Skills-First Readiness and Adoption Index

Methodological Note

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1 The case for a Skills-First Readiness and Adoption Index

Ongoing structural changes in labour markets are challenging traditional credential-based hiring models. In the context of technological disruption, demographic shifts, and the transition towards a low-carbon economy, hiring models that rely primarily on formal qualifications are increasingly misaligned with evolving labour market demands (Gog, Sung and Sigelman, 2025[1]). Employers face persistent skills mismatches, even amid high levels of formal educational attainment, while individuals without conventional credentials are often excluded from open vacancies despite possessing relevant competencies. This asymmetry contributes to both allocative inefficiencies and the underutilisation of human capital.

Skills-first approaches prioritise demonstrated skills over formal qualifications and experience in hiring, training, and workforce development, positioning skills as the core currency for articulating, developing, and recognising capabilities across the labour market (OECD, 2024[2]; Gog, Sung and Sigelman, 2025[1]). In these approaches, qualifications serve not as gatekeepers but as supplementary signals, supporting rather than substituting for recognisable skills and proficiency. By reorienting labour market signalling, recruitment practices, skills development and work design towards skills, such frameworks can reduce information frictions, broaden talent pipelines, and enhance labour mobility. This is particularly salient in the context of digitalisation and the rise of artificial intelligence, where skills volatility and the premium on adaptability demand systems that support continuous reskilling and more granular skill recognition.

Indeed, the World Economic Forum highlights that skills-first approaches have the potential to benefit over 100 million people across eighteen global economies (World Economic Forum, 2023[3]). Additionally, LinkedIn data indicates that skills-first hiring can substantially expand the pool of potential candidates, with eligible talent increasing ninefold on average across the countries reviewed (LinkedIn, 2023[4]). The advantages of skills-first hiring may extend beyond expanding the talent pool. An analysis of social profile data in the United States conducted by Lightcast and the Boston Consulting Group finds that candidates selected through skills-based criteria tend to exhibit greater organisational commitment, remaining with their companies 9% longer on average than traditional hires (Goel et al., 2023[5]).

Yet, despite growing interest, there is limited empirical understanding of the extent to which skills-first principles have been operationalised across countries. Differences in the interpretation of the concept, as well as variations in national contexts, such as regulatory frameworks, hiring and employment practices, and data infrastructure, complicate cross-country comparison. Without a common benchmark, policymakers and practitioners face challenges in identifying gaps, monitoring progress, and designing evidence-informed interventions. A standardised, multi-dimensional index can help assess the uptake and maturity of skills-first practices across countries.

The Skills-First Readiness and Adoption Index, co-developed by the OECD Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, in collaboration with the Centre for Skills-First Practices at the Singapore University of Social Sciences-Institute for Adult Learning (SUSS-IAL), is designed to address this gap by providing a structured, data-driven framework to measure and track the readiness and adoption of skills-first practices at the national level. By examining the extent to which skills-first frameworks are integrated

into critical areas such as policies, hiring practices, education, and workforce development, the Index aims to: 1) enable policymakers to evaluate national progress, identify systemic gaps, and guide evidence-based policy decisions; 2) provide an aggregate view of how skills-first practices are embedded across employers' hiring and workforce strategies; 3) offer an overview of how effectively education and training providers align curriculum with skills demands and industry needs; and 4) facilitate international benchmarking, enabling countries to learn from one another's operating models and best practices.

2 Assessing skills-first readiness and adoption: Insights from the literature

In response to the global push toward a skills-first labour market, organisations around the world have developed tools, taxonomies, and frameworks to improve skills visibility (OECD, 2024[2]; Gog, Sung and Sigelman, 2025[1]; OECD, 2025[6]). While these efforts signal growing commitment to skills-first approaches, they differ widely in scope and depth, raising critical questions about how to meaningfully and comprehensively measure progress toward a skills-first future.

Several studies have sought to measure the emergence of skills-first practices, with most efforts focusing on skills signalling and hiring behaviours. LinkedIn for example draws on its network of user profiles, job postings, and employer activity to identify in-demand skills, hiring trends, and the prevalence of skills-based job postings. Its *Skills Genome* and *Skills-First: Reimagining the Labor Market* report quantify how expanding the talent search to include workers with relevant skills can expand access to opportunity and diversity in hiring (LinkedIn, 2023[4]). Recent OECD work, conducted in collaboration with LinkedIn, also documents a growing prevalence of skills signalling among individuals in recent years (OECD, 2025[6]).

Similarly, Lightcast and the Burning Glass Institute use large-scale job posting data and proprietary analytics to track how employer requirements evolve over time, particularly in relation to skills-based hiring. Their work with the Boston Consulting Group (Goel et al., 2023[5]) and the Harvard Business School (Sigelman, Fuller and Martin, 2024[7]), focuses on employer intent as expressed in job postings and examines the benefits that shifts to no degree requirements bring to both employers (e.g. improved retention) and individuals (e.g. higher wages, faster career progression). Their research also highlights that successfully adopting skills-based hiring involves more than simply removing degree requirements from job postings. It shows that although the number of postings eliminating degree criteria has increased, actual hiring behaviour remained largely unchanged in most cases (Sigelman, Fuller and Martin, 2024[7]).

Other analyses, instead, are broadening the scope from skills-first hiring and focusing on high-level strategic frameworks and systems change. For instance, the World Economic Forum, through its *Putting Skills First* initiative, outlines how governments, employers, and training institutions can integrate skills-first principles into hiring, learning, and workforce planning (World Economic Forum, 2024[8]). It also showcases "skills-first lighthouses", which are organisations that exemplify the systemic adoption of these practices.

Another such example would be Singapore's SkillsFuture Movement, which focuses on both business-centric and personal-centric applicability (Government of Singapore, 2025[9]). By positioning skills as the core currency of the labour market and integrating tools such as the Career-Skills Passport, which captures individual career and skills achievement, and the Skills Profiling Tool for enterprises to plan skills needs, Singapore aligns recruitment practices with national workforce development strategies. The Skills-First paradigm shift in Singapore has also identified structural gaps that are impeding skills-first adoption (Gog, Sung and Sigelman, 2025[1]).

Collectively, these efforts demonstrate increasing interest in measuring the shift toward skills-first practices. However, they highlight important gaps in how this transition is currently measured:

1. Narrow scope and fragmented perspectives: The effective and sustainable implementation of skills-first approaches requires a holistic, ecosystem-wide perspective that integrates hiring and employment practices, skills development systems, and supportive public policies. It is equally important to account for the roles of key stakeholders, including employers, policymakers, training providers, and individuals, in driving such changes (OECD, 2024[2]; Gog, Sung and Sigelman, 2025[1]). However, existing measurements often focus narrowly on the labour market and the role of employers, offering only partial insights and falling short of capturing the systemic and interconnected nature of skills-first transitions.
2. Reliance on a single source of data: Many current measurement approaches depend predominantly on a single data source, such as online job postings. While these sources offer valuable insights, relying on them in isolation constrains the ability to capture the full complexity and multi-dimensional nature of skills-first adoption. In addition, online job vacancy and platform data often disproportionately reflect certain industries and population groups, leading to incomplete representations. Developing a more accurate, inclusive, and policy-relevant understanding requires the integration of diverse data sources to generate a more comprehensive view of the readiness and adoption of skills-first practices across different contexts.
3. Platform- or country-specific design: Most of the research on skills-first approaches is tailored to the needs of the specific country or proprietary platform that commissioned the study, resulting in fragmented insights that lack interoperability and comparability across systems.

