

Conclusions on lifelong learning in the mechanical and electrical engineering industries¹

The Tripartite Meeting on Lifelong Learning in the Mechanical and Electrical Engineering Industries,

Having met in Geneva from 23 to 27 September 2002,

Adopts this twenty-seventh day of September 2002 the following conclusions:

Theme 1: The economic performance of the MEE industries: 2001 recession and outlook

1. The most recent and current economic crises affected: industrialized and developing countries; large, medium, and small-sized enterprises; and workers in all sectors, including the mechanical and electrical engineering industries. As the economic performance of the MEE industries depends on many factors, the best way of avoiding the consequences of economic recession would be the adoption of industrial and financial policies to minimize the effects of cyclical fluctuations and to promote new technologies in those industries, as well as employability.
2. Governments should play a role in reducing economic risks through adopting appropriate legislation and transparent policies which would:
 - encourage long-term growth strategies away from the present short-term focus;
 - promote fair trade;
 - grant developing countries greater access to markets in industrialized countries;
 - contribute to the development of a level playing field; and

¹ Adopted unanimously – with the exception of paragraph 8 which was opposed by the Employers' group.

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- provide incentives to those investing in lifelong learning.
3. Enterprise performance depends on the acceptance of responsibilities and the respect of rights of all stakeholders. Employers should not disregard the rights and duties of all stakeholders in their enterprises, including workers, shareholders and the communities in which they operate. Ethical behaviour of all concerned parties in the economy will improve industry performance and help to regain the confidence of the stakeholders. Workers' organizations are willing to enter into dialogue with enterprises to assist them in adapting to changing economic and social circumstances. Instead of "negative" competition, there should be positive competition, e.g. in terms of lifelong learning.
 4. Lifelong learning is a large but necessary undertaking that should be addressed jointly by governments, employers, workers and their respective organizations in an appropriate manner, especially in times of economic downturn.

Theme 2: The social impact of restructuring the MEE industries

5. Sound business and investment plans are one of the best ways of avoiding restructuring in the first place. Restructuring affects the products, manufacturing processes and the organization of management and labour. Alternatives to employment reduction must be considered. When restructuring is inevitable, the employers should design a restructuring plan and implement it. In this context, lifelong learning and training should respond to the needs of the enterprise and be designed to mitigate the adverse effects on the workforce.
6. Workers' organizations and their representatives should be informed in a timely fashion of restructuring plans and, if retraining and redeployment to jobs requiring new or changed skills is not possible, be followed by consultations and negotiations, which should include consideration of alternatives.
7. In the event of unavoidable restructuring, there should be government assistance to workers including, for example, cost-sharing of short-time working, retraining, relocation, social services and early retirement schemes. Governments should make funds available or grant tax incentives for company-level development and training programmes which can, where appropriate, be jointly developed and administered by the social partners. Financial benefits for individually pursued lifelong learning activities could also be provided.
8. Such government assistance should not be abused and the social partners and governments must prevent the inequitable impact of restructuring on vulnerable groups such as women, youth, minorities, etc. When restructuring, large employers should, whenever possible, assist their SME suppliers and support businesses and their workers in adapting to changing economic circumstances for lifelong learning purposes.

Themes 3 and 4: Lifelong learning in the MEE industries: Concepts and examples; The appropriate curricula for the various aspects of lifelong learning

9. Lifelong learning refers to a continuous process of competency development to ensure mobility and employability of the individual, rather than a system for narrow skills

acquisition, which will, following appropriate basic education³ and training for initial employment, include:

- (a) on- and off-the-job education, training and development;
- (b) retraining for new jobs as industries restructure; and
- (c) higher education for enhanced employability.

