



SOUL Skills



Soft skills Outside of a school  
Learning environment

# Child after the Social Isolation due to Covid-19

SOUL Skills Project



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

# Child after the Social Isolation due to Covid-19

Analytical Report  
Results of the empirical study

BULGARIA, FRANCE, GREECE,  
ICELAND, ITALY AND SPAIN

# Child after the Social Isolation due to Covid-19

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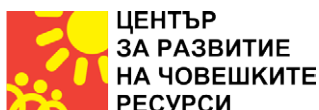
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*“People need the right set of skills and competences to sustain current standards of living, support high rates of employment and foster social cohesion in the light of tomorrow’s society and world of work.”*

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION  
on key competences for lifelong learning,  
22 May 2018

## Introduction

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This analysis aims to show how the global Covid pandemic changed education within the project partner countries, especially at primary schools and points out some effects on 6-12 years old children. Due to the rapid spread of pandemic and the need to suspend it one of the health measure was schools in many countries to be closed and suspended attendances for the second semester of the 2020/2021 academic year. The priority of most Governments was to cope with the virus’ spread.

The first political decision was to transfer education to distance learning form. All educational entities: schools, out of school activities, universities across Europe were strongly affected in 2020 and 2021 by the pandemic, which in many countries led to their closure. Nobody was prepared for the rapid changes: teachers were not ready to teach online, students were not ready and equipped to learn online from home. In this unpredictable situation a primary effort of governments was to adapt the infrastructure for ensuring distant education. And it was done. However, less attention was paid to the readiness of the main actors in this process to cope with it – teachers/educators and pupils and their families. The first analysis after the school closures highlighted the significance of establishing the infrastructure for distance education, but the readiness of teachers and parents to manage was even more essential.

In all partner countries, Covid-19 pandemic can be recognized as a catalyst that exposed key issues in education systems. The focus is mainly on the impact on acquired knowledge and forming of transferable skills due to the school closures and distance learning. On the other hand, the Covid pandemic changed the way of living and had a more general impact on students’ development: uncertainty has increased, new relationships in the pupils’ family were formed, pupils understood that IT could be used not only for games but also as a source for information, learning, etc.

Today, almost all key actors in the educational sector have come to an understanding that the time for introducing teaching reforms is long overdue and the focus on soft (transferable) skills development has to be a part of the schools education in parallels with acquiring academic knowledge. In recent years, a lot of private schools have been established in the EU member states that put an emphasis on skills’ development. They implement great variation of innovative educational methodologies. Those private schools are also well accepted in the society and attract a lot of parents who want their children to study in a school offering flexible and comfortable study environment.

In unison, EU policy in education emphasizes on creating a real space for education of different ages, including child learners by promoting the development of key competences and basic skills in order to achieve a fulfilling, effective and desirable professional career. The Council of European Union adopted in May 2018 a Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning focused on combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes equally important for the personality

development. Thus, today there is real possibility for educational reforms to happen, as there is a bottom-up understanding of the need for changes by the teachers and also there is a top-down understanding by the policy-makers.

Covid-19 pandemic only accelerated the understanding for the need of changes in the education system: the need to implement new alternative teaching approaches and potential variations of IT including teaching/learning processes. The current analysis argues some of these issues: 1) effects of Covid-19 pandemic on pupils' behavior with a focus on soft (transferable) skills development and results of distance teaching/learning of pupils; 2) the difficulties that teachers/educators faced in the process of transfer from face-to-face teaching to remote education. The study paid special attention on the parent's participation in education of their children and what are the acceptable forms for collaboration between parents and teachers.

The focus of the study is on public schools and out of school centers and their opportunity to implement innovative methods for development of pupils' soft skills as part of their personal development.