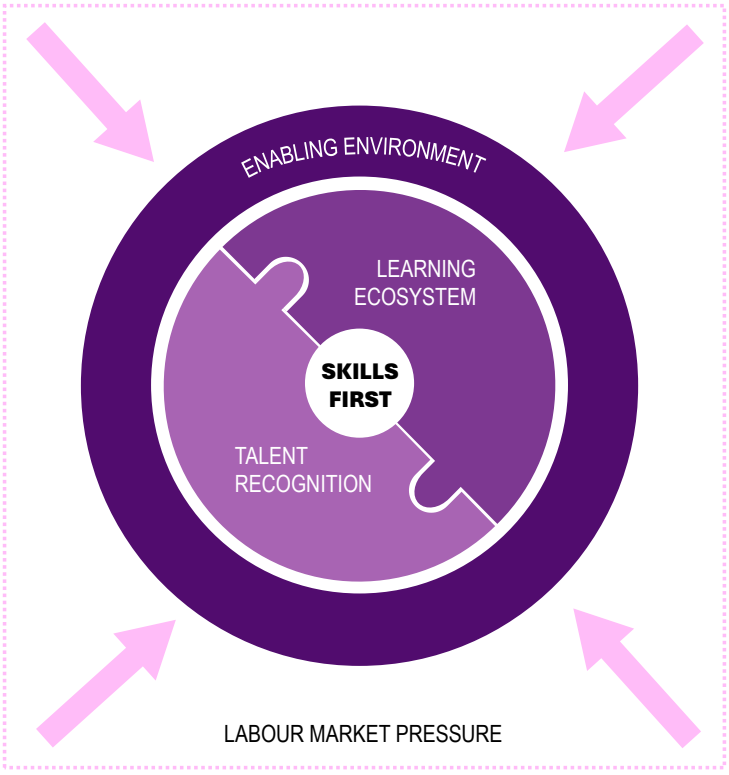
These limitations point to the need for a more comprehensive, inclusive, and globally coherent approach to tracking progress towards skills-first labour markets. Currently, there is no globally accepted framework for assessing the degree of skills-first adoption across countries, nor a standardised method for benchmarking progress in a consistent and comparable way. A robust, multi-dimensional index that captures employer practices, system readiness, policy alignment, education and training systems, and individual experiences can offer a clearer and more actionable picture of where and how the transition towards skills-first approaches is truly taking root. Such an attempt should account for the complexity of multi-stakeholder skills ecosystems, which reflect the interconnections between education, work, and lifelong learning. This will help overcome the risk that “skills-first” becomes more of a rhetorical commitment than a substantive shift – adopted in principle but weakly implemented in practice.

3 A framework for measuring skills-first approaches

A robust and holistic conceptual framework for skills-first approaches must go beyond the conventional employer-centric framing that emphasises skills only at the point of recruitment. Instead, it should embed the skills-first paradigm within a wider context that connects firm-level demand signals with the systemic development and recognition of skills across education, training, and labour market infrastructures. This expanded framework should acknowledge that skills are not static attributes to be assessed in isolation, but dynamic capabilities cultivated and rewarded through interdependent systems.

At the core of skills-first approaches are two interlinked components: developing skills ("learning ecosystem") and valuing skills ("talent recognition") (Figure 3.1). The interaction of these two components establishes a feedback loop in which skills are both cultivated and rewarded through coherent, mutually reinforcing systems, thereby advancing a more inclusive, efficient, and innovation-ready workforce.

Figure 3.1. Skills-first readiness and adoption framework



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Skills development takes place within the broader **learning ecosystem**, which is indeed the first domain where a skills-first mindset takes root. Governments and training providers are increasingly investing in flexible, modular, and targeted learning opportunities that equip individuals with specific, in-demand skills. As the concept of skills-first has emerged in response to widening skill gaps, these programmes are often designed in close alignment with labour market needs. Individuals are actively pursuing upskilling and reskilling opportunities, while employers are supporting employee participation in skills-focused learning and embedding skills development into broader talent strategies. Career guidance professionals are also shifting their focus, helping individuals identify relevant skills and connect with appropriate learning pathways. Together, these efforts contribute to a more agile and responsive learning system that places importance on the acquisition and application of skills over the completion of traditional credentials.

The second domain of skills-first approaches is **talent recognition**, which focuses on how skills are signalled, recognised, and valued in the labour market. This means shifting from recruitment and progression systems that rely heavily on formal qualifications and experiences to ones that acknowledge and reward demonstrated skills, regardless of how or where they were acquired. Skills signalling is a critical component, ensuring that individuals can clearly communicate their capabilities and that employers can articulate their skills needs. Recognition of prior learning plays a complementary role, enabling individuals to have their informal and non-formal learning validated and translated into traditional credentials. This is particularly helpful in contexts transitioning from qualification-based to skills-first systems, where such mechanisms help bridge the gap and ensure that skills are both visible and valued. When skills are clearly identified and fairly rewarded, labour market matching improves, delivering benefits not only for individuals and employers but also for the wider economy.

However, to fully develop a skills-first economy, the right learning and talent recognition systems are not enough: a much broader **enabling environment** – encompassing infrastructure, policies, data systems, and cultural mindset – is also needed to support and sustain skills-first approaches. In particular, a common skills language is essential, as fragmented skills frameworks can hinder communication and coordination among key stakeholders. When existing tools such as national qualification registers and occupational standards are aligned with a shared skills framework, it becomes easier to develop, signal, and recognise skills throughout the system. Reliable labour market information, particularly on current and emerging skills demand, helps all actors make informed decisions and supports efforts to close skills gaps. Public policies that remove barriers to adult learning, such as financial constraints and lack of time, can increase participation and engagement, especially among underrepresented groups. Organisational resistance to change remains a challenge in many contexts, so fostering a business mindset that embraces innovation and lifelong learning is crucial for the success of skills-first reforms.

In addition, the conceptual framework of skills-first readiness and adoption recognises that **labour market pressure** often drives the move towards skills-first approaches. Talent shortages and skills mismatches are obvious motivators, but the push can also come from concerns over workplace diversity and equal access to opportunity. These needs are intensified by the current megatrends (such as ageing, and the green and digital transitions), which heighten the urgency for more inclusive, adaptive, and future-ready skills systems.

