Synthesis report

Context

The COVID-19 pandemic and global lockdown represent an unprecedented challenge for skills development systems. Lockdown is having an immediate impact on the world economy, which varies dramatically across sectors and across regions. Many sectors have nearly stopped operating, others are facing activity peaks with shortages of skilled workers. Some have already re-oriented their production, either to provide much needed masks, for instance, or to produce health equipment. Besides the loss of activity, workers have to face a new organization of work, e.g. sanitary constraints at the workplace, or telework. The impact of confinement is bound to be most severe for vulnerable workers, especially poor, informal-sector workers in low-income countries with daily earnings and no savings, raising concerns for their survival. Women, who are overrepresented among wage labourers, own-account workers and unpaid family workers, stand to lose the most. Young people face a particularly difficult entry into the labour market, which risks having long-term consequences on their careers and earnings.

In the short-term, the challenge has been to change the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) provision rapidly from real live to digital or in some cases blended to fill in the gaps and provide various platforms for delivery. Some countries engaged in providing Technical and theoretical content,
Skills development during the COVID-19 pandemic and preparing for recovery

COVID-19 Education Response webinar

where support is offered live and online. Some innovations in this space include simulated environments and live recordings including for work-based learning. Some countries are currently working on improving assessments of workplace performance virtually and changing exams modalities and/or shifting exams online, which have traditionally taken place in physical spaces.

Numerous challenges for initial and continuous skills development processes have become more visible. These challenges are immediate, as they relate to the school, TVET institutions and company closures currently in place in most countries. The loss of several weeks or months of learning and training is likely to affect the outcomes and motivation of TVET students, especially from disadvantaged background, and may result in dropout, changes in career plans and need for short skilling programmes. Workers participating in skills development programmes (apprentices, interns, adults in continuous development training including literacy, etc.) as well are affected by these disruptions.

The provision of TVET including work-based learning in the current context depends on the digital skills of both trainers and learners but equality is an issue. And when it comes to distance learning, there is a digital skills gap among workers and TVET learners. This point is confirmed by UNESCO analysis of gaps in access to technology.

These challenges do not affect TVET systems evenly. While they can emphasize already existing structural weaknesses, they also bring an opportunity to rethink their readiness to face similar crises in the future with more agility. This dialogue requires voices of key stakeholders of TVET systems: policy-makers, companies, TVET providers, young people.

This UNESCO webinar on skills development during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic builds on country experiences already shared in the previous UNESCO webinars,1 which have tackled several dimensions of education policy responses. It aims to share innovative country experiences exploring the effectiveness of strategies tackling the immediate and longer-term effects of the COVID-19 crisis on TVET and skills development systems. It will also explore how recovery is planned and how to build further equitable, resilient and labour market-responsive TVET systems.

Objective and guiding questions

- To share information and facilitate peer learning about how various TVET stakeholders (policy-makers, providers, the private sector, including companies involved in work-based learning, and youth) are coping with the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on TVET provision at central and local levels.
- To share country experiences on approaches to responding to crisis and enhancing recovery while ensuring equity in TVET during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To identify key building blocks of a resilient and labour-market relevant TVET system.

1 https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/webinars
The discussion will feature a keynote presentation by UNESCO and interventions from high-level representatives of national authorities and/or international agencies reflecting different perspectives/constituencies around the following policy questions:

1. What are the key immediate and anticipated impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on TVET and skills development systems in relation with labour markets and how are countries managing this situation?

2. What are the best/most innovative approaches to ensuring equity in TVET and skills development recovery process during the COVID-19 crisis? Do we have any evidence of their effectiveness?

3. What are the characteristics of resilient, agile and labour-market relevant TVET systems that would help countries to face future crises?

**How can we concretely manage development of practical skills?**

We have to be flexible and agile in this situation by using: free tools in our handles; OER; and distance learning may not be perfect but, as much as it is not physical it provides solutions in terms of OER (Brazil).

**How can the training on trainers ensure that trainers have the capacity to deliver online training?**

Similarly to professional support programs being provided to staff, a lot of support have been provided to teaching staff (Australia).

**What kind of criteria are put in place to measure the impact of the successful delivery of training during the crisis?**

Students have been able to go on with studies and completed modules without problems such as cooking courses. Teachers have offered online lessons through video. The Finish national agency has sponsored digital skills as core of teaching today. Online training teachers have completed the training by presenting what they did to apply this through showing and sharing in classroom and out of classroom which gives a portfolio of opportunity on what to do, this is not an easy topic but there are many upcoming initiatives such as the ones being implemented by UNESCO being very valuable to the networks (Finland).

