UNESCO Strategy for TVET (2022-2029)
Transforming TVET for successful and just transitions
Discussion document
UNESCO – a global leader in education

Education is UNESCO’s top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation for peace and sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations’ specialized agency for education, providing global and regional leadership to drive progress, strengthening the resilience and capacity of national systems to serve all learners. UNESCO also leads efforts to respond to contemporary global challenges through transformative learning, with special focus on gender equality and Africa across all actions.

The Global Education 2030 Agenda

UNESCO, as the United Nations’ specialized agency for education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.
In 2015, UNESCO adopted a Strategy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) (2016–2021) aiming to “support the efforts of Member States to enhance the relevance of their TVET systems and to equip all youth and adults with the skills required for employment, decent work, entrepreneurship and lifelong learning, and to contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a whole.”

The Strategy identified three priority areas: fostering youth employment and entrepreneurship, promoting equity and gender equality, and facilitating the transition to green economies and sustainable societies. UNESCO committed to supporting its Member States in designing and implementing cross-cutting interventions, including the identification of skills requirements to inform TVET policies, strategies and programmes, the recognition of qualifications across countries, and the collection and analysis of data on progress towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 and related technical and vocational skills targets.

A final evaluation of the Strategy was conducted in spring 2021 through a wide range of consultations with internal and external stakeholders engaged in its implementation. According to the evaluation, the problem statement, overall objectives and main line of reasoning of the Strategy were sound and helped UNESCO respond to challenges identified in the 2015 evaluation of the previous Strategy covering the period 2010–2015. The three priority areas were framed in broad terms and remained relevant, both for UNESCO and for national TVET systems. UNESCO also responded to changing demands and covered TVET-related topics that were not explicitly mentioned in the Strategy, whether broad areas such as digitalization, or specific policy interventions such as the creation of TVET centres of excellence and innovation hubs, or the introduction of micro- or digital credentials.

Coordination improved within UNESCO, especially through the internal TVET community, and between UNESCO and external partners, for instance through the UNEVOC Network and the Inter-Agency Group on TVET (IAG-TVET). Efficiency could be further improved by using more standardized approaches, guidelines and tools.

UNESCO reached its quantitative targets, bringing change in Member States’ TVET policies and systems. Over the period 2015–2021, UNESCO supported 50 countries worldwide. More than 2,700 teachers and around 5,000 TVET stakeholders (leaders, officials, and experts from the private sector) were trained, and 224 TVET institutions benefited from UNESCO support, through training, capacity development and the procurement of equipment. Overall, UNESCO mobilized around US$ 72 M for TVET.

The final evaluation made recommendations for the next TVET strategy. To be operational, the strategy should clearly describe how UNESCO can work with Member States to advance the TVET agenda, based on the 2015 Recommendation concerning TVET and, more broadly, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (including SDG 4, especially targets 3, 4, 5 and 7, as well as other SDGs on which TVET can have an impact, in particular SDG 8 on inclusive growth and decent work). Two long-term trends, digitization and the transition toward sustainable development, have become even more salient through the COVID-19 pandemic. They are bound to dominate the post-COVID-19 world and should be central to the development of the new strategy. Moreover, the Strategy evaluation noted that more
attention should be given to lifelong learning, credentials including micro-credentials, and the quality of the teaching workforce.

The final evaluation recommends that UNESCO maintain its broad set of activities, including normative work, capacity development, policy advice, knowledge development and technical assistance. UNESCO should build on initiatives taken as part of its response to the COVID-19 crisis, including the Global Education Coalition and its Global Skills Academy.

Furthermore, the final evaluation recommends reinforcing UNESCO’s partnerships with other TVET agencies and stakeholders. The UNEVOC Network could be expanded to additional training institutions, while focusing on capacity development at the levels of ministries, national authorities, training providers and research institutions in the Member States. The Inter-Agency Group on TVET (IAG-TVET), which has proven successful in ensuring coordination and stimulating knowledge exchange between agencies, could be replicated at regional level, for instance in Africa and in Asia-Pacific. The Memorandum of Understanding on TVET and skills development between UNESCO and the International Labour Organization (ILO) could be updated.

