

**Workshops on Promoting Competency Based Training policy and system in GCC countries**  
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**Background**

Globally, TVET has been a proven instrument for empowering youth in the domestic and the global labour market. The TVET sector reform has now turned out to be in high need of global policy reforms as it provides youth with employable skills set and facilitates their path to productive employment and work. In the GCC countries, TVET could play a critical role in combating youth unemployment, skills mismatch and skills recognition of those who have acquired /learnt skills on the job. National efforts to further develop and reform TVET, especially in the context of achieving sustainable development, can have a significant impact on economic growth, reducing inequality, particularly for the most vulnerable youth, and also contribute to consolidation of peace. In line with this approach, the 2030 Agenda also emphasizes the linkages between technical and vocational skills and employment and decent jobs (SDG 8). However, TVET transcends education and employment and cuts across the five pillars of the 2030 Agenda: people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnership.

Closing the gap between the needs of the labour market and the output of the education system has become a priority for sustainable economic development. A modernized, market responsive and inclusive TVET would contribute to building a knowledge-based society, which most of the GCC countries are aiming to become by 2030.

**Key issues in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries**

While the general education is making significant progress in many GCC countries but several challenges have hindered the development of TVET. Despite variations across and within countries, some general challenges include outdated curricula, absence of continuous professional development and poorly equipped schools, poor coordination and collaboration between TVET and the private sector restricting TVET responsiveness to the labour market and deepening the skills mismatch between the qualifications of TVET students and the needs of the labour market. The other key issue is skills gap that exists across basic skills (such as creative and independent thinking), problem solving skills and soft skills, as well as in sector-specific and functional skills. Moreover, there are limited pathways connecting TVET with higher education for students wishing to do so. National TVET systems are poorly equipped for lifelong learning required to respond to the challenges that the Future of Work Presents. At the same time, one-fourth of the human capital accumulated in GCC countries is not currently being utilized in the labour market, mainly due to low economic participation by females, more broadly contributing to the persistent gender gap. The COVID 19 pandemic has further exposed the limitations of TVET system in continuing their services through remote and relevant TVET.

The TVET system with poor employment outcomes leading to skills mismatch is one of the key barriers for GCC countries to their aspirations for Knowledge Economy.

**Opportunity for impetus to TVET / Skills reform and skills match**

*Policy environment*

GCC countries have launched a number of economic and education reforms to align their education and training systems with macroeconomic policies to develop diversified,

knowledge-based economies. GCC countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, have viewed TVET as a key element of educational policy for many years, other GCC nations have only relatively recently focused their attention on improving TVET systems. Technical Education is a key component of the Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 with focus on expansion of technology and use of artificial intelligence (AI) in schools, and a greater emphasis on technical and vocational training. Since the opening up of private universities and colleges in the Kuwait education system in the late 1990s, tertiary institutions (both domestic and international) have mushroomed with many of them offering vocational education and training. The move towards vocational and educational training is also getting a push because of two-pronged policy approach by the Kuwait government: firstly – to educate and train young Kuwaitis who may not have reached university entrance levels and equip them for meaningful work; and secondly – to encourage a process called Kuwaitisation. The GCC countries' initiatives towards diversification of economy and changing eco-system for getting skilled migrant workers are other imperatives for TVET reform in the region.

In recent times, the COVID 19 pandemic has changed the skills demand with the growing digitalization and the changing business practices. As a result, various chambers of commerce in these countries have also expressed their interest in finding ways to promote market relevant skills and skills recognition.

#### *Emerging promising practices for replication and manual to guide skills reform*

Because of the growing attention that TVET is receiving in GCC countries and across the Arab region, several emerging promising /good practices in the region hold potential for replication. ILO has examined a selection of those good practices that highlight the development of TVET to address future labour demands and has potential to empower youth. This includes the importance of paying attention to the local context in implementation and using TVET as a means to promote wage employment and entrepreneurship in the region.

ILO has supported important positive developments towards TVET reform in the Arab region. The ILO's activities to enhance market relevant skills and improve employability include:

- Improving strategic frameworks and governance of skills development systems ;
- anticipating skills needs – through studies and surveys;
- design and implementation of competency-based training within sector-based approaches and non-formal training in a context of fragility;
- apprenticeship and work-based learning schemes, and national frameworks on apprenticeship;
- public employment services ;
- improvement of testing and certification systems and recognition of prior learning;
- life-long learning in the context of the Future of Work.

Based on these experiences to support selected countries in promoting market relevant inclusive skills and skills recognition, the ILO & UNICEF have recently developed and published the Competency-Based Training (CBT) Manual for Practitioners in the Arab Region. The manual draws upon the experiences gained, good practices generated and the lessons learnt in reforming TVET system in the region. The overall purpose of this manual is to provide guidance to TVET developers, TVET administrators and instructors on the design, delivery and assessment of competency-based training (CBT) programmes. The manual encompasses the minimum knowledge that practitioners should possess on delivering CBT for lower- to mid-level skilled occupations. This training manual is the first of its kind in the

region to provide TVET trainers and developers with a basic understanding of the steps involved in designing a competency-based programme. It shows how to implement such a programme, measure its impact and update it. The training programme cycle therefore will need to take into account issues of building new competencies, certifying competencies people already have and competencies they acquire while they are working in the host countries and finally recognition of these competencies when they return home.

