

REPORT

VIDEO CONFERENCE: THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS

26 March 2020

1. Background

The social and economic impacts of the current global health crisis have affected vocational training policies and certification, and the actions of the agencies and institutions that handle them.

This situation poses a challenge for a tool such as ILO/Cinterfor. It is not possible to put scheduled plans for cooperation and technical assistance on hold, hoping for a return to normal. ILO/Cinterfor must more than ever be at the side of countries and vocational training institutions in the region, supporting them in building strategies to continue working on the current phase of the crisis and to confront their immediate challenges, as well as to prepare for the future, when they will become essential in strategies for economic recovery and social inclusion.

Because of this, and in view of the pressing nature of current events, ILO/Cinterfor has swiftly designed and deployed an action plan that includes as its first initiatives:

- A survey on the situation of Vocational Training Institutions (VTIs) and how they are operating and responding to the challenges of the crisis. This online survey has already received responses from 22 VTIs in the region and Spain.
- An observatory for regional experiences that also acts as an information bank on initiatives carried out by VTIs in the context of the crisis, fuelled both by the survey and by information made available by the VTIs themselves (<https://www.oitcinterfor.org/node/7744>).
- An observatory for virtual and distance training currently offered by member VTIs.
- A mechanism for the sharing and transfer of experiences and tools between ILO/Cinterfor VTI Network members, focusing at present on designing responses to the current phase (in which most of the VTIs have had to suspend all face-to-face training activities), and progressively developing strategies for post-crisis reconstruction.

All of these initiatives have been implemented over the course of a week. In order to put in place the sharing and transfer of experiences, ILO/Cinterfor held a video conference, inviting all of its VTI network members, with the purpose of establishing a first contact between their authorities and reaching initial agreements regarding the characteristics of this venue.

2. Video conference: The response of vocational training to the COVID-19 crisis

The video conference was held on Thursday, 26 March (at 2 pm, Uruguayan time), and lasted approximately 90 minutes. It was attended by 31 representatives of 22 vocational training institutions and two labour ministries, from 16 countries. It was conducted on the Cisco Webex platform. Previously, and in order to reinforce the invitation sent by email, a WhatsApp group was formed, to which VTIs responded promptly and in large numbers.

Fernando Vargas, Director, a.i. of ILO/Cinterfor, gave a brief introduction explaining the objectives of the online meeting, and reviewing the highlights of the current crisis, its impact on labour markets and on vocational training institutions. He linked the celebration of this discussion to other initiatives undertaken

by ILO/Cinterfor, emphasizing the importance of the survey to incorporate updated information to be made available in these exchanges and in the newly created observatory.

He then opened the discussion to all of the attendees, with Rodrigo Filgueira acting as moderator. Significantly, despite their large numbers, all of the institutions and ministries participating were able to talk about their situation, initiatives and requirements. A large majority of participants were present throughout the video conference.

3. Contributions made by participating ministries and institutions

All of the participants expressed their appreciation of the event and highlighted its timeliness.

Omar Villareal, Deputy Director General for Promotion and Development of Mexico's CONOCER gave a brief overview of the situation in his country and reported that officials were working remotely. He said efforts were being made in keeping with the intention of the institution to take advantage of the certification system as a resource in order to make fruitful use of the time people were spending at home owing to the health measures in force. They were then at the stage of determining the issues, which would take the following two weeks, at which time they hoped to be able to evaluate alternatives for online certification.

Luis Hiraoka, Director General for Standardization, Job Training and Labour Skills Certification of the Ministry of Labour of Peru, also reviewed the situation in his country and noted that they were currently expanding their online services capabilities. He finally stressed the importance of having collaborative and training areas available, such as those pursued at the initiative of ILO/Cinterfor.

Edgar Pimentel, External Resources and International Relations Manager of INFOTEP and Ramona Mejía of the same institution, began by describing the situation in their country and then considered that the current situation was an opportunity to emphasize and work on "soft skills". At that moment, INFOTEP was using the quotas already available for distance learning, and a lesson learned was the need to reinforce that offer and the platforms that support it.

