



IN BRIEF



Second  
Chance

Photo: UN Women/Dzilam Mendez

## TEN LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE SECOND CHANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMME

### Introduction

UN Women's Second Chance Education (SCE) Programme (2018–2023) provides women who have missed out on education with a second chance to access learning and training opportunities and find pathways to personal and economic empowerment. It was piloted in six countries in three different contexts: humanitarian crisis (Cameroon and Jordan), middle income (Chile, India and Mexico) and with refugee, migrant and indigenous women in a high-income country (Australia). The programme is carried out by local implementing organizations who adapt the SCE model to their own context.

E-learning has been a core component of SCE from the start, offered either in tandem with face-to-face training in the hubs and other locations through a blended learning approach or through a wholly online modality. Thousands of women have been introduced to e-learning for the first time, in no small part due to the localized and creative solutions to the barriers facing women learning online: lack of digital devices, connectivity and skills; lack of confidence; and lack of relevant, relatable and contextualized content. This brief draws on the experiences across all six countries and outlines the top 10 lessons learned.

The learning management system used by SCE from 2018 to 2022 was the offline-first Kolibri platform, managed by Learning Equality, a US-based not-for-profit. In 2021/22, a

mobile-first microlearning platform was introduced to the programme through a partnership with UNITAR. A variety of other online tools are used as described in Lesson 6.

### Ten Lessons Learned

#### 1. E-learning becomes possible for women who have missed out on education with context-appropriate programme design

E-learning in SCE has been implemented in very different contexts, including those where participants have low levels of literacy and digital literacy. SCE data suggests that a supported e-learning programme can attract, engage and retain learners even when 100% online, as evidenced by the SCE Chile programme. This was originally going to be delivered through training centres and public libraries but with the onset of the pandemic was re-designed as a fully online programme where women would participate from home. The Chile programme has been characterized by high retention, with a dropout rate in January 2023 of only 10%.

The Mexico programme, which uses a blended learning approach, had a similarly low dropout rate of 13% over 2019–2022. It has adapted its e-learning provision and the accompanying support in order to meet the needs of women facing multiple challenges: lack of access to devices and connectivity, low digital literacy and time-consuming caring responsibilities. Participants can access computers, internet, digital skills training and childcare in the hubs,

which then equips them for more autonomous self-study in the future.

SisterWorks in Australia provides another example of context-appropriate programme design. The organization supports migrant and refugee women who often arrive in Australia with little knowledge of English and low digital literacy. Many have no community or family networks, are marginalized from mainstream society, and feel isolated. Most have a mobile phone but no computer. In 2020, SisterWorks addressed the issue by developing the E-Hub app, along with a vast library of bespoke video tutorials that impart practical information about life in Australia and digital and entrepreneurial skills while also teaching English through slow voiceovers and large, clear subtitles. Live sessions held through the E-Hub app on Zoom were essential for maintaining engagement during the 2021 lockdown.

## 2. E-learning can reach more women than conventional adult education programmes

E-learning offers the potential to benefit individuals who cannot reach a learning hub where face-to-face learning is offered. Online learning can be synchronous (joining live tutorials, webinars, discussions or chats at the same time) or asynchronous (learners study at whatever time suits them). As long as access to the internet and appropriate devices is assured (see Lesson 5), it becomes possible to include rural and indigenous women living in areas that are often not served well by traditional educational or economic empowerment programmes. In Chile, SCE has managed to reach isolated communities and extend coverage to a vast area of the country, going beyond what was originally planned when envisaged as an in-person programme. This has resulted in higher-than-expected participation among indigenous women.

*“At the beginning, the programme was designed just for the city of Temuco in the Araucania Region of southern Chile. However, with the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, we have been able to roll out this programme 100% online, which has allowed us to implement the programme in more regions, from Biobio to Magallanes, covering a distance of almost 1,660 km and reaching very isolated communities, in particular the more rural communities where we know that women lack support networks and opportunities.”*

*Alejandra Lukaschewsky, General Coordinator,  
VeOmás, SCE Chile<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> SCE Virtual Hub Tour, VeOmás, <https://youtu.be/CQkV6KnnzI>, 1:37–2:11.

In Mexico, SCE’s partnership with the Government of Jalisco enabled more than 8,000 women to access SCE’s content on the Kolibri platform on tablets distributed through the Fuerza Mujeres programme.



