

OECD CENTRE FOR SKILLS

OECD Skills Summit 2026 Joint Summary

Unlocking Talent Across Generations

27-28 April 2026, İstanbul, Türkiye

The Government of Türkiye, and the OECD organised the 6th biennial OECD Skills Summit in İstanbul, Türkiye on 27-28 April 2026. Held in person under the theme “Unlocking Talent Across Generations”, the 2026 Summit brought together ministers and senior officials from 36 OECD Member and non-Member countries and 12 international and regional organisations, in addition to Turkish and OECD delegates. Ministers and senior officials represented diverse skills-relevant portfolios including education, employment and training, the economy, science, technology and innovation.

Discussions focused on the three Summit themes: i) Rethinking Formal Education – Recalibrating Strategies for a Lifetime of Opportunities; ii) Harnessing Adults’ Skills – Empowering Workers Across Generations; iii) Tapping into Hidden Talent – Leveraging the Potential of Overlooked Groups.

This document presents a summary of the event by the Government of Türkiye and the OECD.

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JT03589614

OECD Skills Summit 2026: Joint Summary



Background of the OECD Skills Summit 2026

1. Demographic shifts driven by population ageing and labour migration, compounded by the green and digital transformations, call for rethinking education and training systems to unlock people's potential at every stage of life.
2. What students learn and how they are taught must evolve to equip them with skills needed to navigate ongoing transformations and foster a culture of lifelong learning. Teachers, too, must be empowered with skills needed for an age of artificial intelligence. At the same time reallocating educational investments and infrastructure and sharing innovative practices effectively will be essential to modernising formal education.
3. As working lives grow longer and workforces shrink, lifelong learning becomes vital to maintain and improve employability and optimise the use of existing talent. Removing barriers to adult learning, recognising prior skills, and fostering inter-generational knowledge sharing will enable individuals of all generations to thrive in a rapidly changing world.
4. At the same time, expanding workforce participation by unlocking the potential of under-utilised groups – such as women, youth not in education, employment or training (NEET), people with a migrant background and others – can help alleviate skills shortages, boost employment, and strengthen societal resilience. By investing in lifelong learning and inclusive workforce strategies, countries can lay the foundation for a more dynamic, adaptable, and sustainable future.
5. In this context, Türkiye hosted the OECD Skills Summit 2026 under the theme “Unlocking Talent Across Generations”.

OECD Skills Summit 2026: Key facts

- The Summit brought together around 220 participants from 36 countries, spanning the OECD and beyond, and 12 international and regional organisations, in addition to Turkish and OECD delegates.
- There was high-level engagement by the President, Minister of Labour and Social Security and Minister of National Education of the Republic of Türkiye, the OECD Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General, and 28 ministers, deputy/vice ministers and state secretaries from diverse countries and portfolios.
- Discussions centred on the growing importance of skills in the context of demographic shifts, as well as technological change – particularly AI – and the green transition. These transformations

are creating shared challenges across countries, requiring co-ordinated and forward-looking policies.

- A central message was that skills should be developed across the life course. While lifelong learning has long been a policy ambition, the current context makes its implementation urgent – shifting from prioritising education systems to fostering continuous skills development.
- Participants stressed that education systems must prepare individuals for multiple transitions over longer and more dynamic careers. This includes strengthening foundational and transferable skills, investing in teachers, and embedding innovation and flexibility into learning systems.
- Adult learning systems must become more learner-centered and embedded across the life course, supported by flexible provision, stronger guidance systems, and more effective cost-sharing between governments, employers and individuals.
- Using the talent of underrepresented groups – including youth, women, migrants and older workers – was mentioned by participants as an economic and social priority, requiring early intervention, inclusive workplaces, and integrated support systems to strengthen participation and resilience.
- Overall, the Summit underscored that skills policy is a shared, system-wide responsibility requiring stronger collaboration among governments, social partners, and international and regional organisations, alongside better data, and international co-operation to translate insights into action.

OECD Skills Summit 2026

6. The Government of Türkiye and the OECD organised the 6th biennial OECD Skills Summit on 27-28 April 2026 in Istanbul, Türkiye. It brought together more than 220 participants from 36 countries, spanning the OECD and beyond, and 12 international and regional organisations, in addition to Turkish and OECD delegates (see Annex A for a full list). Attendance was at a high level - 28 ministers, vice/deputy ministers and state secretaries attended.

7. The two-day Summit included a tour de table; an official welcome with H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of the Republic of Türkiye; H.E. Prof. Dr. Vedat Işıkhan, Minister of Labour and Social Security; and Mathias Cormann, Secretary-General of the OECD; four keynote speeches; opening presentations; site visits; side events; and discussions across three sessions. These events are described in more detail below.

