

SHANGHAI UPDATE

Follow-up to the UNESCO Third International TVET Congress

Skills on the move: Global trends, local resonances

Five-hundred-plus delegates at the [Tangshan conference](#) held in China last July achieved their aim of updating the international roadmap guiding TVET. The main points of their discussions are reflected in the conference [outcome statement](#) on how to achieve the Education 2030 agenda.

The text places the emphasis firmly on four areas and urges countries to develop strategies accordingly. These are anticipating skills needs, making sure opportunities to develop skills are available to all and promoting gender equality in TVET, making skills and qualifications more transparent and better recognised as well as developing common principles for quality assurance and, finally, contributing to a better use of skills at work, supporting entrepreneurship and providing ways for TVET learners to develop personally and professionally.

But seeing as the [Shanghai Consensus](#), the output of the previous international conference on TVET, is barely five years' old and TVET and educational reform are, by their nature, slow moving, you might be forgiven for wondering why we need an update? The answer lies in the sheer number and importance of developments in TVET policy since 2012. For this period has seen the advent of the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG4 on education, the Education 2030 Framework for Action — with its focus on quality, inclusiveness and lifelong learning opportunity for all — and UNESCO's revised Strategy for TVET to name but a few.

Brazilian TVET graduate and WorldSkills champion and mentor Carla de Bona, a delegate at Tangshan, applauds the focus on entrepreneurship skills in the outcomes and hopes this will lead to a greater emphasis on equipping young people not only with practical know-how but also with soft skills.

"I work with a lot of young people and the problem is not whether they have the technical knowledge, but do they have enough soft skills to apply the practical knowledge in the right way?" she says.

Anticipating skills needs is another key point but, for Ms de Bona, this is not the only problem. "The challenge with TVET is that as a teacher I know I can't change some classes quickly to adapt to what is happening on the job market," she says, "so technology moves quickly and we don't have a chance to adapt."

Creating real equality of opportunities for women and men in TVET is a third priority for Ms de Bona. "We are creating a future where computers, technology and maths are for young men so when a young girl chooses a course at school she thinks they are not for her," she says, "it is like we are making separate boxes for men and women." Role models and mentoring can help, according to Ms de Bona, but providing the right training in the right environment is also key.

As a co-founder of a Brazilian start-up which trains unemployed women to be front-end programmers in just four months, Ms de Bona's views are based on experience. "With [frograma](#), we are trying to produce women who can work in tech fast so we can change the numbers," she says, "we have to create the role models."



Editorial

The changing nature of TVET - a lifetime perspective



Much has changed in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) since I joined UNESCO as a senior education specialist back in 1993.

TVET has had to take on board new priorities and adapt to the realities of a changing global context; thirty years ago the need to contribute to the protection of the environment or gender equality were not often mentioned.

Today we pay far more attention to whether women and girls enjoy equal access to skills development and greening TVET has become top priority. At the same time, many countries, for example in Sub-Saharan Africa, have entered a phase of fast socio-economic growth, and so need more people with the technical skills to keep their economies on track.

The increasing priority given to TVET globally is reflected in the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on education and lifelong learning. Specific targets of the SDG 4 focus on access to affordable quality TVET, the acquisition of technical and vocational skills for employment, decent work and entrepreneurship and the elimination of gender disparity and access for vulnerable groups. TVET is now seen in a lifelong learning perspective, with the development of literacy, numeracy and transversal skills considered an essential element in TVET programmes.

But one thing that stubbornly refuses to change is the social perception of TVET. In many countries, parents still want their children to go to university and TVET can end up as a second choice.

This issue is raised whenever I talk to policymakers at international conferences or teachers at TVET schools, but I wonder whether we are missing the point. If we can develop quality TVET systems and provide people with the skills they need to find a good job, then surely this should be the measure of our success.