Photo: UN Women

## 3. E-learning can enable greater participation among women compared to an in-person modality

Many women across the different implementing contexts face severe challenges around time-availability, particularly connected to the care responsibilities in their households and communities. The demands of unpaid care and domestic work mean many only have pockets of time available for SCE activities, sometimes only in the evenings. Lack of childcare can be a big barrier to attending in-person training and online learning offers greater flexibility. Having the opportunity to learn and interact with others from their homes can benefit women who would be unable to participate in in-person training, giving them the chance to spend even more time learning. SCE participants have expressed their appreciation of the flexibility that e-learning offers in when and where they learn, allowing them to get around the barriers to accessing learning opportunities caused by their caring responsibilities.

To respond to this finding, SCE Mexico adjusted the balance of in-person/online learning in some of its hubs.

SEPICJ adapted services for women who struggle with access in Toluca in the State of Mexico when they found that women were travelling long distances in order to register and attend sessions in the SCE hubs. Courses and related activities were therefore moved online so that women attended in-person workshops only once a week.

At the same time, in Jalisco, ProMexico and ProSociedad's 'life project' training involved practical exercises on visualizing and planning the future, and personal SWOT analyses, resulting in a long-term life plan. The training was originally delivered in-person in the hubs, and then through Zoom during COVID-19 restrictions. In 2021, it was digitized and converted to an asynchronous e-learning course to provide maximum flexibility.

*"I feel really comfortable taking classes online because I can manage my time better and I never stop learning, even though I'm at home."*

*Cinthya Ayala, SCE participant, Cemex Hub, Jalisco, SCE Mexico<sup>2</sup>*

*"I'm a student on the UN Women SCE programme run by Infocap and I love the course because I can do it from home."*

*Florence Alssaint, SCE participant, SCE Chile<sup>3</sup>*

#### 4. Blended learning enables flexibility of learning modalities so that women can benefit from the best of both worlds

While the Chile model has proved that a supported learning approach can be extremely effective without any in-person contact, a blended approach<sup>4</sup> has proved popular among partners and participants elsewhere, with women benefiting from in-person support and social interaction in the hubs while having the flexibility to self-study at home at a time convenient to them. A blended approach can introduce women to the digital world in a gradual way, with in-person support on hand when needed. It also means

<sup>2</sup> SCE Virtual Hub Tour, Jalisco, [https://youtu.be/nzv\\_oUPhkoM](https://youtu.be/nzv_oUPhkoM), 07:14–7:24.

<sup>3</sup> SCE Virtual Hub Tour, Infocap, <https://youtu.be/oZjGKCvzfas>, 7:27–7:39.

<sup>4</sup> Blended learning refers to an approach that includes in-person and digital learning. Except in the case of Chile, which is 100% online, most SCE programmes follow a blended model to reap the benefits of both approaches. In the hubs, women can meet others in person, benefit from group discussions and collaborative learning, take courses difficult to deliver online, and focus on themselves outside of the home environment. They can also use the hub's computers/Internet for online learning.

that the different modalities can be ramped up or down as required – the fact that an e-learning system was already in place at the start of the pandemic was instrumental in the rapid pivot that SCE partners made to online teaching and support.

Entrepreneurship training in Mexico brings together the best of both worlds in a blended approach that comprises hands-on practical workshops on product creation (pot production, floristry, baking and cooking) and online courses on human development and business skills. In this sense, participants can use online resources to consolidate or refresh knowledge retention after an in-person workshop. In Australia, participants at SisterWorks might attend an in-person craft workshop and later watch the step-by-step craft video tutorial on the E-Hub app at home. At Real Futures, videos from their online Life and Career Planning course are shown in a group session to stimulate discussion and the sharing of experiences, and participants complete the other parts of the course independently on their smartphones at home.



Photo: UN Women/Dziliam Méndez

Similarly in India, online learning resources are used for in-person digital skills training. Videos demonstrating how to use WhatsApp, set up an email account, or open a Word document can be projected during a group session and also accessed afterwards by women on their own.

## 5. Access to devices and connectivity is critical, particularly considering the gender digital divide

In a world where two-thirds of the population uses the Internet but 2.7 billion people remain offline, women account for a disproportionate – and increasing – share of the global offline population: women now outnumber male non-users by 18 per cent, up from 11 per cent in 2019. Among those not owning mobile phones, women outnumbered men by 39 per cent in 2022.<sup>5</sup>

Discriminatory norms side-line women from entering the digital world to learn online and so ensuring their access to an internet connection and appropriate devices is paramount. The SCE programme has explored a wide array of possibilities for providing access to both devices and connectivity. These include building partnerships with the private sector, where equipment is donated to the hubs, as SCE Mexico and SCE Cameroon have done through partnership with HP. They also include leveraging government partnerships to piggyback on tablet/computer distribution programmes – as mentioned above, in 2020 and 2021 in Jalisco, Mexico, implementing organizations uploaded SCE content to thousands of tablets which were distributed to 8,000 women through the Jalisco Government’s Fuerza Mujeres programme. According to the beneficiaries, the main usefulness of the tablet was being able to use it to take the e-learning training offered by SISEMH and the Kolibrí platform. It allowed them to do it at the time that best suited them, to watch the contents repeatedly, to share them with their family and friends, and to discover their potential to improve various aspects of their business<sup>6</sup>.