Together, the three domains of learning skills, recognising skills, and building an enabling environment form a coherent skills-first readiness and adoption framework that unites key stakeholders and aligns fragmented initiatives. By responding to immediate labour market pressures while building long-term system capacity, skills-first approaches can help address existing labour market challenges and foster a workforce that is not only better matched to today’s needs, but also resilient and adaptable for the future.

4 Constructing the Skills-First Readiness and Adoption Index: Methodology and data

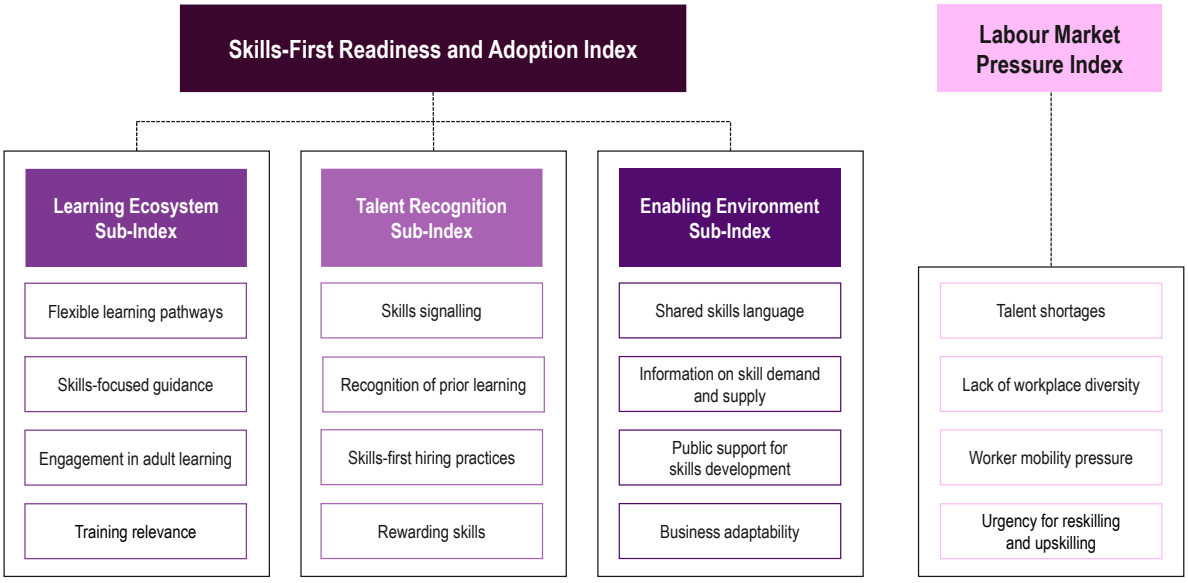
The Skills-First Readiness and Adoption Index is a composite measure designed to synthesise the multi-dimensional skills-first concept into a single, interpretable metric. By aggregating a broad range of indicators, it facilitates the identification of trends and patterns that may otherwise be overlooked in disaggregated data. Moreover, it provides a structured foundation for policy analysis, stakeholder engagement, and comparative assessment. However, the construction of a composite index necessitates careful methodological choices to avoid misrepresentation through over-simplification. Indicator selection must be theoretically grounded and empirically robust to ensure meaningful inference.

The Index is composed of three sub-indices, each divided into four dimensions (Figure 4.1): (1) the Skills-First Learning Ecosystem sub-index examines the extent to which skills-first principles are embedded in the design and delivery of education and training; (2) the Skills-First Talent Recognition sub-index evaluates whether skills are formally recognised and rewarded; (3) the Enabling Environment for Skills-First Approaches sub-index assesses whether a country has the foundational structures to support a shift towards skills-first approaches.

These three sub-indices and 12 dimensions encompass a total of 25 indicators selected to capture the multifaceted nature of skills-first approaches. These indicators reflect policies required to develop individuals' skills, mechanisms that promote employer recognition of those skills, as well as the broader national and institutional environments that enable both development and recognition. Additionally, the indicators are selected to capture the roles that key stakeholders play in building toward a skills-first mindset: employers, governments, training providers, and individuals themselves. A higher score on any component of the index is associated with greater skills-first readiness and adoption.

A complementary Labour Market Pressure for Skills-First Approaches Index has also been developed. This index covers four dimensions comprising a further nine indicators. It represents the degree to which a country stands to benefit from improving its skills-first policies. Importantly, the Labour Market Pressure Index is not incorporated into the calculation of the main Skills-First Readiness and Adoption Index; rather, it is intended to provide further contextual information for each country, highlighting latent opportunity. A higher score signals stronger labour market pressure and greater potential gains from timely adoption. A lower score suggests less immediate pressure, but this does not imply that skills-first strategies are unnecessary; they may still generate significant long-term benefits.

Figure 4.1. Key dimensions of the Skills-First Readiness and Adoption Index



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Each of the three sub-indices of the Skills-First Readiness and Adoption Index is weighted equally for each country C:

$$\text{Skills First}_C = \frac{1}{3}(\text{Learning Ecosystem}_C) + \frac{1}{3}(\text{Talent Recognition}_C) + \frac{1}{3}(\text{Enabling Environment}_C)$$

Within each sub-index, each dimension is weighted equally (irrespective of the number of indicators within each dimension). This means that the weight assigned to each indicator is proportional to the number of indicators within that dimension.

For a small subset of countries, the data used to produce some indicators are not available. Imputing such missing data can introduce unwarranted assumptions and statistical noise, particularly when there is not enough information on other variables (correlated, but statistically and theoretically different) to be exploited for the imputation. Rather than applying imputation techniques that may inflate inter-indicator correlations artificially, in these cases, the score for that dimension is calculated using the indicators for which data are available. This so-called "complete case analysis" approach maintains the empirical integrity of the index, and avoids potential bias arising from model-driven estimations that lack sufficient theoretical or empirical justification (for more information and guidance on dealing with missing cases, see OECD/European Union/EC-JRC (2008[10])).

Because indicators are each measured in different units, the value for each country for a given indicator is normalised to a scale between 0 and 1 based on the maximum and minimum values for each indicator (among all countries); 0 is assigned to the lowest indicator score among all countries with available data, and 1 is assigned to the country with the highest. Thus, the score for a given indicator in country C equals:

$$\text{Final Score}_C = \frac{\text{Initial Score}_C - \text{Min}}{\text{Max} - \text{Min}}$$

After normalisation, all indicator variables have an identical range, from 0 to 1. A higher indicator score is intended to represent greater skills-first readiness and adoption for that country. Normalisation is not

performed for indicators where values are manually assigned between 0 and 1 based on a country's policy environment.

