

Board of the Centre

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FOR INFORMATION

THIRD ITEM ON THE AGENDA

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

I. Introduction

1. The 2018-21 Strategic Plan of the International Training Centre of the ILO (the Centre) envisions the Centre to be a **world-class provider of capacity development services for ILO constituents** and **service quality** is an important pillar of the Results-based Management Framework underpinning the 2020-21 Programme and Budget of the organization. The Centre continuously monitors service satisfaction rates and knowledge acquisition rates of participants at the input and output stages of the training results chain, and furthermore commissions **annual external evaluations** of the knowledge application rates and consequent performance improvements of its former participants.¹ **In 2021, 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 accounted for only 3% of ITC's activities in 2019, they are expected to grow up to 54 % by the end of 2021 and will play an important role in the future service mix of the Centre.
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 2021, the evaluation focused on 20 sampled online training activities delivered in the course of 2020. 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, Solicomm, webinars, and virtual reality. The 20 courses were chosen based on

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>.

their representativeness of the training topics evident in the content and delivery of the training, and the courses languages (English, Spanish, and French).

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.	• How well did the activity operationalize the 2018-21 strategic plan and the 2018-19, 2019-20 Programme & Budget of the Centre, and the higher level ILO 2018-21 strategy framework and 2018-19 Programme and Budget?
<i>Validity of the activity design:</i> The extent to which the design of the activity was logical and coherent.	• 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.	• 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	• 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
<i>Effectiveness of management arrangements:</i> The extent to which management capacities and arrangements put in place supported the achievement of results	• Were the roles and responsibilities of Centre officials, including programme management, who were responsible for the implementation of the activities clearly defined and understood? • Were the current arrangement for implementing the activities effective? • Were the activities coordinated across technical programmes?
<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	• 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 **evaluation methodology** included a combination of quantitative and qualitative assessment methods:

- A **desk review** of existing documentation, including quantitative and descriptive information about the activities, including final reports about their outputs and outcomes, and other evidence.
- A **participants' survey** sent to more than 9,000 learners to obtain in-depth information about their impressions or experiences of the activities. The survey was administered online on the basis of a pre-written and pre-coded questionnaire and attracted 1,284 responses. About two-thirds of respondents were male (66.3 %), and one-third were female (32.3 %). The majority of respondents had participated in two open, self-guided DL courses, i.e. Fire Safety Management (n=380) and Introduction to International Labour Standards (n=285), followed by OHS, living wages and adequate working time: Protecting Workers in the World of Work (n=81), the Monitoring and Evaluation Certification Programme (n=80), and Diplomado en Gestion de Organizaciones Empresariales (n=73). The responses came from a wide range of 151 different countries, with the majority from Africa (31.8 %), Asia and Pacific (29.3 %), the Americas (26.3 %) followed by Europe (6.1 %) and the Middle East (5.9 %).
- 27 in-depth **interviews** with Management, Programme Managers, Activity Managers and Programme Assistants.
- In-depth interviews with two institutional clients who had sponsored participants linked to technical cooperation projects, to explore tangible and non-tangible changes resulting from the activities.
- Two **focus group discussions** with seven participants to explore in further depth tangible and non-tangible changes resulting from the activities.
- Three **case studies** of participants met during the focus group discussion, documenting changes resulting from the activities.

II. Conclusions and recommendations made by the Evaluators²

Conclusions

6. In regard to **relevance**, there is a strong sense of appreciation and recognition, shared among the interviewees, that the Center has successfully managed to reach out to its target groups or provide training demanded by its beneficiaries, partners, and donors. The Centre has effectively played its role in providing ILO constituents with specialized training on different aspects of the Decent Work Agenda by promptly and effectively transitioning its training activities online.
7. 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 for travel and accommodation. Participants from 151 different countries responded to the participant's survey. After the online learning experience, 75 % of the participants said they would prefer digital training activities (blended or fully online) in the future. However, internet connectivity is still a problem in many countries. 50 % of participants from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Oceania reported they had regular issues with internet connectivity that disrupted their learning.
8. In regard to the **validity of the training design**, the results show that the Centre's provides an appropriate mix of synchronous and asynchronous information and communication

² The conclusions and recommendations are quoted from the executive summary of the evaluation report.

tools. Participants tend to slightly prefer asynchronous content presentation and communication that allows for higher levels of flexibility and accessibility. Ratings with regards to teaching, social, and cognitive presence in the courses indicate that course designers and facilitators managed to deliver highly engaging, interactive, and supportive online courses that provided opportunities for rich and deep learning experiences.

9. In regard to **effectiveness**, the online training activities reviewed in this evaluation effectively achieved to strengthen the capacity of ILO constituents and other ILO development partners—especially during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Centre has a very good overview of the needs of their target learners and their organizations. In terms of individual learners, 98.3 % responded that they would recommend the training activities to their colleagues. Participants perceive courses that provide structured and tutor-guided opportunities to use new skills in their work settings and to share their experiences with other participants more effective.
10. In regard to **efficiency**, despite the time and labour put into ad-hoc development of online courses in 2020, the resources invested into the delivery of online training activities have been used economically, i.e. the inputs were translated into desired results to meet the demands of ITCILOs beneficiaries, partners, and donors.
11. In regard to the **impact** of online training activities, this evaluation measured an impressive 94.3 % of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they can apply what they learnt in their work setting. 54.6 % shared a concrete example of their application of knowledge after the online training in an open text question in the survey. Furthermore, the participants reported that they made large or very large improvements in terms of their competencies (85.6 %) and job performance (69.0 %) as a result of the training activities.

