

# SHANGHAI UPDATE

Follow-up to the UNESCO Third International TVET Congress

## Editorial

### Shaping our future through collaboration and partnerships



More than 1.5 billion students and youth have been affected by school and university closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Here at UNESCO, we are working with our partners to reduce the disruption, support learning continuity and set the world's education systems on a path of recovery and resilience.

The pandemic has exposed deep inequalities, not least because education everywhere has become heavily reliant on remote learning solutions. At least one-third of the world's students has not been able to access online learning. Millions of teachers, despite their tremendous dedication, lack digital competencies while many curricula are not adapted to online platforms. And the practical, hands-on nature of TVET has been particularly penalizing for students in these institutions.

Convinced that, in times of adversity, we are stronger together, we have been responding to these challenges by collaboration and partnerships through the Global Education Coalition, which now counts 160 public and private partners.

This is not only about meeting immediate needs but also about better gearing education and skills to the realities of interdependence, rapid technological advances and the transition to green economies and societies.

Education and training systems must prepare young people and adults to engage effectively with technologies in the workplace such as data analytics, artificial intelligence and machine learning while respecting sustainability and ethical imperatives. This requires broader partnerships with industries and employers to narrow the gap between skills supply and demand. Initiatives, such as our Global Skills Academy launched with the help of ten of our partners, are one part of this endeavour.

Partnerships must be supported by strong political will and commitment to education as the bedrock of prosperous, inclusive societies. Without maintaining national budgets for education and training, we will put a generation at risk of marginalization. No society can afford this. At UNESCO's Global Education Meeting in October, 15 heads of state and over 80 education ministers committed to protect education financing and agreed on priority actions to leave no one behind, with investment in skills development ranking among them.

As a global community, we have a responsibility to empower youth with the knowledge, skills and values to shape a better and safer future and I thank all our partners who are helping to make this possible.

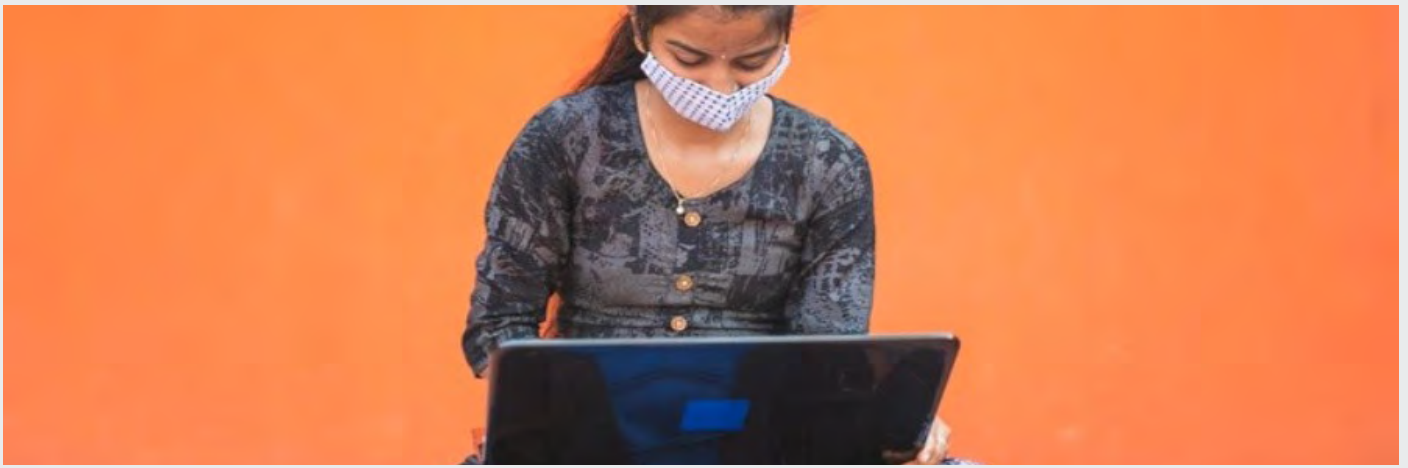
Stefania Giannini  
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## We must not let COVID-19 stop the learning

In 2020, COVID-19 has changed peoples' lives in many ways. After health, education has been the social sector most affected — with schools, universities and TVET centres around the world shut down for months on end.

