

# LIFELONG LEARNING: CONCEPTS, ISSUES AND ACTIONS



International  
Labour  
Organization



**RECENT YEARS HAVE WITNESSED A GROWING INTEREST IN LIFE-LONG LEARNING (LLL) AS AN INDISPENSABLE ELEMENT OF POLICY RESPONSES TO THE FUTURE OF WORK. THIS BRIEFING NOTE PROVIDES A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO LLL, FOCUSING ON THE CONCEPT ITSELF, IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES AND RELATED POLICY ACTIONS FOR CONSTITUENTS AND THE ILO.**



# INTRODUCTION

The recent release of the report of the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work has renewed interest in life-long learning and how the work of the ILO is supporting implementation. The ILO's normative work on skills development has, since the early 1970s, reflected life-long learning (LLL) concepts from the time when they first entered international policy debates.

However, in the context of ongoing change to education and training systems and the labour markets and societies they seek to serve, it is timely to reconsider the concept of LLL, examine the key issues that shape implementation and to outline priority current and possible future actions for the ILO.

**As such, this position paper seeks to guide ILO constituents in their discussions on the following strategic questions:**



**WHAT DOES LLL MEAN IN THE CONTEXT OF DISCUSSIONS ON THE FUTURE OF WORK AND THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GLOBAL COMMISSION?**

**WHAT ARE THE KEY ISSUES AFFECTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LLL?**

**WHAT KEY ISSUES AND ACTIONS SHOULD THE ILO TAKE WITH REGARDS TO LLL?**

# BACKGROUND

The origins of lifelong learning (LLL) can be traced back to the early 20th century when adult education was recognised as 'a permanent national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship (that) should be both universal and lifelong' (MOR 1919). From the 1920s until the 1960s, adult education thus remained the central concept related to learning after school and university.

When this was displaced in the 1970s, it was with terms such as 'continuing education' rather than the more expansive language of 'lifelong learning' that only began to assume a central role in policy debate in the 1990s after the release of the influential Delors report (UNESCO 1996). The concept of LLL recognised that whilst the value of initial training was not to be discounted, the frontloading of skills through education and training for a single lifetime qualification was no longer sufficient, and that education and training systems of the future needed to be flexible and prepare individuals to learn continuously over their life (ILO, 2018).

The concept of LLL was in part a response to concerns surrounding economic competitiveness, globalization, unemployment and the implications they held for human capital development. As noted by the ILO, education, training and lifelong learning are fundamental and should form an integral part of comprehensive economic, fiscal, social and labour market policies and programmes that are important for sustainable economic growth, employment creation and social development (ILO 2004). Debates at this time called for the introduction of 'new and different concepts based on learning rather than education, on the integration of different learning environments and on the promotion of individual pathways between them' (UNESCO, 1999, p. 1).

Whilst the socio-economic context of skills development has continued to evolve since the concept of LLL was developed, the imperative for LLL has been recently reinforced by emerging debates surrounding the accelerating pace of technological change and the future of work and employment. Consequently, as labour markets and the demand for skills evolves, a comprehensive people-centred and rights-based approach to LLL is seen as a key strategy to help workers adjust to change, prevent the high social costs and maximise the positive effects of the complex and disruptive changes that lie ahead (ILO 2018).

The importance of LLL has also been further strengthened by its inclusion as a central feature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, where in Goal 4, UN member states have committed to ensure inclusive and equitable quality

education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (UN 2015). In this context at least, the concept of lifelong learning has been reaffirmed as a guiding principle and operational framework for education systems and policies (UNESCO 2018).

From the time it emerged in policy debates, LLL was recognised by the ILO as a key principle to shape the development of education and training systems and it was incorporated in a number of normative and policy instruments. These include the Human Resources Development Recommendation, 2004 (No.195) (ILO 2004), the Paid Educational Leave Convention, 1974 (No. 140) (ILO 1974), and the Conclusions on Skills for Improved Productivity, Employment Growth and Development (ILO 2008).