Overview of Day 1: 27 April

Tour de table

8. On Monday 27 April, the Summit opened with a Tour de Table of Heads of Delegations, co-chaired by H.E. Prof. Dr. Yusuf Tekin, Minister of National Education of the Republic of Türkiye, and Frantisek Ruzicka, OECD Deputy Secretary-General. Delegates were invited to share recent skills policy developments, priorities and challenges since the 2024 Summit.

9. The interventions collectively underscored that skills development is becoming a central policy priority in response to accelerating structural change driven by digitalisation, AI, demographic shifts, and the green transition, requiring more agile, inclusive, and demand-responsive skills systems.

10. There was widespread recognition that labour markets are evolving rapidly, requiring more adaptive and future-oriented skills systems. Many participants highlighted the growing importance of digital, AI-related, socio-emotional, and foundational competencies, alongside the need to continuously update skills throughout working lives. However, there was variation in emphasis: some countries prioritised foundational skills and literacy/numeracy, while others focused more strongly on advanced digital and AI skills, or socio-emotional and transversal skills.

11. Lifelong learning emerged as a key priority. In this context, there was strong emphasis on moving beyond traditional education models towards more flexible, modular, and individualised systems for skills development across all stages in life. This includes expanding vocational pathways, strengthening adult learning, and developing tools such as learning accounts, micro-credentials, and recognition of prior learning.

12. Closer alignment between education and labour market needs is critical for reducing skills mismatches and supporting smoother school-to-work transitions. This is being pursued through stronger employer engagement, sectoral skills bodies, improved skills intelligence, and enhanced career guidance. Many interventions stressed the importance of reducing skills mismatches and supporting smoother school-to-work transitions. Employers have a critical role in communicating not only short-term recruitment challenges, but helping to anticipate skills needs in the long term. Countries take slightly different approaches: whether formalised sectoral governance structures, social partnership models, or more centralised state-led planning and training systems.

13. Inclusion and equity considerations were consistently highlighted. Several contributions focused on ensuring access to training for underrepresented groups, such as youth NEETs and women, improving foundational skills, and addressing barriers linked to age, gender, migration status, or socio-economic background. At the same time, the focus of inclusion policies varied: some countries prioritised reducing gender gaps in the labour market, others emphasised migrants and integration, while others focused on disadvantaged learners or territorial disparities.

14. VET was widely seen as a vital part of skills systems. Dual systems, apprenticeships, and work-based learning were repeatedly cited as effective models, particularly when employers are actively involved training is responsive to technological change.

15. Finally, governance and system coherence were identified as critical enablers. Participants stressed the importance of whole-of-government approaches, social dialogue with employers and unions, and stronger co-ordination across institutions. International co-operation and shared learning were also seen as important to support reform efforts.

16. After the tour de table, the Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth of Germany and the OECD organised a side event on “*Towards a Global TVET Agenda*” (see Box 1).

Box 1. Side event: Towards a Global TVET Agenda (27 April)

A side event on “*Towards a Global TVET Agenda*” was organised by the German Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMBFSFJ) and the OECD. The initiative, developed in partnership with international organisations, aims to strengthen technical and vocational education and training (TVET) systems.

In his presentation, Mr. Andreas Schleicher, the OECD Director of Education and Skills, highlighted the urgency of a co-ordinated global approach in light of major demographic and technological shifts. Fragmented policy responses are no longer sufficient in a context of labour shortages, automation, and ageing populations. Opening the session, Ms. Catrin Hannken, Director General, VET and Further

Learning at BMBFSFJ, underlined the strategic importance of TVET in a context of rapid change and geopolitical uncertainty, calling for stronger international co-operation on TVET.

The discussion highlighted persistent global challenges, including the limited visibility of TVET, slow reform processes, and mismatches between skills needs and infrastructure. Participants emphasised the need to enhance the attractiveness, flexibility, and responsiveness of TVET systems, supported by better data, stronger partnerships, and earlier, more effective career guidance. Several countries highlighted the importance of the Initiative and voiced interest in joining the effort.

Source: BIBB (2026), "Towards a Global TVET Agenda", www.bibb.de/en/207285.php.

Official welcome

17. The Summit was formally opened by H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of the Republic of Türkiye; H.E. Prof. Dr. Vedat Işıkhan, Minister of Labour and Social Security; and Mathias Cormann, OECD Secretary-General.