Most SCE programmes have set up computer rooms in the hubs that are accessible at any time and in Jordan and Cameroon, have provided data card allowances or subsidized data for women who are unable to afford it.

In an effort to further close the gender gap, the SCE programme has also implemented innovative approaches to make sure that participants are able to access what is needed. Being flexible with scheduling for women who attend the centres and being open to adjusting time is

vital to cater for women’s heavy workloads. In Australia, SisterWorks’ bespoke mobile app offers women bite-sized learning and access to classes, services and support on their phones. SCE Mexico brought training to women’s spaces in community/neighbourhoods and delivered mobile training with laptops and tablets (e.g., in the State of Mexico), so learning takes place in a secure location that

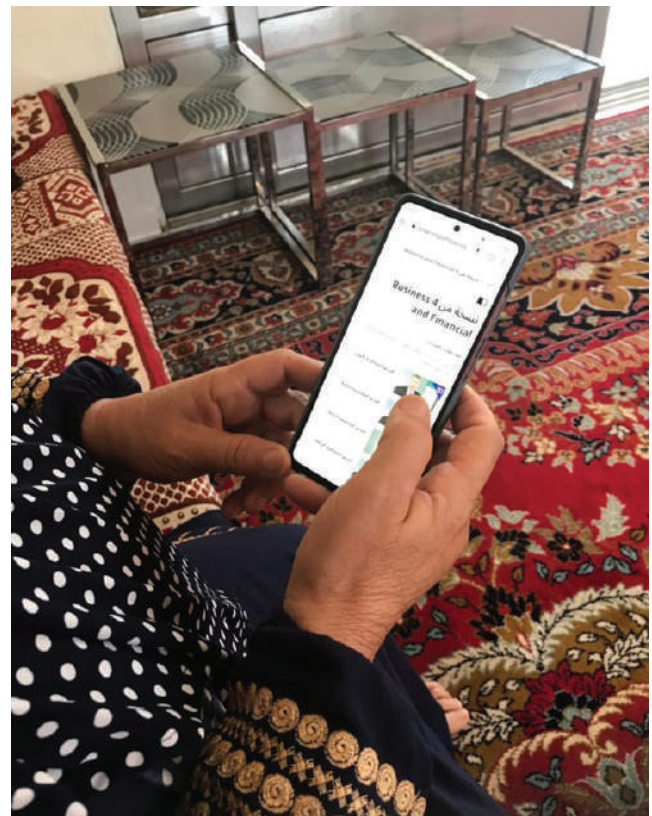


Photo: AWO/Suhaib Khamaiseh

participants ask the facilitators to travel to. The centre has 30 tablets that can be used in this way.

SCE facilitators have discovered how critical it is to try to be as flexible as possible in finding solutions to help women participate. In a programme modality where attendance is counted towards completion, requiring participants to attend 70% of the sessions, VeOmás in Chile created a category called ‘women in green’ for participants who had found work but did not want to end their involvement with SCE. They were given permission to be absent from the workshops but watched recordings afterwards. Recording sessions and putting them on YouTube so they are easy to access has proven to be an easy and fast way to accommodate women who miss out on synchronous sessions.

Beyond these innovative, localized approaches, sustainable solutions for this challenge require advocacy with

5 International Telecommunications Union (ITU). (2022). Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2022. Geneva, ITU.

6 Secretariat for Substantive Equality between Women and Men (SISEMH), Jalisco, Mexico (2022). Diagnostic study on the relevance and most significant effects of the in-kind support of the Fuerza Mujeres Program in building the economic autonomy of the target population for SISEMH. [https://igualdad.jalisco.gob.mx/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Informe-de-Resultados\\_Diagnostico-del-Componente-Tableta-del-Programa-Fuerza-Mujeres\\_Febrero-2022.pdf](https://igualdad.jalisco.gob.mx/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Informe-de-Resultados_Diagnostico-del-Componente-Tableta-del-Programa-Fuerza-Mujeres_Febrero-2022.pdf)

### Practical tips for low connectivity contexts

If using EdApp, build lessons that women can download to their phone using the hub's internet, complete them at home, and sync their progress to their account once they are back online.

