

An ILO Round Table
Knowledge and Skills for
Productivity and Decent Work

Montreal, Canada, 23-24 April 2002

Executive Summary

The Global Employment Forum (Geneva, November 2002) had agreed that the ILO should organize high-level Round Tables in various technical fields of employment, including knowledge and skills development. The Montreal Round Table was the first in the series, and focussed on the theme *Knowledge and skills for productivity and decent work*. It was organized to coincide with the G8 Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting in Montreal, which had a similar theme *The Knowledge Imperative B Skills and Learning Challenges for the 21st Century*. Participating in the Round Table were G8 government officials, policy makers from selected developing countries, representatives of workers and employers organizations and international organisations, including the European Union and UNESCO. The Round Table discussed the ILO's Global Employment Agenda framework; the major policy challenges of knowledge and skills development; and recognition of workers' skills in the context of lifelong learning and national qualifications frameworks.

The Round Table agreed that the Global Employment Agenda (GEA) framework provides the context for developing education and training policies and programmes in support of employment growth, higher productivity and decent work. By broadening and deepening workers' skills and competencies, a virtuous circle of productivity and employment growth can be created that will reduce poverty. Globalization led to higher requirements of product quality and therefore of skills everywhere. The Round Table called for stronger *advocacy* by the ILO and its global alliance partners so that employment - the key to sustainable economic and social progress **B** is put high on the political agenda. There was concern among workers at the Round Table that productivity gains had to be fairly distributed so as not to compromise their impact on economic and social progress. The links between skills enhancement and productivity growth had to be explored further. The GEA framework had to be sharpened and its various pillars, including education and training needed deepening.

The Round Table endorsed the 5 education and training policy challenges identified in the GEA: i) the need for more and better investment in training; ii) urgent reform of basic education, and literacy and core work skills development in order to improve individuals employability and access to decent work; iii) the need to reform vocational education and training systems; iv) developing systems for recognizing individuals skills; and the need to strengthen, and improve the capacity of the partners to engage in, social dialogue on training. Although the responsibility for basic education lies with the state, learning and training for work can be enhanced substantially by encouraging the private sector, enterprises and also individuals to invest in

learning. Apprenticeship improves significantly the learning of an occupation among young people and their insertion into the world of work. Based on state/enterprise co-responsibility and co-financing, apprenticeship ensures that the skills developed are those needed by the enterprise. Five principles should underpin lifelong learning for all: *accessibility, affordability, recognition of skills gained; be driven by the market; and be based on partnership among stakeholders.* Learning should be based on skills standards and recognition; a system of incentives; provision of information and guidance; and an adequate infrastructure for learning and training provision.

There was agreement that recognition of individuals' skills facilitates lifelong learning, assists individuals in their choice of a career and helps them move to better jobs. National qualifications frameworks (NQFs) and recognition of skills and prior learning should be based on partnerships between government, the social partners and other stakeholders. Capacity building was necessary in order to make the social partners effective participants in developing the systems and making them work. There were many models and approaches to NQFs and skills recognition. Some were voluntary and sector-based, while others were national in scope and legally based. Putting in place effective frameworks and skills recognition systems could be costly, but this could be overcome through cost-sharing. The Round Table agreed that the best service the ILO could offer was to facilitate exchange and sharing of approaches and good practices; it should therefore develop a user friendly data base and practical guide on skills development policies and practices, including NQFs and skills recognition.