18. President Erdoğan underlined the transformative impact of artificial intelligence and broader technological change on labour markets, noting that such shifts must be actively shaped. He described changing job content, emerging occupations and new forms of work organisation, and stressed human capital as a key determinant of national success amid shrinking working-age populations and accelerating digital and green transitions, including Industry 4.0, robotics and battery technologies. He also pointed to challenges such as declining foundational skills and an ageing teaching workforce, stressing the importance of adapting education systems and expanding lifelong learning. He highlighted Türkiye's efforts to boost labour market participation, particularly among women and under-represented groups, through measures including maternity leave, education investment, vocational education reform and youth employment initiatives aimed at reducing informality. He called for practical, people-centred policies based on co-operation across government, education systems and social partners.

19. Minister Işıkhan emphasised alignment between skills policy and broader megatrends, particularly inclusiveness, with a focus on women and youth participation. He noted ongoing training initiatives supporting around three million students and stressed the importance of strengthening labour market integration in response to structural change.

20. Finally, the OECD Secretary-General Cormann underlined that skills policies must adapt to changes in the labour market, including those brought about by artificial intelligence, to effectively address inequality of opportunities and ultimately help drive growth. The Secretary-General stressed the importance of lifelong learning, including through more accessible training opportunities. Further, he highlighted Türkiye's reforms in vocational education and work-based learning, including the National Employment Strategy 2025-2028, which promotes improved skills matching for jobseekers and employers.

Keynote speeches

21. The opening session was followed by keynote speeches by four invited speakers.

22. Mr. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Head of Turkish Delegation to NATO PA, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, highlighted the rapidly changing global context driven by shifting supply chains, geopolitics, and technological change. He stressed that skills are becoming a "global currency", requiring both competition and co-operation grounded in trust. He also underlined the importance of lifelong learning, adaptability, and better leveraging the potential of women and migrants.

23. Prof. Sharon K. Parker, John Curtin Distinguished Professor in organisational behaviour, Curtin University emphasised the central role of work design in unlocking talent, presenting the SMART framework (Stimulating, Relational, Autonomy, Mastery, Tolerable demands). She argued that well-

designed work supports skill development, inclusion, and healthy ageing, while poorly aligned policies risk undermining the benefits of AI adoption.

24. Mr. Özgür Burak Akkol, Chair of the Board of Directors of Turkish Confederation of Employer Associations (TİSK), focused on the implications of AI, automation, and robotics, stressing the importance of technologies that augment rather than replace workers. He pointed to large-scale investments in vocational education and digital transformation in Türkiye, alongside initiatives to strengthen sectoral collaboration and improve workplace safety through AI applications.

25. Finally, Prof. Sandra McNally, Professor of Economics, University of Surrey; Director Education and Skills Programme, the Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics, highlighted the growing importance of analytical, technical, and social skills. She stressed the need for stronger data on skills demand, broader education pathways including apprenticeships, and core competencies such as literacy, numeracy, communication, and problem-solving. She also underlined the importance of integrating skills policy into wider economic strategies, using well-designed incentives, and ensuring rigorous evaluation of new policies.

Site visits

26. The first day concluded with site visits organised by Türkiye to the Yıldız Technical University (YTU) Yıldız Teknopark and YTU Maçka Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School (see Box 2). These visits to schools and businesses illustrated practical examples of policies aimed at unlocking talent across generations, including through work-based learning, education reform and employer engagement.

Box 2. OECD Skills Summit 2026: Site visits

Yıldız Technical University (YTU) Yıldız Teknopark

A site visit to YTÜ Yıldız Teknopark, hosted by Prof. Dr. Lutfihak Alpkın, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Security of the Republic of Türkiye, showcased one of Türkiye's leading innovation ecosystems. The Teknopark, which is the country's largest, operates across four locations and supports over 750 entrepreneurs. It provides a sector-focused innovation model spanning AI, fintech, health, edtech, defence, gaming, energy, and e-commerce, supported by targeted incentives and tax exemptions that are particularly important for start-ups and scale-ups. The ecosystem combines university-based research capacity with entrepreneurship, technology transfer, investment, and prototyping infrastructure.

The visit began with a presentation by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Muhammet Garip, General Manager of the Teknopark, who highlighted its end-to-end support model – from project submission and entrepreneurship training to international scaling. He noted strong collaboration with industry partners, with the strategic ambition of fostering at least one Turkish unicorn. Participants also heard about structured entrepreneurship programmes, and observed demonstrations from companies originating in the Teknopark. A tour of facilities showcased applied innovation, including 3D printing and advanced prototyping laboratories.