**How can digital skills development be supported and how does it ensure the establishment of platforms needed by several occupations?**

PIX framework has been evolving every day through all that feedback from professionals and users, working with experts in the field such as security companies in data. System in the platform where you can notify through feedback/comments if you do not agree with something, worked with lots of people giving comments that are useful, community users, experts through comments make the platform evolve (France).
How can skills be anticipated and assessed linking with policy planning?

The country has been trying to address key issues such as enhance/develop dialogue between social partners and to identify what are the various skills that trainers’ facilities require in order to adopt (Republic of South Africa).

The labour marketing information system has been developed for the construction sector to capture and aggregate needs and expectations and promote relationships collaboration between relevant bodies in addressing specific needs within the construction industry such as providing training. Employer organizations are expected to present what kind of skills needs exist (Nigeria).

Country experiences

**Australia** by Lesley Richardson, Manager, Australian School-based Apprenticeship, Department of Education in Tasmania

There have been impacts of COVID-19 crisis in Tasmania. Impact on young people has been surprising. Students are still connected, with opportunity to continue their academic programmes. There has been minimum effect on their programmes. Learning in different forms and mix of employment and education have been introduced. A pathway has been established between education and employment supporting future transition from school to work.

**Brazil** by Filipe M. Cassapo, Technology and Innovation Manager, SENAI

SENAI, the National Service of Industrial Apprenticeship of Brazil, is a TVET centre to help learners acquire technology entrepreneurial knowledge. After the COVID-19 pandemic, SENAI has mobilized the industry to increase manufacturing of protective equipment, produced masks and alcohol gel manufactured by SENAI in units and at least 35 companies. SENAI has contributed to designing the future that we desire, through education, professional learning; TVET is key word for the future.

**Finland** by Mervi Jansson, CEO Omnia Education Partnerships, Member of Finland’s Global Learning Crisis Task Force Group and Education Finland Steering Committee

Finland has enjoyed flexibility by students, as distance learning is not a new modular in the education system. Structure modules can be rearranged if it does not work in the present circumstances of lockdown. Possibility of continuous assessment has been considered to continue apprenticeship such as in tourism and hotel industry. Finish schools have been closed since March 16, but this has not hindered graduation as there are no final exams in the finish system. Competency based exams can be scheduled at later dates out of the pandemic. In order to keep distance learning, more engagement of learning, virtual worlds, and different possibilities such as online possibilities should be taken into account as solutions.
France by Marie Bancal, Partnership and International Cooperation Manager, PIX Digital Skills Platform

PIX platform is the new French digital skills framework. The online service allows students, teachers and job seekers to evaluate job skills. Evidence-based assessment has been conducted in PIX to prove learners’ skills through various challenges using digital environments. Under the lockdown, PIX platform guarantees education continuity. To address COVID-19 crisis, specific programs targeting digital skills have been launched and new items will be added to address distance learning. The platform expects the increase of users and expanding demand for the online learning platform under the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nigeria by Peter Kuroshi, CEO Council of Registered Builders of Nigeria (CORBON)

The Nigerian skills development programme is designed to build the capacity of youth by supporting youth in securing jobs in the skills industry. Some of the impact of COVID-19 crisis include: closure of training sites; shut down of project sites; discontinuity of the apprenticeship process and assessment; loss of job placement opportunities; and lack of attention to public investment sector, manufacturing and agriculture. There are needs to: put in place right structures; deploy ICT systems; review curriculum to enhance learner efficiency and capacity for entrepreneurship; develop volunteer programmes to provide career progression for artisans and trainees to enable them venture into business; and connect with banking industry for business development. The pandemic has exposed the shortcomings of public investment and personal development by individuals in education infrastructure, and it may trigger in-country productive economic activities (agriculture, manufacturing, etc.). The construction sector may be boosted as requirement for redevelopment.

Republic of South Africa by Mustak Ally, Head of Skills Development, Minerals Council

The government suspended all training during full lock down since March 16. The government has adjusted strategy to lock down and has been prepared to reopening the society and economy by: increasing the connectivity; introducing alternative learning materials for continuous leaning; providing procurement of devices to aid learners; and introducing policies and regulations in online platforms.