# Transferable skills and their role for pupils' development and growth

The 21st century is a century of knowledge, skills and abilities. Last decade, the attention to skills development increased significantly. Their key role for personal growth and maturity has been widely discussed within society. To achieve full potential as adults, children from an early age need to develop a range of skills and knowledge. These skills labeled “transferable skills”, are known also as “soft skills” and “21st century skills”. They have become increasingly important for today's society as they determine the scope of competences for personal development, including potential capacity for future professional life. Skills today are understandable as regulators of the boundaries for personal adaptation to the changing nature of the labor market and the style of living.

Transferable skills are the nucleus of every person's competencies. One of the popular definitions for transferable skills is: “skills, abilities, and traits that pertain to personality, attitude and behavior rather than formal or technical knowledge”<sup>1</sup>.

Formation of transferable skills begins in early childhood and continues throughout life and the first developmental phase is crucial for later periods to be successful. Therefore, primary school is an important place for the development of transferable skills, and is as important as acquiring academic knowledge. Also, researches and practices prove the ‘bridging’ function of transferable skills and academic knowledge, as they improve the level of the students' knowledge acquisition and the formation of competences reflects the individuals' maturity. Teachers have a key role for incorporating transferable skills development as a part of the educational model.<sup>2</sup>

The interest in the nature of transferable skills development and its role for personal growth is a key task for pedagogical studies.<sup>3</sup> The results of numerous research have shown that skills may develop individually but usually one skill influences the development of others: transferable skills contribute to enhancing cognitive skills and academic knowledge; skills are improving during the individuals lifetime; they can be developed through practice and reinforced through every day experiences; skills drive individual success and personal maturity. There are sensitive periods for skill development and the first years are one of these periods as they lay the foundation for all future skills development. Having more developed skills today helps develop more skills tomorrow (OECD, 2015 p.76) As early skills development impacts the individual's future skills development, the level at which a child begins to develop these skills outside of his/her house, can determine the level that will ultimately be achieved<sup>4</sup>.

Economic and social progress in the knowledge economy is based on knowledgeable and skillful people. Skills like: problem solving, critical thinking, ability to cooperate and collaborate, creativity, analytical thinking, and emotional self-regulation are essential in business sectors: industry, agriculture, services as only educated and skillful people could work in high technology; only educated and skillful people could be the bridge between science and practice and could ensure economic and social progress of each society.

1 Snell, S., et al.2002, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277289896>

2 Barrios,T., 2021. Teaching competencies for the 21st century, ACADEMIA/ Letters, August 2021 [https://www.academia.edu/50948831/Teaching\\_competencies\\_for\\_the\\_21st\\_century](https://www.academia.edu/50948831/Teaching_competencies_for_the_21st_century)

3 Lordan, G., 2019. New soft skills training in schools improves children's health and behavior, July, LSE, UK

4 Skills for Social progress, The power of Social and Emotional Skills, OECD Skill studies, ([https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/skills-for-social-progress\\_9789264226159-en#page20](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/skills-for-social-progress_9789264226159-en#page20))



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Skills are tools one uses in real time to activate what has already been learned, in order to generate new ideas, new theories, new products, and new knowledge.

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During the last decades, policy- and decision-makers in education all around the world have focused on the necessity of transferable skills' development as a key part of the educational programs both in school and at pre-school entities. This study focuses on the primary school level and affiliated to primary school out of school activities. Thus, the study's focus is on children aged 6-12 years old. However, despite the fact that development of transferable skills are accepted as a key element of qualified people, despite that soft skills today are already involved in national educational programs, they are not developed progressively, neither in nor out of school. Within this context, UNICEF, EU and the national policies focused on embedding transferable skills together with basic skills development within different educational and learning systems. That resulted in the systematic development of a breadth of transferable skills, at scale, across the life course and through multiple learning pathways: formal, non-formal and community based (2019, p.10).<sup>5</sup> The European Council based on results of OECD, PISA and PIAAC indicated a constant high share of teenagers and adults with insufficient basic skills, stressed to the need for development of key competences and for their validation as well as to the provision of competence-oriented education model.<sup>6</sup> They recommended implementing competence-oriented education, training and learning in a large variety of educational entities – formal and non-formal ones, at public and private schools and in out of school educational centers.