Carlos Mario Estrada, Director General of Colombia's SENA, listed some of the measures taken and agreements reached with the Government and other institutions. Among them, he mentioned the integration of learning resources for the territories by means of platforms (which would make it possible to provide training to two million people within a fortnight); the agreement signed with LinkedIn to obtain licenses for courses; the purchase of data packets from providers so that instructors would not need to use their own data and could connect with their students; the availability of the Emprender Fund to convene entrepreneurs to respond to the crisis; supplementing online consultations using SMS (a technology which was still effective for contacting students in areas without connectivity). He concluded by noting the need to meet the demand for human talent development in the health sector, in response to situations such as the one they were experiencing.

José P. Valverde, Director of the President's Office of Costa Rica's INA, reported that his institution closed its centres and face-to-face services, but continued its virtual training offer, based on currently available capabilities. The institution had also taken the initiative to mobilize the capabilities of its centres, as well as of companies managed by graduates of the institution, for the production of health and hospital supplies.

Marcelo Casartelli, Educational Design and Planning Manager of the UOCRA Foundation in Argentina, noted the need for cooperation and networking to build the capacity of institutions to develop socio-emotional skills remotely, and to reinforce vocational guidance in the same way.

Ricardo Guisado, Head of International Relations of FUNDAE, Spain, shared the availability of the "Digitalízate" platform (<https://www.fundae.es/digitalizate>), which provides free and open access to

digital skills courses provided by large technological companies, and whose main objective at that moment was to ensure that training did not stop.

Igor Dedic, Head of International Relations of ChileValora, Chile, explained that, given the nature of that agency's functions, aimed at the certification of job skills, their activities had currently stopped. He expressed ChileValora's interest in participating in the exchange sessions in both the current situation and with a view to including certification policies in post-crisis recovery processes.

Olivia Costa, of Chile's SENCE, said that the Service offered free online training through 46 courses divided into three main areas: ICT, enterprise development, and soft skills. It also provided a platform for organizations to connect their courses, which had an average 75% attendance.

Janete Lacerda, Director of the Vocational Education and Social Promotion Department of SENAR, Brazil, explained that her institution focused primarily on disseminating material and providing advice to farmers, to which end they had opened various communication channels (e.g. via WhatsApp) in order to answer questions. She also stressed the need to expand distance training and provide guidance material for rural workers.

Marta Iglesias, International Relations Advisor for the Paula Souza Centre of the state of São Paulo, Brazil, reported that they had begun by adopting a strategy of bringing forward and concentrating all of the holiday periods planned for the year, a total of four weeks. This would make it possible to strengthen the institution's capacity to start offering distance courses as from 22 April.

Anna Beatriz Waehneltdt, Director of Vocational Education of SENAC, Brazil, reported that the institution already had a distance learning network with over 220 courses and covering 120,000 students. Since the same courses were also offered face-to-face, they were attempting to continue them online.

Frederico Lamego, Executive Manager of International Relations of SENAI, Brazil, explained that SENAI centres focusing on innovation were now dedicated to providing services in support of research projects for hospitals and pharmaceutical companies. SENAI had also developed new courses on digitization.

Rodolfo Silveira, Director of the Technological University of Uruguay (UTEC) noted that they were working on a digital production project, leveraging resources and courses delivered by UTEC, in order to focus on the production of hospital supplies, including open license ventilators. As for the courses they offered, UTEC already had distance and blended courses in place.

Pablo Darscht, Executive Director of INEFOP, Uruguay, explained that when the crisis emerged, the institution was in the middle of a change of management. Classroom courses offered by training institutions contracted by the Institute had been completely interrupted, and they were in the process of expanding their virtual training by means of the same mechanism (through training institutions). He added that they expected the situation to encourage the evolution of new ways of teaching remotely. INEFOP was also focusing on measures to be implemented after the crisis period, in order to reactivate work.