### The world of work in multiple transitions

TVET is at the intersection of education and the world of work, and is expected to facilitate the insertion of young people and adults into the labour market, and their career progression. However, 31 per cent of young women and 14 per cent of young men worldwide were not in employment, education or training in 2019. Too many were trapped in vulnerable employment in low-skilled jobs, or settling for jobs for which they were overqualified and underpaid. As a result, 12 per cent of young people in employment were living in extreme poverty (below US$ 1.90 a day), twice the rate of adults. The COVID-19 pandemic led to school, training centre and workplace closures. An unprecedented recession resulted which has severely affected young people. The number of young people in employment fell by 39 million in 2020, or 8.7 per cent — compared with 3.7 per cent for adults.¹ Economic recovery prospects for 2021 and 2022 are highly uncertain. Besides, the crisis has accelerated several transitions the world of work was already undergoing, which add layers of uncertainty regarding the skills and competencies that will be in demand after the pandemic is overcome. TVET systems worldwide need to adapt those transitions and enhance their labour market relevance.

**Economic recovery:** After contracting by 3.3 per cent in 2020, the global economy was projected in July 2021 to grow by 6 per cent in 2021 and 4.9 per cent in 2022.² The recovery is being threatened by the rapid spread of virus variants and the slow progress of vaccination in most low- and middle-income countries. It will be heterogenous across countries, activity sectors and categories of workers (depending on age, gender, qualifications, occupations, etc.). The 2020 recession, by far the deepest at the global level since the end of World War II, will have long-term impacts on learning and training, jobs and economies.

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² International Monetary Fund (IMF), *World Economic Outlook*, July 2021.
Technological change: Digitization, automation, the advent of the fifth generation of mobile communication technology (5G) and rapid progress in artificial intelligence are leading to a fourth industrial revolution, captured by the concept of Industry 4.0. As was the case with previous industrial revolutions, this will both destroy and create jobs on a massive scale, in ways that are particularly difficult to predict.

Informality: Informal employment can no longer be considered a feature of a “traditional” sector that will be gradually replaced with a “modern” sector as economic development unfolds. First, informal employment remains pervasive, representing 61 per cent of total employment (including agriculture) in the world, 68 per cent in Asia and the Pacific and in the Arab States, and up to 86 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa. Second, today’s technological change is challenging formal employment and the associated worker benefits, as in the gig economy. Innovative approaches are emerging that can help extend social protection to informal workers, and protect them from working poverty.

Demographic transition: At the global level, the demographic transition from high to low natality and mortality is well underway, and population growth has slowed considerably, to 0.98 per cent per year in 2020–25. The total fertility rate is down to 2.4 children per woman, and the median age of the world population has reached 30.9 years. Yet continents and countries are at different stages of that transition. Most countries in sub-Saharan Africa and to a lesser extent South Asia are experiencing youth bulges, which call for a continued, rapid expansion of education and training systems — and for job creation on a massive scale. Meanwhile, many countries in Europe and East Asia have fast ageing populations, in which shrinking cohorts of working age support ever larger numbers of elderly people. As the retirement age rises with life expectancy, these countries need to develop skills development for senior workers.

Societal and political issues: TVET is part of the social contract which should guarantee the right to education and decent employment, as well as intergenerational solidarity. The world of work more broadly should aim to reduce poverty and inequality and promote corporate social responsibility. While demands for more democratic, inclusive and tolerant are voiced, which should be reflected in TVET and corporate governance, the world is also witnessing trends in the opposite direction. Authoritarian regimes in major emerging countries are questioning democracy as a model, Western democracies are in crisis. Multilateralism is being challenged. Interstate wars are less frequent, but conflict fatalities are increasing. Political instability, conflict and climate change among other factors are leading to large-scale migrations within and between countries. TVET systems have a part to play in facilitating the integration of internally displaced people, refugees, and migrants.

Sustainable development: The world is not on track to mitigate climate change, stop the loss of biodiversity, restore ecosystems, or reduce pollution. To focus on climate change, CO2 concentration in the atmosphere nearly reached 420 ppm in 2021, a 50 per cent rise compared with pre-industrial times (280 ppm). In July 2021, global temperature was 1.16°C
above the 1880–1920 mean. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), limiting global temperature increase to 1.5°C as expected by the Paris Agreement will require CO2 emissions to decline by about 45 per cent from 2010 levels by 2030 and to reach net zero by 2050. This will require a rapid and radical transformation of the global economy. For instance, this is inconsistent with current modes of electricity production, 38.5 per cent of which relies on coal.