- Make materials easy to download by compressing videos before publishing and reducing the size of images.
- Include how to use free public WiFi safely in digital skills training.
- Design for the most widely available device: smartphones. Although some skills in Word or Excel need to be learned on a computer, most SCE subject areas can be designed for mobile learning.

### 6. Platforms and tools should be appropriate to women with no or low digital literacy, limited access to PCs, and limited connectivity.

The platform used by SCE from 2018–2022, Kolibri, is an offline-first platform used around the world where connectivity is poor or non-existent, such as in rural schools, refugee camps, orphanages and training centres without WiFi. Although designed primarily to be used offline, Kolibri was used by all SCE programmes online, including in humanitarian contexts (Cameroon and Jordan) where internet has been installed in the hubs by SCE. Each SCE country had its own Kolibri site which held selected materials in the relevant languages from the public Kolibri library. Implementing organizations added to this during the pilot phase with content that they sourced, created, or commissioned themselves, thanks to the Kolibri tool for uploading and organizing educational resources. Thus, participants had access to highly relevant and customized learning materials through either self-study or group sessions in a blended learning approach.

Since 2022, SCE has been building capacity in the use of the mobile-first microlearning app EdApp. Through an initiative called Educate All, established through a partnership between EdApp and UNITAR, access to the app, its library of courses and authoring and management tools is offered free of charge to organizations in exchange for sharing of content through the EdApp public library.

EdApp courses can be accessed through the mobile app and through a browser on PCs, and lessons can be downloaded for offline use on the app. The authoring tools and



Photo: UN Women/CVA

templates enable the creation of bite-sized, interactive lessons by people who are not professional instructional designers. EdApp features and functionality seem to be a good fit for the SCE programme and the Educate All initiative offers a sustainable way for implementing organizations to reach more women with contextualized content they have developed or commissioned themselves.

Based on the experiences utilizing both Kolibri and EdApp, the SCE programme has found that the requirements for a learning platform that is appropriate for women with low digital literacy and limited access to devices and connectivity include the following:

- The learning platform is designed for smartphones and can be accessed offline.

- It allows for the use of courses developed or commissioned by implementing organizations, since this is the contextualized, gender-responsive content that is most relevant and relatable for SCE women.
- The platform is easy to navigate for users with low digital literacy, with a simple, intuitive interface.
- The content is easy to access and digest through bite-sized learning.
- It allows for users to interact with each other.

### Tips to engage refugee and migrant learners

Refugee and migrant women can be constrained by language, low digital literacy, a lack of family or community networks, and marginalization from mainstream society. They may be unable to attend in-person training because of caring responsibilities or lack of money for transport. They may have a mobile phone but no computer. As such, they need tools that:

- Are simple, easy to use, and intuitive.
- Work on smartphones.
- Navigate through images rather than text.
- Offer resources tailored to participant needs and language skills.
- Enable them to connect with other women.

SisterWorks in Australia could not find a tool that fit these requirements, so they developed an app<sup>1</sup>. The app offers easy access to a library of high-quality, internally produced videos and live classes that are designed to create the same sense of community as in the physical hub. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, it was a lifeline for many women.

While developing a bespoke app is not always be an option, it is important to find a tool and blended learning formulation that meets as many of the above requirements as possible.

In a humanitarian context like Jordan, where training is conducted in person in host community hubs and online in the refugee camps, at the beginning of a cycle, a participant would join a group of about ten women to discuss their training needs with a facilitator who then curated relevant resources on the Kolibri platform to meet the group's needs. A course of about 12–16 hours resulted and participants completed it over about four days. The facilitator created an account for each participant, so she could access the course whenever possible.

1 Hear how the app was developed here: <https://youtu.be/TjRz5l4cD3E>

### 7. It is not just the learning platform that is important but the tools for communicating.

Across contexts, it has been clear for SCE implementing organizations that for successful online learning, other communication technologies are required to ensure easy communication with participants in a way that makes them feel fully connected and supported. Putting women at the centre when planning which tools/technologies will be best suited increases the chance of impact. For example, many programmes benefited by using WhatsApp as the primary peer-to-peer and mentor-to-peers communication tool, since many women were already comfortable using it. Starting small with a pilot can help show what works well and what does not and it helps identify ways of adjusting to fit the specific needs of women.

