



GUIDANCE BRIEF March 2021

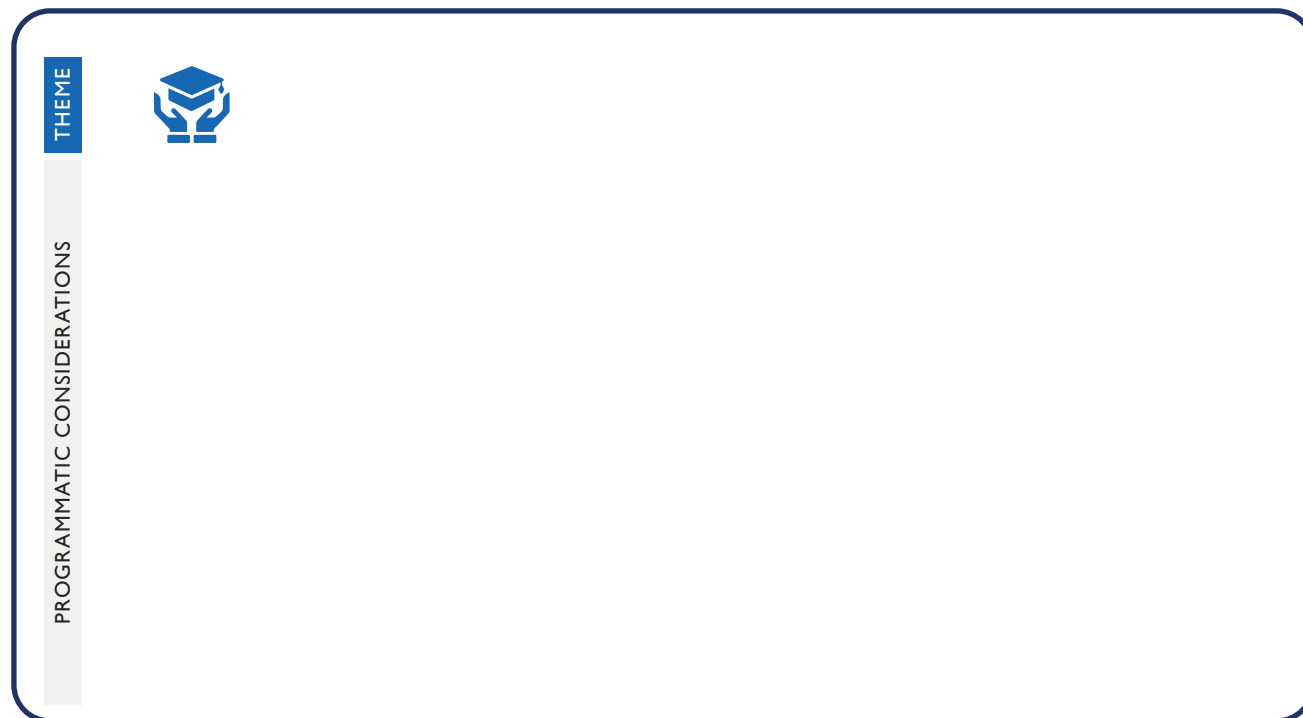
This brief summarizes literature related to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on youth education and employment, with programming considerations for USAID’s higher education and youth workforce development (HE/YWFD) subsectors. This brief provides recommendations on how USAID can pivot its current activities or design new HE/YWFD activities to address immediate COVID-19 response priorities, and provides longer-term recommendations for preparing for and mitigating the impact of other future shocks and stressors on youth education and employment. Each recommendation contains an illustrative list of interventions that is not intended to be prescriptive, but rather to generate ideas that help USAID Mission staff identify the responses that may be most relevant for their context. Examples of similar interventions and additional resources are also provided.

PANDEMIC-ERA RESPONSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND YOUTH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Summary

This review spans over 100 policy reports, assessment findings, websites, journal articles, and other documents related to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on HE/YWFD. One major theme overwhelmingly stands out: **a massive call for policymakers and practitioners to prioritize equity, and to be more intentional in improving education and employment opportunities for marginalized youth.** Accordingly, this review highlights the following programmatic considerations, illustrated in [Exhibit 1](#). These considerations reflect the principles and priority areas of the USAID Education Policy,² and align with USAID’s white paper on education and resilience³ and the Positive Youth Development Framework.⁴

Exhibit 1. Overarching considerations for USAID’s response to COVID in the HE/YWFD subsector



= short-term responses = short- and long-term responses = long-term responses

Overview: The Pandemic's Impact on Youth Education, Work, and Wellbeing

Amid the turmoil caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, young people have suffered some of the worst effects. Children and youth living in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) have experienced the greatest levels of educational disruptions, and those from poor households, who have limited digital access, are also more likely to be out of school.^{5 6 7} Young people have disproportionately experienced the greatest job losses compared to adults, with one in six young people stopping their work altogether due to the pandemic.^{8 9 10 11} Evidence from past crises shows that the suspension of young people's education and training and their delayed entry into the world of work could have "scarring effects" in terms of educational attainment, job prospects, and earnings over their lifetime.^{12 13} From a policy perspective, these losses translate into significant long-term development impacts for poorer and more vulnerable youth and their families.^{14 15} These vulnerable youth cohorts include:

- **Female youth** face even greater barriers to accessing education than ever before,^{16 17} and women have demonstrated relatively higher employment and productivity losses compared to men.^{18 19 20 21} These shocks will likely lead to increased dropout rates, changes in career plans, and increases in child labor or other forms of exploitative work.²² Furthermore, girls and women are also experiencing higher levels of intimate partner violence than before the pandemic,^{23 24 25} while those living in poverty may be more likely than ever to engage in transactional sex in return for financial or in-kind support.²⁶ Experiences from the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone suggest that adolescent girls may experience higher levels of unintended pregnancies, resulting in them permanently leaving school.²⁷ Women from refugee, displaced, and post-conflict settings are also at greater risk of gender-based violence (GBV), sexual exploitation, early pregnancy, and forced marriages.²⁸
- **Over-age learners or out-of-school youth** who have not completed their education are unlikely to return to school in order to pursue income opportunities for their families.^{29 30} Even before the pandemic, 200 million adolescents and youth aged 12–17 were out of school,³¹ and more than one in five young people aged 15–24 were not in employment, education, or training (NEET).³² People with lower levels of education have also experienced proportionally higher job losses.^{33 34}
- **Young adults** ages 18–24 have experienced some of the lowest levels of unemployment and mental well-being.^{35 36} Younger youth whose caregivers have experienced COVID-19-related prolonged illness or death may face increased educational barriers, child labor, or sexual and physical abuse when they turn to extended family networks for support.³⁷
- **Youth with disabilities**, who are less likely than their peers to have attended school prior to the pandemic, now face even greater barriers to accessing education.³⁸
- **People working in the informal economy** and those in lower income ranges with low-paid and low-skilled jobs are also more likely to be suffering economically;^{39 40} this group tends to be comprised of women and youth.

Moreover, the education and training institutions that serve these young people are feeling the effects of the pandemic, with massive disruptions to instruction, personal strains on instructors and administrators, decreased student enrollment, and resource challenges associated with pivoting their curriculum and re-opening schools safely. As young people transition from education to employment, the employers and value chains that employ them are also experiencing rapid change. These shifting dynamics call for system-wide responses that create more equitable opportunities in youth education and employment.

Overarching Recommendation for USAID Missions

Prioritize equity: institute intentional policies and programs for vulnerable youth cohorts.

COVID-19 has pointed a spotlight on the need for resilience-strengthening strategies among youth and families from the most marginalized backgrounds.⁴¹ USAID's most powerful investment for young people is its intentional effort to transform education systems so they are more inclusive, while also improving the quality of education so it is more engaging for learners and adaptive to change.⁴² Tailored responses will reach students previously in formal education as well as those in non-formal education, those who have dropped out due to the pandemic, and those who were previously unable to be in education, training, or employment.⁴³ Working with these underserved and marginalized youth groups may cost more and take more time to achieve results.⁴⁴ In addition to mainstreaming equity across USAID's HE/YWFD activities, programs could also promote intentional practices at the national level, such as:

- Conducting participatory rapid assessments prior to activity design to identify the special opportunities and barriers faced by different marginalized youth cohorts⁴⁵
- Engaging higher education institutions (HEIs), research institutes, and national statistical offices to: (a) collect and disseminate national and sub-national data (disaggregated by age banding, gender, learners with disabilities,⁴⁶ and other identity factors) regarding young people's education and employment and the impact of the pandemic on their lives, and (b) generate, distill, and disseminate research on country-specific policies and practices that could reduce inequity among marginalized youth cohorts in a post-pandemic world
- Supporting governments to develop more equitable financing policies for young people, whether it be through overall education financing mechanisms, block grants for education institutions, education policy schemes for disadvantaged students, and/or social protection mechanisms⁴⁷

“Evidence from previous disasters shows that when disadvantaged groups experience shocks, they are also more likely to adopt coping strategies—such as reducing food consumption and selling productive assets—that lead to lower accumulation of human and physical capital (in the long run).”

—Ruth Hill and Ambar Narayan.
“What COVID-19 can mean for long-term inequality in development countries.”






Programmatic Considerations

With this overarching theme of equity, the following sections offer strategies for retrofitting activities and designing new activities in HE/YWFD across three major outcomes: (1) increasing equitable access to education and training for youth; (2) building youth assets and resilience capacities in a changing environment;⁴⁸ and (3) developing youths' agency to engage in a pandemic and post-pandemic world.

YOUTHS' EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING

 **Extend Distance Learning to Marginalized Youth.** Multiple channels for distance learning extend educational opportunity to even the most marginalized youth.⁴⁹ The spectrum of distance learning modalities includes: “no tech” solutions such as the distribution of hard copy education packets and supplies; low-tech solutions like interactive radio and audio instruction (using feature phones or audio/MP3 players) or television broadcasts and video (via smartphones and tablets/MP4 players); and high-tech delivery channels that combine voice/text/web-based instruction via mobile phones and/or use online cloud-based or internet dependent courses.^{50 51} In addition to USAID's and others' guidance notes on distance learning (see [Annex: Resources](#)), HE/YWFD-specific recommendations include:

- Support HE/YWFD education institutions seeking to revamp their learning platforms, curriculum, connectivity, and hardware associated with distance learning, giving priority to those serving disadvantaged student populations

BOX 1. Examples in Multiple Distance Learning Channels to Reach Different Youth Cohorts

The distribution of **hard copy reading and learning materials**, combined with **telephone-based mentoring**, has proven effective for reaching marginalized secondary school girls.⁵²


USAID-funded **radio-based instruction** showed positive results in numeracy and literacy outcomes during the Ebola crisis in Liberia.⁵³

Simultaneous **sign language** in TV learning programs have provided access to education for youth who are deaf and hard of hearing in Georgia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Peru, and Rwanda.⁵⁴

- Mobilize young people into peer-based virtual learning networks to support one another during distance learning
- Supplement distance learning efforts with community-based and youth-led “stay-in-school” campaigns directed at parents and young people to keep students—especially girls and people with disabilities—engaged in education and/or training programs during the crisis
- Support HE/YWFD institutions to offer their students youth-friendly, ancillary, cross-sectoral services that were disrupted when schools and universities closed (for example, see [Box 7](#))
- Engage HEIs and researchers to evaluate the efficacy of various distance learning modalities across different contexts and learner profiles

BOX 2. Open-Sourcing Resources for Online Tertiary Education

“The **Virtual University of Tunis (VUT)** (<https://www.uvt.rnu.tn/>), which offers courses via distance learning, made its platform, content, and IT and training capacity available to other universities in Tunisia to help them move their courses online. An estimated 110,000 students have already signed onto the VUT online learning platform to take classes, and 18,000 professors are involved in online teaching activities.”⁵⁵