According to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, “Coal must be phased out by 2030 in OECD countries, and by 2040 in all other countries […] Financing for coal and other fossil fuels abroad must stop and be redirected towards the clean energy transition.” To the extent countries engage towards zero-emission economies — post-COVID-19 recovery plans that have been already announced tend to reconduct “business as usual” — the green transition will have an impact on technologies, production, goods and services. This will result in an increased demand for workers with new technical and generic skills needed in the greener jobs and sectors.

TVET as a proactive player

The multiple transitions outlined above have major implications for TVET. The skills young people and adults need to thrive in the world of work will evolve rapidly, whether job-specific skills, foundation skills, transversal/soft skills, or more broadly the capacity to handle change and to engage in both local and global communities. TVET systems should be proactive in the way they adapt their training supply, to the benefit of individuals, economies, and societies.

Supporting individuals: Individuals will need to be lifelong learners and keep their skills up to date. The COVID-19 crisis and recovery are creating massive demand for training, as young people face difficulties entering disrupted labour markets, and laid-off workers need reskilling to find new jobs or become entrepreneurs in sectors that are resilient to the crisis. TVET must offer lifelong learning opportunities, with individualized and adaptative pedagogies, flexible learning modalities, pathways across types of education and training and across activity sectors, recognition of prior learning and validation of skills, career guidance and counselling.

Supporting economies: Labour market demand for skills will shift rapidly. TVET systems must supply firms, and economies more broadly, with the skills needed for inclusive and sustainable growth, in a context of rapid technological change. This requires engagement with social partners, firms and workers, as well as the timely collection and use of data on skills needs, based on a range of data sources including administrative data, surveys, data analytics and big data.

Supporting societies: Societies will be increasingly challenged by the multiple transitions affecting the world of work, which will have major implications for the distribution of income.
and wealth, solidarity between social groups and between generations, and political organization. TVET systems can respond through more transparent governance, greater efficiency and improved accountability. They can also adapt the contents of training, including education for sustainable development and global citizenship education. TVET has a role to play in equipping youth with the knowledge, values, skills and attitudes they need to understand their rights and empower them to engage and promote a just world of work and just societies.

**UNESCO’s three proposed strategic priorities**

UNESCO, as the lead UN agency in education, science, culture, and communication and information, should drive the global TVET agenda. The new Strategy will seek to generate a global momentum for TVET, contributing to the post-COVID-19 social and economic recovery and to an acceleration of progress towards SDG 4. It will seek to instil a renewed ambition for TVET in Member States and build a common vision for transforming labour markets, economies, and societies. Considering the changing context outlined above, and persistent challenges specific to the sector (quality, equity, relevance, governance, financing, and attractiveness), TVET needs to be repositioned for what it should be: a pathway for individuals to thrive, a catalyst towards sustainable economies, and a vector of social justice.

Three strategic priorities are proposed:

1. **Skills for individuals to learn, work and live**
2. **Skills for economies to transition towards sustainable development**
3. **Skills for inclusive and resilient societies**

At the global level, this implies applying “mission” principles and linking global and regional agendas to national policies and systems. At the country level, this entails providing policy support and guidance for Member States to adapt to the world-of-work transitions and mobilize public sector, private sector and civil society TVET stakeholders. Within UNESCO’s corporate perspective, the three strategic priorities will be focused on gender and Africa. Platforms will be built to connect TVET-related activities across the Education, Culture, Science, Social and Human Sciences, and Communication and Information Sectors.

1. **Skills for individuals to learn, work and live**

National TVET systems should offer equitable access to skills development for jobs, entrepreneurship and economic opportunities. They should target populations that have had limited access to skills so far, including women in many societies, people belonging to disadvantaged social groups or living in remote rural areas or urban slums, people living with disabilities, refugees or internally displaced people. Policies should not only organize the provision of TVET for young people, but offer lifelong learning opportunities for adults and the elderly, whose activity levels are likely to increase in countries with ageing populations. TVET systems will need to experience new training modalities, including through digital technology, which offer personalized, adaptive and flexible learning. Training will need to be reoriented towards jobs of the future, in the digital economy, creative industries, and in occupations that expand as all sectors shift towards environmentally sustainable production processes.
At the national level, UNESCO will support TVET policy reviews and policy development, in a lifelong learning perspective. Priority areas will include learning pathways, the recognition and certification of skills, governance, and funding. UNESCO will support capacity-building initiatives of national decision-makers and institutions responsible for the training of teaching staff and managers. At the regional level, UNESCO will support the emergence of regional TVET agendas including cross-country recognition of skills and qualification frameworks, peer learning and knowledge-sharing. At the global level, UNESCO should be the international organization that sets the agenda. It will scale up ongoing initiatives such as the Global Skills Academy and Global Teachers Campus, reinforce and reshape the UNEVOC Network, and support multilateral initiatives that promote the transformation and attractiveness of TVET worldwide. Priority areas will include facilitating the mobility of learners, cross-country recognition of learning experiences and outcomes, and leveraging frontier technologies (artificial intelligence, blockchain, data protection and the interoperability of TVET systems).

