Digital acceleration in the context of learning and skills development

2 March 2021, 14.00 – 16.00 CET

Background

PROSPECTS is a partnership with enormous opportunities for learning. Strategic and continuous learning is recognised across the PROSPECTS' Global Logic Model, M&E and results framework, and the MACPs and MAGRP as integral and critical to accelerate programme results at country level. Through learning events and knowledge products that move beyond individual partner institutions, the partners aim to produce, share and disseminate knowledge that provides added-value in terms of influencing the wider agenda on forced displacement within PROSPECTS countries and beyond.[1]

In support of these ongoing efforts to develop a shared Learning Agenda, and responding to country-level demand, UNICEF and the ILO have initiated discussions to convene technical-level learning meetings related to digitalisation and the digital economy. The engagement of all PROSPECTS partners in this initiative is welcome.

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[1] According to the MAGRP, the objectives of the Learning Agenda are as follows: (i) Improve programme implementation for the benefit of forcibly displaced persons (FDPs) and host communities (HCs); (ii) Foster experimentation and innovation, (iii) Increase the overall knowledge base to influence the desired paradigm shift through addressing three major thematic pillars of the Partnership, (iv) Contribute learning from the Partnership to the wider humanitarian-development context.

At present, it is being proposed that the thematic areas to be targeted will cover two topics. Firstly, the use of digitalisation to accelerate education and skills development, and secondly, the role of digital platforms and digitalisation more broadly in promoting youth employment, self-employment and enterprise development opportunities. The theme '*Digital acceleration in the context of learning and skills' w*ill be addressed in the first half of 2021. The theme covering the area of the digital economy and youth employment will be addressed in the second half of 2021 to benefit from ongoing assessment work and programme design in particular by the ILO (and the IFC).

During the first virtual learning meeting, further discussions will take place on follow-up, looking especially at the opportunity of organising additional technical learning meetings based on needs and expectations.

Context of digital learning, education and training

This section addresses the first theme on digital acceleration of education and skills development. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a dramatic shift in the way in which education and skills development is delivered in many countries. In the wake of widespread closures of schools, higher education and training institutions, some countries have systematically rolled out remote, digital and blended learning opportunities, while others are exploring opportunities to do so or might struggle to do so in light of limited resources and capacities.[2]

The impact on forcibly displaced children and young people and their peers in host communities has varied, depending on countries' capacities to transform their education and skills development delivery systems, adapt them to the new COVID realities and ensure the inclusion of the most vulnerable and those forcibly displaced.

To accelerate the reach and impact of digital learning technologies, UNICEF's flagship Reimagine Education initiative aims to radically scale-up digital learning solutions which work for the most marginalized children and young people by working to improve access and quality of world class digital learning solutions, improve connectivity, access to devices, and affordable data; as well as leverage young people's engagement to enhance results. By 2030 the initiative aims to impact the lives of 3.5 billion children and young people worldwide.

The ILO considers the digitalization of skills systems as critical to improving the relevance and quality of education and training for learners and workers throughout their lives. Digital and blended solutions can complement existing TVET provision and enhance outreach, access and participation – provided connectivity challenges and lack of capacity within the systems are addressed. The new ILO programme and budget has included a strategic objective on the issue and country support has been rolled out. Recognising the need for dramatic digital acceleration in the context of learning and skills across PROSPECTS countries and through partners throughout 2020, the Partnership's initial focus on Education (Pillar 1) and commitment to both innovation and 'strategic learning', the planned technical discussion starts from the premise that:

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[2] UNICEF remote learning factsheet https://data.unicef.org/resources/remote-learning-reachability-factsheet/
- OECD (2020): Impact of COVID-19 on Education – Insights from education at a glance
- WB (2020): Simulating the Potential Impact of COVID-19 School Closure on Learning
- UNESCO (2020): What have we learned – Findings from a survey with ministries of education
- UNICEF (2020): Remote Learning Factsheet
- ILO (2020): Tackling the COVID-19 Youth Unemployment Crisis
- ILO (2020): COVID-19 and the World of Work
WEF (2020): Reskilling Revolution – Closing the Skills Gap Accelerator