The TVET community will face new challenges in the coming years. The increasing mobility of workers means that having transparent, easily recognized qualifications will be more important than ever. In large countries, such as my native China, people often move from city to city so it is important for TVET providers to have similar standards and for TVET skills to be standardized. Globalization is driving international mobility — in Europe there have been no borders for some time, now this is becoming the case in other parts of the world.

The speed of technological innovation has posed new challenges for TVET — countries need middle-ranking technicians, but increasingly they also require professionals who can master advanced technologies. This accelerating pace of technological change will place increasing demands on our ability to anticipate skills needs for the future. In the past, a new generation of skills was needed, every ten years, but now the nature of an occupation can change within a few years and new ones are appearing, which we find hard to imagine, let alone predict. This means that, more than ever, the TVET community needs to talk to the world of technology; here at UNESCO, we will continue to do our best to promote this essential dialogue.

Qian Tang PhD,
Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO

Mr Tang has served as Assistant Director-General for Education at UNESCO since April 2010. He joined the Organization in 1993.

Initiatives such as this one can be seen as local responses to global trends such as women's thirst for economic empowerment or the labour market's need for tech-savvy workers. How successful national policymakers and global organizations such as UNESCO are at helping countries to meet local needs for skills development will no doubt still be on the agenda at the next major conference in five years' time. What the recommendations of the Tangshan conference have provided is a useful set of directions to show us how to get there.

Greening of skills on the agenda at Bonn climate change talks

As countries at [COP23](#) pressed on with preparations for putting the Paris goals on climate change into action, UNESCO-UNEVOC made its own contribution to the debate on green skills and sustainable development at the event in Bonn.

This year's climate change talks, held on 6–17 November in Bonn under the presidency of Fiji, aimed to help define the rules and processes to set the Paris agreement in motion.

On 16 November, COP23's Education Day, UNEVOC organized a debate on how countries can design the best education and training policies to support the transition to a greener economy. The basis for the discussion was provided by the [policy guidance framework](#) produced recently by the Platform for Advancing Green Human Capital, a collaboration between UNESCO, UNESCO-UNEVOC, ILO, French Development Agency and the French Ministry of Ecological and Inclusive Transition.

Patterns of employment are changing fast as the world moves towards a greener economy; jobs in sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, energy, manufacturing and construction, to name but a few, will be particularly affected by the ecological transition, according to the report on the framework. But national plans for climate action are not paying enough attention to how to fill the green skills and qualifications gaps that will appear as economies evolve. A UNEVOC study due to be published in 2018 comes to a similar conclusion.

The session presented solutions for addressing these gaps through policy and institutional support and capacity building of leaders and educators, illustrated by examples of how the Republic of Korea, Philippines and Marshall Islands are successfully integrating skills development in their climate action agendas.

Earlier in the week, UNEVOC, the German Ministry of Education and Research and the ILO organized a public debate on skills and climate change. Discussions included how countries such as Germany and Thailand are using the green skills agenda to try and create new opportunities for employment for people in the informal sector and for those who are being displaced by climate change.

UNEVOC empowers TVET leaders in Southern and Eastern Africa

Last autumn saw UNESCO-UNEVOC take its [TVET Leadership Programme](#) to Southern Africa when it organized the first ever regional edition of the course in Harare, Zimbabwe in October 2017. Aimed at building the capacity of TVET managers to contribute to sustainable development goals, the initiative is also designed to tackle one of the obstacles to change in TVET, namely the shortage of people on the ground who can lead the transformation of TVET inside their institutions.



For Lova Zakariasy, head of the Higher Technical Institute in Antsirana, Madagascar, this was her first visit to an English-speaking African country to discuss TVET. “The contact with people from other countries was very enriching,” she says, “it has helped us to see our policy direction for our institute.”

Each participant in Harare worked on a proposal for change to take back to their institution. In the case of Ms Zakariasy, this was how to design a new ICT system for her institute as well as how to encourage teachers and students to make good use of digital resources.

She was able to compare notes with other course participants who had a similar project. “One of the things we discussed was how to link digitalization and greening TVET,” Ms Zakariasy says, “by using e-docs for example, we can save a lot of paper so there are many links between e-services and greening TVET.”