- 10.** Lifelong learning and training should be a combination of vocational (job) training focusing on a particular skill and long-term (developmental) training focusing on the abilities within the speciality or expertise of the individual and personal career guidance.
- 11.** The right of every person to basic education, and access to training, retraining and further education should be constitutionally or at least legally guaranteed. Basic education systems must be accessible to all and establish a sound foundation for future learning. Governments should develop a regulatory framework and devise appropriate policies with regard to the above (especially with respect to the financial implications) and encourage dialogue with the social partners as required. While it is understood that governments bear primary responsibility for basic education, it is likewise understood that once students leave school and enter an industrial setting, employers bear the responsibility of vocational training as it relates to the enterprise and there is a greater need for the social partners to be involved in further education and training programmes based on demand. This social dialogue can take the form of consultations, collective bargaining or the joint administration of training bodies or funds.
- 12.** One of the challenges for lifelong learning is the development of the ability to provide a quick response to new requirements. If devised in a flexible manner lifelong learning should allow for continuous improvement to meet rapidly changing market demands and, in addition to skills development, address issues such as creative thinking, problem solving, team building, leadership, decision-making and coping with stress. In this context, e-learning or other methods in or outside the workplace are also important so that opportunities for lifelong learning should be made available to the workforce from the unskilled to the most highly qualified workers. Lifelong learning systems must pay special attention to the most vulnerable groups.
- 13.** The development of relevant competencies benefits not only the career of the individual in providing better employment and self-development opportunities, but is also of benefit to the employer who is able to draw on the proficiency of the workers to apply these newly acquired abilities to market needs.
- 14.** In order for lifelong learning to be accessible to all, skill certification and skills upgrading need to be nationally accepted and internationally transparent and understandable. Information on this should be exchanged internationally.
- 15.** On the question of financing:

There is no universal model of investing in training. Governments should create a general economic environment and incentives conducive to encourage individuals and enterprises to invest individually or jointly in education and training. This investment and the

³ The following elements should form part of the basic education: reading, writing, numeracy and at least a second language, problem-solving ability, creativity and teamwork, computing skills, ability to communicate, including in a multicultural context, and the ability to learn how to learn, etc.

responsibility for it should generally be determined by the objectives of training, e.g. individual, enterprise or societal objectives. Countries can use different ways and means to foster investment in training and increase resources for training. Enterprises have a critical role to play in investment in training. A number of mechanisms used in combination to further investment in training and to guarantee access are required. These may include levy systems on enterprises accompanied by public grants, establishment of training funds, various incentives for training and learning, e.g. tax rebates, training credits, training awards, individual training accounts, collective and individual training rights, sabbatical leave, collective training agreements and emulation of national and international best practices of investing in training. The chosen mechanisms should take into account the special needs of the SMEs.⁴

Such education and training programmes should enable participants to find jobs in industries lacking skilled workers.

Theme 5: The role of the social partners and governments in lifelong learning in the MEE industries: Implications for the ILO

16. It is the responsibility of governments to establish the legal framework and enabling environment that makes it possible for employers and workers to participate in and promote lifelong learning. While basic education is the responsibility of governments, vocational training is provided by enterprises in many countries (or in close collaboration with the government); the opportunities and benefits of lifelong learning will be fully explained to individual workers by the social partners.
17. Enterprises and workers' organizations should encourage access to lifelong learning and, where workers do not participate, the social partners will jointly work to create the environment for motivating them. It is the responsibility of individual workers to use the training opportunities offered by companies and training providers.
18. The ILO should continue to maintain the current social and economic databases which it has developed in connection with the preparatory work for the adoption in 2004 of the new Recommendation on human resource development (and which contains initiatives on lifelong learning) and expand it to include specific references to the MEE industries.
19. The ILO should continue to promote the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (1977)⁵ and the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up (1998).
20. ILO sectoral meetings on MEE industries should be maintained as outstanding opportunities for tripartite constituents, especially from developing countries, to meet and exchange views on important aspects of a broad range of topical issues.

⁴ Para. 12, resolution on human resources training and development, ILC, 14 June 2000, reprinted in *Learning and training for work in the knowledge society* (Geneva, ILO, 2002).

⁵ As amended in 2000.