



## **Background Note for E-Discussion on Quality, Innovative Apprenticeships for the Future of Work**

*Organized by the ILO with support from partner organizations such as the European Commission, the OECD, UNESCO and the Global Apprenticeship Network (GAN).*

### **The future of work, youth employment and apprenticeships**

Global youth unemployment continues to be a major development issue, with nearly 70.9 million young people unemployed in 2017, more than the total population of Canada, Switzerland, Singapore, New Zealand, Portugal, Namibia and Jamaica. In addition, youth are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults. Responding to the problem of youth unemployment (and by extension adult unemployment) is an issue of great concern and requires bringing to the forefront modern skills and employment policies that promote the creation of jobs as well as address skills mismatch. Within this context, giving youth a better start in the labour market is a key priority for many countries. The importance of achieving decent employment and work has been highlighted in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), more concretely, SDGs 4 and 8, on promoting quality education and lifelong learning, and decent work and economic growth for all, respectively.

Wide scale youth unemployment represents a social paradox: while many youth are looking for work, many employers cannot find workers with the skills they need. This type of skills mismatch is being accentuated significantly by the transformational changes buffeting the world of work such as technological innovation, globalization, climate change and shifts in the organization of work through platform-based economies. These transformational changes have important implications for education and training systems to find the right policies and programmes. What is more, traditional school-based vocational education and training systems face growing challenges to be more flexible and responsive in ensuring that young people are better equipped with the skills to take on new jobs today and in the future.

Against this background, quality apprenticeships and other work-based learning programmes are critical to meeting the challenge of the future world of work. While apprenticeships alone are not a panacea for high youth unemployment, they are part of the solution that provides youth with technical and core skills that are increasingly necessary to find work in today's labour markets. In Switzerland, for example, a dynamic apprenticeship programme is an integral part of the country's educational system, equipping young people with the capabilities required by the labour market and exposing them to the use of new technologies. Through this programme, youth unemployment has been kept low while a large pool of new talent becomes available to the country's economy. Other countries with a long tradition of apprenticeship systems, such as Austria and Germany, have a higher proportion of young apprentices and report lower rates of youth unemployment.

### **Apprenticeships also benefit enterprises, training institutions and governments**

In addition to closing the skills gaps, apprenticeships contribute to increasing enterprise productivity and growth. Other advantages offered through apprenticeship schemes include strengthened links between training, and employers and sectors, to provide for more effective and relevant skills training for young people.



Furthermore, apprenticeships have a strong track record of return on investment to governments as individual successfully completing their apprenticeships report improved career prospects, and higher earning over their lifetime.

### **The ILO's work in promoting quality apprenticeships**

The ILO provides technical support to Member States with the aim of creating and strengthening apprenticeship systems. During the past five years, this has included supporting improvements in country-appropriate responses to the school-to-work transition through apprenticeships, and in encouraging the strengthening of public-private partnerships to better guarantee both the quality and sustainability of vocational education and training programmes to more than 25 countries across the world. It also develops new knowledge products to strengthen the capacity of constituents to more effectively establish and implement apprenticeships. Towards this end, in 2017, ILO Director-General Guy Ryder launched the ILO Toolkit for Quality Apprenticeships (Vol I): Guide for Policy Makers.

The ILO Toolkit presents examples of good practice from ILO constituents around the world and demonstrates how Quality Apprenticeship systems and programmes can be developed in practical terms.

### **Challenges to apprenticeship systems**

Successful examples of countries like Switzerland, Austria and Germany have renewed public interest in apprenticeship systems. Yet, despite numerous benefits afforded by apprenticeships, many countries, particularly developing ones, have challenges in establishing, scaling up and sustaining high-quality apprenticeships. A key issue is to find the root causes of the problem and possible solutions.

### **Issues for discussion**

This E-discussion invites skills development experts and practitioners, constituents, representatives of employers' and workers' organizations, academia and international organizations, among others, to discuss emerging trends, innovations, challenges and solutions and lessons learned on the topic of Quality Apprenticeships for the Future of Work. Among the questions to be discussed over the coming two weeks are:

1. How do apprenticeships benefit various stakeholders such as employers, trade unions, governments and apprentices? Are there any institutions in your country that collect and disseminate evidence about the benefits of apprenticeships?
2. In view of rapid changes in labour market contributing to an increase in skills mismatches, how important is the role of apprenticeships in aligning skills supply to the future of work?
3. In your country, is there a clear, common understanding of the differences between apprenticeships, internships, traineeships, learnerships and other forms of work-based learning?
4. Despite widely accepted benefits, why do many countries have difficulties in establishing, scaling up and sustaining high-quality apprenticeships? What specific challenges are faced in implementing and expanding apprenticeships in your country?



5. What innovations are needed to make apprenticeships more attractive for youth and employers respectively, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)?
  
6. What strategies could be used to ensure better gender equality and disability inclusion in apprenticeships?

**END**

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