The change project of Doris Mtemang’ombe, head of Technical Education at the University of Malawi – the Polytechnic, involves using career guidance to encourage more girls to opt for TVET. She is changing the way she does things since returning from Harare. “From now on my careers talks will be focusing more on primary students and their guardians. If we wait till a later stage, many people have already made their decisions,” she says.

Earlier in the year, in September, UNEVOC held the second edition of its Global TVET Leadership Programme in Bonn, Germany providing a two-week course of capacity building for 22 TVET heads and personnel. The third edition is planned for summer 2018.

Empowering the voice of youth on skills development

UNESCO’s NET-MED Youth project has helped seven countries in the South Mediterranean establish a model for forecasting skills needs and encouraged the region’s young people to join in the policy dialogue on TVET and skills over the past three years. These were just some of the results presented at the regional seminar on the skills forecasting work of the project held in Paris, France on 23–24 October 2017.

Achieving these goals involved looking at governance and more technical aspects. UNESCO worked with one institution per country to develop a new simulation model which can help forecast what skills employers will need in future. Such projections can send valuable signals to a country’s education and TVET system about the kinds of profiles it needs to train for.

Encouraging the emergence of platforms of stakeholders — that complex ecosystem of employers, trade unionists and civil society whose input to TVET policymaking is so important — was the second big achievement.

Making sure young people had a seat at this table was one of the EU-funded project’s most pioneering features. This involved providing specific training for youth organisations and a range of actions tailored to each country. In Palestine, these took the form of radio debates involving young people and relevant ministers, in Lebanon, youth organisations worked with the national employment office to produce a youth-friendly toolkit for empowering young women and men to act on youth unemployment.

Plenty of progress has been made, “but this is incremental work so this is just the beginning,” says H  l  ne Guiol, programme specialist at UNESCO’s TVET Section. The EU has agreed to fund a follow-up project, Supporting Youth Employment in the Mediterranean Region through improved skills anticipation systems and TVET promotion, that started in January 2018.

This drive to make TVET in the South Mediterranean more fit for purpose complements work UNESCO is doing in other parts of the world. Better Education for Africa’s Rise — a project working with five Eastern African countries on TVET quality and relevance, supported by the Republic of Korea — entered its second phase in 2017. Such initiatives are fully aligned with UNESCO’s five year strategy on TVET and are part of UNESCO’s contribution to meet Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education.

Workshop on quality assurance launches Mahe Process for Eastern Africa

TVET officials from all over Eastern Africa convened in Nairobi, Kenya in July 2017 to help UNESCO set about improving quality assurance of qualifications in the region.

The workshop marked the start of a research action into how the thirteen countries currently conduct quality assurance and how it could be improved. It also marked the launch of the broader Mahe Process for creating better job prospects for Eastern African youth.

The kick-off event allowed the participants to present and discuss methodologies for collecting and analyzing data and to agree on outlines for national reports on quality assurance of qualifications in each country. Producing these reports will be a vital part of the initiative as they will provide the majority of the data the participants will use to develop a comparative analysis of quality assurance in the region.

The TVET officials had the chance to learn about how neighbouring countries do quality assurance as well as exploring promising practices from African countries and other parts of the world. The workshop represents the first step in building a network of expertise on the subject in Eastern Africa. A set of guidelines for better quality assurance in TVET qualifications will be a second output.

The Mahe Process was born at a meeting organized by UNESCO in Seychelles in March 2016. Policymakers and education experts decided to use a regional approach to improve TVET as one of the best ways of tackling youth unemployment.

According to the [ILO](#), youth employment across Africa is relatively low but this general description masks great disparities between countries — in South Africa for instance almost 50% of young people are unemployed. Moreover being in employment does not always mean a better life — in 2016 Sub-Saharan Africa had the world's highest rate of poverty for working youth.