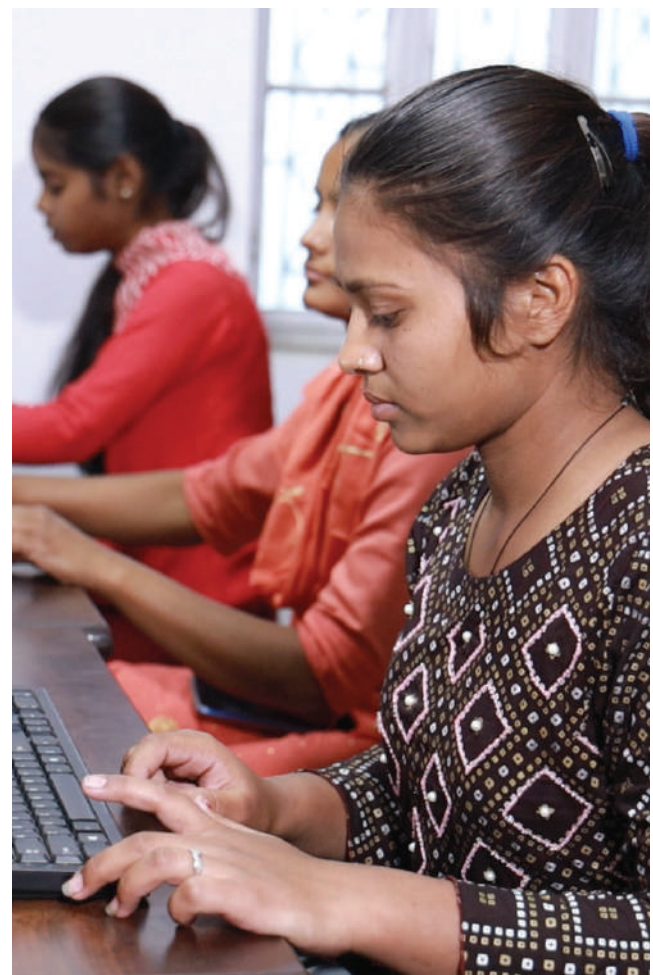


Photo: UN Women

Table 1 shows the main technologies/tools that were used by SCE implementing organizations and some specific examples of the ways in which they were used to improve women's experiences of online learning.

Table 1: Communication and e-learning tools used in SCE

Technology/tool	Examples of use
Zoom, Google Meet, Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Live skills training, regular tutorials, social and wellbeing sessions.</li> <li>• Led by a facilitator or tutor but with interaction among participants.</li> </ul>
WhatsApp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group chats in parallel with live sessions and asynchronous courses.</li> <li>• Enables women to interact, motivate and support each other; provides a space for strengthening peer relationships.</li> <li>• A familiar tool for women who own a phone. Groups can continue beyond the end of the programme.</li> <li>• Allows tutors/facilitators to contact women regularly but informally, to remind them of their activities and maintain their sense of belonging and motivation.</li> </ul>
Private Facebook group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For promoting learning events and building an online community of SCE participants and SCE support staff. A private, protected, safe space which only registered participants can join.</li> </ul>
YouTube	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To host videos of SCE success stories that inspire and motivate.</li> <li>• To host recordings of live sessions for women to catch up/view again.</li> </ul>
Phone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To confirm participation in the programme and welcome participants.</li> <li>• To check in on a participant's wellbeing, issues they face and how to help, and motivate them to attend upcoming hub events or live sessions.</li> </ul>
Email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For sharing introductory information on the programme and activities.</li> </ul>
SCE portal, <a href="http://mylearningpathway.org">mylearningpathway.org</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The main online source of information on SCE and SCE resources and gateway to a selection of SCE courses.</li> <li>• Offers users in each country a sample of course offerings, information on the national programme, and contact details of local partners.</li> </ul>
Chile networking app	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enables SCE participants, mentors and tutors to communicate with each other in multiple languages and to build networks. Launched in December 2022.</li> </ul>
EdApp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A commercial microlearning app that is free to use through a joint initiative with UNITAR called Educate All.</li> </ul>
e-Hub app (SisterWorks)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SCE's learning platform from 2019–2022.</li> </ul>
Kolibri	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gives participants easy access on their phones to tailored resources and live classes.</li> </ul>

### 8. The content of online courses should be relevant, relatable and contextualized for women pursuing a second chance education

The digital learning content that supports the SCE curriculum includes content from external providers – both open educational resources and licensed content, the use of which SCE negotiates with the provider – and content created or commissioned by implementing organizations themselves. In SCE's first year, the SCE global and country teams worked with Learning Equality to undertake a mapping of existing open educational content much of which was available in the Kolibri 'library'. Suitable content for women with low levels of education was found to be limited. The development of content by implementing organizations has filled a gap in learning material and

in many SCE countries has led to a unique collection of relevant, relatable and contextualized resources for SCE participants. The release of new courses and resources by external providers continues to be monitored by SCE teams at country and global level in order to maximize the use of what has already been developed, but access to content specifically tailored to SCE participants, in which they can see and hear 'women just like themselves', has been a powerful aspect of SCE's e-learning activities.