Whilst not explicitly addressing all elements of LLL, these instruments do provide a solid normative and policy framework for action on LLL by ILO constituents. For example, the instruments note that realization of lifelong learning should be based on the explicit commitments by government through investing and creating the conditions to enhance education and training at all levels; by enterprises through training their employees, and by individuals through developing their competencies and careers (R. 195, Article 4.b) (ILO 2004). Examples of other key policy principles on LLL drawn from these instruments are highlighted in Box 1.

These instruments provide important guidance and policy principles for member States and the International Labour Office in the area of education, training and LLL.

## **BUT WHAT EXACTLY IS LLL, WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF A LLL SYSTEM AND HOW MIGHT THE OFFICE EFFECTIVELY ASSIST MEMBER STATES TO CONVERT THE RHETORIC OF LLL INTO ACTION?**

## BOX 1: KEY POLICY PRINCIPLES ON LLL

- “members should formulate, apply and review national human resources development, education, training and lifelong learning policies which are consistent with economic, fiscal and social policies” (ILO 2004, p. 2)
- that the social partners have a particularly important responsibility in “supporting and facilitating lifelong learning including through collective bargaining agreements” (ILO 2008, p. 14).
- that “as part of the lifelong learning agenda”, governments should provide “employment placement services, guidance and appropriate active labour market measures such as training programmes targeting older workers and, where possible, supported by legislation to counter age discrimination and facilitate workforce participation (ILO 2008, p. 9);
- “that members should develop a national qualifications framework to facilitate lifelong learning” (ILO 2004, p. 3).
- “that members should promote equal opportunities for women and men in education, training and lifelong learning” (ILO 2004, p. 3).
- “that members should recognise employees’ rights to free time for training through paid study leave” (ILO 1974, p. 1); and
- that a holistic approach includes “development of core skills – including literacy, numeracy, communication skills, teamwork problem-solving and other relevant skills and learning ability, as well as awareness of workers’ rights and an understanding of entrepreneurship, as the building blocks for lifelong learning and capability to adapt to change” (ILO 2008, p. 2).

Source: ILO (1974), ILO (2004), ILO (2008)

# KEY CONCEPTS AND ISSUES

## WHAT IS LIFELONG LEARNING?

Interpretations of lifelong learning vary widely around the world and it can be argued that there is no real agreement on what exactly lifelong learning means (UNESCO 2016a). In fact for some, LLL remains a contested concept. According to Bengtsson, the concept of LLL remains vague and without a coherent implementation strategy (Bengtsson, 2013), and as various authors have stated, it is a 'chameleon like' and 'slippery' term (Johnston 2000) which allows it to be adapted according to the context and purpose (Lovren & Popovic, 2018). Diverse understandings about learning have also fuelled ongoing disagreements about the role and significance of lifelong learning. Some interpretations limit the scope of learning to formal education and training systems whilst others regard lifelong learning as covering all kinds of informal learning, differing valuations that underpin ongoing disputes about lifelong learning (Hager, 2011).

LLL has also been labelled by some as a 'Nordic' and 'Western' concept imposed on the Global South which has a stronger tradition of 'adult education' (Torres 2004). Other critiques see LLL as part of an agenda to enable the state to withdraw from the education process, and the field of adult education in particular, shifting responsibility to individuals (Lovren & Popovic, 2018). Although the initial proposals on LLL were meant for all countries, subsequent development of the concept has occurred mainly in the context of OECD countries, and questions might well be raised about its relevance for less developed countries (Hasan, 2012).

Despite these tensions, in broad terms, the concept of LLL has generally evolved to be understood today as covering all education and training during a lifetime, including both initial education and training and adult learning. It is considered 'lifelong' but also 'lifewide', covering learning in institutions, families, communities and workplaces. It is also considered 'life-deep', because it recognises the ongoing and active acquisition, development and deployment of knowledge over a lifetime (Bélanger, 2016). It is worth noting that these concepts are reflected in the report of the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work which calls for a human centred agenda for the future of work that 'means investing in people's capabilities, enabling them to acquire skills, reskill and upskill and supporting them through the various transitions they will face over their life course' (ILO 2019, p. 24).

