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Contribution by WFP

to the CSTD 2019-2020 priority theme on "Harnessing rapid technological change for inclusive and sustainable development"

**EMPACT**

*Background*

EMPACT (formerly known as Tech for Food) connects refugees and vulnerable communities to the future of work putting job opportunities in the global digital economy within reach of young adults affected by war. Through short and focused practical training on one side and open communication and collaboration with the private sector on the other, EMPACT enables access to those populations that were otherwise cut-off from the global online economy. Tailored digital training courses provide hard (e.g. data cleaning, picture tagging) and soft skills that help bridge the gap between poverty and a new career in a globalized job market.

In 2018, together with a network of forward-thinking private sector companies, WFP trained more than 2,500 Syrian refugees, displaced or vulnerable Lebanese and Iraqis affected by war and economic crisis. Over 50 percent of graduates are women. Improved financial self-reliance, increased social cohesion and less dependence on humanitarian assistance are benefits so far observed. Nearly one third of graduates were able to immediately connect to online, freelancing, work opportunities and make a monthly average income of US$ 135.

*Operational Updates*

- WFP is currently designing and deploying the best model to scale EMPACT. The goal is to reach 20,000 students by the end of 2020; 100,000 people over the next five years, with immediate plans to expand to North and East Africa. EMPACT has also begun work in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya and plans to continue to scale in 2019.

- Operations in Lebanon and Iraq are running smoothly. Both WFP Country Offices (CO) and respective host Governments are working closely together in delivering the training to identified vulnerable young people.

- Pilots are being planned also in Kenya and Ghana. The preparation phase is running smoothly with the additional need for follow up of the teams on the ground especially regarding the establishment of effective M&E frameworks.

# Empact
## Connecting vulnerable communities to online work

**INNOVATION ACCELERATOR**

**Across the world, WFP is helping refugees and vulnerable host communities build a brighter future through learning digital skills and finding the path to alternative livelihood opportunities.**

UN assessments have highlighted that the two primary drivers of displacement for most refugees are lack of safety and the loss of livelihood opportunities at home, which negatively impact people's ability to afford food. Food is essential and an important source of stability. When families are able to afford and put food on the table, the need to move and leave home often diminishes.

Furthermore, 85% of refugees are hosted by developing countries who are grappling with their own socio-economic challenges and struggling employment rates. The chances for these refugees ever becoming financially self-reliant are very low, leading to a continuous and unsustainable dependency on international aid.

## Learn and Earn

WFP's Empowerment in Action Initiative, EMPACT collaborates with leading tech firms to open up access of their solutions or platforms and put income opportunities within reach of refugees and the local communities hosting them. Empact also provides training for the digital skills necessary for individuals to confidently perform the work, starting with a tailored and short Basic IT program. Students learn a variety of entry level skills such as basic computer manipulation, web research, typing skills, the principles of images and basic tabulation tools.

Working remotely is fast becoming the norm across many industries, with basic digital skills now a requirement for most jobs. Through WFP's Empact (formerly known as Tech for Food) those we serve are empowered to identify the appropriate marketplaces, supported to create accounts and enabled to find work without being bound to the possibilities of the local market, allowing them to tap into a growing global demand for lower-skilled, labor-intensive services, such as data entry, data cleaning, image annotation, fact checking and photo tagging or editing.

Empact opens up this online realm to areas in the world that were previously unprioritized, effectively shifting mind-sets and the understanding of what's a possible source of income.

## Creating Better Opportunity Through Digital Training

Beyond the wage facilitation, one of the aspects of Empact's model is that it leverages the low-income data labor market as an incentive for talented, disadvantaged participants who would otherwise need a financial buffer to dedicate time to learning a new skill or advancing through a specific qualification and make their way out of informal/exploitative work. Moving beyond the Basic training and entry-level work, selected participants in the program have the opportunity to learn more complex skills like coding, front-end developing and to manipulate intermediate or advanced softwares like QuickBooks$^©$ or Tableau$^©$. Candidates are supported by coaches who mentor them and guide them through the uncertain and overwhelming world of training and online freelance work.



Since 2016, Empact has trained more than 3,000 individuals across nine campuses in Lebanon and Iraq; 50% of participants being women. In Iraq almost 20% of students generated an income through online work and 33% of the alumni was employed 4 months after graduating. The programme, supported by the WFP Innovation Accelerator, is now being rolled out in Kenya; prototyping various models of sustainability. Other countries in Africa and South-East Asia are assessing their contexts for the adoption of Empact; with a potential to collectively reach more than 20,000 individuals by 2020.

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