Forming and progression of skills in education request sires change at all levels of the teaching/ learning model. Today, there is a common understanding among teachers/ educators that skills allow the pupil to enhance his/her personal lore and experience with new knowledge, skills and attitudes that allow him/her to behave adequately and effectively in the complexity of the situations in which he/she lives. Currently, many educators recognize the need of using techniques for skill development, they look for such techniques, they are ready to use them in practice. We could say it is a period of implementing innovative teaching methods aimed at integrating skills formed with learning lessons content. At present, development of skills is implemented more in out-of-school training activities during non-formal education in all countries involved in the study, except for Italy, where skills development is a key priority at the educational program at the national level. **The reason skills development is better presented at out-of-school trainings is that these educators are free to design their curriculum and can choose what methodology to use in comparison with public schools.**

In Italy, there is a national policy for spreading the innovative teaching/learning model aimed at connecting action-oriented activities based on transferable skills with real life. There is a national program: PCTOs Percorsi per le Competenze Trasversali e l'Orientamento (Pathways for transferable skills and orientation) aimed at implementing innovative practices and strategies so the students can develop these skills PCTOs is a fundamental program that allows to be established and technologically advanced in various organizational forms; gives possibility to pay attention to the personal needs of each student. The key issue is the program also is basis of the national curriculum, fulfils and follows the territorial specificity of the each school. The personalization of the path is an essential aspect because it allows the student to become aware and orientate him/herself to the task that should be worked on. An important issue is the selection of the skills that the teacher has to identify and to stress the development of them. The main principle of the skills selection is based on the pupils' needs. The teacher has to know at any moment on which of the skills to focus on. Thus, the students' need to develop one skill or another brings the assessment mechanism to the fore.

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5 The Global Framework on Transferable Skills, 2019. UNICEF Education Section Programme Division, <https://www.unicef.org/reports/global-framework-transferable-skills>; COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning, 2018. Official Journal of the European Union, C 189, [file:///G:/SOUL\\_project/Literature/EU-8%20transfSkills2018\\_EN\\_TXT.pdf](file:///G:/SOUL_project/Literature/EU-8%20transfSkills2018_EN_TXT.pdf)

6 European Council, Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, 22 May 2018, (2018/C 189/01)

Involving skills development at the national school's curriculum needs a new model of certification to be created.<sup>7</sup> Through this new certificate the pupils' learning and behavior is assessed and it represents a long-lasting educational process that adds useful information about the development and maturity of the students, as it describes the results of the five-year and three-year training process.<sup>8</sup> The idea of such certification is to draw attention to the new understanding about competence, which requires the school to rethink its way of proceeding. That suggests using the learning acquired in the context of the individual disciplines within parallel skills development to achieve individual growth and maturity. Designing teaching activities based on skills and their certification requires renewing teaching qualification, new professionalism and deeper knowledge and attention to these issues. Parents, as well as many primary school teachers, often do not have a clear understanding of what competences could primary schools and families can provide to support in students.

Integration of knowledge acquired with skills development is still in a process of development. Transferable skills that are currently developing at Italian primary schools are based on the 8 European key competences<sup>9</sup>.

In the other partner countries (Bulgaria, France, Greece, Iceland, Spain) there is not a separately established and implemented national skills development programs. The importance of skills' development is in the policy documents as a part of the educational policy.

In Iceland educators in out of school activities are using the competence-oriented model for skill development. There was a study carried out about the existing university courses giving knowledge about sustainability of key competences development which to become a base for educational policy development.<sup>10</sup>

In Bulgaria the concept incorporating the development of transferable skills at public school is a part of the *National Strategy for Lifelong Learning* and of the *National STEM Platform whose tasks are the: development and implementation of STEM methodology at public schools*<sup>11</sup>. *STEM development incorporated 21 skills presented in 4 sets of skills: Creativity, Critical thinking, Collaboration, and Communication, later became known as: 4 C's of 21st-century skills*<sup>12</sup>.