However, in various international and national contexts, definitions of LLL differ, reflecting key conceptual issues including for example the extent to which labour market utility is prioritised and whether informal and non-formal learning is included. This

is evident in the following three definitions, one from UNESCO, one from the ILO and another from the European Commission:

- **“all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons” (UNESCO 1984);**
- **“all learning activities undertaken throughout life for the development of competencies and qualifications” (ILO 2006); and**
- **“all general education, vocational education and training, non-formal education and informal learning undertaken throughout life, resulting in an improvement in knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective. It includes the provision of counselling and guidance services” (EC 2006).**

There is no single model for LLL which can be supported by the diverse range of education and training systems that exist amongst ILO constituents. As such, given the range of perspectives presented here, it is clear that a wide range of learning processes, learning outcomes and sites of learning can be considered as forming part of LLL. However, notwithstanding the potential breadth of the concept, it is worth noting that in recent years LLL has in many policy contexts become increasingly used as a proxy term for adult education and training (see for example the European LLL Index which is based on analysis of adult learning policies (EC, 2015)) - but only in terms of labour market driven learning and not the broader agenda of adult education which includes civic engagement and personal development. As such, one question that requires further consideration is which elements of LLL in its broadest sense might be given priority by constituents and how ambitious or modest should that scope be.



## WHAT IS A LIFELONG LEARNING ECOSYSTEM?

The report of the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work calls for the establishment of a lifelong learning ecosystem. Whilst not specifically defining what that means, the report notes that “establishing an effective lifelong learning ecosystem is a joint responsibility, requiring the active engagement and support of governments, employers and workers as well as education institutions....governments must broaden and reconfigure institutions such as skills development policies, employment services and training systems” (ILO 2019, pp. 31-32).

Whilst an ambitious goal, it must be recognised that implementation of LLL has in the past been considered weak, uneven and often without strong commitment (Bengtsson, 2013). Few countries can be identified as having clearly defined the features of an overall system of lifelong learning, or as having attempted to implement one. Whilst lifelong learning has been widely accepted in rhetoric there is a low level of operationalization (Lovren & Popovic 2017). Indeed, if the existence of a law, policy or strategy on LLL is accepted as progress towards implementation, the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning (UIL) has identified 41 countries where such instruments exist (23 in Europe, 5 in Asia and the Pacific, 8 in the Americas, and 6 in Africa) (UIL, 2019) although the high incidence of interest in Europe may reflect the policy guidance and funding criteria used for the 2014-2020 programming period for EU Structural Funds (see EC, 2015).



This slow and uneven pace of implementation is due to many complex factors including the 'lack of workable and agreed upon strategies for implementation...the lack of a coherent and equitable system of financing LLL for all... and the underestimated resistance to change among the main stakeholders in the traditional systems of education' (Bengtsson 2013, p. 346).

Regardless, it is clear that taking steps to implement LLL demands a broad perspective that sees all learning activities as part of a national system of learning (Hasan 2012). Lifelong learning provides us with the organizational principle for thinking about educational priorities in a coherent, cross-sectoral and interconnected way. In that sense, issues of governance and coordination become central to discussions about how to operationalise LLL and develop an LLL ecosystem. For an LLL ecosystem to be established, there is a need to outline the institutional setup through which roles and responsibilities are matched with well-functioning system of coordination, monitoring and evaluation (ILO 2018). As noted by the EC, a lifelong learning strategy on its own is not enough to increase participation, but it is enabled by co-ordination and collaboration between different institutions and stakeholders.

