

Technical Note – Survey with TVET providers, policy-makers and social partners on addressing the COVID-19 pandemic in West Africa¹

The COVID-19 pandemic has largely affected education, prompting training providers to search for rapid and feasible solutions to deliver learning content. In the months of April and May 2020, the ILO, in partnership with UNESCO and the World Bank, conducted a qualitative worldwide survey with TVET providers, policy-makers and social partners on addressing this pandemic. The purpose of this survey was to gather good practices and share knowledge to help countries around the world to address the current situation. It targeted providers of initial and continuing technical and vocational education and training (TVET), policy makers and social partners. The survey counted with the participation of 11 West African countries.

What are the main impacts of COVID-19 on West African TVET systems?

In the vast majority of countries, TVET schools and training centres are closed as a measure to counter the COVID-19 pandemic. Work-based learning, apprenticeship training and internships are affected by the closure of workplaces. The few businesses that remained opened allow only essential staff to work at their facilities.

In a few countries where training centres remained opened, trainers and students follow the WHO's recommendations on infection prevention and control. However, training attendance has been largely affected due to government restrictions to public transportation. In addition to this, uncertainty contributed to demotivation among students. In some cases, students that live at nearby

school compounds moved back to join their families.

Certifying exams and assessments were postponed, but not yet cancelled for this year. Students, and especially those completing their graduation in the current year, fear of not being able to complete training and of impacts on their entry in the labour market. Trainers face the challenges of readapting training content to environments where interactions with students are largely reduced and to an academic schedule that has been disrupted.

Which solutions were implemented and are in use to ensure the continuity of training?

Online learning and other solutions to deliver training, including TV, radio and mobile applications were adopted in a number of countries. The implemented solutions are mainly based on asynchronous learning, and rely on environments prepared as quick solutions for the download of training materials. Although they do not support instant interactions among students and with instructors, they favour self-paced learning. The solutions also do not involve components for practice-based learning, which are of particular importance in competence-based training.

Are these solutions supported by existing policies, and specially to encourage initial or continuing vocational training and lifelong learning in response to the crisis?

The implementation distance training solutions was a response to the disruption in training due to the pandemic. Some countries have existing policies on the digital economy, and strategies for distance education, however, the adoption of distance training solutions followed the closure of education and training establishments as part of country level emergency responses to COVID-19

¹ Based on the results for West Africa from the ILO, UNESCO and World Bank Survey of May/June 2020.

pandemic. In most countries, online training was rarely or never used before.

Who benefits from distance training programs during the COVID pandemic?

In countries that implemented online training solutions, target beneficiaries are students current enrolled in training programs, and there is a special focus on ensuring access to those graduating in 2020. Information about the availability of online training was shared with students through regular means of communications, such as radio, TV, internet, telephone and printed flyers.

What are the main challenges and opportunities to the expansion of online training?

The absence of ICT infrastructures, the lack of funding for the acquisition of personal computers and of basic computer literacy training were mentioned as limitations to the diffusion of online training among a larger number of students. These were also cited as the main reasons for not using online learning environments as a regular option for training delivery before the pandemic.

Training of trainers to develop online training environments is limited and supporting manuals are not available. Very few respondents mentioned that their TVET institutions provided training to trainers on the use of collaborative platforms, the creation and management of online forums, and on recording instructional videos.

There is a recognition of the importance of exploring new solutions for distance training delivery. The creation of online learning environments and encouraging the use of videoconference among students and trainers are the main envisaged options to promote the expansion of online training. They are followed by the development of blogs, forums and videos, with the support of existing tools for

communications and storage available over the internet under the terms of free use.

The expansion of online training should also take into account solutions to address skills shortages in sectors or occupations affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as in health care, and to enable reskilling and upskilling of the labour force, and particularly those who lost or are at risk of losing their jobs. There are also opportunities to expand distance training to migrants and to unemployed youth and young workers the informal sector.

Which additional policy measures to support online learning during the pandemic?

Suggested additional policy measures to support online learning during the pandemic involve the provision of free high-speed internet access for students, the expansion of training with the use of mass media communications such as TV and radio and provisions for the creation of internet-based communities dedicated to distance/e-learning solutions for TVET.