Women affected by crises are often an afterthought if not completely side-lined by major content producers. One of the first and most important findings that SCE has generated is just how crucial it is that learning materials are developed to directly meet the needs of participants.

Content must be contextualized, relevant and relatable, containing imagery that reflects participant experiences and their cultural, social and economic background, and should be presented in bite-sized portions. It is even possible to design courses for women who cannot read using audio, video and pictures.

The most engaging courses are those that implementing organizations create or commission themselves because they understand their target audience's needs and priorities, and the language they respond to best, which tends to be friendly, conversational but concise. Course content always includes a gender lens and is tailored for adult women who may not have completed their school education. However, it is important to note that in-house creation of e-learning materials requires planning and time. Fortunately, resources have been made available within the SCE programme that support this and ensure a minimum quality standard.

In the State of Jalisco in Mexico, SCE facilitators are in charge of content development and do everything from design, development and editing to uploading. They produce hard-copy materials as well as digital content, such as brochures, leaflets and infographics for SCE participants. In creating online courses on Kolibri, implementing organizations in Chile (Acción Emprendedora, Infocap and VeOmás) assessed the suitability of open resources available elsewhere on Kolibri and curated those that were appropriate and relevant into some of their courses, alongside new materials that they created themselves.

According to feedback from participants, the SCE content on the 8,000 tablets distributed by the SISEMH Ministry in Jalisco allowed them to learn how to advertise their products and services. It was a source of ideas for their own human development and entrepreneurship. They found good advice and guidance for the administrative activities involved in their business and for their life project.

*"I liked the courses 'How to sell and be profitable' and 'Personal Finance'. Because I was very disorganized, I was very informal. Now we are more formal and manage to reach potential clients. We are trying to make inventories, to know what materials we have, and to place orders in time."*

*Participant in Fuerza Mujeres Program who received a tablet with SCE content, Jalisco, México<sup>7</sup>*

<sup>7</sup> Secretariat for Substantive Equality between Women and Men (SISEMH), Jalisco, Mexico (2021). Diagnostic study on the relevance and most significant effects of the in-kind support of the Fuerza Mujeres Program in building the



Photo: SisterWorks

### 9. Personalized support and social interaction are key to e-learning success.

Ensuring personalized support for each participant makes a huge difference to the quality of the learning programme and women's retention. A mentoring and/or tutoring system has been a good way of doing this since facilitators and other hub staff often do not have the time to give regular support and encouragement. SCE has demonstrated that participants benefit from more than one-to-one support from SCE staff and that connections with peers make it easier to maintain motivation, feel connected to others, and embark on significant learning after hearing about other women's experiences.

However, one of the biggest challenges with online learning in SCE is to create opportunities for interaction and relationship-building that replicate the sense of community found in the hubs. Self-guided learning by an individual may work in some cases but for most SCE participants, interaction with others is an essential component of the digital journey, especially in the early stages. Support and opportunities for interaction must be built in.

As such, SCE experience has highlighted the benefits of setting up live sessions and WhatsApp groups involving the same group of people so that relationships can build over time. Setting up communication channels with tools that women are already familiar with, so that they can connect with each other immediately, has also worked very well across contexts. This is often through WhatsApp groups but can also be through SMS, phone calls, or emails.

For women who believe the digital world is 'not for them' or who lack skills and confidence, the relationship and trust they have with a facilitator can be central to moving them

economic autonomy of the target population for SISEMH. [https://igualdad.jalisco.gob.mx/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Informe\\_Final\\_Estudio\\_Li%CC%81nea\\_Base\\_del\\_Programa\\_Fuerza\\_Mujeres\\_Enero.pdf](https://igualdad.jalisco.gob.mx/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Informe_Final_Estudio_Li%CC%81nea_Base_del_Programa_Fuerza_Mujeres_Enero.pdf)



towards digital learning. SCE has identified the importance of starting to build both with each participant from the first moments in the SCE hub, be it physical or virtual.