UNESCO is determined that COVID-19 will not stop the learning, however. To prevent this from happening, the Organization has put together a [Global Education Coalition](#), based on partnerships and a spirit of solidarity, as an immediate response to the pandemic. The Coalition is supporting countries in the transition to remote learning for learners and educators and will help ease the recovery of the world's education systems in the aftermath of COVID-19.

UNESCO was quick to see that the COVID-19 pandemic would take learning into unknown territory and from mid-February the Organization began monitoring its impact on education. Early data showed that 350 million learners had already transitioned to remote learning. "When we saw the scale of the disruption, we organized a meeting with education ministers,"



says Borhene Chakroun, UNESCO Director of Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems, “at that point Asia was hit and the pandemic was starting in Europe. Latin America was following behind and there was a concern for how Africa would be able to respond.”

No country was entirely prepared to respond to such a major event, the ministers found, but some were less so than others, particularly for remote learning. They were concerned about the impact on equity and inclusion in education, especially for young women and girls. “Learners don’t just get education from being at school — for disadvantaged groups, it can provide social and emotional support, even nutrition,” says Mr Chakroun.

Responding to such an extraordinary crisis called for an extraordinary coalition — one that could harness not just the influence of governments, but also the energy and resources of the private sector, the media and civil society. During the third week of March, by then with 900 million learners out of school worldwide, the Global Education Coalition was launched.

In addition to country support, the Coalition works in three flagship areas: ensuring connectivity, empowering teachers and boosting their status and promoting gender equality. At its heart, UNESCO acts as a broker, matching the needs of countries with the services of Coalition members.

The Coalition has grown from 30 members at launch to 160 today. It is working in 70 countries on issues ranging from operating online platforms, digitalization of curricula, training teachers for their new roles and how to deliver hybrid learning.

## Pandemic drives innovation in distance learning

When the pandemic shut down schools and universities from March onwards this year, distance learning was seen as the obvious way to continue studying.

But the hands-on nature of TVET created its own set of challenges. For this kind of education, which relies heavily on learning-by-doing, practical demonstrations can be hard to reproduce at a distance. Centres from the UNEVOC Network have found different ways to manage the move from presential to online.

It is still early to speak of long-term impact. But for Mr Chakroun, seeing members, who are often competitors, working together constructively for a major cause is not a minor achievement. He cites the way Microsoft, Orange and Huawei are working on connectivity in Senegal or Lark, Vodafone and the Moodle Foundation are cooperating in Samoa. Private sector expertise is focusing on supporting public policy. The nine-chapter [COVID-19 Response Toolkit](#) — a joint effort by McKinsey & Company and UNESCO — offers practical frameworks and checklists for action in nine areas including strategies for remote learning or supporting students at risk of dropping out. A [Global Skills Academy](#) brings together free and high-quality online training offered by members of the Coalition including IBM, PIX and Dior.

This new spirit of partnership translates into an agile response. When a massive explosion rocked Beirut on 4 August, killing over 200 people and forcing 300,000 to flee their homes, 159 education centres were damaged. Ninety Coalition members quickly joined the Beirut authorities in contributing to the emergency response, including USD10 million in emergency funds.

Dealing with the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the need to work cooperatively and in solidarity. It has also fast-tracked innovation in education and training in ways which would have been hard to imagine just ten months ago. Mr Chakroun believes that working on the Coalition has also taught lessons about innovative ways of mobilizing resources in times of crisis. “More importantly, through our response to the crisis, we have seen how we will cope with the challenge of SDG 4,” he says, “so we will need to build bridges between the response and looking ahead to 2030 and achieving the SDG agenda.”

