, reskilling and upskilling efforts by 2020. To date, businesses have committed to reach more than 8 million individuals by 2020. Work has begun to analyse these so that further commitments can be targeted towards areas with particular gaps, and collective efforts can be strengthened.

Communities involved

Companies, governments and education and training practitioners are core stakeholders in the project and will be engaged through:

Informal Global Alliance on Closing the Skills Gap

The Informal Global Alliance is a community that shapes dialogue and best practice exchange on Adult Reskilling/ Upskilling, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Higher Education and Basic Education. The community comprises the Forum’s Steering Committee on Education and Skills (under the System Initiative on Shaping the Future of Education, Gender and Work), leaders of pioneering countries and international organizations, co-chairs of country-level task forces, and select experts and practitioners.

Closing the Skills Gap Task Force

Senior business executives and key representatives from government, civil society, and education and training institutions will form a task force. Its members will participate in meetings to develop national action plans, and regularly assess progress and collaboration across the project component areas. Additionally, country task forces will be responsible for ensuring alignment with the vision, gathering information, providing feedback to stakeholders and shaping progress against a national action plan.

Value for the private and public sectors

Private sector

- Take action to prepare a “future-proof” skilled workforce and counter workforce redundancy
- Join a global network of like-minded businesses to share best practices, scale-up 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 a thought and action leader

Public sector

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

System Initiative on Shaping the Future of Education, Gender and Work

The Closing the Skills Gap project is coordinated under the Forum’s System Initiative on Shaping the Future of Education, Gender and Work, which aims to enable people to fulfil their potential. This is achieved by developing and deploying their talent, thereby contributing to more prosperous economies and societies. Thematically, the initiative promotes the development of education that matches the needs of the future; a workforce that is better prepared for shifts in labour markets; opportunities for job creation; and structures that allow for gains and opportunities to be shared equally, regardless of gender, age and origin.

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