Furthermore, a learning programme that helps women to identify and pursue personal goals and provides tangible support in linking ‘learning’ to ‘earning’ seems to maintain engagement more than a generic professional skills programme. Embedding a personal life project within the programme and offering a blended approach to life and career planning helps women to think through options with the support of their facilitator, tutor or e-learning resources.

In Chile, online learning content has a strong focus on the development of personal skills that receive attention at the start and are interwoven through the entrepreneurship and employment pathways. Participants have scored the programme highly on the development of personal skills and the support networks offered to them. In addition, participants are matched with a mentor from the programme’s network of mentors, who offer them support on specific topics that are relevant for their business, their job search or their personal development.

During the 2021 lockdown in Melbourne, Australia, when delivery had to be entirely online, SisterWorks picked up on the reduced appetite for employment and entrepreneurship training. Instead, they shifted the focus to wellbeing, life skills and maintaining a virtual community that could counter the isolation and mental challenges the women were experiencing.

Enabling connections between participants through meeting spaces and other support can also be critical to foster women’s sense of belonging and improve their learning experiences. For example, in Mexico, SCE participants sometimes voluntarily organize live sessions when they have particular skills or knowledge to share with the others. In December 2021, a participant who makes figurines for sale livestreamed a demonstration of the process on social media so that other women could benefit from her skills. In India, informal peer groups are established as a result of mentors raising awareness of the program and encouraging women to join. They are used to share information on education, employment and entrepreneurship, including through WhatsApp groups. In addition, the Manjari Foundation in India organizes online sessions for one-off mentoring events where specialists share knowledge and practical experience, and participants can ask questions.

### Tips for ensuring effective online support and interaction

- To be effective, a fully online SCE programme requires a mix of asynchronous and synchronous learning, whereby participants can access the learning platform at any time but also meet with others in their group through regular online videoconferencing sessions. Providing personalized support through a mentor or tutor and giving women opportunities to interact with each other are essential in creating bonds and supportive networks and add value to asynchronous learning.
- As with hub-based SCE programmes, the key structural components of an online programme can be summarized as personalized support through tutoring, mentoring and peer networks, regular opportunities to interact, and contextualized learning materials.
- Dividing large cohorts into smaller groups (20–25 women per group in Chile, for example) is necessary for relationships to develop and for the facilitator, tutor or mentor to offer personalized support. The relationships that build over time in smaller groups enable women to maintain motivation, feel connected, and gain and give support.
- Regular live sessions are essential for a fully online SCE programme. They present opportunities to discuss the week’s topic and develop bonds.

### 10. E-learning can be a gateway into the wider digital world but initial digital skills training is essential, preferably carried out in-person.

In order to fully access and benefit from online learning, SCE participants first need to learn how to use the learning platform and the other digital e-learning tools. Digital activity in a safe place and among a trusted group consolidates what they learn and increases their confidence in navigating the digital world, which they can apply to other areas of life.

The SCE programme has recognized the importance of including digital skills training early in the learning programme so that women know how to use the learning platforms and connect with each other online. Implementing organizations start with digital basics like how to turn on a computer, set up email, passwords and security, and change phone settings. Using tools that the

women already know, like WhatsApp, alongside new platforms can be extremely beneficial. Digital literacy can be reinforced throughout by repeating tasks and introducing new skills (see box below for the areas that comprise ‘digital literacy’) so that working online becomes a habit.

The initial teaching of digital basics in an in-person environment has proven to be highly effective as women can solve problems in the moment. For hub-based implementation, such as in Mexico and Jordan, training in digital skills is offered at the outset and usually through in-person training in the computer room(s) in the hub. It is easier to teach digital skills to novices in an in-person setting because of opportunities to interact, work out problems, and receive instant help from instructors or peers. The idea in Mexico, Jordan and Cameroon is for participants to receive in-person digital skills training in the hubs so they can study online independently on computers/tablets either in the hub or at home.

The fully online Chile programme has been successful in connecting women with each other and their own personal tutor and mentor online, both in the critical initial stages and throughout the programme. Basic digital skills, such as connecting to Zoom and logging into the SCE learning platform are addressed at the beginning of the programme as they are prerequisite for participants to join live learning classes and access materials.

For example, for VeOmás in the south of Chile, training in digital skills was considered particularly important in rural areas given the lack of on-site education programmes through which women can return to education and prepare for exams. The demand for such programmes is greater than in cities as the proportion of women not completing their studies in rural areas is higher. The SCE online programme offered an opportunity to fill that gap.

