

What the 2026 Human Progress Report Reveals about education and workforce systems for a changing economy

The trust gap: why 75% doubt their education system measures the right skills

The proof gap: why 73% of workers can't prove the skills they have

The action gap: where governments can act, and what's working elsewhere



Is your workforce ready for where your economy is heading?



67%

of respondents experienced a major workplace disruption in the past year



96.7

ETS Human Progress Index, 2026. Up from 95.4 in 2025 and 93.3 in 2024

Insights from 32,000+ workers across 18 countries reveal where education and skills are falling short of future workforce needs, and where governments can act.ⁱ

Change is no longer episodic. Around the world, workers report a fundamental shift in how they experience job security: 77% now say it depends not on tenure, but on their ability to keep adapting.

Workers cannot carry that burden alone. Their ability to adapt depends on two systems:

- **Education systems** tasked with equipping young people with the skills changing economies need.
- **Workforce systems** tasked with helping people already in work build new skills as those needs shift.

There is cause for optimism. The ETS Human Progress Index, which tracks how easy or difficult people find it to access the building blocks of progress, rose again this year. But that gain isn't shared evenly. In some countries, the gap between education, skills, and economic readiness is closing. In others, it's widening.



Economic change demands a coordinated response across education and workforce systems.

Is your education system measuring what matters?



75%

say their country's education system doesn't adequately measure what students learn



28%

rank comprehensive K-12 skills-focused programs as the top initiative to improve workforce readiness



Support for this runs even higher in some countries

Kenya (44%), Nigeria (41%), Vietnam (38%)

Around the world, people are losing confidence that schools are tracking the skills their economies will need.

People are questioning whether education systems can prove what students know. Three-quarters say their country doesn't adequately measure student learning, while 71% say the assessment systems needed to track student progress aren't there.

This isn't a call for more testing. It's a call for better evidence. 89% want school assessments to measure practical, real-world skills alongside academic knowledge.



Better evidence reveals where skills gaps are emerging and where policy can have the greatest impact. That's where our work with governments often begins.

Are your workers being left to adapt alone?



85%

believe graduates would be more employable if they could prove their skills through credential transcripts



86%

believe upskilling and reskilling will become essential throughout a career



73% vs. 45%

interested in credentialing programs vs. have access to them

**People are willing to build new skills.
Many lack the means to prove them.**

Workers understand the need to keep adapting, and 77% are already building new skills.

The challenge is turning that willingness into recognized, accessible pathways to progress. 70% worry they lack the proof to show they have the right skills, and for many, that worry is justified: 48% say accessing the certification or license they need is difficult. The result is a clear gap between demand and access.



Closing the gap requires accessible pathways to continuously develop and demonstrate skills throughout working life. They're the kind of pathway we help build.

A clearer path to workforce readiness

86% of workers want government support to build the skills their economy needs.

That mandate points to three priorities:



Start before graduation

88% say better data on student skills at graduation would help.



Expand access to recognized credentials

54% want government-funded support for courses leading to a recognized credential.



Make skills development continuous

45% want personalized guidance on the skills they need next. 42% want to benchmark their skills against industry requirements.



From evidence to action

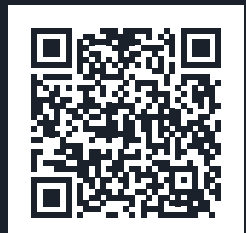
What this looks like in practice differs by country, education system, and labor market. Closing the gaps starts with understanding where they exist and what's driving them.

ETS helps governments identify where education and workforce systems are falling out of alignment with changing skills needs, determine where intervention can have the greatest impact, and build the measurement and assessment infrastructure to act on those insights.

Grounded in more than 80 years of measurement science and global research.
Backed by secure, scalable assessment capabilities.

Identify the priorities for your education and workforce strategy.

Explore an ETS workforce readiness diagnostic.





ETS Solutions Government Advisory

We help governments build education systems that equip young people with the skills their economy needs, and workforce systems that help people continuously upskill and reskill as that economy changes.

¹ The 2026 ETS Human Progress Report is based on a global survey of 32,558 individuals across 18 countries. Survey conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of ETS August 25-September 10, 2025.