Last year in Bulgaria, Greece, and France educational reforms have been in process that give more autonomy to public schools and educators to involve skills' development in their lessons. Teachers are free to select educational teaching methodologies and to cover the national programs. In Bulgaria – these schools are called “innovative schools”, in Greece – since there was no exact plan for distance teaching teachers have the right to invent and decide which educational model to select to integrate transferable skills into the traditional and distance teaching program. In France, after holding a national experiment about Multiple Intelligences methodology to become an element of an educational model, there was a decision that Multiple Intelligences pedagogical methodology will be implemented at schools after their autonomous decision<sup>13</sup>. This methodology is based on personalized teaching and includes skill development in parallel with academic knowledge learning.

7 Competences certification of C.M. n 3, prot. n. 1235 of 13 February 2015, Ministry of Education, Italy

8 <https://www.miur.gov.it/web/guest/-/linee-guida-dei-percorsi-per-le-competenze-trasversali-e-per-l-orient>

9 European Council, Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, 22 May 2018, (2018/C 189/01)

10 Pálsdóttir, A., Jóhannsdóttir, L., 2021. Key Competencies for Sustainability in University of Iceland Curriculum, Open access, *Sustainability* 2021, 13(16), 8945; <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13168945>

11 <https://www.stemcoalition.eu/members/ministry-education-and-science>

12 Singh, M., (2021). Acquisition of 21st Century Skills Through STEAM Education. *Academia Letters*, Article 712. <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL712>

13 Multiple intelligences methodology based on the Gardner's theory emphasize attention to knowledge acquire and skills development in parallel based on innate strengths of each pupil. (Gardner, H., 2011. *Frames of mind* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: Basic)

Up to now, private schools and out-of-school centers are more advanced in incorporating the transferable skills development in the learning process.

Non-formal education in all partner countries allows educational model to be selected by the educators. For years, a great variation of extra curriculum training centers have been functioning. Most of these centers are supported by municipalities (Bulgaria, Spain), associations (France, Iceland, Italy), church (France, Iceland), etc. All of these educational entities offer additional opportunities for the development of transferable skills outside of formal schooling. Most popular are the training courses in art, dance, painting, singing, photography and sports; teaching foreign languages is traditionally popular in Bulgaria. For the last 4-5 years the interest in Robotics trainings has increased rapidly as educators and parents recognize that it stimulates students' motivation to engage in collaborative, creative and problem solving projects. It helps in a pleasant, attractive form to acquire new knowledge and skills development. Today such skills' development becomes a root for a sector of toys' production. Strategy of many company's production is based to study results for early skills development. A good example is the well-known LEGO company which through their LEGO Foundation enlarges the training variations, initiates and supports kid's creativity.<sup>14</sup> Some schools and kindergartens include these toys in their curricula.

There are different channels for teachers to gain information and knowledge about teaching tools for skill development. Some NGOs offer teacher training teaching basic principles how to create practical tools for skills development. The challenge is that most of these NGOs work rely on project funding, they don't have without a common program and system, and the time during which they offer trainings is usually limited by the project duration. In such cases it is difficult to promote sustainability of those trainings that contributes to teacher capacity building. Also, there are platforms providing space for teachers to participate in online trainings, to share their experiences, but the participation is voluntary, and more often it is not related to the teacher's career development.

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Today's changing model of education is a process of self-education and sharing of successful practices among teachers and educators; it is a process of change initiated from the bottom-up, as many teachers in most of the countries already realize the need to improve/change the teaching style and the traditional education model.