Carlos Hernández, Development Manager of SENATI, Peru, indicated that while face-to-face courses and on-site company internships had been suspended, the institution had an Online Campus, which SENATI made available to its students and collaborators so they could gain access to technological learning tools. These tools included email, online learning platforms, content libraries and the curricula design site. The Blackboard learning platform could also be found there. Among the actions they were taking was outsourcing content development for their online training courses.

Raúl Claire Centellas of INFOCAL, Bolivia, reported that they were developing a platform for online training, but focusing mainly on teachers, because in Bolivia, the statutes do not allow the teaching of VT degrees online. He noted that they need Cinterfor's assistance to develop mechanisms to deliver courses

remotely. To support people during the crisis, agreements were being reached with the Ministry of Development and Labour to develop plans to promote employment.

Juan Pablo Guzmán, Director of Quality Assurance of SETEC, Ecuador, explained that one of the Service's functions was the accreditation of online training platforms. In this regard, he offered the use of the "Vértice" platform to the other institutions (<https://www.vertice.org/blog/tag/ecuador/>).

Vinicio Morales, Head of International Technical Cooperation of INTECAP, Guatemala, reported that the institution was working remotely, and that over the following two weeks they would be determining their actions, including with regard to online certification.

Key trends

The following core ideas emerged from the VC:

1. The crisis has affected the face-to-face delivery of VT. Participating institutions have closed their delivery of classroom courses, as education has done, in compliance with national guidelines.
2. Distance training or online training using each institution's platforms emerges as the very first solution to keep participants in touch with their training content.
3. Solutions are emerging to extend the coverage of virtual training and use Learning Management Systems (LMS) extensively.
4. Some are opening up to the private learning platforms available, such as LinkedIn, others are promoting their own LMSs, in order to ensure the supply of the online training they contract with.
5. Skills certification poses challenges in relation to evaluation and gathering evidence of performance, and how this could be done remotely.

Agreements reached and follow-up

All of the participants were unanimous in their assessment of the timeliness of this discussion and the need to continue conducting similar activities.

There was an enhanced commitment to increase the number of institutions included in the survey carried out by ILO/Cinterfor, as well as in the circulation of information and resources available to feed the observatory available on the Centre's platform.

It was also agreed that institutions would channel towards ILO/Cinterfor their initiatives and proposals in order to continue to build collaborative responses based on vocational training to the current crisis and subsequent recovery.

ILO/Cinterfor shall organize regularly, and over the next few weeks, new video conferences on specific topics.

Participating institutions:

- Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (Argentina)
- UOCRA Foundation (Argentina)
- INET (Argentina)
- INFOCAL (Bolivia)
- SENAI (Brazil)
- SENAC (Brazil)
- SENAR (Brazil)
- Paula Souza Centre (state of São Paulo, Brazil)
- SENCE (Chile)
- CHILEVALORA (Chile)
- SENA (Colombia)
- INA (Costa Rica)
- SETEC (Ecuador)
- INSAFORP (El Salvador)
- FUNDAE (Spain)
- INTECAP (Guatemala)
- INFOP (Honduras)
- CONOCER (Mexico)
- INADEH (Panama)
- SENATI (Peru)
- Ministry of Labour (Peru)
- INFOTEP (Dominican Republic)
- INEFOP (Uruguay)
- UTEC (Uruguay)

List of participants

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Attending for ILO/Cinterfor:

- Fernando Vargas, Acting Director of ILO/Cinterfor - Senior Specialist in Vocational Training
- Michael Axmann, Senior Specialist in Business, Productivity and Vocational Training
- Anaclara Matosas, Assistant for Knowledge and Information Management
- Gonzalo Graña, National Officer of Social Dialogue and Vocational Training
- Rodrigo Filgueira, National Officer for Technologies Applied to Training
- Fernando Casanova, Programme Officer
- Lorena Llana, Executive Secretary