Yıldız Technical University (YTU) Maçka Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School

A site visit to YTU Maçka Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School, hosted by Ms. Celile Eren Ökten, Deputy Minister of National Education of the Republic of Türkiye, highlighted innovative approaches to vocational education. Supported through a protocol signed between the Ministry of National Education and Yıldız Technical University, the school is a pioneering vocational and technical Anatolian high school offering a five-year programme that integrates academic education with strong

technical and applied training. The school is designed as an “early university” model, combining laboratory-based instruction, close co-operation with university academics, R&D projects developed by students and teachers, and achievements in national and international competitions, while aiming to prepare students both for higher education and for the labour market.

The visit included discussions with students, who shared their experiences of combining classroom learning with hands-on technical education and workplace-oriented training. They underscored the school's emphasis on applied skills, foreign language development, and exposure to real-world problem-solving. Participants also heard presentations from school leadership on its model of university–industry collaboration, dual training pathways, and focus on advanced technical English and digital skills. The programme further included a tour of school facilities, including laboratories and workshops showcasing engineering applications and emerging technologies.

Source: YTU Yıldız Teknopark (2026), “YTU Yıldız Teknopark”, www.yildizteknopark.com.tr/en/; YTU Maçka Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School (2026), “YTU Maçka Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School”, <https://itumtal.itu.edu.tr/en>.

Overview of Day 2: 28 April

Opening presentations

27. On Tuesday 28 April, the Summit resumed with opening presentations by H.E. Prof. Dr. Vedat Işıkhann, Minister of Labour and Social Security; and Mr. Mathias Cormann, OECD Secretary-General. They reaffirmed the importance of international dialogue and peer learning in addressing shared skills challenges. They stressed the economic risks of ageing populations and declining fertility, which threaten to slow global GDP growth unless productivity is improved. The OECD Secretary-General emphasised that strengthening foundational skills and bridging generational technology gaps are essential for raising wages and extending productive working lives. To mitigate these demographic pressures, targeted policies must focus on strengthening teacher training, expanding adult participation in training, and enabling individuals currently excluded from employment or education to realise their full potential.

28. Discussion took place around the three themes of the Summit: i) Rethinking Formal Education – Recalibrating Strategies for a Lifetime of Opportunities; ii) Harnessing Adults’ Skills – Empowering Workers Across Generations; iii) Tapping into Hidden Talent – Leveraging the Potential of Overlooked Groups. All discussions were held under Chatham House Rule and are summarised below in an anonymised manner.

Session 1: Rethinking Formal Education – Recalibrating Strategies for a Lifetime of Opportunities

Setting the scene

29. The topic of the first session was “*Rethinking Formal Education – Recalibrating Strategies for a Lifetime of Opportunities*” (see the [Agenda](#) for questions for discussion). The session explored how formal education systems (early childhood, school, vocational and higher education) should adapt to equip students with the skills, knowledge and attitudes they need to navigate the megatrends and become lifelong learners. This includes reforming curricula, strengthening teaching workforces and reallocating educational investments and infrastructure. The session was co-chaired by Ms. Celile Eren Ökten, Deputy Minister of National Education of the Republic of Türkiye and Mr. Andreas Schleicher, OECD Director for Education and Skills.

30. Deputy Minister Ökten, presented a strategic framework aimed at recalibrating formal education. The “Century of Türkiye Education Model” focuses on four pillars: equipping students with labour-market-

aligned foundational and transferable skills; transforming the teaching profession via National Education Academies and AI-integrated training; optimising investments through data-driven ecosystems like the Ministry of National Education Management System; and fostering nationwide innovation through multi-stakeholder partnerships. By prioritising continuous, adaptive, and resilient learning, this framework seeks to ensure that education systems provide equitable opportunities and successfully navigate the complexities of a modern, high-risk world.

31. In his presentation, Director Schleicher emphasised that while financial investment is a necessary foundation for the development of basic skills, it is insufficient without strategic recalibration of curricula. He highlighted an unprecedented level of career uncertainty among teenagers, whose aspirations are often narrow or misaligned with actual market needs, necessitating stronger career guidance. Furthermore, the presentation addressed the urgent requirement to make the teaching profession more attractive by integrating modern tools like AI and improving job satisfaction to ensure educators are prepared for evolving pedagogical challenges and declining student enrolments.

Highlights of discussion

32. Delegates converged on the need to rethink formal education as part of a broader, lifelong learning continuum. Education systems must move beyond linear pathways and instead enable individuals to learn, unlearn, and relearn throughout their lives. This implies a shift from viewing education as school to understanding it as an ongoing activity, embedded across diverse contexts, including workplaces and communities. Several interventions emphasised the importance of integrating formal, non-formal, and informal learning, including recognising learning that occurs outside traditional institutional settings.