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Already, many teachers at public primary schools have used a variety of tools, including those that promote transferable skills development, to facilitate the learning process, to make it attractive for pupils and to provide them with engaging and relevant education. But it is far from changing the model. It is still in process of development and there are great variations in schools and countries. Teaching based on competencies is practice that prepares children to better integrate into a world of constant change – from technology, to science, to culture.

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As a rule, transferable skills are formed together in a set of different combinations determined by the type of activity and learning tasks. By definition transferable skills are inter-related and as such, while an educator may focus on one skills he/she is always supporting the students' development across several skills. It is not possible to develop skills separately. Each child has preferable skills, determined by his/her dominant multiple intelligences type and innate characteristics. This preferable skill is the driving element developing the whole set of inter-related skills.

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Pupils form transferable skills step by step through solving different tasks – through “learning by doing”. Teachers have to give them well selected tasks to stimulate their skills development.

<sup>14</sup> Learning through Play, Why Creativity Matters and How Play Nurtures Creativity Minds, (<https://learningthroughplay.com/explore-the-research/why-creativity-matters-and-how-we-can-nurture-it>)

While the focus may be on developing one skill, a set of other skills are developing in parallel. Selection of the topic has to be multidisciplinary, understandable by pupils; it has related to academic knowledge and to help students to create values and competencies important for their everyday life.

**Transferable skills have to be a part of the education program. Developing teaching models in classrooms that promote the development of transferable skills requires a re-thinking of school models and pedagogies in many places. A key issue is teachers to have a methodology for evaluation development of each skills. Teachers will need the support of administrators, national policies and professional development to build their capacity and have the time to design new lessons and teaching experiences which prepare the students for their lives.**

It is important in school the skills develop gradually and consistently, to cover a wide spectrum that regulates the entire behavior of the pupil. There has been made an attempt to select these skills that are important for the regulation of the behavior of pupils aged 6-12 years old (in primary school). Their behavioral reactions are described and offered for evaluation by the educators.

On the table below it is a list of selected for investigation skills and their descriptive behavior related to pupils 6-12 years old. The suggested description is provisionally made for the aims of this study, as in real life it is impossible to strictly separate them. The selection has been made based on theoretical publication and the practical experiences of project partners. The selected transferable skills are: comprehension skill (written and oral texts), analytical and critical thinking, responsible decision making and taking responsibility, evaluation skills, communication skills, creativity skills, curiosity, and emotional self-regulation self-control of the body. Each skill is described through descriptive behavior that can be easily identified by teachers/educators.

List of transferable skills	Descriptive behavior of the skill
Comprehension skill (written and oral texts)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Understands any oral or written texts, ability to recognize main ideas</li> <li>➤ Addresses logical questions to the text</li> <li>➤ Summarizes the text and reveal its message, moral, conclusion</li> </ul>
Analytical and critical thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Gives own interpretation of any text and oral stories</li> <li>➤ Reveals and evaluate the information of any texts (stories)</li> <li>➤ Finds the explicit meaning of the any text (stories)</li> <li>➤ Reveals the attitude of the author of the text – a positive and negative messages of the author</li> <li>➤ Invents another title of the text</li> <li>➤ Ability to embed the message and moral of the text in different contexts</li> </ul>