There are several main data sources for these indicators. The OECD's 2023 Survey of Adult Skills from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (henceforth, PIAAC) is used for eight indicators in the Skills-First Readiness and Adoption Index, and a further six indicators in the Labour Market Pressure Index. It is a large-scale, computer-based household survey covering adults aged 16–65. For the purposes of this Index, however, most of the analysis focuses on adults aged 25–65, excluding younger individuals who are typically still engaged in initial education. For a few countries that did not participate in PIAAC in 2023, data from earlier rounds conducted during the first cycle of PIAAC are used.[1] Information on public policies mostly comes from the OECD Trends in Adult Learning Policy Questionnaire (henceforth, TALP). This questionnaire was circulated to representatives of OECD member countries and Singapore in the first half of 2025, and it is used to produce a further eight indicators for the Skills-First Readiness and Adoption Index. To gather the business perspective, data from the World Economic Forum (WEF) *Future of Jobs Survey 2024* are used to compute three Skills-First Readiness and Adoption Index indicators and one indicator in the Labour Market Pressure Index.[2] Other data sources are described beneath the indicator in question.

Skills-First Learning Ecosystem

Table 4.1. Skills-First Learning Ecosystem Sub-Index summary

Dimension	Indicator name	Unit	Source
Flexible learning pathways	National policies promoting modularisation	Assigned score between 0 and 1	OECD TALP Questionnaire
	National policies promoting micro-credentials	Assigned score between 0 and 1	OECD TALP Questionnaire
	Availability of suitable training opportunities	% of adults reporting a barrier to adult learning	PIAAC
Skills-focused guidance	Availability of guidance and incentives to train in high-demand skills	Assigned score between 0 and 1	OECD TALP Questionnaire
	Career guidance focused on skills (rather than qualifications)	Assigned score between 0 and 1	OECD TALP Questionnaire
Engagement in adult learning	Adult participation in non-formal learning	% of adults	PIAAC
	Employer-sponsored training	% among those who participated in job-related non-formal adult learning	PIAAC
Training relevance	Alignment of training with employer skill needs	% overlap	EU Continuing Vocational Training Survey 2020
	Perceived usefulness of training	% of workers who participated in adult learning	PIAAC

[1] PIAAC data for Belgium refer to the Flemish Community; data for the United Kingdom refer to England. Data on participants for each round and cycle of PIAAC are available here: https://www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/piaac.html#participation

[2] The WEF Future of Jobs Survey 2024 collected responses from 1 043 employers in 55 countries spanning 22 industry clusters.

Flexible learning pathways

National policies promoting modularisation

Modularised learning pathways allow individuals to acquire skills in smaller, stackable units that can be accumulated over time and recognised independently of full qualifications (OECD, 2023[11]). This flexibility is essential to skills-first approaches, as it enables learners – particularly adults balancing work or care responsibilities – to upskill or reskill incrementally and in response to labour market demands. Modularisation also enhances the portability and visibility of skills, supporting more targeted job matching and greater adaptability in training provision. This indicator is calculated using the OECD TALP Questionnaire, which asked countries the extent to which the modularisation of learning pathways has been implemented nationally. Countries that reported no national implementation received a score of 0. Those that indicated implementation to a limited, moderate, or substantial extent were assigned scores of 0.25, 0.5, and 0.75, respectively. Countries reporting universal implementation received the maximum score of 1.

National policies promoting micro-credentials

Micro-credentials are short, targeted learning offerings that certify mastery of specific skills or competencies. Developing and promoting micro-credentials contributes to skills-first approaches by allowing individuals to demonstrate job-relevant skills without the need to complete full qualifications (OECD, 2024[2]). This can make upskilling more accessible, especially for adults and non-traditional learners, and enhances the ability of employers to identify candidates with the precise skills required for a role. Micro-credentials can also be a component of designing more agile training systems, able to respond quickly to changing skill demands. This indicator draws on the OECD TALP Questionnaire, which asked countries the extent to which the development and promotion of micro-credentials have been implemented nationally. Countries that reported no national implementation received a score of 0. Those that indicated implementation to a limited, moderate, or substantial extent were assigned scores of 0.25, 0.5, and 0.75, respectively. Countries reporting universal implementation received the maximum score of 1.

Availability of suitable training opportunities

A central premise of skills-first approaches is that individuals must be able to access learning opportunities that align with their skill development needs and employment goals. A poor match between available training activities and learners' own needs – in terms of content, relevance, or mode of delivery – limits the adult learning system's capacity to support timely upskilling and reskilling. The presence of appropriate training opportunities is therefore essential for ensuring that workers can acquire the specific skills required to enter or transition within the labour market. Exploiting PIAAC data, this indicator measures the percentage of adults who did not cite a lack of a suitable training activity as the reason they did not participate in adult learning, among those reporting barriers to adult learning. Because a lack of suitable training reflects a shortcoming in the training system, higher scores are assigned to countries where this barrier is less prevalent.

Skills-focused guidance

Availability of guidance and incentives to train in high-demand skills

Skills-first approaches hinge on the alignment between training systems and evolving labour market needs. Public policies that guide individuals towards in-demand skills – or incentivise their development through financial assistance or job-search support – play a critical role in ensuring that acquired skills are both economically relevant and valued in the labour market. Similarly, mechanisms that encourage providers to design training based on current and projected skill needs enhance the adaptability and responsiveness

of the broader skills ecosystem to structural economic shifts. This indicator measures the extent to which countries implement policies or initiatives explicitly aimed at guiding individuals to train in high-demand skills, and/or incentivising providers to offer such training. Countries were scored on a four-point scale: a score of 0 reflects minimal policy engagement in this area; 0.33 indicates moderate implementation; 0.67 denotes substantial policy intervention; and a score of 1 corresponds to comprehensive and systematic efforts to steer individuals toward high-demand skills and qualifications. The data source for this indicator is the OECD TALP Questionnaire.

Career guidance focused on skills

Effective career guidance helps individuals make informed decisions about training and employment pathways based on their current and potential skills. While qualifications can indeed develop and signal skills, guidance that focuses on skills puts the emphasis on what individuals can actually do rather than on the credential itself. This in turn allows for more personalised career advice, where individuals can identify and pursue paths that align with their strengths and interests, rather than predefined career tracks (OECD, 2024[2]). This indicator measures the extent to which career guidance systems prioritise skills development over the attainment of formal credentials. Countries with limited career guidance systems receive a score of 0. Those where guidance is primarily qualification-focused are assigned a score of 0.5. Countries reporting a balanced or neutral approach and those with a strong skills-first focus are assigned the maximum score of 1. Data for this indicator are from the OECD TALP Questionnaire.

Engagement in adult learning

Adult participation in non-formal learning

Engagement in non-formal learning is a key marker of an adult learning system's capacity to support continuous skill development throughout working life (OECD, 2025[12]). In a skills-first context, regular participation in job-related training enables individuals to adapt to changing job requirements and maintain the relevance of their skillsets. High levels of adult engagement in training also signal a broader culture of lifelong learning, which is essential for sustaining skills-first hiring and workforce development practices. Drawing upon PIAAC data, this indicator measures the share of adults who reported participating in a job-related training activity over the past 12 months, excluding workplace health and safety training (while workplace health and safety training may be valuable, these compliance-based training activities are conceptually distinct from trainings that expand or develop a worker's skills). Values are expressed as a percentage of all adults aged 25-65 who are not still completing their initial studies.