The abruptness of the shutdown proved difficult for many. “It has been a major headache in every country. All of a sudden we had to close our campuses and invent new ways of online learning,” says Esko Lius, Digital Learning Expert at Omnia, a UNEVOC Centre in Espoo, Finland. “In Omnia luckily we have quite good infrastructure and basic skills for most but not all of the teachers,” he adds.

To help teachers adapt content and methods of teaching and assessment, Omnia set up a dedicated teaching taskforce to provide online support. This included a course for those who are new to teaching online and Q&A sessions, chat and short online courses. “Technically it is not so difficult to arrange

courses online, it is more about the pedagogy," says Lius. Feedback on online learning from Omnia's TVET students was positive – 60% reported that teaching was either good or excellent – but many were worried about missing on-the-job training. UNESCO will launch a case study in December 2020 on how Finnish TVET institutions have become a resilient model of training during COVID-19.

For Ibraheem Abdul, Director of Flexible Skills Development at Yaba College of Technology, a UNEVOC Centre in Lagos, Nigeria, flexibility has been key to a successful transition to online teaching and learning. His institution allowed teachers to use whichever technology was "best suited to their environment and to the learners they are meeting," he says.

Students face constraints such as limited resources, bad connectivity, the shortage of suitable devices or lack of computing skills, according to Jacqueline Flavian-Obasi, lecturer in English at Yabatech. She has overcome these barriers by converting course material into short lessons delivered to students' phones through a messaging app. She supplements this with audio recordings and receives feedback from students via text and audio messages.

TVET institutions around the world discussed these and other experiences at a virtual conference on skills for a resilient youth, organized by UNEVOC and the Commonwealth of Learning to mark World Youth Skills Day in July 2020. The participants highlighted the extra challenges that TVET faces in moving to distance and online learning because of the need to develop practical skills. Simulations, as well as virtual and augmented reality, can help, but are not yet widely used and are limited in what they can achieve.

## Young people — preparing for the recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly difficult for young people. Before the crisis, they were already more likely to be in unstable and precarious jobs compared to older people, but the pandemic is only making things worse. Since economic growth slowed down from spring this year, one in six young people in employment has stopped working altogether, while those who are still employed have lost nearly a quarter of their working hours, [according to the ILO](#).

The effects of the pandemic on young people's education have been equally dramatic. At the peak of the crisis in late April, over 1.6 billion learners were affected by education shutdowns, [according to UNESCO](#). For most, some form of distance learning has been the only way to carry on with their education.

But many, including students from UNEVOC Centres, have not found it easy.

"The most difficult part of distance learning is the self-isolation that comes with it," says Rachael Patrick, a TVET student at Yabatech, in Lagos, Nigeria. "The system of interaction changes with online education

as students miss out on face-to-face contact with their instructors and other learners."

Studying from home obliges young learners to be more self-directed. "To keep up with my own learning, I am using the content available all over the internet," says Leticia Araujo, a chemistry student at the Federal Centre for Technological Education of Minas Gerais, in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. "Trying to absorb all that knowledge on my own requires a lot of effort."

In the midst of the disruption, some students, however, can see a silver lining. "It not only makes us think differently and takes us out of our comfort zones, but it also is giving birth to a magical ... thing, an innovative and technological way of studying and working," says Yousra Assali, a Moroccan electronics student and WorldSkills Champion.

UNESCO and partners from the Global Education Coalition agree. They have launched the Global Skills Academy to help young people improve their digital and technological expertise. This is one practical way of helping them find their way in a job market that looks bleak and uncertain for the coming few years.

Through the Global Skills Academy, students from more than 250 UNEVOC Centres, as well as individual learners, can access high-quality online training on subjects ranging from water technology to leadership courses for women or reskilling for the unemployed, with an emphasis on digital skills. The aim is to help one million young people build skills for employability and resilience between 2020 and 2021.

