

# Building Effective Skills Strategies at National and Local Levels

## - Project Brochure -



*What is the OECD Skills Strategy? .....2*

*How can countries benefit from building a Skills Strategy? .....2*

*How does the OECD work with countries to build an effective Skills Strategy?.....3*

*What are the next steps? .....4*

- The OECD Skills Strategy focuses on how countries can strengthen their skills systems by developing relevant skills, activating skills supply and putting skills to effective use. Effective skills systems connect skills with jobs, productivity, innovation and social cohesion.
- Each national project offers a highly tailored approach to focus on the unique skills challenges, context and objectives of each country. The project leverages OECD comparative data and policy analysis, fosters collaboration across ministerial portfolios and levels of government while engaging all relevant stakeholders – employers, trade unions, and civil society organisations.
- Interactive workshops help promote a shared understanding among national stakeholders of the skills challenges their country faces, providing a strong basis to move from shared diagnosis to developing and implementing concrete actions.

## What is the OECD Skills Strategy?

### *Translating better skills into better economic and social outcomes*

The **OECD Skills Strategy** provides countries with a strategic approach to better align education and macroeconomic development

- by **developing the skills** and human capital relevant for a country's socio-economic and demographic context starting from early childhood up to adult education
- by **activating the country's skills** supply on the labour market, for example by developing policies to better integrate vulnerable groups in the labour market
- by **using skills more effectively** and creating a better match between people's skills and the requirements of their jobs as well as economic demand



The OECD is now working collaboratively with countries on applying the Skills Strategy framework to build more effective Skills Strategies at national and local levels. Experience with this process in the first participating countries – Austria, Korea, Norway and Portugal – already indicates that it is leading to new ways of approaching public policy that will, in turn, lead to more effective policy design and implementation.

## How can countries benefit from building a Skills Strategy?

The national Skills Strategy project can assist countries in tackling a wide range of economic and social challenges. These challenges may be well known to the experts of the national policy scene and other stakeholders. Yet, there may still be a lack of knowledge on how to best address these challenges or there has not yet been the chance to build consensus or there has simply not yet been a window of opportunity to address these challenges.

The Skills Strategy project mobilises national expertise together with with international evidence and experience, to build a shared understanding of what the country's skills priorities are and how they can be addressed.

### *Examples of challenges a country could tackle through a skills strategy*

#### *Is the country developing the right skills?*

- Do people have a solid base of foundation skills that enable them to learn throughout their working lives in response to changing skills demands?
- How could adults benefit from continuous learning within the workplace and through education and training based also on employer engagement?
- Are the current systems of education provision through schools, vocational education and training and higher education institutions providing the skills demanded by an innovation-driven economy?

#### *Is the country activating its supply of skills?*

- How can a country enable working parents to combine raising families and pursuing careers?
- How can a country ensure unemployed people remain engaged and do not become detached from the labour market?
- How can certain disadvantaged groups, such as older workers and people with a migrant background, gain better labour market access?

### Is a country putting its skills to effective use?

- How can a country tackle unemployment and help young people to gain a foothold in the labour market?
- How can employers make better use of their employees' skills?
- How can countries build up new economic potential and strengthen innovation and entrepreneurship?

### Do countries' institutional settings provide the enabling conditions for a more effective skills system?

- How can a whole-of-government approach be strengthened to ensure that skills policies are aligned? How can ministries responsible for education, employment, regional development, innovation and tax cooperate more effectively to deliver better skills outcomes?
- How can employers be encouraged to invest in skills development and also make more effective use of skills at work?
- How can countries ensure adequate flexibility and adaptability of skills policies at the regional and local levels?



*“To diagnose what are Norway's challenges is helpful, but it is also the easiest part of the job. Now the demanding job is to implement policies that allow more people get a second chance in the workplace (...)”*

Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg following the launch of the OECD Skills Strategy Diagnostic Report for Norway.

## How does OECD work with countries to build an effective Skills Strategy?

Collaborating with the OECD in developing a national Skills Strategy involves a new approach from the OECD to support the countries in more effective policy development and implementation. Each national skills project:

- Is a collaboration between the OECD and the country concerned (where relevant, the European Commission may also be involved)
- Is carefully tailored to the country context and priorities
- Uses the framework of the three pillars of the OECD Skills Strategy (developing, activating and using skills) and addresses overarching governance questions for policy coherence
- Is designed to draw in all relevant ministries and agencies as well as all relevant stakeholders to:
  - Foster dialogue across ministries, agencies and stakeholders
  - Build a deep and shared understanding of the country's skills challenges and their inter-connections
  - Develop a commitment to working together to tackle the challenges
- Draws actively on the available international evidence and insights, which can include:
  - International data comparisons
  - International experience – concrete examples
  - International experts

Each project moves step-by-step from diagnosis towards action to achieve better economic and social outcomes. The process is divided into **two phases** - diagnosis of the policy challenges and building a concrete action plan - which both involve all relevant government ministries as well as stakeholders.

### *The Diagnostic Phase – reaching a deep, shared understanding of the challenges*

A key element of successful reform is building a deep, shared understanding of the challenges facing the country. Taking the time to fully explore the challenges with all stakeholders before moving to action is important to:

- Clarify whether the perceived challenges are, on closer examination, the real challenges
- Facilitate the process of identifying the policy obstacles and how to tackle them in the Action Phase
- Lay the ground for successful implementation by engaging all the stakeholders in the process

This phase would typically involve several diagnostic workshops held over a period of a few months that would involve all relevant ministries and national and/or regional stakeholders. Workshops use techniques designed by the OECD and adapted to the country's context in close consultation with the national project team – they are designed to facilitate dialogue among the stakeholders and highlight relevant international evidence. The main skills challenges identified are set out in a short report and presented publicly along with an “evidence pack” and workshop highlights.

### *The Action Phase – making reform happen*

This phase involves several workshops that focus on tackling the skills challenges identified in the Diagnostic Phase and building agreement on what actions need to be taken and by whom.

The Action Phase has produces a set of proposals for action, which can be used as input to developing an action plan for improving the country's skills system. Such proposals will have widespread support and can be successfully implemented. During the Action Phase project activities are designed to support, and contribute to, the country's own skills policy agenda.

A full Skills Strategy project, comprising a Diagnostic Phase and an Action Phase, would typically be carried out over a period of 18-24 months, in order to allow time for reflection and further discussion at the national level between workshops. A two-step approach can also be envisaged if a country should wish to embark only upon the diagnostic phase in the first instance.

## **What are the next steps?**

### *Possible next steps*

The OECD would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with countries on “Building national and local skills strategies” and would look forward to discussing in more detail the potential shape of this collaboration.

The OECD's costs for the project would need to be covered by a voluntary contribution from the participating country which could be supplemented by funding from additional sources, such as the European Commission.

### **Contacts:**

- Andreas Schleicher, Advisor to the Secretary-General on Education Policy, Deputy Director for Education and Skills, Phone +33 1 4524 9366; [Andreas.Schleicher@oecd.org](mailto:Andreas.Schleicher@oecd.org)
- Joanne Caddy, Team Leader, Effective Skills Strategies, Directorate for Education and Skills, Phone +33 1 4524 1636; [Joanne.Caddy@oecd.org](mailto:Joanne.Caddy@oecd.org)