In a LLL ecosystem however, the governance, coordination and social dialogue challenges are substantial. Given the scope of learning potentially included within a framework of LLL, the range of actors, systems and sub-systems at the national, regional and local levels creates a large, complex and fragmented policy landscape. The need to ensure sound initial education and basic skills to enable future learning, the importance of clear and accessible pathways between different education and training systems, including adult education and labour market programs, plus the importance of systems for the validation and recognition of formal and non-formal learning are all substantial challenges to be addressed. For example, in terms of adult education alone, there have been calls for reshaping organisational or institutional setups for effective delivery and monitoring of adult education including coordination between government and wider stakeholders in the field of education, employment and social protection, establishment of one-stop shops such as career guidance agencies and establishment of assessment and certification agencies (EC, 2015).

As education and training systems continue to evolve, the nature of the training offer has also become more diverse and digital. The growth of micro learning, digital credentials, massive online courses (MOOCs) and the personalisation of learning are affecting the role of all education, training and service providers involved.

The learning ecosystems that seek to unlock the potential of each individual, as well as the collective learning potential of society, are embedded in local communities, are learner centred and involve partnerships between different learning environments (ILO 2018b). Ensuring these networks are recognised and supported in LLL ecosystems is thus an important priority. Building an effective LLL ecosystem also demands establishment of mechanisms for policy alignment at local and regional levels (EC, 2015). Taken together, these perspectives and developments present a challenging picture of what might constitute a LLL ecosystem.

Furthermore, given the limited feasibility and significant challenges associated with bringing all aspects of LLL under the responsibility of one government ministry, it may be reasonable to expect countries to establish a clear allocation of responsibilities across ministries and make greater efforts to support coordination, collaboration and social dialogue through initiatives such as inter-ministerial and tripartite platforms. However, this coordination and framework for policy action should be based on agreed elements of the LLL system which would also then allow for indicators to be developed to track implementation of LLL (see for example the Composite Learning Index (CCL 2010) developed by the Canadian Council of Learning).

Any discussion of LLL ecosystems should also include the role of social partners. Building on earlier ILO normative and policy frameworks, the report of the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work argues that 'employer and worker organisations also have a leading role to play in this ecosystem' (ILO 2019, p. 31), a role that includes governance, financing and quality assurance and one that demand effective social dialogue to be in place.

This approach recognises that policies to promote lifelong learning can be taken by a variety of actors including the state, social partners, sector or occupational organisations and single companies. It also recognises that these different approaches and initiatives are embedded in the national institutional settings of the education and training system or systems that exist. Thus given the broad potential scope of a LLL ecosystem, one question that requires further consideration is what other steps might be taken to support development of LLL ecosystems beyond promoting the need for wider engagement, greater coordination and tripartite governance?



**REMOVING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION AND WIDENING ACCESS TO LEARNING ARE REGARDED AS NECESSARY STEPS TO ENSURE EQUITY AND TO END SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN SOCIETY. TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION AND BROADEN ACCESS TO LEARNING, THE REPORT OF THE ILO GLOBAL COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF WORK HAS RECOMMENDED A UNIVERSAL ENTITLEMENT TO LIFELONG LEARNING THAT ENABLES PEOPLE TO ACQUIRE SKILLS, RESKILL AND UPSKILL AND TO PROVIDE WORKERS WITH THE TIME AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT THEY NEED TO LEARN.**



## HOW DO YOU FUND LIFELONG LEARNING?

A key issue often raised in discussions on lifelong learning is financing. As education and training systems become increasingly decentralised, demand driven and reliant on cost sharing between governments, learners and the private sector, financing of LLL presents a complex challenge, particularly given that funding is not always allocated across education and training systems according to lifecycle needs or used to incentivise individuals to participate in learning at key stages in their lives. Whilst international data suggests slight recent increases in funding to education as a whole (UNESCO 2019), there are relatively low levels of funding for adult learning and education. Forty-two percent of countries spend less than 1% of their public education budgets on adult learning and education (UNESCO, 2016), and at the same time there is evidence of reduced levels of formal training offered in enterprises (World Bank 2017).