 **Provide Financial Support to Prevent Mass Dropouts.**⁵⁶ Increased dropouts due to lower family incomes and remittances due to COVID-19 have not only negatively affected young people. Reduced enrollment and cuts in national education budgets have also negatively impacted the private and public HE/YWFD institutions,^{57 58 59} leading some to resort to academic staff layoffs or hiring and salary freezes.⁶⁰ USAID can address these financial constraints by:

- Coordinating with existing government and donor programs that offer cash stimulus payments, food-based assistance, and other social protections to young learners and their families
- Offering student scholarships, subsidies, stipends, loans/grant assistance, or reduced tuition fees⁶¹
- Supporting inclusive economic growth policies and livelihoods programs as the pandemic subsides, thereby enabling affected youth and households to generate income and cover school-related expenses over the long term (see following section, “[Invest in Youth-Inclusive Economic Recovery](#)”)

BOX 3. University Scholarships in the Wake of COVID-19

In **Paraguay**, in response to calls from the student union, the National University of the East agreed to award scholarships to under-resourced students facing economic hardship due to COVID-19. Selection criteria for scholarship recipients considered equity among students and departments.⁶²

In **Guatemala** following the lockdowns, the Pan-American University in Guatemala reduced its tuition to support learners.⁶³

 **Expedite Youths’ Return to Learning with Flexible Approaches.** Among the evidence-based practices in [USAID’s Return to Learning Toolkit](#) and other resources (see [Annex: Resources](#)),⁶⁴ HE/YWFD-specific recommendations are to:

- Create more flexible learning opportunities (self-paced learning, flexible hours, etc.) for young people, especially for girls and young women, allowing them to balance their educational goals with employment and other responsibilities
- Direct resources toward the safe administration of important examinations (such as those used for students to graduate secondary school or enter university) by suspending less important examinations
- Enlist tutoring programs or summer schools, and extend instructional time (extending the school day or term, shortening school breaks, double-shifting), and other remedial efforts to help learners catch up; older youth can also be enlisted as tutors of younger children, which gives them valuable work experience while also contributing to the pandemic recovery
- Fund HEIs and other educational institutions to research, disseminate, and incorporate evidence-based practices for the reopening of secondary schools, universities, and technical and vocational training and education (TVET) institutions, taking into consideration their specific circumstances and student needs

☀ **Institutionalize Accelerated Education Programs (AEPs).** Even before the pandemic, many countries had high levels of over-age school attendance and significant overage out-of-school youth populations.⁶⁵ Today there is only a greater imperative to institutionalize second-chance learning opportunities to provide youth with foundational skills. Many countries still require certain legal and regulatory frameworks and/or implementation practices that enable flexible and continuous learning pathways,⁶⁶ such as:

- Expanding flexible non-formal education and alternative education programs for over-age learners experiencing a more than two-year educational lag,⁶⁷ and especially for girls facing competing domestic/childcare responsibilities, pregnant girls and young mothers experiencing stigma and discriminatory school re-entry practices, learners with disabilities, and youth in the workforce

BOX 4. Accelerated Education Programs Help Youth Return to School

“To compensate for lost learning during Ebola, Sierra Leone’s Ministry of Science, Education, and Technology implemented **two shortened academic years with an accelerated syllabus focused on core subjects**. The Accelerated Education Program was used to re-enroll older learners who did not return to school after the Ebola outbreak. The program filled critical gaps created by the interruption of instruction to continue their education (see 10 Principles for Effective Practice in Accelerated Education from the Accelerated Education Working Group 2019).”⁶⁸

- Instituting policies and programs that increase mobility between general and technical secondary education, and between formal and non-formal programs; such work could include that which provides learners with equivalent certified competencies for basic education, establishes national qualifications frameworks that recognize competencies or prior learning, and/or allows “micro-credentialing” that enables youths to move between formal education, non-formal training, and the workplace^{69 70}
- Testing and rolling out innovative peer, family, and community-based solutions that attract young people into completing their education

☀ **Narrow the Digital Divide.** The role of technology in education has accelerated during the COVID-19 movement restrictions. Even as students return to school, it is likely that technology will remain an important tool for expanding access to education and employment. Yet, the pandemic has only heightened the digital divide.⁷¹ USAID can help narrow this divide by:

- Supporting HE/YWFD institutions to continue adapting and scaling their distance learning curricula beyond the pandemic, such as: (a) identifying the right online curriculum that meets the learning needs of different youth cohorts, especially marginalized groups (e.g., by language, ability, learning level, subject matter, delivery mechanism);⁷² (b) supporting institutions in authoring, licensing, and maintaining online tools; (c) training or reskilling educators and staff in instructional design for distance learning, differentiated learning strategies, digital skills, and how to use technology;⁷³ (d) offering guidelines for remote work and providing guidance on how institutions can best support students through the distance learning experience;⁷⁴ (e) facilitating cross-border knowledge exchange about institutionalizing distance learning systems; and (f) establishing mechanisms that support families and youth peer groups in their distance learning experience (e.g., parental guidance and youth peer groups)
- Incorporating digital skills into HE/YWFD curricula (see following section: “[Institutionalize Digital Skills in HE/YWFD](#)”)
- Subsidizing the expansion/adaptation of existing internet cafes and community-based technology centers as safe spaces for women, girls, younger adolescents, and youth with disabilities

“Connectivity is becoming a new human right.”

—ILO, “Digital skills and the future of work: Challenges and opportunities in a post COVID-19 environment”

- Coordinating USAID education activities with other public-private efforts that are expanding ICT infrastructure at the community level (electricity, internet, affordable mobile data packages) and providing the necessary hardware, software, and technological support in schools, universities, and homes

BOX 5. Connectivity and the Scaling of Online Tertiary Education

In **Sri Lanka**, all internet services providers “provided free internet access to university services from the spring through August 2020. Provision of laptops and affordable high-speed internet was crucial for ensuring equal access by students in poor households.” As a result, “nearly 90 percent of tertiary students have been able to access online education.”⁷⁵

In the **Philippines**, “the University of the Philippines quickly shifted its eight universities and 17 campuses to virtual instruction and collected donations to help students afford laptops and internet.”⁷⁶



“Foundational skills can no longer be viewed as one priority amongst many. We need to make the case that developing these skills across the entire school system and at all ages must be the key priority in low- and middle-income countries. This does not mean other skills or higher levels of education should be ignored. It does mean, however, that we urgently need to raise awareness of the scale of the crisis in foundational learning and drive radical and sustained action to tackle it.”

