

# The shift to online learning and skills training shows promising trends and troubling signs

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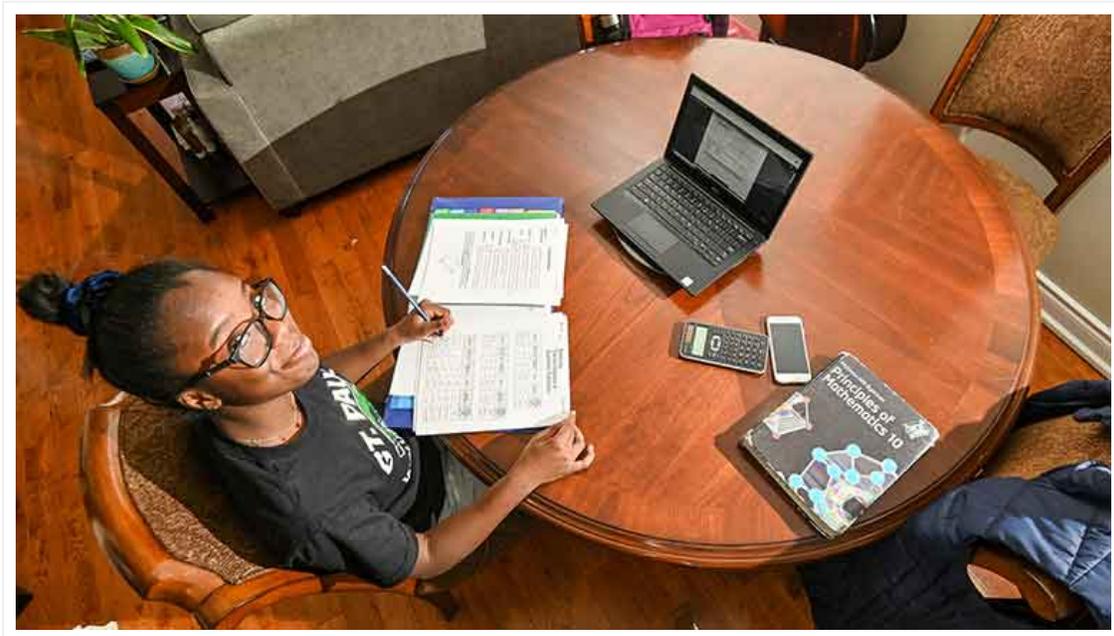
— Jeannette Sanchez,  
Communication Officer,  
Employment Policy Department

The [COVID-19 pandemic](#) has triggered an abrupt transition to distance education, training and e-learning. The crisis has resulted in massive shifts to online platforms and tools for the continued delivery of learning and skills development, which have shown both promising trends and troubling signs.

Among those signs, the evidence that, while much is being made of digital learning making access more equitable, access to online platforms doesn't always result in equal quality learning. Women, for example, are being disproportionately cut off from distance learning due to lack of childcare or home help during the pandemic.

These were among some of the main conclusions emerging from a recent E-Discussion on "[Continuing online learning and skills development in times of the COVID-19 crisis](#)", organized by the [ILO's Skills and Employability Branch](#) through its Global Skills for Employment Knowledge Sharing Platform.

For more than two weeks, the virtual discussion drew scores of practitioners, representatives of training institutions and policy-makers from around the world who shared their experiences regarding the impact of the pandemic, highlighted challenges that have emerged for education and training and offered solutions for tackling them.



— michael\_swan

Challenges included: instructors not properly trained and prepared to deliver online courses. Difficulties in adapting TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) curricula and training to online formats. Lack of access to the internet or ICT (Information and communications technology) equipment to carry out learning or training. Apprentices ready for assessment but who couldn't be assessed due to COVID-19 issues. Students unable to access the resources necessary to continue their training because they were not familiar with online platforms.

Yet, despite these challenges, students, apprentices, providers of TVET, and policy-makers are making the important changes needed when it comes to learning and acquiring skills in times of crisis.

For example, in **Uruguay**, INEFOP (Instituto Nacional de Empleo y Formación Profesional) developed a contingency plan calling for proposals from institutions that wanted to work in distance and semi-presence courses. Based on this, a table was created to study the methodology of moving from face-to-face courses to online formats.

In **Bangladesh**, the [Skill 21 project](#), a joint initiative of the government and the ILO, is developing an e-campus which would be the first online learning management platform for the TVET sector in the country.

In **England**, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is taking steps to ensure that, wherever possible, apprentices can continue and complete their apprenticeship, despite any break they need to take as a result of COVID-19.

New forms of partnerships are also emerging. In **Syria**, for example, a partnership established with IECD, a development assistance organization, is being repackaged to

include e-learning, and to develop videos on recent training programmes in construction, agriculture and manufacturing.

In the future, skills that can easily be acquired and strengthened via distance learning during this pandemic could change the landscape of work for the coming generation.

In the near-term, we need to think about the “new” skills required by industry and employers post-COVID-19 to get people back into employment quickly. These might encompass short courses and/or skill sets that are targeted. In the long-term, hiring remote workers could become more commonplace.

One thing seems clear: Giving informal education a more privileged spot in the lifelong learning concept to ensure better validation of skills will be critically important when we emerge from this crisis.

**See also:**

- [E-Discussion: Continuing online learning and skills development in times of the COVID-19 crisis](#). 27 March – 17 April
- [ILO SKILLS response to COVID-19](#) (for guidance notes and resources)
- [Skills for Employment Policy Brief – Distance and Online Learning during the time of COVID-19](#)
- [ILO-UNESCO-WBG Survey for TVET providers, policy-makers and social partners on addressing the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

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