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4.7.2.4 Education and orientation

Ensuring the continuity of children's education has been a priority in all Member States. To facilitate distance learning, several countries launched projects to improve Internet access and the quality of wifi in reception facilities, for example in Belgium, Lithuania and Poland (with AMIF funding). The Spanish Ministry of Inclusion provided a subsidy to authorised NGOs to cover increased connectivity costs in reception centres.

Meanwhile, the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) expressed its concern about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugee children's fundamental right to education.[623] UNHCR continued its campaign on education and published its report, "Coming together for refugee education", showing some inspirational examples of overcoming the challenges in refugee children's education post-pandemic.[624]

In Austria, social workers within federal care facilities helped students and their parents to be informed about changing rules on education and provided them support with education.

Fedasil in Belgium reported in the beginning of the pandemic that more laptops or suitable study corners with IT facilities were necessary to enable children to follow classes online and complete their homework. Leisure activities and recreational facilities keeping children occupied were also more in demand. Forum réfugiés-Cosi observed that applicant children in reception centres in France also had frequent issues in following online classes, and some missed out on education during the first lockdown phase.[625]

The AIDA report for Spain reported that several unaccompanied children were not able to access education on the Canary Islands while waiting to undergo an age assessment procedure.[626]

The State Agency for Refugees in Bulgaria prepared the framework for distance learning for children accommodated in the agency's facilities. Social workers in the facilities provided daily assistance to register and use the educational platforms. Children and educators also exchanged information through mobile applications and e-mail. When issues arose for distance learning, teachers contacted children by telephone to follow and set tasks. Activities also continued in the summer in small groups, providing classes in the Bulgarian language and literature, mathematics and a mixed module of natural sciences. The Red Cross purchased laptops with AMIF funding to support the transition.[627]

Are you Syrious noted that preparatory classes to learn Croatian were no longer organised due to the COVID-19 pandemic and children were expected to follow the mainstream curriculum

broadcasted on television without language support.628 However, the Red Cross provided support to the Croatian Ministry of the Interior to ensure that children in reception centres received support in learning the language and were able to follow online schooling and continue with their education in line with their Croatian peers.

The UDI in Norway provided special guidelines to all reception centres on preparing for education. One-year-old children in reception centres were included in the financing scheme of free, full-time care in kindergarten. Municipalities remain in charge to decide on offering this coverage, depending on their resources. So far, approximately 60%-70% of all children in the target group benefit from this service. In addition, extensive support was offered to families and children in reception centres in Finland through the method "Let's Talk about Children", which was introduced in 2019 and rolled out throughout 2020.629

Concerns persisted and deepened in Greece, where access to formal education continued to be limited, especially on the islands.630

Save the Children noted that applicant children often needed to move and change schools in Sweden, as reception centres were closing down due to decreased arrivals.631

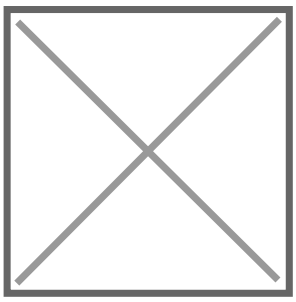
At the same time, adult learning came under pressure. Language courses were paused, for example in Czechia, before they were partially resumed in the middle of 2020 or were substituted by online courses. The availability of courses substantially shrank in the Netherlands and Portugal due to smaller class numbers as a result of social distancing rules. Study groups and clubs were also reduced in Finland.

Poland used this occasion to prepare a project with AMIF funding to improve remote education classes which were on offer.xxxviii

Among the more general developments, a new governmental project is planned to be implemented in Sweden in 2021, obliging applicants to attend a 1-day information session about the host society. The programme has existed for several years, but it was implemented as a voluntary 2- to 3-hour session.

The Community Centres and the Immigrant Integration Centres in the Greek Attica Region will employ intercultural mediators to facilitate communication between applicants and government agencies and support organisations.632

The COA in the Netherlands and the National Council on Swimming Safety signed the National Action Plan of Swimming Security for Asylum Seekers to ensure that they can learn basic swimming skills. Applicants were found to be more at risk of drowning and several tragedies had happened in recent years, so the plan aimed to address this occurrence.633



[xxxviii] The employees of the centres for foreigners remain in contact with schools, inform parents about the change of the form of teaching to traditional or remote education and encourage foreigners to study remotely according to the guidelines received from schools. They mobilize both students and their parents to fulfil compulsory education. Foreigners were provided with information on how to use educational platforms. Moreover, the Office for Foreigners reacts to difficulties related to the education of minor foreigners and introduced wifi access to the Internet in all centres as well.

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[626] AIDA Spain. *Country Report: Spain - 2020 Update*. Edited by ECRE. Written by Accem. https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/AIDA-ES_2020update.pdf
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