—Save Our Future—Averting an Education Catastrophe for the World’s Children

YOUTH ASSETS AND RESILIENCE CAPACITIES IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Pivot and Expand USAID’s Efforts in Soft Skills and Entrepreneurship. Much of the literature on the COVID-19 pandemic and HE/YWFD highlights the importance of soft skills, as they equip young people with short-term coping strategies and build their long-term resilience to withstand future shocks and stressors.⁷⁷ Moreover, soft skills contribute to a flexible workforce, where young workers are able to transfer their skills across and between sectors—a critically important skill in the pandemic era. In fact, skills such as critical thinking, analysis problem solving, self-management, and flexibility are in high demand by employers, and are also linked with entrepreneurial success.^{81 82 83 84 85} When combined with follow-on support such as improved market linkages and tailored business consulting and advice (discussed in the next section), soft skills and entrepreneurship skills development leads to increased sales, profits, and/or employment among self-employed youth.⁸⁶


While USAID has long promoted soft skills and entrepreneurship among youth in LMICs (see [Annex: Resources](#)), the pandemic has only underscored the need for these skills to be institutionalized into education systems. Although these skills are best developed through learner-centered, experiential learning opportunities,⁸⁷ during school closures and lockdowns, HE/YWFD institutions have pivoted their soft skills curricula to the distance learning environment by:⁸⁸

- Creating a sense of trust and community among learners through the use of WhatsApp and other social media groups that allow students to make connections with one another
- Maintaining interactive instruction through the use of online breakout groups, online polls, chat functions, virtual whiteboards, and two-way engagement learning platforms, such as the use of automated phone-based “robocalls” that deliver educational content and learning prompts, and require text-based learner feedback⁸⁹
- Replacing face-to-face role plays with videos for students to observe mock workplace behaviors and discuss those behaviors through peer feedback forums⁹⁰
- Partnering with employers to offer virtual work-based learning opportunities and “micro-internships,” particularly for university students in ICT-related fields where young people can take on discrete assignments such as web page design and data analysis

BOX 6. Pivoting Experiential Soft Skills Instruction to Virtual Platforms

Since the pandemic, Accenture's Skills to Success and Nestle's Virtual Internship Programs in **Africa** have facilitated virtual internships between youth and employers.⁹¹

A USAID skills development activity in **Djibouti** is pivoting in-person coaching and mentoring interventions to blended virtual formats while also mobilizing interactive youth peer discussion groups through WhatsApp chats.⁹²


 **Embed Psychosocial and other Cross-Sectoral Supports into HE/YWFD.** Without the school environment, many young people have lost access to important services that support their wellbeing. For example, youth have not been able to access relevant service providers who have closed during lockdown, including schools, which often play an important role in reporting and referring potential cases of child abuse and assisting survivors of gender-based violence (GBV).^{93 94} Youth have also lost their social networks and are experiencing mental health problems associated with isolation. Economic insecurity and social isolation are two recognized pathways to increased violence and are risk factors associated with violence against children.⁹⁵ ⁹⁶ With a global “infodemic” widespread both online and offline,⁹⁷ the pandemic may potentially amplify the drivers of radicalization.⁹⁸ To address the psychosocial impacts and other holistic needs of young people, USAID's HE/YWFD activities should incorporate the following as part of their service package:

- Psychosocial counseling and referrals for young participants of HE/YWFD activities (offered through direct support by phone call or text, or by radio), as well as for educators and school staff⁹⁹
- Opportunities for youth to safely engage in youth-led organizations/youth clubs in schools and universities, as well as sports, civic activities, volunteerism, the arts,^{100 101} and other peer-based and intergenerational social networks (including in-person, social media, technology-based communication), which offer important support to young people experiencing isolation or intimate partner violence¹⁰²
- Coordination with school meal programs to ensure HE/YWFD participants' basic needs are met¹⁰³
- GBV hotlines and referral systems for USAID youth participants, as well as co-funding to community-based organizations supporting survivors of GBV that have had to endure disruptions and make accommodations (such as the purchase of personal protective equipment) during the pandemic¹⁰⁴

BOX 7. Mental Health in HE/YWFD

After the pandemic hit **Latin America**, higher education institutions began to offer psychosocial support for learners, educators, and other staff.¹⁰⁵

Meanwhile, in **Bangladesh**, “a youth-led mental health service platform (Mindo) is providing free mental health sessions to people in need and donating food to people from low-income communities.”¹⁰⁶

 **Strengthen Local Actors' Responsiveness to the Changing Nature of Work.** The pandemic has caused significant shifts in sectoral demand and in how value chains operate. Distance learning has been particularly hard for students pursuing technical tracks who need the hands-on trade skills and experience to qualify for employment or self-employment. Meanwhile, institutions that offer job intermediation and work-based learning opportunities—secondary schools, universities, and TVET institutions—are finding that many employers have put a hold on recruiting, internships or work-study programs.¹⁰⁷ Partnerships between the private sector and HE/YWFD institutions help ensure that curriculum stays relevant and that youth emerging

from HE/YWFD programs have skills that meet this ever-changing demand. USAID’s efforts can strengthen these partnerships through the following strategies:

- Pivot work readiness curricula—including the use of public-private “virtual bootcamps” and smaller, socially-distanced “upskilling hubs”—that adapt to shifts in sectoral demand (such as the recent increased demand in the healthcare, pharmaceutical, and agro-food industries, and ICT and digital work),¹⁰⁸ while also incorporating entrepreneurship skills for young men and women who have pivoted to self-employment during the economic crisis.

