UNLOCKING THE POWER OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES TO SUPPORT "LEARNING TO EARNING" FOR DISPLACED YOUTH

FORCIBLY DISPLACED YOUTH FACE SEVERAL BARRIERS IN THEIR TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

The number of forcibly displaced persons (FDPs) - and the duration of typical displacement is increasing - which makes building the economic resilience of FDPs a priority. For forcibly displaced youth in particular, the difficulties faced in preparing for and making the transition from school-to-work, from learning to earning, pose serious challenges to their future. The specific barriers that forcibly displaced youth face fall into three main, albeit mutually reinforcing, categories: (i) barriers related to developing relevant skills for work, comprising foundational, transferable, job-specific, entrepreneurship and digital skills; (ii) barriers related to connecting with the labour market; (iii) barriers related to availability of decent jobs and livelihoods. See Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: School-to-Work transition barriers for FDPs

BARRIERS RELATED TO DEVELOPING SKILLS FOR WORK
(SKILL SUPPLY)

Low quality and labour market relevance of skilling programmes

Limited access and uptake of learning and skilling opportunities due to:

- Cultural and gender norms
- Competing responsibilities
- Psychosocial and motivational factors
- Lack of support from social networks
- Cost
- Distance / Mobility
- Connectivity
- Gaps in service provision
- Lack of alternative, flexible pathways

BARRIERS RELATED TO CONNECTING WITH THE LABOUR MARKET
(SKILL ACTIVATION)

- Information gaps
- Lack of social networks, career guidance and mentors
- Cultural and gender norms
- Psychosocial factors
- Legal restrictions on right to work and travel
- Other mobility constraints – transport, childcare, cost, etc.
- Language barriers
- Recognition of skills and credentials
- Barriers to youth entrepreneurship – access to markets, finance, etc.
- Discrimination and stigma

BARRIERS RELATED TO AVAILABILITY OF DECENT JOBS
(SKILL DEMAND)

- Low rates of job creation in the host economy due to barriers to firm entry and growth
- Inadequate quality of jobs in the host labour market – e.g. high informality, low levels of labour protections, etc.
- Restrictions on employers on hiring FDPs
- Employer attitudes towards hiring FDPs
- Spatial mismatch – where jobs are vs. where FDPs are

For FDPs, the extent to which barriers are present and experienced varies widely between countries, between camps and resettled urban areas and for particular groups, e.g., women and young girls, disabled persons, and ethnic minorities.[1] The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the vulnerability of FDPs.[2] Given their existing vulnerabilities, forcibly displaced youth are projected to be impacted more deeply and be at increased risk of exploitative, insecure work.[3]

A WIDE RANGE OF DIGITAL SOLUTIONS TO SUPPORT SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION OF YOUTH IN DISPLACED AND HOST COMMUNITIES (AND SIMILAR CONTEXTS) ARE EMERGING

Technology has been playing a growing role in humanitarian and migration responses to provide education and employment.[4] The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the use of digital technologies to support the journey from learning to earning including solutions focused on young people who are FDPs, in host communities, or are otherwise vulnerable.

This expanding solutions space features approaches ranging from those that promote remote learning and skilling opportunities, introduce gamified applications, to those that focus on digital entrepreneurship. Promising examples of high-quality programmes that are changing lives and look set to become all the more important in the global economic recovery are highlighted in Figure 2.

Whilst COVID-19 has accelerated the use of digital technologies to support school-to-work transitions, more needs to be done to enable successful programming to deliver sustainable employment outcomes for forcibly displaced youth at-scale. Relatively few solutions have evolved into larger programmes and many solutions are either operating at a small scale or are no longer operating at all. Lack of outcomes data for many solutions makes it difficult to inform programme improvement or assess impact at this stage in their development.

FIGURE 2: Digital solutions that support school-to-work transitions

SOLUTION FUNCTIONALITY	EXAMPLES OF TYPES OF SOLUTION FUNCTIONALITY	EXAMPLES
Learning and Skills Solutions	• Content Repositories • Learning Platforms	• Kiron Campus (Global) • Learning Passport by UNICEF and Microsoft (Global)
Credential Solutions	• Digital recording of qualifications • Alternatives to traditional qualifications, including micro-credentials, portfolio development	• Government of India's Digilocker • RebootKamp Github repositories (Jordan, Tunisia, Iraq, State of Palestine)
Advice and Guidance Solutions	• Career Guidance Apps and Websites • Remote Mentoring	• Mobile for Career Development by Save the Children (Ethiopia) • Micromentor by Mercy Corps (Global)
Job Search Solutions	• Job Matching Platforms	• ECSJO by ILO (Jordan) • Kormo Jobs by Google (India, Bangladesh, Indonesia)
Employment and Entrepreneurship Solutions	• Training for remote digital livelihoods • E-marketplaces	• Gaza Sky Geeks by Mercy Corps (State of Palestine) • Mikono Refugee Craftshop by Jesuit Refugee Service (Kenya)

A NUMBER OF INSIGHTS RELATED TO GOOD PRACTICES AND BARRIERS AROUND DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION ARE EMERGING INCLUDING:

- Co-designing with intended users (and ensuring alignment to labour market needs) is critical to developing solutions that are relevant to the challenges faced by FDPs.
- The "bundling" of different programme elements to provide an integrated 'whole-youth' solution is a common and useful approach and often requires strong partnership and referral mechanisms among programme implementers.
- Developing "open" systems which include host communities (rather than closed loop systems specifically for FDPs) can mitigate against duplication and harmful separation between both communities.
- Designing solutions targeting FDPs should incorporate gender and social inclusion considerations. Several programmes have developed promising ways to design this into programmes, but there is often a lack of disaggregated data on outcomes achieved by the most disadvantaged participants.
- Digital employment solutions pose some challenges in terms of ensuring decent work: it is crucial that platform solutions engage with the decent work agenda and identify what they can do (and are not doing) to support its realisation.
- Security and privacy are big concerns for users as well as implementing and funding organisations and are an emerging barrier to uptake.

FURTHER INSIGHTS RELATED TO SCALE AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THESE SOLUTIONS INCLUDE:

- Infrastructure and connectivity remain crucial barriers to uptake of digital opportunities and the effective deployment of solutions.
- The biggest obstacle to scale is often the legal and regulatory system, with particular challenges around refugees' right to work, travel and earn a living. Digital solutions for learning, skills and employment cannot fix these underlying problems, which require political action.
- There is a need to develop ecosystems that support organisations to create, test and scale solutions. To improve the ecosystem for solutions, development actors (including international agencies and the private sector) need to have the digital capabilities required to successfully harness the potential of digital technology.
- The aim of efforts to boost scale should be delivering better outcomes at scale for forcibly displaced youth rather than just improved access. As such, it is crucial to gain a better understanding of programme outcomes, and "what works".
- The solution and funding landscape is fragmented, with competition among programme implementers for limited funding acting as a disincentive for collaboration and sharing of successful programme design. There is a real need for efforts to improve coordination in this space.
- For solutions looking to scale, getting the right partner organisations in place, and being open to wider collaboration, is crucial. Making solutions open-source can provide an indirect route to scale through allowing other implementers to re-use and contextualise assets, concepts and content – although some open-source solutions struggle to raise sufficient income to grow.

A ROADMAP FOR ACTION

Five key promising action areas are identified to unlock the potential of digital technology as an accelerator and enabler for school-to-work transitions for youth in displaced and host community contexts:

1 **Focus on how to build an ecosystem for digital education and employment solutions at scale.** This should include a new global coordination function, the Partnership on Technology-Enabled Livelihoods for Forcibly Displaced Persons, which:

- Supports scaling through match-making between implementers and funders.
- Supports knowledge sharing and reduces fragmentation through cataloguing successful models, building a community of practice, catalysing investment in practice-oriented research on what works, and providing advice to host country governments and other stakeholders on prioritisation of potential solutions.

- Supports innovation by catalysing investment in a pipeline of potential solutions, with particular focus on decent work dimensions.
- Supports new entrants by providing guidance, comprehensive information, and linkages to potential partners.

2 **Improve digital infrastructure and access to connectivity** through infrastructure investment in areas with high numbers of FDPs, exploring partnerships with telecommunications companies to reduce the cost of data, development of low-data and off-line solutions, and where necessary, bundling device access into programme design for targeted groups.

3 **Improve the regulatory, policy and operating environments for solutions** through joint work between host governments and development partners to identify and phase out legal and regulatory barriers that prevent FDPs from working, travelling to work, and earning an income.

4 **Align programme design more closely to FDP and labour market needs** including through co-design with participants, investing in – and using – labour market intelligence, mainstreaming gender and inclusion considerations into design, and prioritising solutions that integrate and involve the host community.

5 **Promote decent work in new forms of digital employment** through development and implementation of legal, policy and regulatory mechanisms to protect those engaged in digital work from exploitation, including baseline standards on regular and fair remuneration, ensuring worker representation, safe workplaces, and social protection. Funders of digital livelihoods programmes for FDPs could consider supporting complementary safety net systems. Implementers of digital livelihood solutions should embed decent work considerations into solutions.

ABOUT THIS STUDY:

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ENDNOTES

1 Forster, Robert, No City is the Same: *Livelihood opportunities among self-settled Syrian refugees in Beirut, Tripoli and Tyre*, CMI Insight Number 1, Bergen: CMI, March 2021; International Youth Foundation, *Opportunities for Syrian Youth in Istanbul: A labour market assessment*, London: International Youth Foundation, 2018; Kabir, R., and Jeni Klugman, *Unlocking Refugee Women's Potential*, New York: International Rescue Committee, 2019.

2 ILO, *Protecting the Rights at Work of Refugees and Other Forcibly Displaced Persons During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Recommendations for policy-makers and constituents*, Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2020.

3 ILO, *ILO Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020*, Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2020; UN-DESA, *Youth Flash: Special issue on COVID-19 and youth*, New York: UN-DESA, 2020.

4 For instance, an estimated half of the private sector's engagement in the Syria response has been related to using technology for education.