33. A recurring theme was the urgency of strengthening foundational skills from an early age. Delegates highlighted concerns about declining performance in literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking, alongside increasing disengagement among learners. Early childhood education and care was widely identified as a high-impact investment, particularly for reducing socio-economic disparities. At the same time, strong foundations must be complemented by the development of broader skills, including creativity, collaboration, adaptability, and the capacity for independent thinking. While there was broad agreement on early investment, countries differed in policy emphasis. Some prioritised additional instructional time in core subjects, or early compulsory participation, while others emphasised structural investment and system capacity.

34. Many delegates underscored the need to shift from content-heavy curricula towards competence-based approaches. This includes prioritising transversal skills and fostering the motivation and ability to continue learning in a context of rapid technological and societal change. Curriculum reform efforts are increasingly incorporating digital, green, and civic dimensions, as well as placing greater emphasis on critical thinking and the responsible use of technology. At the same time, several participants cautioned that digitalisation can both enable and hinder learning, underscoring the importance of purposeful and pedagogically grounded integration.

35. VET featured prominently as a key pillar of more flexible and responsive education systems. Delegates emphasised the importance of upgrading and rebranding VET to ensure it becomes an attractive choice, supported by strong employer engagement and clear pathways to employment and further learning. However, VET systems differ in maturity and positioning across countries - some have long-established dual systems with employer engagement, while others are in the process of modernising and expanding VET. Moreover, the development of modular and flexible learning opportunities, including micro-credentials, was highlighted as a means of better signalling skills and enabling individuals to update skills throughout life.

36. The teaching profession was identified as central to the success of education reform. Participants noted growing pressures on teachers to adapt to new pedagogies, technologies, and learner needs, often

in the context of workforce shortages. Strengthening initial and continuous teacher education, enhancing professional autonomy, and supporting teachers in developing both pedagogical and socio-emotional competencies were seen as critical priorities. Building teacher capacity for digital and competence-based learning was particularly emphasised.

37. Delegates highlighted the importance of using evidence and data to inform education policy and practice. Robust diagnostic tools, better use of learning data, and stronger research infrastructures were seen as essential for understanding what works and for targeting resources effectively. Several participants noted the need to develop a stronger culture of evidence use within education systems, including learning from other sectors.

38. Participants emphasised the importance of ensuring equitable access to learning opportunities, particularly for disadvantaged and underrepresented groups, through early intervention, targeted and data-driven support, and flexible pathways such as apprenticeships and work-based learning; these issues are described in greater detail under Session 3.

39. After Session 1, Business at OECD (BIAC) organised a side event on “*The Role of Business in Supporting Lifelong Skills*” (see Box 3).

Box 3. Side event: The Role of Business in Supporting Lifelong Skills (28 April)

The side event on the “Role of Business in Supporting Lifelong Skills”, organised by BIAC, brought together business and policy leaders to discuss how employers are helping to shape more adaptive and inclusive skills systems. The session was opened by Hanni Rosenbaum, Executive Director of Business at OECD, and Prof. Dr. Lutfihak Alpkan, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Security of Türkiye.

The discussion was chaired by Bettina Schaller, Chair of the Employment, Labour, and Social Affairs Committee at Business at OECD. Panellists included Feyza Narlı (TÜSİAD), Aslı Parmak (TOBB: Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Türkiye), and Kristen Edgreen Kaufman (USCIB: United States Council for International Business). Speakers highlighted rising demand for both digital and human-centred skills, alongside the accelerating impact of AI on jobs and training needs. They emphasised that firms are responding to growing talent shortages through large-scale reskilling and workplace-based learning. Examples from Google, Microsoft, and LinkedIn illustrated how businesses are scaling AI and digital skills initiatives, while embedding learning into work through mentoring, apprenticeships, and job design. Overall, the discussion reinforced that employers are central actors in skills ecosystems, acting as co-designers, co-investors and key drivers of lifelong learning.

Closing remarks by El Iza Mohamedou, Head of the OECD Centre for Skills, underlined that unlocking talent across generations requires a shift towards lifelong, work-integrated learning systems and stronger public–private collaboration.

Source: Business at OECD (2026), “The Role of Business in Supporting Lifelong Skills”, www.businessatoecd.org/newsroom/upcoming-events/the-role-of-business-in-supporting-lifelong-skills.

Session 2: Harnessing Adults’ Skills – Empowering Workers Across Generations

Setting the scene

40. The second session focused on the topic of “*Harnessing Adults’ Skills – Empowering Workers Across Generations*” (see the [Agenda](#) for questions for discussion). Harnessing the skills of adults across generations empowers workers at all life stages to have longer and more productive working lives in the

face of ongoing megatrends. To this end, countries should ensure that all adults have access to relevant and accessible upskilling and reskilling opportunities, improve career guidance, and support older workers with the health, resources and conditions to remain meaningfully employed. The session was co-chaired by Mr. Mark Pearson, OECD Acting Director for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, and Mr. Samet Güneş, Director General of Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR).