Recommendations

12. The Centre should:

- 1) develop **an operational plan on how to best reach their target groups in different regions** with appropriate educational technologies and media to get the right mix of online training activities.
- 2) **focus on the development of tutor-based distance learning** that facilitates interaction between tutors and learners as well as among participants. Self-guided course content can be used in combination with tutor-guided instruction.
- 3) review and **improve its technical support provisions**, both processes and information, to help training participants smoothly join and navigate their online courses.
- 4) **consider more student-centred evaluation methods** such as a self-rating scale of knowledge application, participant panels, or self-reflective learning journals.
- 5) consider develop and use Open Educational Resources and **publish its training materials under a Creative Commons license** that allows its users to retain, reuse, revise, remix, and redistribute.
- 6) expand its role to provide educational 'consultation' and online training packaging services, helping its partners to build their online training capacity as a knowledge hub.
- 7) **develop a dual online training provision model**—i) specialised long-term training courses and ii) general short-term training activities. The Center can consider re-structuring or re-packaging their online training activities with a programme or a degree perspective.
- 8) **invest in its marketing strategies**, thinking more about its future competitiveness after the COVID-19 pandemic when online training becomes more mainstream, and learners have more choices.

- 9) **recognize and reward its staff's hard work and dedication** during the COVID-19. The Centre also needs to provide its staff with reflective learning opportunities, creating and nurturing an supportive learning culture across the units.
- 10) develop **a systematic course design framework and an effective operational model**, taking into account the full spectrum of target groups, content areas, technological tools, pedagogical methods—including corresponding instructional design templates.

III. Management Response

13. **The Centre welcomes the findings of the external evaluation.** The evaluation shows that the Center has successfully managed to reach out to its target groups during the COVID 19 pandemic and that participants 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.
14. In response to recommendation 1, the Centre will **further segment the universe of online learners** by geographic criteria, demographic criteria and vulnerability characteristics in order to fine-tune the mix of educational technologies and media deployed in its online training activities, and as a result to further lower barriers to access. The marketing analytics findings and proposed follow-up actions will be documented in a report.
15. In response to recommendation 2, the Centre will **continue expanding the range of tutor-based distance learning activities** advertised in its training calendar; where applicable, self-guided course content will be used in combination with tutor-guided instruction, for example by imbedding self-guided learning modules as additional steps along the tutor-supported learning journey.
16. In response to recommendation 3, the Centre will in 2022 **upgrade the technical support provisions on the e-campus**, both processes and information, to help training participants smoothly join and navigate their online courses. As part of this upgrade, the tools and applications for presenting learning content and facilitating online interaction will be designed in a way that works on different kinds of mobile devices and thus ensure widest access to the e-campus also for learners not equipped with computers and no fixed-line internet connectivity. Furthermore, bearing in mind that the challenges that some participants face in online learning activities might be due to a lack of digital skills, the Centre will consider starting a project in which the digital skills of participants are assessed in order to identify needs for appropriate training or preparation for online learning (e.g. a “digital driver's license”).
17. In response to recommendation 4, and as part of the e-campus review exercise referenced in the response to recommendation 3, the Centre will consider the introduction of **more student-centred evaluation methods** such as a self-rating scale of knowledge application, participant panels, or self-reflective learning journals.
18. In response to recommendation 5, the Centre will more actively promote access for learners to its suite of free self-guided distance learning courses and **grant a conditional Creative Commons license** that allows its users to retain and reuse these resources, always subject to acknowledgement of the source. Revision of content without prior approval of the Centre is not possible due to the fact that course content requires official endorsement by the ILO.
19. In response to recommendation 6, the Centre will **expand its role as provider of institutional capacity development services** on educational strategies, approaches and technologies for organizations representing the ILO constituency and other ILO partners.

Next to consultancies on learning strategy, these non-training services might also include IT solutions, co-creation of training products and multimedia development services

20. In response to recommendation 7, the Centre will more **explicitly differentiate between short, stand-alone certificate-level training courses and longer term diploma programmes** that stack certificate-level training courses along multi-step learning journeys and conclude with a capstone project. For this purpose, the website of the Centre will be updated to more effectively promote the choice of learning services and to invite potential learners to explore a “suggested courses/learning paths” feature that displays a range of available training courses and shows sequential connectivities. The Centre will furthermore develop additional diploma programmes for subjects of immediate relevance to the Decent Work Agenda, including diploma programmes on international labour standards and sustainable enterprise development.
21. In response to recommendation 8, the Centre will set up a digital marketing & learning analytics function in the Office of the Director Training to inform with data the **elaboration of a post COVID 19 learning strategy** that combines face-to-face training and online learning. Mindful of the mission of the Centre and aligned with the strategy framework of the ILO, the hybrid learning strategy will emphasize on:
 - *Diversity* -diversity of participants, diversity of delivery methods, diversity of online technological media, and diversity of course content.
 - *Inclusion* - inclusion of learners across different geographical contexts, across all stages of economic development and including learners with high vulnerabilities;
 - *Rights-based and human-centred* – firmly rooted in principles laid out in the 2019 Centenary Declaration and the 2021 Call to Action for a human-centred approach to the COVID 19 pandemic.
22. In response to recommendation 9, the Centre explicitly **recognizes the staff’s hard work and dedication during the COVID-19**. The Centre will provide its staff with opportunity to reflect on their learning and training experiences, to solidify their new skills and knowledge, to share learning outcomes and good practices, and to support each other’s professional development across the units. The Centre will also provide further opportunities to **further upgrade staff skills** in reflection of the new hybrid learning strategy.
23. In response to recommendation 10, and under the umbrella of the new learning strategy, the Centre will **further evolve the course design framework, curriculum, technological tools and pedagogical methods**, in a way that continues to allow all Technical Programmes a good level of autonomy and decision-making power while ensuring synergies, scale effects and alignment with the strategic principles described in paragraph 21 through the Office of the Director Training.

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

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