



**Welcome:** Anna Rubin, Manager of the OECD Local Development Forum, Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities

**Moderator:** Eamonn Davern

**Panellists:**

- **Spiros Protopsaltis**, Governor and Chair of the Board of Directors at DYPA (Greek Public Employment Service), Greece
- **Tilde Ussing**, Policy Analyst, Local Employment and Economic Development Programme, OECD
- **Virginia Hamilton**, Founder, Make Fast Studio, United States
- **Robert Pye**, Co-Founder and CEO, EthosVO, United Kingdom
- **Laila Hove**, Subject manager youth effort, Norwegian Directorate of Labor and Welfare
- **Ian Ross**, Executive Director, Program Policy and Development, Ministry of Social Development & Poverty Reduction, British Columbia, Canada

## ■ Main take-aways

- 1) **Human-centred design turns the traditional model of developing and operationalising public services (PES) on its head.** Rather than starting from the perspective of a given agency or organisation, human-centred design starts with understanding the customer or stakeholder needs first, then designing programmes and operating systems around those. This aligns with broader changes in

the orientation of employment services, such as a shifting focus from vacancy filling to looking at long-term career trajectories to using data-driven approaches for customising services based on needs.

*When we are doing design thinking we are not asking the customer what they need from the public services, instead we are just talking to them and listening to them to understand their motivation and story. From that we can develop insights about what people need. Human-centred design is not only about improving the functionality of services but also attending to the importance of emotional aspects when reintegrating people into the labour market.*

**Virginia Hamilton**, Founder, Make Fast Studio, United States

- 2) **Human-centred design is shifting the balance of power between the service delivery body and the customer** by engaging customers in the process of designing, operationalising, and delivering PES. Acknowledging customers as partners instead of service beneficiaries in a co-creation process helps to empower them and develop the agency to create careers that are meaningful to them. The voice of PES frontline staff and businesses also need to be taken into account, as they also have an important stake in the success of services and ultimate help to determine successful outcomes.

*During the pandemic we spoke to businesses to ask what exactly they need and why some of the programmes at the time were not doing as well. Subsequently we made modifications and changes to the programmes based on the input of the businesses and the programmes started to do phenomenally well. In the midst of the pandemic 50 000 people found work through our employment programmes during an 18-month period. As a point of comparison, between 2016 and 2019 40 000 people found work. That showed us that when you listen, and you actually ask the customer for feedback you achieve measurable results.*

**Spiros Protopsaltis**, Governor and Chair of the Board of Directors at DYPA (Greek Public Employment Service), Greece

- 3) **Despite its promise, human-centred design is not a panacea and needs to be understood as one piece of a broader systems change.** For example, service integration is another important method for improving the accessibility of PES by improving coordination between the various government services that any given individual may interact with on their pathway to employment.

*Service integration and human-centred design go hand-in-hand with each other. Service integration is not only about putting services together in one place or one platform. It is very much about designing the right pathways for individuals to get into education and employment. To design these pathways, we need to understand the needs, the experiences, and the challenges of the customer. It is about shifting towards a new way of governing in the public sector where it is more about a process of interaction and common decision-making with the customer and moving away from the traditional bureaucracy.*

**Tilde Ussing**, Policy Analyst, Local Employment and Economic Development Programme, OECD

**Moreover, several challenges and bottlenecks to implementing human-centred design remain and vary across countries.** For example, the general risk aversion within the public sector does not provide an ideal breeding ground for the use of human-centred design. The types of transformative changes that human-centred design could bring may pose a major barrier for broader adoption among governmental agencies. Questions also remain on the efficiency of human-centred design. The pace of the decision-making process could be largely affected by gathering continuous feedback from customers and therefore potentially slow down implementation. Thus, the full potential of human-centred design can only be unlocked if it is part of a broader systems change of public institutions becoming more agile, experimental and risk tolerant. Differences in organisational cultures, resources, or management systems across countries need to be taken into account in understanding how broadly human-centred design can be implemented.

*It is important not to get hung up on understanding human-centred design as something that happens from agencies to individuals but something that empowers individuals with their own agency and self-belief. There is plenty of money, services, and pathways available but actually it is about helping people develop the resilience and the tools so that they don't let us bureaucrats design services that don't feel good for them.*

**Robert Pye**, Co-Founder and CEO, EthosVO, United Kingdom

- 4) **COVID-19 responses showed that governmental agencies can work in ways that may have been unimaginable under normal circumstances.** Several speakers mentioned large public innovation and rapid roll out of new policies and programmes during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the increased use of digital tools, and how these have been adapted beyond the emergency response. Finding ways to maintain the momentum of innovation, experimentation, and risk tolerance will be important to further harvest the full potential of new practices that were adopted as a response to COVID-19.

*During the early days of the pandemic, we adopted a highly virtual model for counselling to be able to continue our services. What we are realising now, is that there is a population for whom face-to-face counselling is the most appropriate way forward and then there are people who are just very content to still be served online. A multi-polar approach of offering both the infrastructure for face-to-face and virtual counselling will probably produce the best outcomes as it responds to the individual needs of our customers.*

**Ian Ross**, Executive Director, Program Policy and Development, Ministry of Social Development & Poverty Reduction, British Columbia, Canada

- 5) **There is still a lot to be learned about the role and potential of human-centred design of PES,** emphasising the demand for a continued international exchange on the topic. All speakers agreed that further international knowledge sharing would be beneficial as human-centred design of PES is still in its infancy in most places and the full range of its benefits and pitfalls is not fully explored yet.

*Human-centred design is also about changing our mindset to see users as our partners and not only as respondents to our services. We are still learning and exploring how to collaborate [with our*

*customers] in an efficient and meaningful way. We have a lot of experience and strengths in our work, but of course there is still a lot of untapped potential and pitfalls going forward.*

**Laila Hove**, Subject manager youth effort, Norwegian Directorate of Labor and Welfare, Norway

## ■ Contact

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The OECD Local Development Forum is a network of thousands of individuals worldwide, united by their shared commitment to making their communities more resilient, inclusive and sustainable. It counts members from over 70 countries, representing city, regional and national governments, education, employment and training agencies, chambers of commerce, social innovators, start-ups, businesses and NGOs in the fields of local economic development, employment, skills, entrepreneurship and social innovation. It is a unique setting for the private and public sector to challenge assumptions, learn from each, and work together to forge practical solutions to today's economic and social challenges.

The Local Development Forum is part of the OECD's Local Employment and Economic Development programme (LEED). LEED provides practical solutions for how to create good jobs in great places. It was launched in 1982, when OECD governments were struggling to provide solutions to the jobs crisis of the day and saw a need for an international forum to share innovative approaches to local job creation, social inclusion and economic development. Since then, it has continued to bring together policy makers and practitioners from around the world to identify, evaluate and disseminate promising approaches to local development.

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