Employer-sponsored training

Employer investment in training is an important enabler of skills-first approaches, as it reflects the extent to which firms take responsibility for supporting the ongoing development of their workforce. When employers provide financial support for adult learning, they help ensure that employees can acquire job-relevant skills in response to evolving demands of the labour market and their own businesses (OECD, 2021[13]). High levels of employer financial support are indicative of a more active and demand-responsive role for firms in the adult learning ecosystem. This indicator exploits PIAAC data to measure the share of individuals who received at least some financial support from their employer for job-related adult learning among those who participated in such learning over the past 12 months.

Training relevance

Alignment of training with employer skill needs

Skills-first readiness and adoption require that training provision is not only accessible, but also aligned with the actual demands of the industry. When training targets skills that firms themselves have identified as priorities for their future development, it suggests that the training is relevant and demand-driven. Failing to address gaps between employer priorities and training on offer can reduce the labour market relevance of training provision and limit its effectiveness in addressing evolving skill needs (OECD, 2019[14]). Drawing on data from Eurostat's 2020 Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS), this indicator measures the degree of alignment between the top three skills that enterprises report as critical for their future development and the top three skills targeted by enterprises providing continuing vocational training (CVT) courses. A score of 0 is assigned if none of the reported priority skills are reflected in training focus, and scores of 0.33, 0.67, or 1 are assigned if one, two, or all three skill priorities are targeted in training, respectively.

Perceived usefulness of training

Skills-first readiness and adoption requires that training systems not only succeed in developing skills, but also that those skills are applicable and valuable in the workplace (Gog, Sung and Sigelman, 2025[1]). High perceived usefulness is therefore a strong indicator of the degree to which adult learning systems support skills-first readiness and adoption. This indicator measures the share of adults who reported that a training activity they participated in was "very useful" for their current job among all adults who participated in job-related adult learning. The data source for this indicator is PIAAC. Further information on the perceived usefulness of adult learning can be found in OECD (2025[12]).

Skills-First Talent Recognition

Table 4.2. Skills-First Talent Recognition Sub-Index summary

Dimension	Indicator name	Unit	Source
Skills signalling	Existence of government-led skills signalling initiatives	Assigned score between 0 and 1	Desk research
	Skills signalling by individuals	Mean probability that LinkedIn users add skills to profiles	LinkedIn
Recognition of prior learning	Existence of established national recognition of prior learning systems	Assigned score between 0 and 1	OECD TALP Questionnaire
Skills-first hiring practices	Prevalence of field-of-study-mismatch among workers with adequate skills	% of workers	PIAAC
	Prevalence of workers with adequate skills, but who are under-qualified	% of workers	PIAAC
	Employer openness to skills-based hiring	% of employers	WEF Future of Jobs Report 2025
	Employers' focus beyond degrees	% of employers	WEF Future of Jobs Report 2025
Rewarding skills	Comparative returns to skills vs. qualifications	Ratio of % increase in wages for skills vs years of education	PIAAC

Skills signalling

Existence of government-led skills signalling initiatives

Skills signalling initiatives, such as skills passports, digital credential wallets, or verified skill profiles, can play an important role in enabling skills-first approaches by making individuals' skills more visible, portable, and verifiable. These initiatives allow employers to evaluate candidates based on what they can do, rather than relying solely on traditional proxies such as degrees or job titles. When led or endorsed by public authorities, they can also support standardisation and broader trust in skill recognition across the labour market. This indicator captures the extent to which countries have implemented national initiatives aimed at improving skills signalling. Countries with no identifiable initiatives are assigned a score of 0. Those with initiatives under development receive a score of 0.33. Countries with pilot projects, regional implementations, or initiatives not fully digitalised are assigned a score of 0.67. Countries with government-led national initiatives are assigned the maximum score of 1. Scores are based on desk research using publicly available documentation describing the initiative's purpose, coverage, and institutional backing.

Skills signalling by individuals

When individuals proactively signal their skills – for example, by listing them on professional networking platforms such as LinkedIn – it facilitates recruitment targeted at skills and strengthens recognition of skills that may have been acquired through a broader set of educational or professional pathways. A higher prevalence of individual-level skill signalling also reflects greater awareness and acceptance of skill-based evaluation within the labour market. This indicator measures the average likelihood that LinkedIn users in a given country list at least one skill on their profile. Values represent the mean probability of skill disclosure by users from each country. The data for this indicator come from a recent OECD report *Empowering the Workforce in the Context of a Skills-First Approach* (OECD, 2025[6]).

Recognition of prior learning

Existence of an established national recognition of prior learning system

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) systems enable individuals to have their existing skills – acquired through work, informal or non-formal learning – formally recognised against existing standards or qualifications (OECD, 2023[15]). This improves the visibility and recognition of skills that people have already developed, facilitating faster, more flexible pathways to credentialing and reducing the time and cost of (re)training (Meghnagi and Tuccio, 2022[16]). Countries with well-established RPL systems are better positioned to reward adults for their skills and integrate them smoothly into the labour market. This indicator measures the extent to which RPL systems are implemented nationally, based on the information gathered through the OECD TALP Questionnaire. Countries reporting no implementation score 0; those with limited implementation score 0.25; moderate implementation scores 0.5; substantial coverage scores 0.75; and universal implementation scores 1.

Skills-first hiring practices

Prevalence of field-of-study mismatch among workers with adequate skills

Skills-first readiness and adoption require that hiring practices are guided by what individuals can do rather than narrowly determined by the specific field of their formal qualification. When workers are employed in occupations unrelated to their field of study yet report that their skills are well matched to the demands of their job, this suggests that employers are placing greater weight on actual competencies than on field-specific credentials. A higher prevalence of such cases reflects a labour market in which skills are more

flexibly valued and utilised across occupational boundaries. Using PIAAC data, this indicator measures the share of employed adults whose highest qualification is in a domain or field of study that does not correspond to their current occupation, but who report that their skills are adequate for performing their job.[3]

Prevalence of workers with adequate skills, but who are under-qualified

Skills-first readiness and adoption are reflected in hiring practices that prioritise individuals' demonstrated capabilities over formal qualification levels. When workers without the typical credential for a given job nonetheless perform their duties competently and report that their skills are well matched to job requirements, this suggests that employers are valuing skills independently of formal attainment. A higher share of such workers points to a labour market where non-traditional pathways into employment are more viable and where hiring decisions are more strongly based on competencies than on credentials. This indicator measures the share of workers who report that their skills are well matched to their job, despite holding a qualification level that is below what they believe would typically be required to be hired into that same role today. It is constructed using three variables from PIAAC: self-reported skill match, highest qualification attained, and the qualification level respondents believe is typically required for their current job. Values are expressed as the percentage of all employed adults who meet the criteria for both skill adequacy and formal under-qualification.[3]

Employer openness to skills-based hiring

Skills-first readiness and adoption is strengthened when employers shift away from credential-based hiring practices and instead assess talent by focusing on skills. Removing degree requirements and conducting skills-based hiring is increasingly recognised as a way for firms to widen candidate pools and meet demand for in-demand competencies. This indicator focuses on employers, surveyed by the WEF Future of Jobs Survey 2024, who identified the business practice of "removing degree requirements and conducting skills-based hiring" as promising to increase talent availability. Countries in which a higher proportion of employers endorse this practice are considered more open to skills-based hiring. The indicator is thus equal to the share of employers in each country who identified removing degree requirements as promising to increase the pool of available talent.