Responsible decision taking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Offers different adequate solutions of a task</li> <li>➤ Draws relevant conclusions based on specific information (instructions)</li> <li>➤ Evaluates the task by summarizing different relevant information concerning the task</li> <li>➤ Makes a broad summary with potential task's consequences</li> <li>➤ Stands up for his/her decisions</li> <li>➤ Expresses autonomously his/her opinion</li> </ul>
Evaluation skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Analyses and evaluates what is going around him/her in a sense how to act</li> <li>➤ Estimates behavior of friends (others)</li> <li>➤ Estimates his/her own behavior</li> <li>➤ Predicts events and consequences of his/her acts</li> <li>➤ Asks for help when it is needed</li> <li>➤ Admits when s/he is wrong</li> </ul>
Communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Expresses to somebody his/her own opinion and to stand up for it (defend, justify with arguments)</li> <li>➤ Prefers (like) to work in a group</li> <li>➤ Hears and takes in mind opinions of the others</li> <li>➤ Takes the role of a leader, finds ways to organize group work</li> </ul>
Creativity skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Invents non-standard solutions (for games, stories, paintings, logical tasks ...)</li> <li>➤ Usually gives different answers to one question</li> <li>➤ Reveals different associations in storytelling</li> <li>➤ Designs innovation models, 3D modeling</li> <li>➤ Creates various endings of a story</li> </ul>
Curiosity (Self-learning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Likes to put a lot of questions</li> <li>➤ Interprets a text in different understandings</li> <li>➤ Likes to invent stories</li> <li>➤ Likes to find unusual (unbelievable) decisions, fancy stories</li> <li>➤ Makes assumptions</li> </ul>
Emotional self-regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Keeps self-control of the spontaneous body movements</li> <li>➤ Adheres to behavior rules in class</li> </ul>

# Education during Covid-19 pandemic

It is already accepted that Covid-19 pandemic aggressively changed the whole economic and social life all around the world.

The educational sector had to adapt and implement initiatives to mitigate, as much as possible, the damage inflicted by long-term school closures across the globe. All educational entities: schools, out of school activities, universities across Europe were strongly affected in 2020 and 2021 by the pandemic, which led to their closure in many countries. Distance learning came as a response to the school closures and became a solution for decrease the interruption to schooling. Periods of distance or blended learning were implemented rapidly supported by many governments. In many counties schools, including primary schools had to transfer from face-to-face teaching into remote education. The longer school closure periods lasted, the longer distance learning was applied.

The duration of school closers is presented on Fig. 1. It is well seen that there were different policies and different measures that each partner country took to stop the virus dissemination and to take care about the people health.

Fig.1 Periods of school closures





Source: Covid-19 Education Response, UNESCO<sup>15</sup>

At the beginning of the pandemic school closures were the most widespread political decision in all partner countries, except in Iceland where health measures were balanced with the concern for children’s isolation (Fig.1, Iceland). Starting from February 2020 up to the time for regular school vacations to begin (May – June 2020) education was transferred from in-person teaching to virtual teaching. This period was a time, not only for school closures, but also a time for societal-wide a strong social isolation. Adults and children had to stay at home. Some adults WFH<sup>16</sup> and all students, in most countries, participated in online learning. Measures were different in different countries and regions, but in general it was period of complete general isolation. Prioritizing kindergartens were the institutions that in Bulgaria, Greece and Spain were re-opened first after about a month of suspended activities.

Distance learning and teaching was implemented in all partner countries except Iceland.<sup>17</sup> Governments did their best to provide learning conditions, provided free access to Internet, gave out electronic devices for students who were in need, organized training courses on how to teach

15 Covid-19 Education Response, UNESCO, ([Http://covid19.uis.unesco.org/global-monitoring-school-closures-covid19/country-dashboard](http://covid19.uis.unesco.org/global-monitoring-school-closures-covid19/country-dashboard))

16 WFH is an acronym for “work from home” which describes work being done remotely, instead of at an office

17 The reaction to Covid-19 pandemic in Iceland is different in comparison with all other partner countries, so the analysis of the study is made separate and is included below as a separate paragraph

in virtual environments, established free access to digital platforms, etc.<sup>18</sup>. It is difficult to say that whether all students had good environments for online learning, but for the majority of them it existed. Online teaching was the predominant mode of teaching for the second semester of the academic 2019/2020 year. During this period all out of school educational activities were suspended as well. Children and their families lived in nearly complete isolation for about two - three months and faced many restrictions for leaving their homes. Families lived in social isolation with a lot of restrictions for going out of their homes- from a complete ban on leaving the house to only restrictions on the gathering of large groups of people at home.