- Digital learning **could** be a great equalizer in education – provided digital learning solutions, systems and infrastructure are radically scaled-up to work for children and young people, including the most marginalised and forcibly displaced.
- Safe, equitable and accessible digital learning and skills development content, tools and platforms **could** enable critical pathways for many young people to continue learning and successfully transition from learning to earning. This will provide a bridge between the first and second areas of focus on digitalisation and the digital economy.
- The scale-up of digital solutions and platforms for learning and skills development in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic **could** offer breakthrough solutions to 'reimagine education and training', including for vulnerable and displaced children and young people.
- PROSPECTS **could** provide a critical experimental learning environment to better understand and document how countries in East Africa and the Middle East and North Africa have experienced digital acceleration in learning and skills development, while ensuring the inclusion of vulnerable host communities and forcibly displaced, as well as to foster the exchange of lessons learned between regions and countries.

Learning needs expressed by country teams
- Ministries of Education with support of Development Partners have implemented various responses to ensure continuity of learning at home through remote learning using different delivery modes—including digital solutions for learning. However, most education systems, teachers, students and parents across the world were unprepared to shift from a face-to-face towards remote delivery mode for various reasons and challenges:***Unequal access to digitation learning resources —*** (i) _weak ICT infrastructures_ to enable effective digital learning— Internet connectivity challenges, Internet bandwidth, (ii) _Lack of devices_ to support effective digital learning at home— challenges related to access to ICT devices (computers, tablets, smart phones, SIM card), competition with ICT resources within the households

- ***Skill gaps in teachers and trainers to use ICT to support digital learning***
- **Unpreparedness of MoE/MoTVET/MoL and teachers and trainers**, to transit from face-to-face method to online / blended training method.
- **Limited financial resources to shift programmes online**
- **Increased inequality**— especially the vulnerable learners and learners with disabilities are being left out, digital learning response are not disability sensitive.
- **Closure of training institutions and workshops** that severely limited the provision of work-based learning and practical skills training.

Moving forward, countries are interested in knowledge sharing on addressing the above challenges and well documented knowledge banks which include the following:
- Methodologies and tools to make digital learning interactive and facilitate peer-learning, motivate people to participate in e-learning
- Approaches for effective implementation at the partner and trainee level: assessing feasibility/selection criteria/ planning/ monitoring/ capacity of teachers and trainers/ measuring impact through tracer studies/ assessments/ PPPs/ digital learning support for on-the-job training/ stakeholders to involve
- Approaches to expand reach and address the digital divide
- Available tools, platforms, materials to use for digital learning

Format

The planned learning events will be:
- technical level, drawing on country and HQ expertise;
- informal to allow for constructive discussion and reflection;
- virtual webinar format;
- informed by country-level experiences, learning questions and 'demand' in PROSPECTS countries;
- iterative, meaning that this first learning event will contribute to the development of future ones, with lessons and key insights being captured;
- reinforce meaningful and effective learning and experience sharing on what works and what did not, a 'joint' learning and knowledge sharing framework will be developed in the course of these exchanges.

Initially, the focus of the event will be on the PROSPECTS Partnership and programmes. To reinforce complementarity, the scope of these technical learning and knowledge exchanges will expand to   external partners and stakeholders as relevant.

Objectives

The aim is to convene a series of learning events to share information, exchange good practices, identify strategic insights and scalable approaches for inclusive and affordable digital learning and skills development solutions.

Duration and participation

The first virtual event will be open to all PROSPECTS partners and teams at country, regional and global level, it is planned to take place over two hours online.

Follow up

These learning activities will contribute to a comprehensive focus on innovative education and training solutions to systematically reach FDP and HC children and young people, and to strengthen and leverage a wide range of strategic partnerships within and beyond PROSPECTS. Moreover, these activities aim to draw lessons learned for education and skills development through digitalisation. In so doing, the partners expect to:

   i. Highlight practical PROSPECTS programmatic challenges, for example, that may justify re-programming.
   ii. Explore ideas for potential PROSPECTS Opportunity Fund proposals.

Identify areas that could be enhanced and accelerated by the PROSPECTS Learning Agenda and wider joint advocacy efforts.