Some estimates suggest that to achieve the targets agreed for SDG4, between 2015 and 2030, low and middle-income countries will need to increase spending on education and training from the current US\$1.2 trillion per year to US\$3 trillion, requiring an annual rate of growth in public education spending of 7 percent (UNESCO 2018).

**Required annual global spending target required to achieve SDG4 from 2015-2030:**

**1.2 TRILLION**  
USD PER YEAR

**2015**

**3 TRILLION**  
USD PER YEAR

**2030**

Source: UNESCO 2018

To achieve the increased level of financial support required by education and training systems particularly in low and middle-income countries, there is a need to meet the financing gap by progressively enlarging and broadening the tax base so spending on education and training can be increased (International Commission on Financing Global Education 2016). When accompanied by adequate transparency and accountability measures, the allocation of additional fiscal resources for the improvement of the education and training system can contribute to a better acceptance of taxes by the public (ILO 2018a). Among possible measures to broaden the tax base is also the reduction of exemptions, the fight against tax evasion by both domestic and international companies (UNESCO 2018), and the use of formalisation strategies which increase the number of taxable entities (ILO 2015). Whilst these measures are aimed at increasing the level of resources available, consideration must also be given to how these resources are made available at key stages throughout the lifecycle.

Traditionally, publicly financed education and training has been mainly directed towards children and young adults not yet in employment, but it also clearly needs to focus on workers and jobseekers to improve their employability and prepare them for transitions between jobs in increasingly volatile labour markets (ILO 2018). This challenge should also be met through the effort of employers to support learning at, and for, work. Whilst employer participation in training is affected by various factors including firm size, information asymmetries, liquidity constraints and the risk of poaching, one of the major reasons governments take action to improve the supply of skills is to encourage formal sector enterprises to provide more and better training.

The important role of employers in supporting LLL has been recognised by the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work which noted the need 'to explore viable options to incentivise businesses to increase their investment in training, including looking at how accounting standards treat training costs' (ILO 2019, p. 31).

Whilst governments may subsidise enterprise training directly from central government budget appropriations, they also often rely on specially designated training funds linked to enterprise levy-grant schemes to fund initial and continuing vocational education and training.



While many variants are found in terms of actual practice, a common feature of levy-grant schemes is the use of payroll or other levies to accumulate funds that are then used to fund training or to incentivise firms to invest in more and better training of workers (ILO 2017a). Training levies can also be sector specific and may be based as appropriate on the value of turnover, output or the value of contracts rather than only company payrolls.

A greater future role for training funds has been proposed by the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work which recommended the establishment of 'national or sectoral education and training funds...managed by tripartite boards' covering workers in both the formal and informal economies (ILO 2019, p. 31).

The Commission further proposed linking education and training to a reconfigured "employment insurance system" or "social funds" (ILO 2019, p. 31) which highlights the important links between lifelong learning, active labour market programs and social protection systems, and which calls for more integrated financing systems that span traditionally separate policy domains of education, training, employment and social protection. Given the broad potential scope of a LLL ecosystem, further consideration should be given to the question of which elements of financing should be prioritised in the development of LLL ecosystems.

## WHAT IS AN ENTITLEMENT TO LIFELONG LEARNING?

In response to the challenge of increasing participation and broadening access to learning, the report of the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work has recommended a 'universal entitlement to lifelong learning that enables people to acquire skills, reskill and upskill' (ILO, 2019, p. 11). It is widely recognised that removing barriers to participation and widening access to learning are regarded as necessary steps to ensure equity and to end social exclusion in society (UNESCO 2016a). Barriers to learning can be addressed through a variety of means, including the provision of literacy and numeracy training along with improved career and vocational guidance. Financial incentives can also be used to steer individuals to acquire certain types of skills. Common approaches include scholarships, grants, bursaries, allowances, vouchers, training cheques and credits. These are the most direct and flexible financial incentives for steering education and training decisions and can be targeted at various groups.

