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Digital Opportunities for Third Country Nationals in the pandemic and post-pandemic era

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Since early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic began to affect every aspect of our lives, reshaping the world around us. Its impact on digital technology has been tremendous, activating **a new digital society**. Increased digitalization during the pandemic has transformed economy, education, working conditions and daily routines, highlighting among others the **importance of digital tools** in enabling **migrants, refugees and asylum seekers** to sustain their livelihoods and obtain employment.

As **Asako Okai**, **UN Assistant Secretary-General and Director, UNDP Crisis Bureau**, mentions: *"for migrants and displaced people, just like all others who aspire to a better life, digital technology offers unique benefits and opportunity to improve their livelihoods. Online, they can learn skills, access critical information and services, and build networks. They can find better work, start businesses or explore new marketplaces".*

Accordingly, **Angel Gurría, Secretary-General, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/OECD**, points out that one major opportunity related to digital transformation in migration is global mobility, which is supported when *"skilled people can find opportunities abroad, and employers can identify persons abroad with skills they can't find at home".*

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However, today's so-called competition for talent is leaving some skilled people out of the marketplace. At this point it is mentioned that an equivalent of **400 million jobs** were lost during the second quarter of 2020, with a disproportionate impact on migrants.

According to the **OECD Secretary-General**, digital tools can improve peoples' chances to participate in the global job market: *"For example, it is now easier for candidates to put profiles to public and private matching platforms that use Artificial Intelligence to assess skills and help candidates and vacancies match up, even across languages and different education systems"*.

In addition, some workers might not even have to go through the migration procedure to work in another country, and can become **"digital nomads"**, as work is becoming increasingly detached from place.

A recent report by the **International Labour Organization (ILO)** explores the growing role of digital economies for refugees, including case studies from **Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe**.

As it is mentioned in its executive summary: *"The wider ecosystem of digital livelihoods among refugees entails a diversity of activities in work, learning, and entrepreneurship, alongside a set of important infrastructural and connectivity related fields that mediate digital access. These include internet connectivity, computer and mobile hardware, payment mechanisms, national and international laws and regulations, and the diverse social and economic contexts of each location and refugee population"*.

The report highlights the importance of **digital skills trainings for refugees and other migrants** that cover a wide range of skills and areas of work, ranging from basic computer skills to microwork and advanced skills in web development, programming, and data science, as well as "soft skills", language skills, and career coaching.

Such **trainings** can provide transferable skills for enhanced employability, and help participants to build motivation for further learning, while increasing confidence and providing a supportive social environment as well as access to professional networks.

However, **problems, challenges and risks** remain. There is no doubt that digitalisation can leave some people behind, regardless of migration status, but this is true especially when looking at vulnerable groups.

ILO's recommendations towards fair and decent opportunities for migrants and refugees in the digital economy argue that a concentrated global effort for a future of decent digital refugee work needs to integrate at least the following interlinked goals:

- Improve refugees' access to the internet and to its economic and employment related dimensions.

- Deepen efforts to build a variety of digital skills among refugees that increase their employability, while cooperating with relevant employers and sectors of the economy to match skills with demands.

- Work towards improved and more decent working conditions for refugees in digital freelancing and entrepreneurialism, while strengthening the institutional protection mechanisms available to them.

- Support existing remote employers of refugees with financial and technical assistance, including social enterprises and social impact work platforms, in achieving better working conditions and higher payment levels for their employees or freelancers.

- Specifically address barriers and obstacles to digital livelihoods posed by legal and political refugee regimes through high-level advocacy and policy innovation.
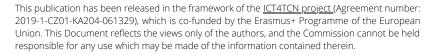
Sources

Gurria, A. (2021, April 30th), "EU Council event on the Digital Transformation in Migration, 30 April 2021" - Remarks by Angel Gurría, Secretary-General, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/OECD, available at https://www.oecd.org/about/secretary-general/oecd-sg-remarks-at-eu-council-event-on-the-digital-transformation-in-migration-30-april-2021.htm

International Labour Organization (ILO), (2021, April 29th), Digital refugee livelihoods and decent work - Towards inclusion in a fairer digital economy, report available at https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/publications/WCMS_785236

Okai, A. (2021, Jan. 20), "Digital opportunities for migrants", United Nations Development Programme, available online at https://www.undp.org/blog/digital-opportunities-migrants

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15 digital opportunities for you!

Acknowledging that digital technologies and tools have a social dimension as well, affecting both the career and the social lives of Third Country Nationals, here you can check some **EU funded projects** addressing **migrants and refugees**. Except from the http://ict4tcn.eu, these projects offer **free** e-learning platforms, educational material, quizzes and games, coaching and mentoring opportunities, as well as both online and in person events that bring closer migrants and refugees with their host societies.

- 3 Steps: Fostering Education and Inclusion of disadvantaged refugee and migrant learners https://3steps.eu
- ALTER: Alternative Safety Nets to advance your digital skills https://alterproject.eu
- Cooking Cultures: for low-skilled migrants who want to work in the Culinary Sector https://cookingcultures.net
- Digi Path: Promoting the integration of migrants at local level through digital skills https://digipathproject.eu
- DIGIMI: DIGItal storytelling for Migrant Integration https://digimi.eu
- DiLitE: Digital Literacy in Europe https://dilite-project.eu
- INTEGRA: DevelopINg Tailored comprEhensive services for younG migRAnts https://project-integra.eu
- JIMINY: Journey to Increase your techniques of eMotional Intelligence, digital awareNess and entrepreneurship lifestYle https://jiminy.erasmus.site
- Passage: Pedagogies of Pacing from Reception to Education https://passageproject.eu
- Queer Migrants: Addressing gaps in adult education and social cohesion https://queermigrants.netsons.org
- RIDE: Reach Inclusion through Digital Empowerment for migrant women https://www.ride-project.eu
- Tour2Include: Migrants' Integration into Tourism-Related Professions https://elearning.tour2include.eu
- Virtual Spitfire: Using Virtual Reality and Local Industrial Heritage for Developing Key Competences https://virtualspitfire.eu
- MIVA: Migrants' Integration through Volunteering Activities https://www.mivaproject.eu
- Include-EU: Regional and local expertise, exchange and engagement for enhanced social cohesion in Europe https://includeu.eu