



## PRESS RELEASE

### Maximising skills for jobs and jobs for skills in the era of the robots

More than 130 experts and representatives of governments, social partners, education and training, and the labour market discussed how technology and workplace change impact on skill needs and how to create partnerships to address skill mismatch at [Cedefop's high-level conference](#) in Thessaloniki this week. Findings of [Cedefop's European skills and jobs \(ESJ\) survey](#), were also discussed at the conference, which featured some world-renowned speakers.



Professor of Economics at Harvard University Richard Freeman talked about robots and the future of work. He argued that robotisation cannot be stopped and that the effect on people's income depends on who owns the robots: 'To prevent a small number from ruling the world, we must widen ownership of machines, robots and capital.' He added: 'We are entering a new world in which robots are going to be more human than many humans in their work, but won't make many of the mistakes we make.'

Prof. Freeman predicted that future workers will not need to learn foreign languages, but the languages of computers: 'Training and skills that work best in the new world are likely to differ from those in the past by being more computer-based.' He spoke of the rise of the 'robot-boss', already in place in some big companies, and said that doctors and lawyers are as likely to lose their jobs to robots as truck drivers and factory workers.

World Bank's Lead Education Economist Harry Patrinos provided international evidence on returns on education and skills, which shows that 'more education leads to higher earnings.' He said that the average global private return to schooling is 10.4%, with the European Union being close to that average at 10%. He noted that private returns are about equal between general education and vocational education and training (VET), but the social returns on general education markedly outweigh those of vocational. He suggested people need to invest in skills early: 'Those who start learning early continue to learn throughout their life.'

Cedefop Director James Calleja said: 'As Europe is emerging from one of the worst economic crises, people need to align their skills with a labour market in which technology has spread from the production line to being online and everywhere. We know robots and machines create productivity. Some see them as teammates, others as tools taking their jobs away. With the rapid development of technology, learning on the job is the only way forward – hence work-based learning is VET's future.'

He added: 'Seeing the results of Cedefop's European skills and jobs survey, I believe skill mismatch mirrors a mismatch between education and employment. Employers need to get involved in education, and educators should play a bigger role in employment. This should be our next policy debate – building a policy highway from education to employment.'

Detlef Eckert, Director for Skills at the European Commission's DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, mentioned the Skills Agenda to be launched by the Commission in 2016, adding that the initiative is 'in essence about technology.'

Cedefop's Head of Department for Skills and Labour Market Pascaline Descy said that skill mismatch is costly for individuals, employers and society in general: 'The unexploited workforce potential is compromising EU efficiency, with 27% of workers being in dead-end jobs.'

Case studies relevant to the role of partnerships in building skills were presented during the conference, accompanied by a poster exhibition. Participants had the opportunity to learn about innovative projects and good practices from across and beyond the EU that discussed skill needs assessment and anticipation in companies and sectors, the role of VET providers in matching skills, and experience from the workplace.

In her closing remarks, Cedefop Deputy Director Mara Brugia called for action to match jobs and skills better from the outset, saying that 'the tools to do that exist (for example, Europass CV and supplement), but we need to become more aware of them and how to use them. There is also a need to manage people's talents more effectively once they are in a job, with validation playing a key role in certifying skills learned on-the-job.' She concluded: 'We must rethink labour and social policies and think of measures to avoid leaving people behind. This requires more cooperation and trust, and Cedefop will remain at the forefront of developments.'

#### Notes to editors

- Launched in 2014, Cedefop's ESJ survey asked 49 000 adult employees (aged 24 to 65) across all 28 EU Member States how their skills and qualifications match the needs of their jobs. The survey is the first to look at skill mismatch over time, taking account of changes to people's skills and their job tasks.
- Evidence from the ESJ survey is available in a free downloadable report titled [Skills, qualifications and jobs in the EU: the making of a perfect match?](#)
- You can find information on what other speakers said at the conference [here](#).

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#### About Cedefop

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), an agency of the European Union based in Thessaloniki, Greece, supports European policy-making in the field of vocational education and training. [www.cedefop.europa.eu](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu)

