

# Soft skills, digital literacy vital in training young workers — ADB

Asia Pacific nations should expand the formation of foundational skills among students and young workers to include soft skills and digital literacy to capacitate them for jobs of the future, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) said.

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In a recent entry on the Asian Development Blog titled “The future of work means learning to relearn,” ADB North America office representative Bart Édés said technological advancements are happening at a rapid pace in Asia that adapting to technological change will largely determine whether countries can prepare their workforce.



He noted that many laborintensive jobs especially in manufacturing may no longer be relevant in the future as new jobs would be created alongside advancements in technology.

“For example, foresighted countries are trying to put their economies on a more environmentally sustainable path. This can usher in a whole range of jobs in renewable energy, energy efficiency and recycling,” Édés said.

Education systems, he said, should continually adapt and retrain workers because the future of work requires lifelong and agile learning.

“Countries need to create a culture where people undergo retraining several times over their career, where they can have the option to shift into new sectors and try out new jobs or tasks within sectors,” he said.

Assuming that a worker’s continuous education and training would be conducted alongside their full-time work, educational content must be provided in a format that is short, convenient and mobile. Shorter online education and training programs are emerging in response to this growing demand.

Édes also said that there is a need for the expansion of foundational skills to include soft skills and digital literacy.

“It used to be that foundational skills only included basic reading, writing, and numeracy. Today, though, they have grown to encompass two more categories: social and emotional skills, and digital literacy. In a technology-driven economy, these skills build on each other to promote further learning,” he said.

Digital literacy, he noted, is fast becoming indispensable for everyday functions as digital finance and e-government, as well as further education and lifelong learning. This covers the ability to use digital devices and platforms, and knowing how to use them appropriately.

As specialized skills are likely to depreciate quickly, particularly in a time of fastevolving technology, Édes urges institutions to regularly update their programs.

“Institutions need to constantly update the training and education they provide to respond to fast-changing labor market demand. Many countries are developing credit transfer systems to enable TVET graduates to pursue higher education – allowing, for example, a technician to become an engineer – and university students to choose a more vocationally oriented track. This is an important step toward expanding skillsets across the workforce,” he said.