2. Skills for economies to transition towards sustainable development

The COVID-19 crisis, technological change and the transition to sustainable development will lead to job destruction and creation, to the disruption of existing activity sectors and the emergence of new industries, in ways that are difficult to predict. Millions of jobs might be automated within a few years, but the same process might generate new jobs with different skill requirements – likely including advanced digital skills, and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills. Countries will need to align their skills agenda with economic transitions and labour market needs. The role of the private sector is central in expressing skills needs, offering work-based learning, investing in skills, recognizing, certifying and valuing the skills acquired.

UNESCO will support its Member States in analysing their changing economies and developing capacity to identify and anticipate skills requirements to inform TVET policies, strategies and programmes. UNESCO will reinforce its programmes for work-based learning, including actions to enable companies as learning organizations that contribute to education and training of young generations and develop a breadth of skills and capacity for learning throughout life for their employees. Furthermore, UNESCO will support Member States in creating national, regional and sectoral stakeholder platforms to facilitate private sector participation and communication between the world of education and the world of work.

3. Skills for inclusive and resilient societies

Societies are facing challenges regarding political representation, institutions and governance. Political disengagement, social unrest, tensions caused by hate speech, prejudice or discrimination are challenging existing political regimes. Extreme levels of economic inequality are adding to social divides. Climate change and other facets of environmental degradation will increasingly represent a major threat to the stability and resilience of societies. TVET and skills development can play a part in alleviating these concerns. This implies more participatory governance of institutions and programmes (associating students/trainees, their families and young people’s organizations, etc.), encouraging young people to engage in public affairs including through social-media and cyber-space. This also implies the renewal of training content, skills and pedagogies.
including problem-based education, collaboration and civic competencies, scientific and digital and information literacy, skills in the arts and creativity, skills and knowledge of labour law, social and emotional wellbeing and sense of global solidarity.

**UNESCO will support its Member States in introducing skills development programmes that teach young people about their rights and the rule of law, equip them with a strong ethical compass and empower them to become champions for justice in their workplaces and communities. This implies training teachers/trainers and policymakers on how to embed such learning in TVET programmes; and fostering youth engagement in TVET governance and in co-creation of policies and programmes. At the global level, UNESCO will promote dialogue with young people through the Global Youth Forum.**

### Cross-cutting interventions

To maximize the outcomes of the Strategy, UNESCO will action three levers.

1. **Data and knowledge lever**

   UNESCO will conduct research and support Member States in collecting and analysing data on TVET programmes and their outcomes, exploiting digital information, including big data and open data. A framework of key indicators will be developed with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) to improve the ability of Member States to monitor progress towards SDG4 and related skills targets. Together with external partners, UNESCO could develop a ‘global skills tracker’ that would document skilling, reskilling and upskilling programmes, and the training and work trajectories of young people. The tracker could be continued until 2029, and should pay particular attention to gender. The tracker could be piloted, for instance in sub-Saharan African countries with large numbers of young people entering the labour market. UNESCO also proposes creating a repository of TVET plans and strategies, including their monitoring and evaluation. This could build on TVET country profiles prepared by UNESCO-UNEVOC and expand the European Union’s Refernet platform and/or the UNESCO-IIEP’s Planipolis platform. The objectives are to inform decision-making, bring synergies, facilitate advocacy and promote accountability.

2. **Normative lever**

   UNESCO has two TVET-specific normative instruments: The Convention on Technical and Vocational Education (1989) and the Recommendation Concerning Technical and Vocational Education (2015). Several other normative instruments cover TVET partially, including the 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education, the 1966 Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers, the 1997 Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel, the 2015 Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education and the 2019 Global Convention on Higher Education. The new Strategy will consider the status of those instruments and reflect on their possible revision.