Of particular interest to LLL as it relates to adult learning is the use of individual time/savings/learning accounts which are another type of instrument for governments to encourage training participation. These allow individuals to save up time or money which they can subsequently use for training purposes. In some cases, countries have built in mechanisms to steer training choices towards skills in high demand (OECD, 2017). In France, time saved through the *Compte Personnel de Formation* (Individual Training Account) can be used to take up a list of training courses selected by the Regional Councils, the social partners and the professional associations, which often reflect foreseeable economic needs. The successful Scottish individual learning account ILA 200 scheme is directed towards low income individuals and provided up to £200 annually towards tuition fees for a wide range of courses that do not necessarily lead to a formal qualification (Ziderman, 2016).

However, the implementation of these schemes is often limited to specific target groups (eg. long term unemployed, low skilled, NEETs) with limited application outside a fixed set of program conditions. In the context of social protection systems, individual savings accounts for the unemployed have been criticised for providing a very limited potential for risk pooling and giving insufficient protection for the most disadvantaged workers (see ILO 2017).

Whilst access to general education is considered a right, it can be argued that achieving a right for all to access formal and non-formal learning throughout their lives has yet to be explicitly guaranteed in international instruments (see UN,

1999). As such, the Global Commission's recommendation for a universal entitlement to lifelong learning builds on the types of schemes outlined above to 'provide workers with the time and financial support they need to learn' (ILO, 2019, p. 31).

This concept has parallels to the proposal for a Universal Right to Learn (URL) by the World Economic Forum which entails an annual allowance of "learning tokens" for every citizen above the age of 16, regardless of their employment status, which could be exchanged for skills training (WEF, 2018). It also reflects similar rights based approaches analysed by UNESCO which document country initiatives to provide new entitlements for lifelong learning (Chakroun and Daelman, 2018). Whilst the concept of learning entitlements is thus not new in itself, the concept of universality and the link with social protection systems promoted by the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work reflects a new direction in thinking on financing LLL.

Whilst a number of issues surround efforts to improve access to LLL, including the use of sectoral education and training funds, the question remains as to the extent to which the use of universal entitlements should be a key strategy?



# POLICIES FOR LLL



It needs to be recognised that there is no universal strategy for implementing LLL that applies to all countries and each country will have to develop its unique approach. However, various policy themes are repeatedly given priority in discussions that seek to answer the question of what steps can be taken to move beyond the rhetoric of LLL to make it a reality. These include:

- **Foundation and core employability skills** - Lifelong learning requires good foundation skills among both young people and adults, particularly those with poor initial education. This requires fundamental changes to curriculum and pedagogy in all education and training sectors, countering drop outs emphasising willingness to learn as much as content mastery. Greater priority needs to be given to numeracy and literacy training, including a focus on digital skills and core skills for employability;
- **Access** – Ensuring equitable access to learning requires a lifecycle perspective. Disadvantaged groups such as workers in the informal economy, rural workers, persons with disabilities and minorities should be given equal access to pre-school and early childhood education as well as to adult learning. Program entry requirements that demand formal qualifications should not act as a barrier to learning, and equally important are the diverse learning methods, courses and settings that cater for multiple learning needs and support increased access;

