REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SPORTS AND YOUTH

22nd Annual Cyprus Summit: A strategic gateway for regional co-operation
Day 2 Panel: 'Building a future-ready workforce'
Chaired by: Joan Hoey, Europe consultant, Economist Intelligence Unit

Intervention by Dr Athena Michaelidou
Minister of Education, Sport and Youth of the Republic of Cyprus

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13:45-14:30

Artificial intelligence is transforming the economy, the workplace and the skills needed to succeed in both.

The question before us is not whether AI will reshape the labor market. **It already is**.

The real question for our Ministry is: ***How can we prepare young people with the skills, adaptability and confidence needed to thrive in a world of continuous technological change?***

For Cyprus, building a future-ready workforce begins with a simple principle: **investment in technology must be matched by investment in people**.

While digital and AI-related competences are increasingly important, the future workforce will **require much more than technical expertise alone**. As AI becomes more capable, **uniquely human skills become even more valuable**.

Critical thinking, **creativity**, **communication**, **collaboration**, **ethical judgement**, **problem-solving** and **resilience** will increasingly distinguish successful individuals, organizations and economies.

❶ This understanding is shaping educational reform in Cyprus. Through curriculum reform, with greater **emphasis on skills and competence** rather than knowledge, stronger digital education and the implementation of Cyprus' ***2025 Policy and Guidelines for the Responsible and Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence in Primary and Secondary Education***, we are helping learners develop the skills needed to succeed in an AI-driven economy.

Through interdisciplinary approaches such as STEAM education, students are encouraged to connect knowledge across different fields and develop innovative ways of thinking.

Particular emphasis is also being placed on strengthening the connection between **education** and the **labor market**.

❷ Initiatives such as the **Technical Gymnasium** combine general education with practical and experiential learning, helping students develop technical, entrepreneurial and problem-solving skills at an earlier stage. At the same time, we continue to modernize **Technical and Vocational Education and Training**, strengthen partnerships with employers and expand opportunities for work-based learning.

However, preparing a future-ready workforce is not simply about initial education.

One of the defining characteristics of the AI era is that the shelf-life of skills is becoming shorter. Many of today's learners will work in professions that do not yet exist, while many existing occupations will continue to evolve significantly.

This makes **lifelong learning, upskilling and reskilling** more important than ever. As the the writer and futurist Alvin Toffler indicates in his landmark 1970 book "*Future Shock*", **the illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.**

It also requires us to anticipate future skills needs more effectively. In Cyprus, the Human Resource Development Authority has longstanding expertise in skills forecasting, while the **CySKILLS-AI initiative** is helping us harness data and artificial intelligence to better identify emerging workforce demands and support more informed policymaking.

Ultimately, preparing a future-ready workforce is a shared responsibility. Governments, education systems, businesses and social partners must work together to ensure that people are equipped not only to adapt to change, but to benefit from it.

If we succeed, artificial intelligence will not simply transform the future of work. It will create new opportunities for innovation, productivity, prosperity and social progress.