BOX 8. Technical Training Pivots in the Face of the Pandemic

Students of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) Create Pandemic Solutions:

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Save the Children was teaching STEM with the use of 3D printers, the curriculum quickly pivoted to produce face shields as part of the learning experience.¹⁰⁹

Governments Expands Training in the Health Care Sector:

In Sierra Leone during the 2014 Ebola crisis, the National Ebola Training Academy was established to offer clinical training modules for frontline health care workers.¹¹⁰


E-Learning Curriculum Responds to New Market Opportunities:

“Educate! in Kenya developed an e-learning training for motorcycle couriers and drivers (boda boda drivers) to respond to increased delivery needs at this time in partnership with supermarket chains (like Sindy) and other industries.”¹¹¹

- Incorporate work-based learning opportunities into the policy and practices of formal and non-formal institutions at the secondary and tertiary levels,^{112 113} which is “significantly related with greater student confidence in being able to adapt to new circumstances,” and is linked to better employment outcomes over the long term.^{114 115}
- Support volunteerism/service learning through the public or non-profit sector when struggling employers are reluctant to participate in work-based learning during the crisis. For instance, health campaigns can give youth experience in the health sector, while national tutoring or remedial education programs could offer young people work experience in the education sector while enabling faster catch-up for children experiencing learning losses due to the pandemic.^{116 117 118}
- Extend job intermediation services to young wage-earners who were laid off during the crisis and may need assistance in job search and intermediation into newly expanding sectors.¹¹⁹

BOX 9. Youth Go Online to Offer Peer-Based Job Intermediation

Recent graduates and young professionals in the **Philippines** mobilized a volunteer group and created an online job information hub, which posts jobs “in different sectors to daily wage earners who have lost their source of livelihood due to COVID-19.”¹²⁰

 **Institutionalize Digital Skills in HE/YWFD.** During the pandemic, digital skills have been important not only for continuing education but also for pivoting and competing in the ever-changing economy. The pandemic has significantly accelerated the pace of technological adoption in jobs and in employers’ work processes, “transforming tasks, jobs, and skills by 2025.”¹²¹ With increased automation, the World Economic Forum projects that an estimated 85 million jobs will be displaced over the next five years, and 97 million

new jobs will be created.¹²² Experts agree that digital skills are not one-size-fits-all; they “differ from country to country and from cohort to cohort, based on levels of development, both economic and technological.”¹²³ For example, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) recognizes the difference between: (a) “basic skills” which include foundational knowledge of hardware, software, and online operations; (b) “intermediate skills,” which are generic job-ready skills that enable people to create content or analyze and visualize data; and more “advanced skills” among ICT professionals involved in computer programming, network management, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and the like.¹²⁴ Some digital skills competency frameworks acknowledge the importance of digital citizenship skills—also known as “online safety” skills¹²⁵—referring to one’s ability to use technology responsibly and appropriately. Because digital skills exist on a spectrum and are changing continuously, education and training providers must continuously assess, implement, and adapt skills training to their particular national context.¹²⁶ Skills development activities should incorporate the basic digital literacy that minimizes the digital divide among underserved youth, as well as the more advanced digital skills that help grow economies among more educated learners. Moreover, while the pandemic has contributed to the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation through junk news outlets, young people can be educated to be “active consumers, sharers, and producers of information and become an informed and accountable generation of digital citizens.”¹²⁷ USAID may consider activities that:

- Develop a national competency framework for digital skills; including tools to regularly forecast future digital skills requirements, both at the national level and the sub-national and community levels;¹²⁸ assessing people’s digital skill levels and digital skill gaps;¹²⁹ incorporating digital skills training into teacher training institutions and teacher colleges; and developing appropriate digital skills curricula, and/or adapt existing curricula so they are relevant for different youth cohorts.

BOX 10. Digital Skills in the COVID-19 Era

In order to adjust to the sudden digitalization of work processes during lockdown, young entrepreneurs around the globe are benefiting from **short-term training** in e-commerce, digital marketing and advertising, use of e-wallets and mobile money, and connecting with suppliers and buyers via virtual channels and social media.¹³⁰

- Equip youth with digital citizenship skills through a variety of means, such as: instruction in media and information literacy and awareness of their rights and responsibilities online;¹³¹ youth-led information campaigns; and institutionalization of digital citizenship in HE/YWFD into competency frameworks, school-level policies and curricula, and training of teachers/trainers/peer mentors¹³²

BOX 11. Youth Combat Misinformation and Promote Social Cohesion

In **Côte d’Ivoire**, youth created a platform, “La brigade de lutte contre les fake news,” to dispel misinformation about COVID-19. This platform has since been embraced by the Ministry of Youth.¹³³

A massive digital youth movement in **five Sub-Saharan African countries** is fighting misinformation and raising awareness of COVID-19 using the #COVID19ss hashtag.¹³⁴


In **Central Asia**, USAID supported local experts to develop a media literacy manual, which is being used to teach media literacy courses for people of diverse ages, across two countries and in three languages.¹³⁵

USAID and UNICEF are supporting a social media campaign in **Morocco** that is mobilizing youth influencers and organizations to co-create and co-implement awareness raising activities around the pandemic.¹³⁶



- Engage the private sector, e.g., by creating incentives for employers to contribute to reskilling and upskilling of their young workers in digital skills, and partner with ICT companies to invest in youth-led digital citizenship efforts¹³⁷
- Engage young people in local and global digital citizenship policy and advocacy campaigns to create greater accountability by search engines, social media platforms, and other actors accountable for spreading mis/disinformation

YOUTH AGENCY


 **Encourage Youth Engagement in the Pandemic Response.** USAID's Youth in Development Policy recognizes “youth participation as vital for effective programs.”¹³⁸ During this time of crisis, it is important for young people to participate in the shaping of programs and policies that serve them.¹³⁹ To engage youth more meaningfully in pandemic recovery policies and practices, USAID can support youth leadership development and youth-led efforts that:

- Ensure and facilitate youth representation in local and national government decision-making bodies, such as through crisis task forces or participation in youth advisory groups that advise policymakers on the response and recovery efforts
- Establish rapid but inclusive youth participatory assessments and other feedback mechanisms that ensure the realities of different youth cohorts are considered, with special attention to female learners and entrepreneurs, youth with disabilities, young migrants, the rural poor, and other marginalized groups
- Set aside funding for youth to crowdsource and implement responses to the pandemic (e.g., soap distribution, installation of handwashing station, distribution of sanitary pads, food distribution, creating case management systems, establishing a crisis response hotline, youth providing online tutoring for younger children)
- Take advantage of technological platforms—radio, SMS, and social media—to elevate the youth voice on issues related to the pandemic
- Sponsor youth-led community or school-based programs, awareness campaigns (such as public “virtual hackathons”),¹⁴⁰ or advocacy efforts that allow young people to implement relevant response strategies and contribute to national or community COVID-19 response efforts

BOX 12. Youth Spearhead Solutions to the Pandemic

Prior to the pandemic, public school students in **Georgia** had formed a civics club, called Kvatsikhe, as a way to make a positive impact in their community. When COVID-19 hit, the club began to host online information sessions to share accurate public health information with the community. The sessions featured leaders such as a health care advisor to the UN Secretary General and served as a forum for students, parents, and teachers to get answers to their COVID-19-related questions.¹⁴¹

Meanwhile, in **Senegal**, public university students mobilized through an organization called 100,000 Students Against COVID-19 to assist with the country's pandemic response. The initiative demonstrates how youth in tertiary education can gain tools and leverage their agency through civic engagement opportunities.¹⁴²

 **Help Young Entrepreneurs Endure the Economic Crisis.** During the pandemic, smaller and informal businesses—many of which are run by or employ a large number of youth, especially young women—have suffered to a much greater degree than larger firms. During the movement restrictions, many of these youth-led micro- and small-sized enterprises have been forced into selling assets and covering their expenses with loans and savings, which has propelled them into a poverty cycle with long-term consequences.^{143 144 145 146}
¹⁴⁷ To help them weather the pandemic, USAID programs can:

- Design activities that combine financial support—grants, savings mobilization, and loans—with business skills training, follow-on advisory services, and linkages to markets¹⁴⁸

BOX 13. Business Grants Help Young Entrepreneurs Withstand the Crisis

Youth Business International, in partnership with Google.org, has recently launched the Rapid Response and Recovery Programme to provide grant support to refugee, migrant, and women-owned businesses in **32 countries**. Google employees volunteer their time as mentors to help enterprises adapt to new challenges.¹⁴⁹


- Mobilize young people into informal savings and lending groups that build youths’ adaptive resilience capacities,¹⁵⁰ while also expanding youth-friendly financial services that allow youth businesses to grow and upgrade (transformative resilience capacities)¹⁵¹

BOX 14. Youth-Inclusive Finance Supports the Economic Recovery Process

USAID/Somalia is partnering with financial institutions to provide \$3 million in micro- and small-sized loans to women and youth-owned businesses to help them withstand the disruptions to their businesses as a result of the pandemic.¹⁵²

USAID/India is supporting the REVIVE alliance, a group of private foundations, to offer returnable grants or loans to over 60,000 self-employed workers and micro enterprises, with preference to youth and women in the informal sector.¹⁵³

- Support young female entrepreneurs, who are especially disadvantaged during the crisis, by increasing access to childcare, transport, networks and mentoring/role models, and combating restrictive social and cultural norms that inhibit their success in the economy
- Host “peer-to-peer ideation spaces,” university-based innovation incubators or competitions, and/or subsidizing new innovations that help young entrepreneurs pivot their activities or start social enterprises that solve pandemic-related challenges (e.g., production of masks, soap, hand sanitizer, money sanitizer, mechanized handwashing machines)
- Identify “referral routes” for entrepreneurs who need mental health support,¹⁵⁴ and sponsoring peer support groups that occur through socially distant or technology-based platforms¹⁵⁵

 **Invest in a Youth-Inclusive Economic Recovery.** As firms have contracted during the COVID-19 crisis, many young people have lost their normal sources of wage-based income and have found it more difficult to find opportunities for internships and work-based learning. USAID can work across sectors—i.e., education and economic growth—to support youth-employing firms in the hardest-hit sectors to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and be more resilient to future crises. Activities include the following:

- In the short-term, offer immediate financial support to struggling firms (including woman-owned businesses) that employ young people (e.g., bridge financing, payroll protection, tax relief, enterprise

subsidies, waivers on payments, soft loans, guarantees for agriculture financing to women and youth, or other appropriate financial schemes that are directly tied to minimizing layoffs and reviving jobs)

- Layer or sequence youth skills development with “cash for work” interventions within public works infrastructure projects (rural roads, electricity, ICT), which keeps young people working and gives them a source of income, while also building soft skills or other transferable skills for later employment¹⁵⁶
- Subsidize HEIs and young researchers to partner with the private sector in product innovation, i.e., creating “a new good or service which can open up new markets or increase market share for innovators”¹⁵⁷


BOX 15. Ideation Spaces Let Students Create Their Own Solutions


Malawi University of Science and Technology, with USAID support, launched an “Innovation Garage” in 2019 that served as a physical space for students and faculty to develop creative solutions to local issues. When the pandemic broke out, the Innovation Garage pivoted to respond, supporting development of solar-powered sanitation stations and a COVID-19 mobile app to track cases and disseminate reliable information.¹⁵⁸

- Work with employers to implement contextually appropriate employment retention measures that are linked to job training and increase the long-term employment prospects for youth (e.g., work-sharing, shorter working weeks, wage subsidies, childcare for female workers, and other schemes)^{159 160}
- Support market systems development activities in sectors with high potential for youth employment, i.e., activities that expand capital, promote upgrading (including skills-building), and encourage job creation in select sectors^{161 162}
- Support advocacy for and implementation of inclusive national workforce policies ([Exhibit 2](#)), including leveraging the role of higher education institutions as conveners to hold multi-stakeholder forums (government, private sector, economists and social scientists) that identify policies and practices that will lead to an inclusive economic recovery

