**ITUEvents**

# Digital Skills Forum

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**Note from the Chair of the Digital Skills Forum - 2024**

Based on the discussions and presentations made during the Forum, I wish to present this short summary report highlighting the main outcomes, conclusions and recommendations of the Forum. The draft of the final report will be available on the ITU website by 4 October 2024.

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**CHAIR'S OUTCOMES, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

We, the participants, have met here at the Gulf Convention Centre, Gulf Hotel, in Manama, Bahrain, from 17 to 19 September 2024 as delegates to the ITU Digital Skills Forum 2024, under the theme: "Developing skills for digital transformation".

The Digital Skills Forum was preceded on 16 September 2024 by the ITU Academy Training Centres (ATC) annual meeting. The pre-Forum event brought together delegates from all ATCs, who are core partner institutions in ITU's capacity development efforts for its membership offering specialized training, certifications, and hands-on expertise to professionals from government institutions, regulators, ICT sector and academia. In line with the objectives of the Digital Skills Forum, the event provided the space for valuable exchanges to help enhance collaborations to upskill key stakeholders that drive digital transformation.

During the Forum, we had very fruitful discussions on a wide range of topics including:

- Bridging the digital skills divide.
- National digital skills frameworks for policymaking.
- Digital skills for jobs.

- Industry perspective on skills needs.
- Digital innovators and entrepreneurs.
- Skills for a safe and secure use of digital technologies and online information.
- Skills for the green and digital transition.
- Future skills requirements in the age of emerging technologies.

The following are the highlights of the outcomes and recommendations drawn from the Forum:

1. Digital skills are no longer nice to have, but a necessity in today's digital world. They are foundational for a sustainable and prosperous future. Soft skills, such as creative thinking, problem-solving and human-centred communication, must go hand-in-hand with technical skilling and upskilling.

2. The Forum noted that digital skills are the backbone of successful digital transformation worldwide. They are both a driver for positive change and an enabler to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

3. By 2030, 90% of all jobs will require some level of digital skills. Additionally, 65% of children entering primary education today will work in jobs that do not currently exist. This underscores the importance of digital skills as a foundation for all workers. Organizations that do not invest in digital skills risk being left behind, missing business opportunities, and remaining vulnerable to cybersecurity threats.

4. Delegates noted that a focus on digital skills ensures that the existing and future workforce is prepared for existing and future job markets, minimizes inequalities, notably for women, persons with disabilities and people in unserved and underserved communities and other marginalized groups, and fosters progress in both developed and developing economies.

5. Delegates acknowledged that partnerships and multi-stakeholder collaboration is paramount in addressing the digital skills gap and tackling unequal access to technology, education, training and infrastructure.

6.   Discussions on bridging the digital divide highlighted that the lack of digital skills is a main barrier to connect the unconnected. Delegates emphasized the need for tailored and sustainable digital skills projects and programmes that meet the needs of underserved groups. Best practices, lessons learned and challenges from various digital capacity development initiatives were shared, including the ITU-Cisco led Digital Transformation Centres Initiative.

7.   In order to address the pressing digital skills gap, policy makers need to include digital skills policies and programmes as a key element in their national digital transformation strategy.

8.   Delegates recognized the new ITU Digital Skills Toolkit as a valuable document that provides policy makers and regulators with concrete step-by-step guidance on how to develop and implement a national digital skills strategy and roadmap. As part of developing a national strategy, governments are encouraged to carry out a digital skills assessment, which is a critical first step in measuring national skills demand and supply. The established ITU ICT indicators are a useful input into this exercise.

9.   Existing digital skills frameworks, such as the European Commission DigComp framework, are helpful in the process of setting up skills strategies, and to assess the national skills gaps. This framework can be adapted to be used in a developing country context.

10.  The ongoing digital transformation is profoundly affecting labour markets globally, necessitating widespread upskilling and reskilling initiatives as well as the promotion of lifelong learning for all generations, to enable job seekers to enter the workforce or adapt to emerging employment opportunities and maintain their labour market relevance.

11.  Delegates emphasized that addressing the digital skills demand requires more than just focusing on digital transformation and technology; it also requires attention to interpersonal and soft skills, as well as cultural factors, to ensure that workers can thrive in rapidly changing digital environments. They stressed that being unemployable is worse than being unemployed.