Employers' focus beyond degrees

Prioritising skills in hiring demands that employers place less emphasis on formal credentials – such as the completion of a university degree – and instead focus on observable skills when screening candidates. A lower reliance on degree credentials signals a shift toward flexible hiring practices that evaluate applicants by their competencies and potential, consistent with skills-first readiness and adoption. This

[3] Note that the indicators "Prevalence of field-of-study mismatch among workers with adequate skills" and "Prevalence of workers with adequate skills but who are under-qualified" in the Skills-First Readiness and Adoption Index, together with "Prevalence of skills mismatch" in the Labour Market Pressure for Skills-First Approaches Index, each captures different dimensions of mismatch:

- Prevalence of field-of-study mismatch among workers with adequate skills: Refers to cases where individuals' occupations do not correspond to their field of study. This mismatch relates to the subject area of education, not to the qualification level or skills required for the job.
- Prevalence of workers with adequate skills but who are under-qualified: Captures adults who report that their skills are well-matched to their job, but whose formal qualifications fall below the level typically required for a newly hired worker in the same role today.
- Prevalence of skills mismatch: Identifies workers who report that their skill level – independent of their qualifications or field of study – is poorly matched to the demands of their job.

indicator measures the inverse of the share of employers who prioritise “completion of a university degree” when assessing skills during hiring, based on employers’ responses to the WEF Future of Jobs Survey 2024. Countries where a higher proportion of firms place weight on degree completion are considered less open to skills-based hiring.

Rewarding skills

Comparative returns to skills versus qualifications

In a system that supports skills-first readiness and adoption, individuals should be rewarded not merely for their educational attainment, but for the skills they bring to the job. While years of education and formal credentials can serve as proxies for skill, they do not always reflect the full range or quality of an individual’s competencies. This indicator assesses the degree to which skills are rewarded in the labour market relative to educational attainment, providing insight into how strongly employers value actual capabilities over formal credentials. It is derived from individual-level data from PIAAC. For each country, a regression model is estimated in which (log) hourly wages are regressed on the two core variables of interest: numeracy proficiency (measured through a direct skill assessment in PIAAC) and years of education. Additional controls include gender, migrant background, living with a partner, having children, and years of work experience.[4] Regression coefficients from this model are then used to compute the estimated effect on wages of a one-standard-deviation increase in numeracy proficiency and, separately, of a one-standard-deviation increase in years of education. The final indicator is the ratio of these two marginal effects: the estimated return to skills relative to the estimated return to education. Higher values indicate that skills are more strongly rewarded – through higher wages – relative to years of formal education.

Enabling Environment for Skills-First Approaches

Table 4.3. Enabling Environment for Skills-First Approaches Sub-index summary

Dimension	Indicator name	Unit	Source
Availability of shared skills language	National occupational standards linked to skills	Assigned score between 0 and 1	Desk research
	National qualification registries linked to skills	Assigned score between 0 and 1	Desk research
Availability of information on skill demand and supply	Accessibility of skills assessment and anticipation (SAA) data	Assigned score between 0 and 1	OECD TALP Questionnaire
	SAAs explicitly focusing on skills	Assigned score between 0 and 1	OECD TALP Questionnaire
Public support for skills development	Nationwide entitlements for education and training leave	Assigned score between 0 and 1	OECD TALP Questionnaire
	Government expenditure on education	% of GDP	UNESCO-OECD-Eurostat (UOE)
Business adaptability	Employer openness to organisational change	% of employers	WEF Future of Jobs Report 2025
	Workplace innovations	% of workers	PIAAC

[4] This estimation model is consistent with the wage regression in OECD (2024[19]).

Availability of shared skills language

National occupational standards linked to skills

Linking national occupational standards to specific skill sets provides a common language and reference point for articulating job requirements. This indicator evaluates the existence and scope of national occupational standards, focusing on the extent to which they are systematically mapped to skills. Countries without occupational standards, or whose standards are not linked to skills, receive a score of 0 for this indicator. Where skills are referenced but not encoded, countries are assigned 0.5. Finally, countries whose occupational standards mention skills and encode skills are assigned the maximum score of 1.

National qualification registries linked to skills

Integrating national qualification registries with explicit skill descriptors facilitates skills-first approaches by codifying and standardising qualifications in terms of the competencies they certify. This enhances transparency regarding the specific skill sets associated with each qualification. The corresponding indicator evaluates countries based on the extent to which qualification registries are linked to skills. Countries without national qualification registries, or whose registries are not linked to skills, have a score of 0. References to skills, but no formal encoding of skills, result in a score of 0.5. Countries where qualifications registries are linked to a clearly coded skill taxonomy are assigned 1. While in several countries, especially in the European Union, these qualification registries cover qualifications across all levels and types of education, in a few countries, this link is limited to vocational education and training (VET) systems. In such cases, the indicator does not penalise the limited scope, provided that the connection between qualifications and skills is systematic within the VET sector.

Availability of information on skill demand and supply

Accessibility of skills assessment and anticipation (SAA) data

Skills Assessment and Anticipation Exercises (SAAs) are systematic efforts to generate information about current and future skill needs. These exercises may draw on quantitative forecasts, employer surveys, expert consultations, or real-time labour market data to identify where skill shortages, surpluses, or mismatches are likely to arise (OECD, 2016[17]). SAAs are therefore an invaluable tool in guiding policies towards the skills that will be necessary for a changing labour market (OECD, 2019[14]). Making the findings of such exercises readily available is imperative if their insights are to inform decision-making. The OECD TALP Questionnaire asks participating countries, “to what extent are findings from SAAs disseminated to relevant stakeholders?”. The score for “sporadically” is 0; countries that responded “through regular communications, e.g. regular newsletters, workshops, mailing lists)” scored 0.5, and countries that disseminate SAA findings “through a labour market information platform” were assigned a score of 1.

SAAs explicitly focusing on skills

To effectively adopt skills-first practices, SAAs must have a focus on skills themselves. When SAAs focus on occupations or credentials alone, they risk reinforcing traditional hiring signals and failing to capture the changing structure of work. By contrast, focusing on skills allows for a more granular understanding of labour market needs, facilitating mobility across sectors and occupations – especially when formal qualification pathways may not align neatly or quickly enough with emerging skills needs. This indicator is based upon the OECD TALP Questionnaire, which asks respondents, “what is the main focus of your skills anticipation exercises?”. Countries are assigned 0 if the focus is on occupations or qualifications, and 1 if SAAs focus on both skills and qualifications equally, or solely on skills.