3. **Networks and partnerships lever**

   The UNEVOC Network brings together a large number and a great diversity of TVET institutions. The Network has the potential to set the agenda for TVET at the global level and

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to become a leading voice in TVET. However, its reach and impact are limited. The new Strategy will enable the Network to build capacity in TVET institutions to meet the emerging demand for skills. TVET institutions belonging to the Network should become centres of excellence and hubs of innovation.

UNESCO established an Inter-Agency Group on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (IAG-TVET), which promotes the exchange of views and the sharing of knowledge, and ensures the coordination of activities of its members involved in policy advice, programme implementation and research. The new Strategy will reinforce and widen the IAG-TVET, further operationalize its working group and place it within the emerging Global Education Architecture to be adopted in 2021.

The Teacher Task Force (TTF) is another critical platform hosted by UNESCO. Its mission is to mobilize governments and other stakeholders for the advancement of teachers and quality teaching, acting as a catalyst of global, regional and national efforts through advocacy, knowledge creation and sharing, and country support and engagement. The Strategy will reinforce the engagement of the TTF, creating a specific area of work on the TVET teaching workforce.

The COVID-19 ushered in a new development, the establishment of partnerships between UNESCO and the private sector, through the launch of the Global Education Coalition, the Global Skills Academy and the Broadband Commission. The new Strategy will strengthen these partnerships, for example though an Annual UNESCO-Business Forum.

Synergies

Initiatives taken in recent years by United Nations agencies have implications for UNESCO’s mandate and positioning. Those include UNICEF’s Generation Unlimited, the ILO’s Decent Jobs for Youth, ITU and WHO skills academies and UNIDO’s Learning and Skills Development Facility. Other members of the IAG-TVET have also adopted new strategies and created new structures: the OECD’s Skills Strategy and Centre for Skills, the European Commission’s “Proposal for a Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience,” the World Bank’s Human Capital Project, and the African Union’s Agenda 2063. These developments have three implications for UNESCO’s next TVET Strategy: a revitalized IAG-TVET to maintain UNESCO’s leadership; an alliance between the Global Skills Academy and other mission-oriented initiatives to maximize impact; and an effective fundraising strategy to mobilize resources for the implementation of the new Strategy.

12 https://www.generationunlimited.org/
13 https://www.decentjobsforyouth.org/global-initiative
14 https://lkdfacility.org/
The new Strategy for TVET will be drafted by UNESCO in consultation with Member States, international partners and the wider TVET community, ensuring that it is relevant to each region. The process can be outlined as follows:

1. **Consider the outcomes of the midterm review and final evaluation.** The evaluation will inform the priorities and contents of the Strategy for TVET 2022–2029, drawing lessons from the implementation of the Strategy for TVET 2016–2021 and seeking complementarity with the strategies and programmes of key partners.

2. **Build on reference documents.** Several documents are central for framing the new Strategy, including the Strategic Objectives set out in UNESCO’s draft Medium-term Strategy (2022–2029, 41 C/4), the updated 2015 Recommendation concerning TVET and the results of its monitoring as well as the forthcoming UNESCO-ILO-World Bank Report covering lessons learned and good practices from reforms in priority areas of TVET systems that are vital to determining access, equity, quality, and relevance. Other documents will be also used, such as the declarations of the Global Education Meetings, the newly adopted Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development and other regional and thematic documents that have been generated through various global and regional fora.

3. **Consultation with UNEVOC centres:** The objective of this consultation will be to discuss the first draft of the new strategy for TVET, including the proposed priority areas for UNESCO’s work.

4. **Consultation with development partners:** UNESCO established the IAG-TVET to ensure systematic cooperation and coordination with international agencies active in the field. UNESCO will organize two interagency meetings to discuss the proposed areas for UNESCO’s work and cooperation in TVET.

5. **Consultation with Member States:** Two international online conferences are planned. The first took place in June 2021 alongside ILO, UNICEF, the European Reconstruction and Development Bank and the European Training Foundation. The aim of the conference was to place TVET within a lifelong learning perspective and discuss preliminary orientations. The second conference will be organized by UNESCO in December 2021 to discuss trends in TVET reforms, persisting challenges and share the final draft before its submission to the Executive Board at its 214th session.

### Consultation questions

The consultation will address following key questions:

1. Do you agree with the analysis of the transitions? Are there other dimensions not covered by the diagnosis?

2. Do you agree with the three strategic priorities and cross-cutting interventions? Given your perspective/country context, are there other priorities the Strategy should address?

3. How can you contribute to the operationalization of the Strategy? Which additional synergies should UNESCO consider?