

## **Slovakia: the clash of culture and technology manifested in the European Year of Skills**

**Many European Year of Skills (EYS) 2023 activities remain relevant year after year, but two breakthroughs have made 2023 an exceptional year. The first topic concerns the Alliance of Skills Councils (ASC), a newly created player supported by labour ministry legislation. This development has generated discussions about the extent of employer influence on education and learning, leading to debates on whether 'learning for life', or 'learning for the labour market' should be a priority. The second hot topic is the introduction of public access to AI chatbots, which raises questions about the balance between the benefits and risks of AI.**

### **EYS 2023 events**

In Slovakia, the EYS started as early as February with the [labour ministry's campaign](#) in support of the development of adult skills. The EYS was officially launched by the education ministry at the [conference in Košice focusing on the quality of VET](#) and culminated in September with the Lifelong Learning Week and the Skills Festival.

The nationwide activities of the [23rd Lifelong Learning Week](#) started on 18 September with a speech by the President of the Slovak Republic. In addition to emphasising the need to adapt to the changing world of work, she stressed the need to develop transversal skills such as 'critical thinking, media literacy and civic engagement, which are essential for the functioning of a democratic society'. She advocated 'systemic support for the development of life skills' and highlighted the importance of the small but exceptional projects and initiatives of actors in the lifelong learning market which are awarded annually. The subsequent [Skills for Life conference](#) emphasised the improvement of the integration of Ukrainian refugees and the importance of capacity building in support of lifelong learning as a strong tool for the development of life skills. The conference also discussed the introduction of individual learning accounts as a strong tool helping workers to adapt to the changing labour market, as presented by the secretary general of the ASC.

### **EYS 2023 flagship event**

The [Skills Festival](#), organised between 25 and 29 September within the ongoing European Year of Skills started with the '[Skills for our future](#)' conference and various activities for the general public in the city centre. In his [opening speech](#), the education minister emphasised the need to move away from the traditional focus of schools on mere content and placing greater emphasis on skills development. He specifically highlighted the growing importance of emotions-driven skills, such as managing fear of failure, or coping with change, concluding that more emphasis should be placed on the development of life skills. Although success in working life is important, preparing for life and not the labour market, is a key challenge. A high representative of employers disagreed with the minister, considering the preparation for the labour market as a decisive role of education. The ASC sees its crucial role in conducting personal audits and in setting up the competence profiles of adults and later of all learners, in order to achieve an immediate perfect match between education and jobs demanded by the labour market.

In the current landscape with challenges posed by AI and technological changes related to digitalisation, automation and robotisation, the education system, including initial VET, must go beyond addressing just the short-term needs of the labour market. Unless education is specifically designed to cater to employers' specific training requirements, it must also focus on developing a more flexible workforce. This flexibility is essential for adapting to future needs but it is still insufficiently valued.

The [conference](#) also discussed the skills needed in the era of artificial intelligence, and the AI workshop addressed the introduction of public access to AI chatbots. Although the majority of debaters were optimistic, the following warning was expressed: AI under democratic control with open access to the technology for all, would not be harmful, as opposed to AI under the control of a small number of technocrats.



### Read more

- [Award of the Association of Adult Education Institutions in the Slovak Republic](#)

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