### Webinar series and its Objective

In the given context, ILO seeks collaboration with the Executive Bureau of the GCC for organizing a webinar series to explore scope for promoting market relevant skills training and skills certification system for improved productivity and economic growth in GCC countries.

Two 90min structured conversation with a select group of informed stakeholders was organised on 09 & 21 Jun with the active support of the Executive Bureau of the GCC. The main objective of these pre consultations was to discuss the specific areas of needs from the GCC and to flesh out the details of the approach and content of the webinar series. The first consultation on 09 Jun resulted in the following needs being identified.

1. Support for digitalisation of skills delivery that builds on what exists and transform towards a blended future
2. Support instituting good quality apprenticeships
3. Support to create legislation for private sector to play a role in the development of curricula
4. Support to set up proper career guidance into the system
5. Establish skills anticipation systems & future focussed skills needs analysis
  - a. Use of data
  - b. Government policy
6. Establishing systems to support inclusion of migrants for upskilling (both hard and soft skills) and also certification of skills
7. Specific targeted support to SMEs especially on green jobs / Entrepreneurship
8. Improve social acceptance of TVET
9. Support in establishing Quality assurance and certification systems
10. Support in creating bridging courses between high school & university - a post-secondary non-university technical education to link directly with jobs, basing on the needs of the labour market. Kind of middle majors

These needs were further discussed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> pre consultation webinar of the 21 Jun. They were clubbed and refined into the following 4 key topics and will be the focus of the webinar series on 26 & 27 Jul.

- I. Skills policy & governance
- II. Career guidance
- III. Skills anticipation & private sector engagement in training design and delivery
- IV. Competency standards

These topics will form the basis of the two 120 minutes webinars which will be held on 26 & 27 Jul 1100-1300h Bahrain time. The overall will be to explore possibility of extending ILO's specific support to GCC countries on these abovementioned themes of Competency Based Learning to minimize skills gaps and skills mismatch.

The flow of the first webinar on 26 Jul Monday will be as follows (all times Bahrain)

1100-1105	Welcome and introductions to speakers (Kishore Kumar Singh)
1105-1115	Remarks by Director of Executive Bureau of GCC
1115-1125	Remarks by Deputy Regional Director, ROAS
1125-1135	TVET priorities, challenges and opportunities – Sara Salman, UN ESCWA
1135-1150	Presentation of different steps and stages of CBT – Yasser Ali
1150-1230	Presentation of 3 good practices from the region (ILO Jordan (skills governance: skills anticipation and sector skills council), ILO Yemen (apprenticeship), ILO Lebanon (skills policy including skills academy for its effective implementation)
1230-1300	Questions / comments / Facilitated discussion

At the end of the webinar, participants will be directed towards the virtual fair space. This 'virtual fair' will be an environment that would be built around the topic of the webinar series and will show case good ILO practices from the region. Maximum of 8 institutions will be invited to set up their booths (like in a real exhibition) and ITCILO will provide support to them to set up the booths. One of these eight booths will be the Lebanon Skills Academy that ITCILO will run with ILO Lebanon. The participants will be able to access these booths and materials made available there even after the webinar series is completed. List of these potential good practices are overleaf.

The flow of the second webinar on 27 Jul Tuesday will be as follows (all times Bahrain)

1100-1105	Recap of day 1 (Kishore Kumar Singh)
1105-1145	Country wise break out rooms to discuss the outlines of a potential entry points by identifying responses to the following questions 1) What is the objective of the proposed initiative? What is the outcome that we are looking for? 2) Who are the key stakeholders involved? 3) What are the main challenges and road blocks that may be encountered and the way forward?
1145-1220	Presentation by each country (5min each – 2 or 3 slides only)
1220-1230	Summary of the discussions and immediate next steps – technical (Kishore Kumar Singh)
1230-1240	Remarks by Srinivas Reddy Chief Skills Branch, ILO
1240-1250	Closing remarks by official of the Executive Bureau of GCC
1250-1300	Closing remarks by ILO ROAS

P.S. The 3 questions above will be circulated to all participants beforehand and they will be specifically requested to come prepared with some thoughts in responding to these questions in the reality of their country contexts.

Simultaneous Arabic English interpretation will be provided in all plenaries of both webinars.

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### **List of potential good practice for setting up booths**

1. The Abu Dhabi Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ACTVET) in the United Arab Emirates: Skills for the future (skills anticipation theme from ESCWA paper)
2. Lebanon: Empowering women and serving vulnerable groups – Institute for Development Research Advocacy and Applied care (inclusion theme from ESCWA paper)
3. Jordan – Empowering refugees through TVET (skills governance from ESCWA paper)
4. ILO Yemen – quality apprenticeship (skills policy theme)
5. ILO Jordan – Automation of skills services TVSDC: e-counselling & career guidance manual (career guidance theme)
6. ILO Jordan, ITCILO (care work in Lebanon desk research) (skills policy theme)
7. ILO Lebanon + ITCILO – Skills academy (skills governance theme)
8. Case study from KSA on skills recognition system for migrant workers