Public support for skills development

Nationwide entitlements for education and training leave

Nationally guaranteed education and training leave entitlements help address a key constraint to skills-first approaches: workers' availability to acquire or update their skills. Leave entitlements reduce opportunity costs by giving workers time, and in the case of paid leave, ensure income security to pursue training (OECD, 2019[14]). Respondents to the TALP Questionnaire were asked, "does your country have country-wide provisions for education and training leave?". Indicator scores are assigned according to these responses. "No provisions" receives 0; "collective agreements in some sectors" receives 0.5, and "collective agreements for all sectors" or "statutory provisions" both receive 1.

Government expenditure on education

Sustained public investment in education is a foundational component of skills-first readiness and adoption. Drawing from joint UNESCO-OECD-Eurostat (UOE) education statistics, this indicator captures total government expenditure on education in 2021, as a percentage of GDP. Higher expenditure levels reflect a strong national commitment to financing learning systems, expanding access to training, and modernising curricula in response to changing labour market needs. Systems with robust education funding may also be more likely to invest in flexible learning pathways, modular credentials, and vocational programmes that are critical to skills-first readiness and adoption. Expenditure is therefore a useful proxy for the overall strength of public commitment to the learning infrastructure that underpins skills-first approaches.

Business adaptability

Employer openness to organisational change

Skills-first approaches require buy-in from all stakeholders, especially employers. Adopting skills-first approaches will necessitate significant shifts in the outlook and culture of an organisation with respect to hiring decisions and the development of skills among employees (OECD, 2024[2]). This indicator is based on the WEF Future of Jobs Survey 2024, which reports the share of employers who expected that "organisational culture and resistance to change" would hinder their organisational transformation. In this context, organisational transformation captures the general confidence that employers have in the culture of their organisation to adapt to changes wrought by macro-trends such as technological change, digital access, green transition, demographic shifts, or geopolitical fragmentation. Because greater openness to change supports the adoption of skills-first approaches, original variable scores are inverted: countries with the highest share of employers citing organisational culture as a barrier to business transformation receive the lowest score, while countries where organisations show greater openness to change receive higher scores.

Workplace innovations

Workplaces that embrace change will have an easier time adopting skills-first approaches. When workplaces frequently evolve their methods and practices – whether by adopting new technologies, restructuring work processes, or experimenting with task design – it signals a culture that values adaptability and continuous improvement. Such environments are more likely to recognise and reward evolving skill sets and support the integration of new competencies into job roles. This indicator scores countries according to the percentage of workers who report that, over the past three years, their working environment has significantly changed in the area of "working methods and practices". The data source for this indicator is PIAAC.

Complementary Index: Labour Market Pressure for Skills-First Approaches

The dimensions in this index capture aspects of a country's labour market that increase the urgency for adopting skills-first approaches. As such, it is ancillary to the main Skills-First Readiness and Adoption Index, and it is not included in its calculation; rather, it is intended to summarise four contextual dimensions of a country's labour markets. Talent shortages, biased hiring practices, low worker morale or skill aptitude issues, and changing skills requirements all increase the pressure on countries and organisations to adopt skills-first approaches.

Table 4.4. Labour Market Pressure for Skills-First Approaches Index summary

Dimension	Indicator name	Unit	Source
Talent shortages	Labour market tightness	Job vacancies per unemployed worker	OECD Employment Outlook 2025
	Employer-reported hiring difficulties	% of employers	ManpowerGroup's 2025 Talent Shortage Survey
Lack of workplace diversity	Gender disparities in skills allocation across occupations	Mean percentage point difference between predicted and observed employment shares	PIAAC
	Age concentration in occupations	Mean percentage point difference between predicted and observed employment shares	PIAAC
Worker mobility pressure	Prevalence of skills mismatch	% of workers	PIAAC
	Job dissatisfaction	% of workers	PIAAC
	Voluntary job exits due to skills mismatch	% of unemployed or inactive adults with employment in the past five years	PIAAC
Urgency for reskilling and upskilling	Anticipated core skills disruption	Mean skill stability %	WEF Future of Jobs Report 2025
	Frequency of learning new things at work	% of workers	PIAAC

Talent shortages

Labour market tightness

In countries with tight labour markets – where the number of job vacancies exceeds the number of unemployed individuals – employers face increasing difficulty filling open positions, which can often be due to mismatches between job requirements and available talent. Skills-first approaches can expand the pool of eligible candidates to include those who possess the necessary skills but may lack traditional credentials. These approaches can unlock underutilised talent, improve job matching efficiency, and reduce hiring frictions, ultimately supporting productivity and easing labour shortages in high-demand sectors. Tighter labour markets increase the potential for benefits resulting from such approaches. Labour market tightness is here defined as the number of vacancies per unemployed person, and the data come from the 2025 OECD Employment Outlook (OECD, 2025[18]).

Employer-reported hiring difficulties

Skills-first approaches broaden the available talent pool and can help alleviate hiring difficulties. This indicator presents the share of employers reporting that they are struggling to find the skilled talent that they need. The data come from the Manpower *2025 Global Talent Shortage Report*, which contains data collected from interviews with over 40 thousand employers in 42 countries.

Lack of workplace diversity

Gender disparities in skills allocation across occupations

This indicator captures the extent to which employment across various occupations is concentrated among one gender above and beyond what would be expected given the skill and training requirements of each occupation. Workplaces with highly gendered distributions can be less productive than those with more balanced shares of men and women. Furthermore, strong concentrations of one gender within an occupation when there are men or women who would otherwise have the skills and training to work within that occupation may be explained, at least in part, by bias in favour of or against a given gender on the part of employers. Large disparities between the share of men or women who are notionally capable of working in an occupation and the observed share of employment for each gender strengthen the case for adopting skills-first approaches. Such approaches can help bring gender shares across occupations more closely in line with the shares of women and men who have the requisite skills, thereby improving productivity and broadening opportunities for men and women.

Exploiting PIAAC data, the first step in calculating this indicator is to create a counterfactual model that estimates the share of women (or men) within an occupation based on the skill requirements of that occupation. This model is estimated, for each country, using educational attainment and field of study. For each country with individuals i:

$$\Pr(\text{Gender}_i) = \text{logit}^{-1}(\beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{Attainment}_i + \beta_2 \cdot \text{Field of Study}_i)$$

Once the model for each country is parametrised, it is used to predict the share of each gender employed in each occupation. This share is obtained by applying the model to each observation in the sample; applying the model in this way assigns a probability to each individual, based on their educational qualifications, that they are a woman or a man (this individual's actual gender notwithstanding), and aggregating these predicted probabilities by occupation produces the overall predicted share of each gender within each occupation, which can be compared against the observed share. Thus, for each country with occupation O:

$$\widehat{P_O} = \frac{1}{N_O}\sum_{i=1}^{\text{N}_\text{O}} \Pr(\text{Gender}_i)$$

$$\text{P}_\text{O}^{\text{obs}} = \frac{1}{\text{N}_\text{O}}\sum_{\text{i=1}}^{\text{N}_\text{O}} (\text{Observed Gender}_\text{i})$$