Exhibit 2. Policies that Build the Resilience of Young Men and Women in the Workforce¹⁶³

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Labor policies that protect young workers and encourage gender parity in the workforce, such as occupational safety and health, flexible work arrangements (teleworking, work sharing agreements, part-time work), employer- or state-funded childcare, access to health care, expanded access to paid leave and parental leave policies, and access to affordable and high-quality childcare |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Social protection systems for part-time and temporary workers and the self-employed |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Creation of an affordable, professionalized childcare industry in countries where such social services are less developed |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Investments in infrastructure that reduce youths’ and women’s time on unpaid work such as fetching water and firewood |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Tax incentives that encourage private investors to invest in micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises that train and employ young people |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Incentives for businesses to invest in the jobs of tomorrow, including reskilling and upskilling for marginalized youth in those sectors |



 **Promote Gender Transformation and Women’s Empowerment.** As noted above, young women have been one of the hardest-hit groups affected by the pandemic; pre-existing gender-related barriers have been exacerbated and are largely the cause of such inequity. As the pandemic subsides, USAID should work to strengthen local transformative capacities that eliminate these barriers and shift attitudes and social norms to be more inclusive, so that females are less likely to be as affected in future crises. USAID education activities can integrate gender transformation and women’s empowerment approaches by:

- Incorporating gender education in HE/YWFD curriculum; targeting employers and lead firms in gender sensitization in their recruiting, hiring, and human resources policies and practices; supporting female leadership initiatives, women’s professional networks, role models, and mentoring; and working closely with families and communities to challenge gender norms around female skills development and employment
- Co-fund and co-design health and education initiatives that address cross-sectoral barriers to female education and employment, such as activities that delay early marriage and/or reproductive health initiatives seeking to reduce unintended pregnancies)
- Setting aside funds for interventions that address the physical and logistical barriers to education and employment, such as physical infrastructure (toilets in education institutions and places of work), safe transport, and childcare services that enable girls to go to school and work
- Innovating new approaches that increase women’s access to technology, such as through financing schemes, or communication campaigns that challenge gender stereotypes

BOX 16. USAID Gender Transformation Activities Help Mitigate the Negative Impacts of Future Crises

The USAID Mission in the **Dominican Republic** conducted a COVID-Specific Gender Analysis to integrate gender equality and women’s empowerment across its activity’s portfolio, including USAID’s IR 4, “enhanced capacity of the Ministry of Education to return children to school.” Among its findings, the assessment highlighted that school closures may increase girls’ gendered responsibilities, such as housework and childcare, and cultural norms threatened the likelihood of adolescent girls returning to school. It also highlighted the heightened risks of early marriage, sexual exploitation, and unintended pregnancy among girls, even further threatening their return to school.¹⁶⁴

Annex: Resources

EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Inclusive Education during the Pandemic:

- [Global Education Monitoring Report, UNESCO](#)
- [Education Resources in Response to Coronavirus, USAID](#)
- [Pivoting to Inclusion: Leveraging Lessons from the COVID-19 Crisis for Learners with Disabilities, World Bank](#)
- [Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergency COVID-19 Resources, INEE](#)
- [mEducation Alliance COVID-19 ICT4E Resources](#)
- [TVET peer support in response to COVID-19, UNESCO](#)

Distance Learning:

- [Delivering Distance Learning in Emergencies: A Review of Evidence and Best Practices, USAID](#)
- [Online and Distance Education for Youth and Higher Education Resource Sheet, USAID](#)

Reopening Schools:

- [Return to Learning during Crises Toolkit, USAID](#)
- [Framework for reopening schools, UNICEF, World Food Programme, UNESCO](#)
- [Framework for reopening schools supplement: from reopening to recovery – Key Resources, UNICEF](#)

Accelerated Education:

- [Strategies for Accelerating Learning Post-Crisis, USAID](#)
- [COVID-19: Pathways for the Return to Learning, Accelerated Education Working Group](#)
- [Catch-Up Programmes: 10 Principles for Helping Learners Catch Up and Return to Learning, Accelerated Education Working Group \(INEE\)](#)
- [Accelerated Education: 10 Principles for Effective Practice, Accelerated Education Working Group](#)

YOUTH ASSETS AND RESILIENCE

Soft Skills:

- [Best Practices on Effective SEL/Soft Skills Interventions in Distance Learning, USAID](#)
- [Social and Emotional Learning and Soft Skills–Curated Programming Resources, USAID](#)

Cross-Sectoral Services and Supports:

- [COVID-19 Toolkit, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Network](#)
- [Note Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Aspects of COVID-19, IASC](#)
- [Resource Operational Guidance for MHPSS Implementation and Adaptation, UNICEF](#)
- [Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Response to COVID-19, Johns Hopkins](#)
- [Gender-based violence and COVID-19, UNDP](#)
- [Global Rapid Gender Analysis for COVID-19, Care International](#)
- [COVID-19 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, UN Women](#)
- [COVID-19 GBV Risks to Adolescent Girls and Interventions to Protect Them, UNICEF](#)
- [Mitigating Effects of COVID-19 on Food and Nutrition of School Children, UNICEF, Food and Agriculture Organization, World Food Programme](#)

Workforce Readiness/Work-Based Learning:

- [“Career ready? How schools can better prepare young people for working life in the era of COVID-19,” OECD](#)

Digital Skills:

- [ITU Digital Skills Assessment Guidebook: step-by-step tool for national digital skills assessments, ITU](#)
- [ITU Digital Skills Toolkit: guidance for developing a national digital skills strategy, ITU](#)
- [Recommendations on Assessment Tools for Monitoring Digital Literacy within UNESCO’s Digital Literacy Global Framework, UNESCO](#)

YOUTH AGENCY

Youth-Inclusive Economic Recovery:

- [Economic Growth COVID-19 Fact Sheet, USAID](#)
- [Stimulating the Economy and Employment, International Labour Organization](#)
- [How Technology Can Help Incorporate Youth Voice in Employment Programs, Solutions for Youth Employment, 2020](#)

Gender Transformation and Women’s Empowerment:

- [USAID’s Gender and COVID-19 Guidance, USAID](#)
- [Bridging the Gap: Emerging Private Sector Response and Recovery Measures for Gender Equality amid COVID-19, IFC](#)
- [Addressing the Economic Fallout of COVID-19: Pathways and Policy Options for Gender Responsive Recovery, UN Women.](#)



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Endnotes

- 1 USAID defines “youth” as young people ages 10 to 29 years. USAID’s workforce development programming includes a range of interventions targeting the demand and supply side of the labor market, including interventions that assist individuals in acquiring knowledge and developing skills and behaviors to prepare for careers and work, pursue self-employment, and/or stay employed and productive in a changing economy. Therefore, WFD programming in the Education sector can occur for learners of all education levels (e.g., primary school leavers, secondary education, and postsecondary/higher education) in both formal and non-formal settings, including in-school and out of school youth.
- 2 USAID, “USAID Education Policy,” Washington, D.C.: USAID, 2018, accessed March 25, 2021, <https://www.usaid.gov/education/policy/>.
- 3 USAID, “White Paper Transforming Systems in Times of Adversity: Education and Resilience,” Washington, D.C., 2019, accessed March 25, 2021, <https://www.eccnetwork.net/resources/transforming-systems-times-adversity-education-and-resilience-white-paper/>.
- 4 “Positive Youth Development (PYD) Framework” YouthPower2, accessed March 25, 2021, <https://www.youthpower.org/positive-youth-development-pyd-framework/>.
- 5 Even prior to the pandemic, “in low- and middle-income countries, adolescents from the richest households were three times as likely to complete lower secondary school as those from the poorest households.” UNESCO, “2020 Global Education Monitoring Report. Inclusion and Education: All means all,” Paris: UNESCO, 2020: 9, accessed February 8, 2021, <https://gem-report-2020.unesco.org/>.
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- 7 According to an ILO survey of youth with internet access from 112 countries, youth in lower-income countries were less likely to be accessing courses, teaching, or training. International Labour Organization, “Youth and COVID-19: Impacts on Jobs, Education, Rights and Mental Well-Being” Geneva: ILO, 2020: 2, accessed February 8, 2021, https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/youth-employment/publications/WCMS_753026/lang-en/index.htm.
- 8 The ILO notes that LMICs have suffered the greatest levels of inactivity (i.e., withdrawals from the labor market), losses in working hours, and losses in labor income. Regionally, losses in employment and in labor income were felt most in the Americas; conversely, Europe and Central Asia experienced the lowest employment losses due to job retention schemes, while Asia experienced the lowest losses to labor income. International Labour Organization, “ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work,” seventh edition, Geneva: ILO, 2021, accessed February 8, 2021, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_767028.pdf.
- 9 International Labour Organization, “ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work,” fourth edition, Geneva: ILO, 2020, https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/impacts-and-responses/WCMS_745963/lang-en/index.htm.
- 10 Young people tend to hold low-paid and temporary jobs in affected sectors such as hospitality and tourism, retail, and the gig economy. OECD, “Youth and COVID-19 Response, Recovery and Resilience,” Paris: OECD, 2020, accessed February 8, 2021, <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/youth-and-covid-19-response-recovery-and-resilience-c40e61c6/>.
- 11 Among youth surveyed in 112 countries, younger workers aged 18–24 have suffered the greatest job losses, as well as those working in clerical support, services, sales, and crafts and related trades. International Labour Organization, “Youth and COVID-19: Impacts on Jobs, Education, Rights and Mental Well-Being.”
- 12 Anthony Mann, Vanessa Denis, Chris Percy, “Career ready? How schools can better prepare young people for working life in the era of COVID-19,” Paris: OECD, 2020: 12-13, accessed February 8, 2021, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/career-ready_e1503534-en.
- 13 International Labour Organization, “ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work,” seventh edition.
- 14 Ruth Hill and Ambar Narayan, “COVID-19 and Inequality: A Review of the Evidence on Likely Impact and Policy Options,” Centre for Disaster Protection, December 2020. Working Paper. <https://www.preventionweb.net/publications/view/75319>
- 15 Ruth Hill and Ambar Narayan, “What COVID-19 can mean for long-term inequality in developing countries.” World Bank Blog, World Bank, January 7, 2021. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/what-covid-19-can-mean-long-term-inequality-developing-countries>
- 16 UNESCO, 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report, 71.
- 17 Interpeace, “Peace and Conflict in a COVID-19 World. Framing the Wider Implications for International Responses to COVID-19,” Geneva: Interpeace, June 2020, accessed February 8, 2021, <https://www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/2020-CoVid-19-v6.pdf>.
- 18 International Labour Organization, “ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work,” seventh edition, and “Youth and COVID-19: Impacts on Jobs, Education, Rights and Mental Well-Being.”
- 19 Ninety percent of working women in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 95 percent in South Asia, are employed through the informal sector, which has especially suffered during the pandemic. “Women in Informal Economy,” UN Women, accessed February 8, 2021, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw61/women-in-informal-economy>.
- 20 One report estimates that female job loss rates (5.7 percent) have been 1.8 times higher than male job loss rates (3.1 percent) globally. Moreover, female jobs are 19 percent more at risk than male ones due to the sectors that women work in. This disproportionate impact is especially the case for women in low- and middle-income countries who are working in the informal sector. Anu Madgavkar et al., “COVID-19 and gender equality: Countering the regressive effects,” *McKinsey Global Institute blog*, McKinsey Global Institute, July 15, 2020. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects>.
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43 Accelerated Education Working Group, "COVID-19: Pathways for the Return to Learning," AEWG Brief, 2020, accessed February 8, 2021, <https://www.eccnetwork.net/resources/covid-19-pathways-return-learning>.

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59 International Labour Organization. "ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work," fifth edition.

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