41. In his presentation, Director Pearson highlighted the critical role of adult learning in fostering economic resilience and productivity. Evidence from the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) indicates that a significant portion of the adult population lacks foundational skills, with older workers and those with lower educational attainment facing the greatest proficiency gaps and barriers to training. To address these challenges, the OECD advocates for several policies, including the recognition of prior learning, the implementation of flexible modular credentials, and the expansion of financial subsidies. Furthermore, the presentation emphasised the transformative potential of AI and data-driven systems to personalise learning pathways and improve job matching, thereby supporting longer and more productive working lives.

42. Director General Güneş focussed on how skills systems can better support adults and strengthen intergenerational talent transfer in response to demographic change, AI, and the digital and green transitions. He highlighted risks linked to ageing populations, skills obsolescence and labour market transformation, alongside opportunities arising from lifelong learning and new forms of employment. The presentation emphasised flexible, labour market-oriented adult learning systems, AI-supported career guidance, age-friendly workplaces and reskilling for older workers. Policy proposals included wage subsidies for workers aged 50+, micro-credentials, mentoring schemes, AI-driven skills matching, and a “Future Readiness Fund” to support lifelong learning and workforce transformation.

Highlights of discussion

43. Delegates broadly agreed on the urgency of strengthening adult learning systems, while recognising that the central challenge lies in implementation. Lifelong learning must move beyond aspiration and become embedded as both a culture and a functioning system. This requires a fundamental shift in how learning is perceived and organised – away from episodic participation towards continuous engagement across the life course. Countries with high participation rates were frequently cited as demonstrating that fostering a culture of learning is both achievable and impactful when supported by coherent policy frameworks and strong social norms. Countries emphasised different aspects of adult learning: some emphasised economic adaptation and competitiveness, while others stressed social inclusion, second chances and learning as a right.

44. A key message was that adult learning systems must be designed around the realities of people's lives. Flexibility emerged as a critical enabler, allowing individuals to combine learning with work, family, and other responsibilities. Delegates highlighted a range of approaches to increasing accessibility, including modular learning opportunities, digital platforms, and more flexible delivery formats. At the same time, the importance of clearly communicating the value proposition of adult learning was emphasised, as time constraints are often as much a matter of prioritisation as availability.

45. Financing mechanisms were identified as a central lever for expanding participation. There was strong consensus on the need for more effective cost-sharing arrangements between governments, employers, and individuals. Examples included individual learning accounts (ILAs), voucher schemes, and targeted subsidies, as well as wage support for workers undertaking training. Different models emerged, with some highlighting generous training subsidies and wage replacement schemes, and others focusing on vouchers, individual learning accounts, or on employer responsibility to support workforce development. Overall, financial incentives must be designed to reduce barriers to participation, particularly for those most at risk of being left behind.

46. Delegates also underscored the importance of targeting adult learning opportunities towards specific skills needs and priority groups. Some countries focused on advanced digital skills such as AI, cybersecurity and IT, while others highlighted green skills and transitions, or foundational skills. Several interventions also emphasised support for vulnerable groups, workers in informal employment, and individuals facing multiple barriers to participation.

47. The role of skills intelligence and guidance systems was highlighted as increasingly important in a rapidly changing labour market. Participants noted that career guidance remains underdeveloped in many systems, limiting individuals' ability to navigate learning opportunities and make informed choices. There is a need for better "navigation tools" to help individuals identify relevant training opportunities and career pathways. This includes strengthening labour market information systems, expanding access to career counselling, and developing user-friendly platforms on learning and employment opportunities.

48. Another prominent theme was the need to better leverage the skills of older workers. Delegates challenged narratives that frame ageing workforces as a constraint, instead emphasising the value of experience and the potential of intergenerational learning. Evidence suggests that age-diverse workforces can enhance productivity and innovation. However, unlocking this potential requires workplace cultures that value contributions across all age groups, as well as policies that support longer and more flexible working lives, including phased retirement and targeted reskilling opportunities. Countries utilise diverse policy approaches that include retirement arrangements, retention bonuses, financial support for retraining and career transitions later in life, and integrated health, employment and skills support.

49. The discussion also highlighted the importance of aligning adult learning with broader labour market and social policies. Integrating employment support, health services, and skills development was seen as particularly important for addressing the complex needs of mid-career and older workers. Active labour market policies, second-chance education, and recognition of prior learning were identified as key tools for supporting transitions, especially for individuals with weaker labour market attachment or those in informal employment.