Here, $\widehat{P_O}$ denotes the predicted gender share for each occupation in each country, N_O is the number of individuals in each occupation in that country, and P_O^{obs} is the observed gender share for each occupation in each country. Once this predicted share is calculated, the occupation-level gender concentration is equal to the absolute value of the difference between the observed share of women and the predicted share (absolute values are used because gender concentration can result from either having fewer women in an occupation than would be predicted, or having more). The difference for each occupation is measured in percentage points.

$$\text{Difference}_O = \left|\widehat{P_O} - P_O^{\text{obs}}\right|$$

These occupation-level differences are then averaged – weighted by the overall employment share of that occupation among all workers in the sample – to produce the indicator value for each country C (N_C denotes the number of individuals in each country).

$$\text{Weight}_O = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{N_O} w_i}{\sum_{i=1}^{N_C} w_i}$$

$$\text{Final Score}_C = \sum_{O \in K_C} \text{Difference}_O \cdot \text{Weight}_O$$

Here, K_C denotes the set of occupations in each country. These calculations produce the percentage point difference between predicted and observed gender share across all occupations – weighted by employment within that occupation – for each country.

Age concentration in occupations

This indicator captures the extent to which employment across various occupations is concentrated among prime-age workers, above and beyond what would be expected given the skill and training requirements of each occupation. In this case, prime-age workers are defined as those between the age of 30 and 55. The indicator compares the share of workers within an occupation who are prime age compared to those who are early-career (15-29) and late-career (over 55). Workers in the early or late stages of their careers may be at risk of discrimination from potential employers. Large disparities between the share of early- or late-career workers who are notionally capable of working in an occupation and the observed share of employment for these groups strengthen the case for adopting skills-first approaches. These approaches can help bring the distribution of workers by age across occupations more closely in line with the shares of the population who have the requisite skills, thereby improving productivity and broadening opportunities for all workers.

The first step in calculating this indicator is to create a counterfactual model that estimates the share of early- and late-career workers within an occupation based on the skill requirements of that occupation. This model is estimated, for each country, using educational attainment and field of study from PIAAC. The indicator is calculated separately for early-career workers versus prime-age and for late-career workers versus prime-age workers, and then averaged. The calculation for the disparities for early-career and late-career workers is the same as those used to calculate gender disparities (see previous indicator). These calculations result in the percentage point difference between predicted and observed employment shares (i.e. between prime-age workers and other workers) across all occupations – weighted by employment within that occupation – for each country.

Worker mobility pressure

Prevalence of skills mismatch

A high prevalence of skills mismatch – where workers possess either more or fewer skills than their job requires – indicates that labour markets are not efficiently allocating skills. This inefficiency results in lost productivity, diminished job satisfaction, and barriers to career progression. In such contexts, there is stronger pressure on policymakers and employers to adopt skills-first approaches that improve how individuals' competencies are identified, recognised, and matched to job roles. Using PIAAC data, this indicator measures the prevalence of skills mismatches, where a worker reports that their skill level is either less than, or more than, what is required to do their job. It is equal to the number of workers reporting over- or under-skilling divided by the total number of workers in each country.

Job dissatisfaction

High levels of job dissatisfaction – whether due to poor job fit, limited advancement, or lack of recognition – signal that workers' skills are often underutilised or misaligned with their roles. By better aligning workers' skills with job demands, employers can improve engagement, retention, and productivity, while enabling more effective upskilling and internal mobility. This indicator presents the percentage share of employed adults who report being "dissatisfied" or "extremely dissatisfied" with their job on a five-point scale ranging from "very satisfied" to "extremely dissatisfied". Data are from PIAAC.

Voluntary job exits due to skills mismatch

Workers quitting a job due to a mismatch between their skills and job requirements creates a drag on worker satisfaction and productivity. This indicator is the number of unemployed or inactive individuals who cited “the job did not match my skills” as the main reason that they stopped working in their last job divided by the number of individuals who cited other reasons for having left their previous employment. The sample for this indicator is all currently unemployed or inactive individuals who were employed at some point within the past five years. The indicator is calculated using PIAAC data.

Urgency for reskilling and upskilling

Anticipated core skills disruption

Changes in the skill requirements for a job mean that employers must either invest in developing new skills among their employees or hire workers whose skills reflect current needs. In both cases, skills-first approaches can help. This indicator reports the share of workers’ core skills that employers expect to change by 2030. It is calculated based on the probability that each employer in each country assigns to each one of 26 core skills. More precisely, the indicator score for each country equals the mean, across all employers within a country, of the mean of the probabilities assigned by each employer across all 26 skills. The data for this indicator come from the WEF Future of Jobs Survey 2024.

Frequency of learning new things at work

In work environments where employees are regularly required to learn new things, there is a heightened demand for systems that can support continuous skill development and agile recognition of evolving competencies. A high frequency of workplace learning signals that job tasks are dynamic and that skills may be in need of maintenance and development. In such settings, skills-first readiness and adoption become especially important, as traditional models based solely on qualifications or static job descriptions are less suited to keeping pace with fast-evolving work demands. Using PIAAC data, this indicator presents the share of workers who report that they learn new things at work “At least once a week” or “Every day”, to the question “How often does your current job involve learning new things?” as a share of all workers.

5 Final remarks

The Skills-First Readiness and Adoption Index represents the first attempt to measure skills-first approaches at the international level in a comprehensive and inclusive way. Building on earlier work identified in the literature review, it adopts a holistic perspective that extends beyond hiring and employment practices to also encompass learning ecosystems and enabling public policies. It highlights the role of a wide range of stakeholders, including policymakers, employers, training providers, and individuals. To reinforce its neutrality, the Index draws on multiple international data sources.

Yet, this remains an initial effort to shed light on skills-first practices, and a few limitations should be acknowledged to guide future research. First, much of the data is self-reported and therefore reflects respondents' own judgements. For example, the OECD Trends in Adult Learning Policy data were provided by country representatives based on their interpretation of adult learning policy implementation. In addition, in federal systems, policy information was typically provided by federal representatives, which may not capture advanced initiatives at the state or provincial level.

Second, there are limitations in data availability. The Index primarily covers OECD countries. For instance, it leverages PIAAC data, which are available for most but not all OECD members, and for only a limited number of non-OECD economies. In a few cases, data come from PIAAC Cycle 1 (2011–18), meaning that not all countries are measured at the same point in time. Data constraints also mean that some indicators carry greater weight than others. For example, two dimensions of the Skills-First Talent Recognition sub-index are based on a single indicator, while others are based on between two and four. As a result, indicators for "recognition of prior learning" and "rewarding skills" exert greater influence on the overall score than those relating to "skills-first hiring practices."

Importantly, the Index is not designed to rank countries. Its objective is to stimulate dialogue on skills-first approaches by defining the concept holistically and operationalising it through measurable indicators. In this way, it can help policymakers and other stakeholders identify priorities, advance implementation, and benchmark practices internationally.

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