Recent and upcoming events

2nd World Open Education Resources Congress

18–20 September 2017, Ljubljana, Slovenia
Education experts from 111 countries met to discuss how to promote Open Education Resources for inclusive and equitable quality education as part of the drive to achieve SDG4 on education. At the end of the congress, organized by UNESCO and the Slovenian Government, participants adopted the [2017 Ljubljana OER Action Plan](#) comprising 41 recommendations.

39th Session of UNESCO's General Conference

30 October–14 November 2017, Paris, France
Audrey Azoulay was elected as the 11th Director-General of UNESCO at the 39th Session of UNESCO's General Conference, where Member States approved a range of budget and programme decisions and reaffirmed the relevance of the work of UNESCO for the challenges facing the world today.

Meeting of the Inter-Agency Group on TVET

22 November 2017, Brussels, Belgium
The latest meeting of the Inter-Agency Group on TVET, which brings together 12 international organizations to share knowledge and work on developments in TVET, focused on the future of work and digitalization of economies and labour markets, how to finance TVET and the anticipation of skills. Bilateral organizations, including French Agency for Development, British Council, Enabel of Belgium, Commonwealth Secretariat, Swiss Development Cooperation and Norwegian Development Agency, also attended.

UNEVOC Network Capacity Development Workshop

27–30 November 2017, Bangkok, Thailand
Greening TVET and sustainable development were the main focus of a workshop organized by UNESCO-UNEVOC, UNEVOC centres KRIVET from the Republic of Korea and Thailand's Office of the Vocational Education Commission.

Consultation meeting on mainstreaming entrepreneurial skills in TVET

5–7 December 2017, Santiago de Chile, Chile
How to ensure entrepreneurial skills are mainstreamed in TVET policies and programmes was the main aim of an experts meeting organized by Duoc UC, a UNEVOC centre in Chile, UNESCO-UNEVOC, UNESCO's Section for Youth, Literacy and Skills Development and UNESCO Regional Bureau in Santiago last December.

Seventh World Reference Levels meeting

March 2018, Brussels, Belgium
The next meeting on WRLs of Learning Outcomes, an expert group looking at the recognition of qualifications, will continue discussing the results of a global comparative analysis of qualifications as well as further research initiatives on level descriptors and progression, higher levels of complexity and quality assurance of certification. It will also review the first findings of a recent study on the recognition of skills and qualifications in a digitized world.

Mobile Learning Week – Skills for a connected world

26–30 March 2018, Paris, France
Jointly organized with the International Telecommunication Union, UNESCO's main conference on ICT in education will provide a platform to share promising practices in mobile learning. It will look at how to combine 'non-digital' approaches to education and mobile learning applications in order to reduce inequality, spur innovative approaches to teaching and learning and bridge the gap between formal and non-formal systems.

UNESCO-UNEVOC Learning Forum

24–25 May 2018, Bonn, Germany
UNESCO-UNEVOC will host a conference to discuss TVET trends and facilitate discussions and peer learning drawing on input from research by its global network of TVET institutions, the UNEVOC Network. The conference focuses on initiatives and research undertaken to effectively manage 'disruptions' brought by technological, economic, environmental and social transitions.

UNESCO-UNEVOC TVET Leadership Programme

25 June – 6 July 2018, Bonn, Germany
The third edition of the global TVET Leadership Programme seeks to help potential TVET leaders to become change agents and contribute to implementing the SDGs in their countries. The programme, hosted by UNESCO-UNEVOC, targets heads of TVET institutions from in and outside of the UNEVOC network.

Recently published

Guidelines for the Quality Assurance of TVET Qualifications in the Asia-Pacific Region

Greening Technical and Vocational Education and Training. A practical guide for institutions

Towards Quality Assurance of Technical and Vocational Education and Training

Working Group on Education: Digital skills for life and work
Publication by the Broadband Commission Working Group on Education

World Youth Skills Day 2017. UNESCO-UNEVOC and WorldSkills International in action

Upcoming publications

Funding skills development: the private sector contribution