50. Finally, delegates emphasised that achieving more inclusive and effective adult learning systems will require strong governance, social dialogue, and collaboration across stakeholders. Employers, trade unions, education providers, and civil society all have a role to play in designing and delivering relevant and high-quality learning opportunities. Ensuring quality, relevance, and equitable access remains a persistent challenge, particularly as participation in adult learning continues to be lowest among those who would benefit most. Sustained effort will be needed to build systems that are not only responsive to changing skills needs, but also inclusive, accessible, and centred on the learner.

Session 3: Tapping into Hidden Talent – Leveraging the Potential of Overlooked Groups

Setting the scene

51. The third session focussed on "*Tapping into Hidden Talent – Leveraging the Potential of Overlooked Groups*" (see the [Agenda](#) for questions for discussion). Fostering and tapping into everyone's talent by unlocking the potential of all groups is not only justified on equity grounds, but is essential for bolstering countries' labour forces and economic prosperity. To this end, countries should explore strategies to activate this hidden talent to fully harness the available skills base that countries have at their disposal. The session was co-chaired by Prof. Dr. Lutfihak Alpkın, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Security of the Republic of Türkiye, and Mr. Frantisek Ruzicka, OECD Deputy Secretary-General.

52. Deputy Minister Alpkın outlined Türkiye's strategic initiatives for unlocking hidden talent. Over the past two decades, Türkiye has achieved significant progress in education enrolment, notably increasing female participation in higher education and implementing a four-pillar policy framework that includes

12-year compulsory education and universal student support. Targeted efforts have reduced the share of NEETs in recent years, and the unregistered employment rate has been halved, driven by digital registration, risk-based audits, and a substantial narrowing of the gender gap in the services and industry sectors.

53. OECD Deputy Secretary-General Ruzicka outlined the critical requirement to harness the potential of overlooked groups, such as disadvantaged students, women, migrants, and NEETs to bolster economic prosperity and labour force equity. Data indicates that socio-economic status significantly impacts educational outcomes, with disadvantaged students far more likely to fall behind in mathematics, while gender and migration status continue to drive employment gaps. To address these disparities, the OECD proposes a multifaceted policy framework focusing on targeted educational resources, flexible learning pathways for NEET youth, and the mobilisation of women and migrants through measures such as affordable childcare, qualification recognition, and digital career support. Ultimately, the presentation called for co-ordinated international action to reduce educational gaps, leverage technology for career guidance, and eliminate barriers to participation for under-utilised groups across all generations.

Highlights of discussion

54. Delegates emphasised that unlocking hidden talent is both an economic imperative and a matter of equity. In the context of labour shortages, demographic ageing and technological change, mobilising underutilised groups was widely seen as essential to sustaining growth and resilience. There was broad agreement that many countries are not facing a shortage of talent per se, but rather a failure to fully activate and deploy existing human potential. While labour shortages and demographic pressures were frequently cited, many participants also emphasised social inclusion, equal opportunity and social cohesion as central objectives.

55. Early investment and prevention emerged as foundational priorities. Participants highlighted the long-term benefits of reducing educational disadvantage, expanding early childhood education and care, and preventing school dropout. Evidence shared during the session underscored that early interventions yield significant returns in terms of labour-market participation and lifetime earnings, while delayed action leads to higher social and economic costs.

56. A strong focus was placed on improving pathways for young people, particularly NEETs. Delegates highlighted the importance of proactive outreach, youth guarantees, apprenticeships and school-to-work transition programmes. Personalised and wraparound support – combining financial assistance, guidance and mentoring – was seen as critical to re-engaging young people at risk of becoming disconnected from the labour market.

57. Increasing labour-market participation among underrepresented groups was identified as a central policy challenge. However, countries differed in the groups they prioritised: some focused primarily on young people and NEETs, others on women's participation, while several highlighted older workers, migrants, persons with disabilities, Indigenous communities, or workers in informal employment. Measures such as affordable childcare, inclusive workplace practices, targeted training programmes and support for career progression were highlighted as effective levers to unlock participation.

58. Delegates underscored the importance of addressing structural and workplace barriers that limit participation. This includes tackling discrimination and bias, improving job quality and working conditions, and ensuring that workplaces are adaptable to diverse needs across the life course. Creating inclusive work environments was seen as essential not only for access to jobs, but also for retention and progression.

59. Integrated and person-centred support systems were highlighted as a key enabler of inclusion. Participants emphasised the need to better connect employment services, skills development, social protection and career guidance. One-stop-shop models, combined with tailored and personalised support,

were seen as particularly effective in addressing the complex and interrelated barriers faced by many individuals. Some countries focus more on targeted programmes for specific groups rather than broader system integration.