12. Policy and education reforms should integrate digital skills training at all levels across sectors to address the pressing digital skills gap. Governments should develop structured curricula on digital skills and competencies that are applied universally across education systems. This implies supporting the upskilling and reskilling of teachers.

13. The private sector can provide valuable guidance for policymakers and educational institutions in aligning their long-term programmes to meet market demands and future skills gaps.

14. Delegates launched a call to action for increased dialogue between government, academia, and the private sector to address common challenges and find common solutions with a forward-looking perspective. Making the right policy decisions today will shape the future world of work.

15. Cross-sectoral partnerships can drive innovative and scalable digital skills training programmes notably leveraging young people to upskill older generations.

16. The role of young people as actors and catalysers of the digital transformation of the job market is crucial. With the right combination of skillset, training, support, and ownership, young people have the potential to contribute to job creation and therefore, reshape the labour market.

17. Investment in young innovators needs to be sustainable, responsible and aligned with ethical considerations in their respective fields. For a well-rounded and innovative digital future, it is essential to make digital education and entrepreneurial opportunities inclusive and accessible.

18. Delegates noted the importance of promoting skills for online safety and the secure use of digital technology to ensure that the public, including children and youth, can critically analyze information and identify online disinformation, fake news and hate speech. The advancement of intercultural understanding and universal access to information are equally important to engage safely and securely in the digital space.

19. The skills that citizens need to be safe and secure online need to continually evolve to match digital threats. To equip citizens with those skills, combined efforts from the public and private sector, as well as academic institutions, are key.

20. The most in-demand skills related to online safety include both soft and technical skills, recognizing that 70% of cyber threats stem from human factors. Key skills include media and information literacy, critical thinking, communication, cybersecurity awareness, incident management and AI application security.

21. The mutually reinforcing evolution of the green and digital transitions was underscored. Digital technologies offer innovative solutions for managing environmental resources, while green principles guide sustainable technological development.

22. Delegates recognized that the combined impact of green and digital transitions will reshape the job market. While certain jobs may be displaced due to automation and digitalization, new opportunities will emerge in green sectors. The ILO projects the potential for 24 million new jobs by 2030 through the transition to green economies.  This shift requires upskilling and reskilling the workforce to meet new demands.

23. Delegates emphasized that educational systems and policy frameworks must evolve to support the green and digital transition. Higher education institutions play a crucial role in developing future-ready professionals, along with the adaption of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) targeted training courses, and regulation of job qualifications to ensure successful green and digital transitions. Digital skills are key drivers of sustainability in the green economy. For example, they enable more efficient resource management and monitoring of environmental data. Developing the workforce's digital capabilities, especially in areas like environmental technology, will be crucial to achieving climate goals and fostering a sustainable economy.

24. AI technologies are poised to transform sectors with high automation potential, such as manufacturing and agriculture. AI will transform at-risk sectors while boosting productivity in others, making upskilling

the workforce essential for effective integration and management of these technologies. AI-powered solutions are expected to be used by 93% of organizations by 2028. To prepare workforces and society, there will be an increasing demand for advanced digital skills coupled with soft skills that facilitate human-AI collaboration.

25. Generative AI, computer vision, reinforcement learning, and predictive analytics are at the forefront of AI technologies reshaping job roles across industries. These technologies are not only creating new job opportunities, but also altering the nature of existing jobs, requiring workers to learn new skills to remain relevant.

26. Governments are called upon to implement robust policies to address the challenges and opportunities presented by AI. These policies should include promoting skills development at all levels of education, particularly in AI and digital technologies.

27. Policymakers were encouraged to monitor and forecast labor market changes, develop skills strategies targeting all levels of the workforce, and support vulnerable populations. Women in particular, need targeted support since they are often less positioned to seize AI opportunities, highlighting the need for dedicated training and awareness. Governments were also urged to implement ethical frameworks to build trust in AI technologies.

28. Collaboration between governments, industry, and educational institutions was stressed as key to addressing the AI skills gap. While the private sector is well placed to know present and future skills needs, educational institutions need to adapt their learning programmes to address those needs. Cross-border cooperation was also noted as crucial for leveling the global playing field.

Finally, delegates expressed profound appreciation for the hospitality provided by the host, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), the Kingdom of Bahrain, which made this event a resounding success.

Delegates congratulated the ITU on the organization of the event and encouraged ITU to continue working together with Governments, industry, academia and other stakeholders to facilitate digital transformation and in bridging the digital skills gap.