## UNEVOC makes the case for more open resources for TVET

Open Educational Resources or OER can do a lot for learning. They provide teachers with new resources, help revitalize curricula, engage students in co-creating learning and generally make education more diverse and inclusive. OER — defined by UNESCO as "teaching, learning and research materials in any medium... that reside in the public domain..." — are taking on a new significance in the midst of the pandemic.

But while OER have been increasingly used in higher and secondary education, it has been less present in TVET. A 2018 [study](#) by UNESCO-UNEVOC found little awareness of OER among TVET practitioners and policymakers, although many saw it as a promising field.

UNEVOC has been busy working behind the scenes to create the conditions for more take-up of OER in TVET ever since.

In December 2019, it launched a competition offering grants of USD5,000 for the top five proposals for creating or adapting OER. Staff were delighted to receive a total of 239 submissions from institutions in 57 countries covering both formal and informal education.

"The outcome is so overwhelming that it must persuade funding organizations to invest more in Open TVET projects," said Robert Schuwer, competition judge and UNESCO Chair on OER at Fontys University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands.

The winners were announced on 31 January. [Technical Education and Skills Development Authority](#), a UNEVOC Centre in Taguig City, Philippines, will use the funds to create an eLearning module on Aquaponics. This will add to the stock of OER specifically designed for TVET available on TESDA's online platform and via the open university in the Philippines. It aims to make studying agriculture more attractive, increase the supply of workers for



green jobs and, in a small way, contribute to achieving the 2030 SDG Agenda.

UNEVOC Centre [Fundación Paraguaya](#) will produce ten animated videos, customized for ease of downloading and subtitled in Spanish and Guaraní – to reach rural areas – as well as in English – for international use. These will be used to improve its offline distance learning programme on organic horticulture for women.

The winning proposals also included projects from India on training school managers; from Germany on digital literacy for refugees; and from Kenya on greening agriculture.

In the meantime, the COVID-19 crisis was brewing and education began to shift to online learning as schools and universities shut down.

The massive, stark disruption of 'business as usual' for education has made the case for more OER in TVET stronger than ever. UNESCO lent its voice to the cause by [issuing a call](#) for greater support for OER on 28 April 2020. This builds on Member States' decision to adopt a [Recommendation on Open Educational Resources](#) at UNESCO's General Conference in November 2019.

## Recent and upcoming events

[BLT Bridging Conference on New Qualifications and Competencies in TVET: Success stories at strategic and operational levels](#). Online. 8 December 2020.

The conference brings together the TVET community to discuss the relevance, applicability and prioritization of new qualifications and competencies, with a focus on practical examples from Europe, Africa and Asia-Pacific.

[UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development](#). Berlin, Germany. 17 to 19 May 2021

Preceded by a series of [online workshops](#) starting from September 2020 onwards, the conference will bring together educators and professionals from the sustainable development community to discuss how Education for Sustainable Development can be an enabler for progress on all SDGs. It will also mark the launch of UNESCO's programme for the coming decade [ESD for 2030](#).



## Recently published

[Boosting gender equality in science and technology. A challenge for TVET programmes and careers](#). UNESCO-UNEVOC

[Innovating TVET – A framework for institutions](#). UNESCO-UNEVOC

[Promoting quality in TVET using technology. A practical guide](#). UNESCO-UNEVOC

[Understanding the return on investment from TVET – A practical guide](#). UNESCO-UNEVOC

[Trends mapping study – Future of TVET teaching](#). UNESCO-UNEVOC

[UNESCO Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education and Training \(2015\). Results of the First Consultation of Member States conducted in 2019 on the Implementation of the Recommendation](#). UNESCO

[Quality assurance and recognition of distance higher education and TVET – UNESCO COVID-19 Education Response. Education Sector issue notes](#). UNESCO

[TVET systems and labour markets – UNESCO COVID-19 Education Response. Education Sector issue notes](#). UNESCO