60. Delegates widely recognised lifelong learning and skills development as essential tools for unlocking the potential of underrepresented groups. Accessible and flexible learning opportunities were seen as particularly important for individuals facing barriers to participation, including women with caring responsibilities, older workers, and migrants. Participants highlighted the value of flexible delivery formats, work-based learning, apprenticeships and targeted reskilling programmes in enabling broader participation. At the same time, there was strong emphasis on ensuring that learning pathways lead to quality employment opportunities and support sustainable labour-market inclusion.

61. Finally, delegates stressed that unlocking hidden talent requires co-ordinated action across policy domains and stakeholders. Governments, employers, education providers and social partners all have a role to play in designing inclusive systems that support participation.

Conclusions

62. The OECD Skills Summit 2026 confirmed that skills policy should be a central pillar of economic resilience, social cohesion, and long-term prosperity. Across discussions, participants highlighted how technological change, particularly AI, alongside demographic shifts and the green transition, are reshaping labour markets at unprecedented speed. This is generating common challenges across countries that call for co-ordinated, forward-looking responses.

63. A central message emerging from the Summit is that skills must be developed across the life course. Lifelong learning, long a policy aspiration, now constitutes an operational imperative. This requires a fundamental shift – from focusing primarily on formal education systems to fostering a broader culture of continuous learning. Such a shift entails embedding flexibility, accessibility, and responsiveness into all parts of the system, ensuring that individuals can acquire and update skills throughout dynamic careers.

64. The discussions reaffirmed that education systems must better prepare individuals for multiple transitions. Strengthening foundational skills remains essential, particularly in the face of evidence of declining performance in key domains. At the same time, participants emphasised the growing importance of transferable skills, including critical thinking, adaptability, and socio-emotional skills. This calls for continued investment in teachers, curriculum reform, and more innovative and flexible learning pathways, including vocational education and modular credentials.

65. Beyond initial education, the Summit highlighted the urgency of building effective adult learning systems. While there is broad consensus on what is needed – flexible provision, shared financing, and targeted support – the challenge lies in implementation. Making lifelong learning a reality requires systems that align with people's lives, supported by improved career guidance, stronger skills intelligence, and incentives that lower barriers to participation.

66. Inclusion emerged not only as a social priority but as an economic necessity. Many countries continue to underutilise the skills of significant segments of their populations, including youth, women, migrants, and older workers. Unlocking this potential is essential to address labour shortages and sustain growth. This requires targeted policies to reduce structural barriers, expand access to learning and employment, and better recognise and use existing skills.

67. A consistent theme across all sessions was the importance of stronger system coherence. Effective skills policies depend on co-ordination across education, employment, and social domains, supported by robust data and evidence. Social dialogue and effective collaboration with employers, trade unions, and other stakeholders are critical to ensuring that systems remain responsive to evolving needs.

International co-operation also plays a vital role in enabling countries to learn from one another and accelerate progress.

68. Ultimately, the Summit highlighted a broad convergence around the direction of reform: more agile, inclusive, and demand-responsive skills systems that support individuals and economies in navigating uncertainty. The task ahead is to translate this shared understanding into sustained action.

69. Moving forward on these fronts will require leadership, vision, and perseverance. It is hoped that the rich exchange of experiences and good practices at this Summit will provide renewed impetus for reform. The OECD looks forward to continuing its work with countries and partners to maintain momentum and advance a future-oriented skills agenda. Delegates also look ahead to reconvening at the next OECD Skills Summit in Bulgaria in 2028, with the shared ambition of demonstrating the tangible progress achieved in turning today's commitments into lasting impact.

Annex A. Participating countries and organisations

Countries	International and regional organisations
1. Australia	1. Business at OECD (BIAC)
2. Austria	2. The Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) to the OECD
3. Azerbaijan	3. African Union
4. Belgium	4. Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (ABEGS)
5. Brazil	5. Council of Europe
6. Bulgaria	6. European Commission
7. Canada	7. European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)
8. China	8. International Labour Organization (ILO)
9. Colombia	9. Organization of Turkic States (OTS)
10. Costa Rica	10. Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIK)
11. Croatia	11. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
12. Czechia	12. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
13. Estonia	
14. Finland	
15. France	
16. Germany	
17. Greece	
18. Hungary	
19. Ireland	
20. Italy	
21. Japan	
22. Lithuania	
23. Luxembourg	
24. Netherlands	
25. Peru	
26. Poland	
27. Qatar	
28. Romania	
29. Saudi Arabia	
30. Slovak Republic	
31. Slovenia	
32. Spain	

Countries	International and regional organisations
33. Sweden	
34. Switzerland	
35. Thailand	
36. Türkiye	
37. United Kingdom	