

Board of the Centre

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FOR INFORMATION

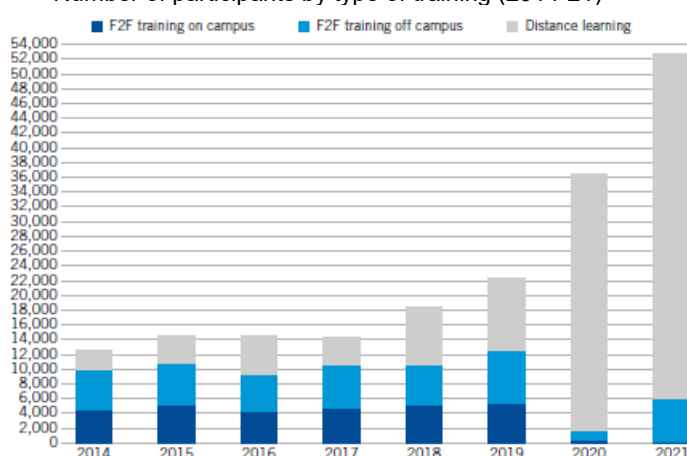
SECOND ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Independent external evaluation of the ITCILO online training and learning activities - Management response

I. Introduction

1. Service impact is a central pillar of the Results-based Management Framework underpinning the 2022-23 Programme and Budget of the International Training Centre of the ILO (the Centre). The Centre continuously monitors the quality of its capacity development services along the service cycle and furthermore commissions annual external evaluations to evaluate positive change in the performance of participants after training.¹ As in 2021, in 2022, the focus of the external evaluation was on the distance learning activities of the Centre, mindful of the massive shift of the organization towards fully online distance learning in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. While online distance learning training activities had accounted for only 3% of ITC's activities in 2019, they had grown to 49% by the end of 2021. On the back of this surge of online learning activities, the number of unique online learners increased from 9,612 (2019) to 46,333 (2021).²

Number of participants by type of training (2014-21)



Source: MAP and eCampus. For 2014-17, blended learning participants are included in face-to-face training on/off campus. For 2018-20 the number of distance learners is included. Distance learning: Count of active distance learners

Source: ITCILO 2020-21 Implementation report, p.9

¹ For the full report of the 2021 external evaluation and copies of the reports of previous years evaluations since 2014 go to <https://www.itcilo.org/about/board>.

² In the first nine months of 2022, the number of online learners has continued growing (35,421 as of 20 September 2022), a clear indication that distance learning plays an important role in the post-pandemic service mix of the Centre. Refer to the 2020 interim implementation progress report (accessible via <https://www.itcilo.org/about/board>) for more information

2. The **purpose of the evaluation** was to provide the leadership and management of the Centre with evidence of the relevance, validity of design, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of its fully online training activities, to assess which modalities of online training are most effective and efficient, to explore good practices, lessons learnt, and to derive recommendations for the improvement and further development of the ITC's online training activities. Therefore, the focus of this evaluation was not placed on the evaluation of single courses or content areas but on the overall management, design and impact of online training activities.
3. The **scope of the evaluation** was to verify whether participants in these distance learning activities acquired new knowledge and later successfully applied it to contribute to the promotion of Decent Work. Carried out from May to August 2022, the evaluation focused on 20 sampled online training activities delivered in the course of 2021. The sample included a variety of paid and free, open and tailor-made, tutor-supported and self-guided courses that took place via various platforms using a diverse set of tools, including eCampus, Solicom, webinars, and virtual reality. The courses were chosen based on their representativeness of the training topics evident in the content and delivery of the training, the mode of delivery (stand-alone webinars, communities of practice, virtual reality, tutor-based or self-guided distance learning), languages (English, Spanish, French) and costs of the training activities (from free to tailor-made, sponsored programs, open fee-based courses).
4. The **evaluation criteria** were based on the OECD DAC evaluation principles: relevance and outreach of the activity, validity of activity design, effectiveness, efficiency of use of resources, and impact orientation of the activity. The guiding questions for the evaluators are listed below:

Assessment Criteria	Questions to be addressed
<i>Relevance and outreach of the activity:</i> Relevance refers to the extent to which the objectives of the activity are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, and partners' and donors' policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well did the activity operationalize the 2018-21 strategic plan and the 2020-21 Programme & Budget of the Centre, and the higher level ILO 2018-21 strategy framework and 2020-21 Programme and Budget?
<i>Validity of the activity design:</i> The extent to which the design of the activity was logical and coherent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the result of online training imply that the design of the activities was logical and realistic? • Did the end of activity evaluation and (where applicable) the follow up activity evaluation effectively measure results and progress?
<i>Effectiveness:</i> the extent to which the activities' immediate objectives were achieved, taking into account their relative importance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What results have been achieved/what progress has been made by learners since the implementation of the activities? • Which gaps remain and how could these be addressed through follow-up activities? • To what extent have the activities and the used tools been an effective instrument to strengthen the capacity of ILO constituents and other ILO development partners?
<i>Efficiency of use of resources:</i> A measure of how economically resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) were converted to results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the resources invested into the delivery of the activities been used in the most efficient manner? How economically were resources and inputs (funds, expertise, time etc.) converted to results? Did the results justify the cost? • What time and cost efficiency measures could have been introduced without impeding the achievement of results?

<p><i>Effectiveness of management arrangements:</i> The extent to which management capacities and arrangements put in place supported the achievement of results</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were the roles and responsibilities of Centre officials, including programme management, responsible for the implementation of the activities clearly defined and understood? • Were the current arrangements for implementing the activities effective? • Were the activities coordinated across technical programmes?
<p><i>Impact orientation of the activity:</i> The strategic orientation of the activity towards making a significant contribution to broader, long-term, sustainable development changes, and whether the changes have been durable/were replicated by beneficiaries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How likely is it that the results of the activities will be maintained or up-scaled by the participants? • What are the participants' perceived benefits from the activities (differentiated by groups)? What evidence exists of participants benefiting from the activities? • What actions might be required for achieving long-term impact?

5. The **methodology** for this evaluation included quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods to provide conclusions and recommendations from the findings, substantiated with statistical data and case studies documenting good practice. 792 responses were collected from a participant's survey, and in-depth interviews were conducted with 28 ITCILO's staff members, two institutional clients and a focus group of eight participants. The 2022 evaluation was framed as a *re-evaluation* since it was based on exactly the same framework as the 2021 evaluation, and thus allowed for the cross-comparison of results across calendar years to determine mid-term trends in service impact.

II. Conclusions and recommendations made by the Evaluators

Conclusions

6. The evaluators drew the following conclusions:³

- In regard to **relevance**, there is a strong sense of appreciation and recognition, shared among the interviewees, that the Centre has successfully managed to reach out to its target groups or provide training demanded by its beneficiaries, partners, and donors. Participant survey results clearly indicate that the Centre has successfully served its target groups. 95% agreed that the course(s) they had taken in 2021 were relevant to their needs in the work setting. Interviews with client organizations and course participants also confirm that the Centre has effectively played its role in providing ILO constituents with specialized training on different aspects of the Decent Work Agenda via offering online training activities.
- In regard to **outreach**, the Centre reached a wider and more diversified audience with online distance learning activities. Especially, participants from middle-income countries can take advantage of digital learning solutions avoiding costs of travel and accommodation. Participants from 128 different countries responded to the survey, with the majority of participants (50%) coming from African countries. Even in the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, 70% of the participants said they would prefer digital training activities (blended or fully online) in the future, although there is a slight trend toward the demand for more face-to-face learning opportunities for networking. Internet connectivity remains a big problem in many countries. About 50% of participants in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Oceania agreed

³ The conclusions are quoted from ITCILO 2022: Re-evaluation of the online training activities of the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization (ITCILO, Italy), p.3

or strongly agreed that they had regular issues with Internet connectivity that disrupted their learning.