- **Learning Pathways** – This highlights the need to examine the link between informal and non-formal learning, qualifications and programs offered in different education and training systems. All learning should be recognised, not just formal courses, and learners should be able to easily move between different programs, building a portfolio of skills and knowledge. Whilst systems for transferring credit and determining equivalence of formal qualifications are improving, gaps remain, especially in recognising non-formal and informal learning and improving the pathways between different types of programs;
- **Financing** - There is a need to create a coherent and affordable system of financing LLL. Additional public resources are needed along with new mechanisms to attract private resources to strengthen those parts of the system that are currently under resourced. Many adult learning systems in particular are insufficiently prepared for the reskilling challenges that lay ahead (OECD 2019). To make LLL a reality there needs to be a revival of adult education for social and civic purposes;
- **Incentives** - Financial and non-financial incentives influence engagement and encourage participation. Incentives should be used to encourage individuals to maintain their employability and for employers to encourage and support their employees to learn, both on and off the job. Incentives and funds should be allocated according to lifecycle needs and deployed effectively;
- **Vocational Guidance and Labour Market Information** – Young people and adults in transition need up to date and relevant information to make informed choices about what education and training will support them in career development and where they can obtain it from. Labour Market Information Systems (LMIS) need to respond to these demands;
- **Coordination** - Joined up government action is required for policy planning and programs that address the above priorities. This includes improved tripartite governance and coordination at national, sectoral and local level and related institution building. Both horizontal and vertical coordination involving all players of lifelong learning ecosystems. There is also a need to build and capitalise on the work surrounding Learning Cities and Learning Regions.



# POLICY ACTION AND THE ILO



The policy priorities discussed in the previous section are all referred to in the 2004 ILO Recommendation concerning Human Resources Development: Education, Training & Lifelong Learning (R.195) (ILO 2004). R.195 calls on Member States to develop and implement, through the process of social dialogue, education, training and lifelong learning policies that promote people's employability throughout their lives. As such, this instrument continues to provide a relevant normative framework for ILO action on LLL.

Whilst the ILO's skills work is recognized as 'having a unique value and being complementary to the skills activities of its partners and constituents' (ILO 2016, p.x), given the growing renewed interest in LLL, it is timely to reflect on the extent to which ILO work on skills development addresses the key issues and policy priorities likely to affect implementation of LLL.

Given the broad scope of LLL, it can be argued that all current ILO work related to skills development can be seen as supporting LLL in some way. Issues such as skills governance, skills recognition skills anticipation, work based learning and skills for migration can all be viewed as supporting LLL in its broadest sense. However, whilst these priorities address different elements of an LLL ecosystem, efforts to support more systemic approaches to LLL will need to be strengthened.<sup>1</sup>

Given the discussion presented thus far, and taking into account the current scope of ILO research and development cooperation activities on skills development, in general terms the following areas can be identified as requiring additional effort if LLL is to be given greater priority in ILO programming:

- **Financing of LLL:** in terms of the use of training funds, incentives to increase the participation of adults and employers and the use of individual entitlements linked to social protection systems;
- **Governance of LLL:** in terms of how governance and coordination mechanisms can support development of LLL ecosystems; and
- **Work based learning for LLL:** in terms of engaging employers and supporting formal and informal learning in the workplace

Whilst these broad areas of action could be considered future priorities for ILO work on LLL, given the broad range of challenges associated with LLL, there remains considerable scope for ongoing ILO work beyond these areas to assist member states to take LLL from rhetoric to reality.

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<sup>1</sup> The ILO Program and Budget for the 2018-19 biennium makes one explicit reference to LLL. Criteria for success 1.3.3 under indicator 1.3 notes 'government, employers' or workers' organizations develop, revise or implement evidence-based policies and programmes that increase the employability of disadvantaged groups, increase their access to training opportunities and ease transitions into decent work and provide lifelong learning opportunities' (ILO 2017, p.15).

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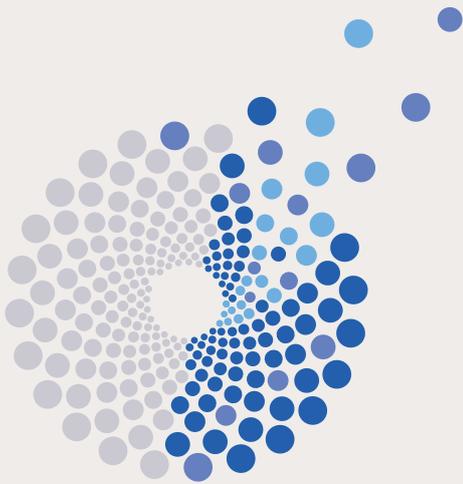
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