

PRESS RELEASE

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Europe India Foundation for Excellence **Skill India in focus at UNESCO meet**

As Modi government completed two years in office, one of his pet schemes, Skill India, was in focus here in Paris as UNESCO hosted a Global Skill Development Meet, attended by delegations from various countries around the world.

The meet was organised by the Europe India Foundation for Excellence (EIFE), Brussels, in close collaboration with the Permanent Delegation of India to UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) at the Paris headquarters of UNESCO on May 23, 2016, and marked the beginning of a crucial journey to bring focus on Skill India project launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a global meet.

The meeting was attended by over 175 skill development professionals from France, Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and India, with an intense agenda that allowed the teams to work closely together, share ideas, experiences and feedback with each other in a long day lasting over 14 hours.

This was also the first time that experts from UNESCO and the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), also headquartered in Paris, got together on one platform to discuss the state of the Indian skill development sector and highlighted case studies of how India could learn from other nations in a similar phase of development as India.

Inaugurating the Summit, Ms Ruchira Kamboj, Permanent Representative of India to UNESCO, welcomed the initiative and emphasised the importance of Skill India programme for the future of India and she also welcomed that so many professionals from all over the European Union (EU) had gathered to participate in the deliberations on what was needed in India and how EU institutions and organisations could play a role in it.

A timely event, after the EU India summit

On the occasion, Count Christophe de Breza, chairman of EIFE, said that the UNESCO conference was extremely timely as it came barely a few weeks after the EU India summit, where Prime Minister Modi and his EU counterparts had agreed to enhance collaboration in the domain of skill development.

“We are very proud and glad that we could bring together so many crucial players in the skilling domain under the same roof for the first time ever to discuss how to enhance Skill India,” he told the gathering, adding that the UNESCO meet was a precursor to a much larger meeting that will be held in New Delhi in early September this year.

These sentiments were enthusiastically endorsed by President of Chambre of Commerce & Industry of Paris, Jean Paul Vermès, who in his special address outlined the various sectors, including sunrise sectors such as renewable energy, defence, urban development, textiles etc. Vermès told the gathering that he was energised by the comments of Prime Minister Modi during his visit to France last year where he laid the foundations of a closer collaboration between Indian and French industries as well as skilling institutions.

David Achurion, director of skills, UNESCO, revealed interesting highlights of the studies conducted by UNESCO in skill development and expressed the desire of the international organisation to work more closely in helping India achieve its ambitious goals in skill development. He said that the challenges facing vocational training in the world included ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Capitalise on the demographic dividend

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the OECD, an intergovernmental body that brings together 35 richest economies of the world, sent in a powerful delegation comprising of three senior officials.

Andreas Schleicher, Director of Skills and Education and Stefano Scarpetta, Director, Employment at the OECD. They talked of OECD's experience in developing skills and education, not only in the OECD nations but also in several developing economies, notably Turkey, China, Brazil etc.

Scarpetta also focused in his presentation on stakeholders of skilling programs and their crucial needs in countries with large youth populations to capitalise on the demographic dividend. OECD believes that it is possible to improve employability by making skills more transferable and workforce more adaptable.

In the session German Experience in India, Tim Miller, Vice President of TUV Rheinland, one of the largest certification, standardisation and training institutions of the world, recounted his rich experience of working in the skills domain in India and he highlighted the numerous challenges faced by the skill development programme in the country. One of the biggest challenges, Miller said, was that as the skilling programmes were free for the children, most of them did not value it and consequently the programmes suffered from a very high drop out rate. The other challenge was the reluctance of even the trained persons to move to jobs that were not in the vicinity of their residence, as moving to a big city, even for a higher salary, meant that the net saving was much lesser, due to the high costs of living in an urban centre.

Many key French institutions

The French companies in skilling domain were represented by a number of key institutions including Promeo/Codifor, the largest metallurgy and manufacturing skilling institution in Europe, as well as IPSA, an aeronautics and space engineering, design and manufacturing training college, with campuses in Toulouse and Paris and which regularly supplies young engineers to global aviation and space leaders like Dassault Aviation, Airbus, Safran, Thales, CNES etc. The presence of Jean Pierre Fine, Secretary General of UIMM and one of the key figures of the French industry, highlighted the importance that France attaches to India's skilling needs.

In a spellbinding presentation, Prof Abhishek Mishra, Minister of Skill Development, Uttar Pradesh, highlighted the numerous initiatives and measures taken by the UP government in the last three years. He said that an intense focus on skilling was the key for a state of the size of Uttar Pradesh, with a population of 220 million, with an overwhelming number of youth.

An interesting and important presentation made by Thomas Weko of OECD analysed the Skill Mobility agenda, helping India skill its young population with skills needed in Europe and other OECD nations, to help bridge the lack of adequate skilled manpower in the developed world due to rapidly ageing societies. He explored the idea of integrity of skill development and the need to bring 6-8 key OECD Countries together with Indian authorities to explore the needs of the others and possible ways to collaborate to fill in this gap.

Next meeting in Delhi on September 5 and 6

Over a dozen MoUs (memorandums of understanding) and agreements were signed on the occasion. The conference was followed by two days of site visits and more intense discussions over collaboration between French institutions and organisations and the Indian delegation.

The next meeting is scheduled to be held in New Delhi on September 5 & 6, 2016 and senior officials from the OECD, UNESCO, ILO (International Labour Organisation) and the European Commission have been cordially invited to attend this event, which will be the first EU-India Skill Development Meet to be held in India, after the EU-India Summit of March 30, 2016. The two-day event will be followed by a day of B2B (Business to Business) meetings and site visits, upon request of EU/Indian partners.

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