- In regard to the **validity of the training design**, the results show that the Centre provides an appropriate mix of synchronous and asynchronous information and communication tools. Participants tend to slightly prefer asynchronous content presentation and communication, which allows for higher levels of flexibility and accessibility. The in-depth analysis of the 20 selected online training activities reveals some room for improvement in terms of teaching, social and cognitive presence and learner engagement.
- In regard to **effectiveness**, the online training activities reviewed in this re-evaluation effectively achieved to strengthen the capacity of ILO constituents and other ILO development partners. The Centre has developed a much more sophisticated sense of digital accessibility and inclusion. However, when it comes to "how-to" matters in designing online courses, digital inclusion is not always easy to implement, given the diverse needs of ITCILO's learner population. In terms of individual learners, 97.4% responded that they would recommend the training activities to their colleagues.
- In regard to **efficiency**, all reviewed online training activities created revenues, fully covering direct costs in 2021. Staff knowledge and expertise in designing online courses and use of educational media have noticeably increased in 2021, which can also be seen as evidence of the efficiency of the Centre's overall financial operation regarding staff development. The Centre has continuously made financial investments in its technological infrastructure, primarily focused on improving the pedagogical functions of its main online learning platform, e-Campus, by inserting various technical tools and applications, including the latest VR and AR technology and applications.
- In regard to the **impact** of online training activities, this evaluation measured an impressive 94.3% of participants that agreed or strongly agreed that they can apply what they learned in their work setting. 52% shared a concrete example of their application of knowledge after the online training in an open text question in the survey. Furthermore, the majority of participants reported that they made large or very large improvements in terms of their competencies (68.2%) and job performance (60.7%) as a result of the training activities.

Recommendations

7. The evaluators submitted the following recommendations:⁴

- A. Develop a strategic plan on how to best reach their target groups in different regions with appropriate educational technologies and media to get the right mix of synchronous and asynchronous, blended and fully online distance learning delivery that allows for maximum accessibility and outreach.
- B. Further improve technical support and provision of advice and information to ensure that participants can easily enroll in and navigate the online courses. The Centre should carefully analyze the procedures and data pertaining to technical support.
- C. Review the expected duration, learning hours and number of required tasks to avoid an overwhelming workload for course participants. A clear timetable

⁴ Quoted from ITCILO 2022: Re-evaluation of the online training activities of the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization (ITCILO, Italy), p.5

should always be provided, and distance learners should be given time to catch up in case of falling behind due to work commitments or private obligations.

- D. Include a recorded welcome message to introduce the course tutors and course content for all online training activities. Whenever possible, asynchronous forums need to be monitored, and personalized feedback must be offered timely by the tutors. Recordings of synchronous sessions should always be provided.
- E. Implement collaborative learning opportunities wherever possible. Group work and discussions must be facilitated and guided by the tutors. All courses should provide participants with an opportunity to formally meet their peers and introduce themselves to other course members.
- F. Consider publishing some of the flagship learning materials under a Creative Commons license (e. g. CC-BY). The Centre can also develop its own OER policy to support the development and use of open content, which would further increase the visibility and impact of its training courses, and facilitate collaboration among ILO constituents.
- G. Develop a more long-term mechanism to evaluate its' financial performance in terms of technological innovations—particularly the ones involving the latest VR and AR applications, addressing concerns about the practicality and sustainability of such technology.
- H. Review the staff workload involved in online training activities. Both an actual increase in online training activities and enrolments and a perceived increase in staff workload voiced by many interviewees in this project need to be carefully reviewed. The economic merits of online training compared to face-to-face training should also be critically reviewed.
- I. Re-think and re-design staff development mechanism. The staff with a well-established knowledge foundation for online training would benefit more from just-in-time, personalized, and informal skill development opportunities rather than from one-off training sessions happening at the institution-chosen date and time.
- J. Focus on translating the “idea” or “ideal” of digital inclusion into online training practice by developing a solid understanding of specific circumstances and diverse challenges that restrict both the “access” and “success” of participants' online learning experiences. A comprehensive accessibility checklist with brief real-life scenarios and an additional staff position can be created.
- K. Prudently approaches educational data mining and profiling, being cautious of unintentionally privileging dominant participant groups. The Centre should also move from "learner analytics" to "learning analytics" to develop a deeper understanding of how different learner groups engage with learning activities.
- L. Develop a coherent training framework taking into account the full spectrum of online training—including corresponding instructional design templates. While it is important to increase consistency among the Centre's training activities in terms of their structural and presentational aspects, it is even more crucial to note that the one-size-for-all principle does not work.