In addition, SCE Chile partnered with the telecom company Claro Chile to offer participants face-to-face digital literacy courses and provide them with a computer or digital device connected to internet. The initiative has reached more than 1,000 migrant, indigenous and socioeconomically vulnerable women.

*“It has been very important ... that [the women] themselves recognize how online learning processes have also been a path towards autonomy, for example ... some have said that before, they were afraid to go to a bank because how were they going to use the ATM? And having done the training, and being able to use certain devices, they are also beginning to be interested*

*in other, more complex digital tools ... that contribute to their development of themselves.”*

*Elsa Domínguez, ProSociedad, Mexico<sup>8</sup>*

<sup>8</sup> IP roundtable on COVID-19, <https://youtu.be/Y8GARg8VpZU> 1:12:20–1:13:05.

### E-learning and digital skills

Digital literacy is today recognized as a prerequisite for full participation in the economy and society. As such, the digital skills training provided in SCE’s gender-transformative life skills component does not just cover the development of digital skills for e-learning but aims to increase participants’ digital literacy more widely, based on UNESCO’s definition:

*Digital literacy is the ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate and create information safely and appropriately through digital technologies for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. It includes competences that are variously referred to as computer literacy, ICT literacy, information literacy and media literacy.*

*UNESCO Institute for Statistics<sup>1</sup>*

SCE is seeking to extend and standardize its digital skill offering based on UNESCO’s framework, which has five areas of competence: Information and data literacy; Communication and collaboration; Digital content creation; Safety; and Problem solving. The aim is to strengthen SCE participants’ digital inclusion and their capacity to access employment, entrepreneurship and educational opportunities.

At the same time, SCE aims to ensure, and track in its monitoring, that its digital literacy curriculum and pedagogy are adapted to the intersectional needs of diverse groups of participants in each context.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2018) A global framework of reference on digital literacy skills for SDG indicator 4.4.2, Information Paper No. 51, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000265403> p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> How do digital competence frameworks address the digital divide? (undated) UNESCO-UNECOC (undated) How do digital competence frameworks address the digital divide? [https://unevoc.unesco.org/up/How\\_do\\_digital\\_competence\\_frameworks\\_address\\_the\\_digital\\_divide.pdf](https://unevoc.unesco.org/up/How_do_digital_competence_frameworks_address_the_digital_divide.pdf)

## Conclusion

The enduring challenge for adult learning and education is to reach those who need it most.<sup>9</sup> Women affected by humanitarian crises, poverty and discriminatory social norms are being left behind and are side-lined from entering the digital world to learn online. To put this into perspective, two-thirds of the world's population uses the Internet, but 2.7 billion people remain offline, and women account for a disproportionate – and increasing – share of the global offline population: women now outnumber male non-users by 18 per cent, up from 11 per cent in 2019.<sup>10</sup> Gender gaps in digital access persist. In the least developed countries, only 30 per cent of women use the internet compared to 43 per cent of men, with hardly any progress towards gender parity over the last three years.<sup>11</sup> Excluding women from the digital world has shaved \$1 trillion from the gross domestic product of low- and middle-income countries in the last decade. Without action, this loss will grow to \$1.5 trillion by 2025.<sup>12</sup>

The challenges of the digital gender divide and of ensuring that connectivity and hardware are available for all should not be under-estimated. But online learning, when informed by the 10 lessons outlined above, offers a unique opportunity to reach women who have always been at greatest risk of exclusion. The blended learning approach offered by many SCE programmes shows how e-learning can be adapted to meet the needs of women facing multiple challenges: a lack of access to devices and connectivity, low digital literacy, lack of digital confidence and time-consuming caring responsibilities. Computers and connectivity are available in SCE hubs, often with on-site childcare, with face-to-face digital training that gives women the skills to participate in e-learning independently in the future. E-learning gives them greater flexibility to study at their own pace, at a time and location of their choosing, with access to a safe virtual space for instructional support and social interaction and the option of asynchronous interaction by text. When accessible on smartphones, it means women without access to a computer can participate.

In summary, SCE's experience suggests that e-learning programmes, whether blended or fully online, can be designed to take into account the barriers that women face in participating online, offering contextualized content and tailored learning opportunities that build their digital skills and enable them to participate in an ever more digitally connected world.



Photo: AWO/Suhaib Kharmaiseh



Photo: UN Women



Photo: UN Women/Ernesto Treviño

9 UNESCO (2022) 5th Global Report on Adult Learning and Education – Citizenship education: Empowering adults for change. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381669>

10 International Telecommunications Union (ITU). (2022). Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2022. Geneva, ITU.

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