III. Management response

8. **The Centre welcomes the findings of the external evaluation.** The evaluation shows that the Center has successfully managed to transform its training portfolio during the COVID 19 pandemic and that participants have moved on to successfully apply the newly acquired knowledge in their place of work. The Centre acknowledges that additional measures can be undertaken to further upgrade its distance learning activities and also to offer its institutional partners more support to deliver distance learning activities for their own constituencies. The following paragraphs set down the **management response to the recommendations** made by the evaluators.
9. In response to recommendation A, the Centre will amend the 2022-23 strategy implementation framework of the training department (that operationalizes the 2022-25 strategic plan and the 2022-23 Programme and Budget of the Centre) and **specify in further detail how to best reach ILO constituents in different regions with appropriate educational technologies and media.** Concrete measures might involve the adaptation and translation of course content, targeted outreach campaigns and 'mobile first' learning activities.
10. In response to recommendation B, the Centre will further refine its existing processes to ensure that participants can **more easily navigate between online courses.** More in particular, the Centre will cross-reference learning activities by adding relevant links on the course page to other offerings in the catalogue.
11. In response to recommendation C, the Centre has commissioned a **follow-up participant survey to refine the expected duration, learning hours and number of required tasks** to avoid an overwhelming workload in future course editions. In response to the survey findings, the Centre will communicate at the outset of the learning activity that participants can under certain circumstances ask for additional time to complete module-specific learning tasks. The Centre will also more clearly distinguish between compulsory and facultative readings, and specify the time needed to complete the study of the documents.
12. In response to recommendation D, the Centre will add to each tutor-supported online activity a **recorded welcome message to introduce the course tutors and course content** for all online training activities. More in particular, a Moodle plugin will be installed to facilitate [the video production by colleagues directly within the eCampus.](#) Asynchronous forums will be more closely monitored, and personalized feedback will be offered timely by the tutors. In future, the Centre will also provide participants with recordings of all synchronous sessions.
13. In response to recommendation E, the Centre will **further emphasize tutor-supported collaborative learning opportunities** during online training, with focus on group work and discussions. In tutor-supported courses, participants will always be provided with an opportunity to meet their peers and introduce themselves to other course members.
14. In response to recommendation F, the Centre will explore in collaboration with the ILO **publishing selected flagship learning materials under a Creative Commons license.**
15. In response to recommendation G, the Centre will carry out a **cost-benefit analysis of its technological innovations,** to better document the potential use case of such technology for constituents.

16. In response to recommendation H, the Human Resources Services of the Centre together with the Information and Technology and Communication Services of the Centre will commission **a staff survey to assess the workload involved in online training activities**. Pending findings, the Centre will undertake **measures to better distribute the workload** in each Technical Programme and across Technical Programmes, to facilitate full compliance with the digital rights of all staff, including the right to disconnect.
17. In response to recommendation I, the Centre will step up its ongoing programmes to **target staff with well-established knowledge about online training with more personalized skills development opportunities**. All members of the learning faculty will be encouraged to determine together with their supervisors and HRS their skills development needs and next to submit their individual learning requests via the staff development portal. The Centre furthermore will furthermore continue upgrading its group-based staff development activities with the launch of an in-house training course based on a digital facilitation toolkit developed jointly with the European Trade Union Institute.
18. In response to recommendation J, the Centre will **strive further to make its online learning activities fully inclusive**. More in particular, the Centre will introduce an accessibility toolkit to design and deliver online courses mindful of the principles outlined in the publication elaborated after the 2021 digital inclusion summit of the Centre. The e-campus support team will be trained to perform accessibility checks before the course starts. The Centre will furthermore offer its staff, training sessions on digital accessibility and facilitate access for Technical Programmes to expert advice on the creation of digitally accessible course content. The Centre will bundle the knowledge accumulated as a result of these follow-up activities and make it available to ILO constituents by way of a digital inclusion laboratory.
19. In response to recommendation K, the Centre will further **upgrade its data analytics processes and tools**. More in particular, the Centre will consolidate its data analytics unit in the Office of the Director Training and recruit an additional expert on data-driven services. The knowledge will be made available by way of a self-guided distance learning module on learning analytics and by way of advisory services to Technical Programmes across the Centre and to ILO constituents engaged in the design and delivery of online training.
20. In response to recommendation L, the Centre will continue along the path of **standardizing its online training activities**, to increase consistency in terms of the structural and presentational aspects – while leaving space for Technical Programmes to tailor courses to the needs of their respective constituency.

The Board is invited to provide guidance on the findings and recommendations of the independent evaluation and on the management response.