At the end of academic 2019/2020 year, the schools were opened to provide exams and to evaluate students' achievements of online learning and their success in general<sup>19</sup>. At that time some research had already been published showing that online learning was not effective as was expected, especially for kids and pupils in the lower grades; it showed a negative impact on both – knowledge acquisition and skills development<sup>20</sup>.

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Distance teaching/learning was a decision in combating the spread of the Covid-19 virus and its effects on education according to the teachers have become increasingly clear negative for most of the students.

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UNICEF and UNESCO sounded the first alarm about students' deteriorating level of achieved knowledge. Results of PISA (Standard external assessments) also warned an alarm about significant learning loss during online education in winter/spring semester 2020. The Institute of Fiscal Studies (UK) focused on Covid-19's impact on education at primary school level; *"The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly worsened overall outcomes as well as widening inequalities. The share of pupils leaving primary school meeting literacy and numeracy benchmarks fell from 65% in 2018–19 to 59% in 2021–22. Children from more disadvantaged backgrounds may have fallen twice as far behind as the average child, in part due to worse experiences home learning."*<sup>21</sup> In Bulgaria, France, Greece, Italy and Spain the level of education decreased. In Iceland, where there weren't school long term and systemic school closures it was approximately the same.<sup>22</sup>

The numerous analytical results of the effects of school closures and distance learning showed that it is not acceptable for kids 6-12 years old to study in such modes at primary or/and secondary schools.<sup>23</sup> The second academic year 2020/2021 of the pandemic started as usual with in-person learning and distance learning was more dynamic based on dynamics of local pandemic situations.

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18 European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2022. Teaching and learning in schools in Europe during the COVID-19 pandemic. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union (pp 9-10); Teaching on the front line: National teacher responses to the COVID-19 crisis, 2021. Open Access under the Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 IGO (CC-BY-SA 3.0 IGO) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/igo/>)

19 There were no exams during the first academic year during the pandemic in Bulgaria and Greece

20 Aurini,J., Scott,D., 2021. COVID-19 school closures and educational achievement gaps in Canada: Lessons from Ontario summer learning research, *Can Rev Sociol*, May;58(2):165-185. doi: 10.1111/cars.12334. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34080780/>; Huang, R.H., Liu, D.J., Amelina, N., Yang, J.F., Zhuang, R.X., Chang, T.W., & Cheng, W, 2020.Guidance on Active Learning at Home during Educational Disruption: Promoting student's self-regulation skills in COVID-19 outbreak. Smart Learning Institute of Beijing Normal University (SLIBNU)

21 COVID-19 and literacy: Primary Schools, 2022. National Literacy Trust ([literacytrust.org.uk/information/what-is-literacy/covid-19-and-literacy/covid-19-and-literacy-primary-schools/](http://literacytrust.org.uk/information/what-is-literacy/covid-19-and-literacy/covid-19-and-literacy-primary-schools/))

22 <http://pisadataexplorer.oecd.org/ide/idepisa/dataset.aspx>;  
<https://eudashboards.sdgindex.org/map/indicators/pisa-score/trends>

23 Hristova, A., S.Petrova, E.Tosheva, 2021. Analysis of the effects on the learning process, on distance learning of students and teachers during the academic year 2020/2021, p.37 (in Bulgarian); Hajisoteriou, Ch.,2020. EDUCATION AT STAKE: LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM THE COVID-19 CRISIS, in: IN DEPTH – Volume 17 Issue 3, (May), CYPRUS CENTER FOR EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, University of Nicosia, pp 24-26; Munoz-Najar, A.,et al 2021. REMOTE LEARNING DURING COVID-19: Lessons from Today, Principles for Tomorrow, Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group



According to the study it is worth highlighting at least two major impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on pupils' learning behavior: 1) online learning was new and unusual and 2) there was long-term social isolation and uncertainty about the future.

Both of the above impacted students more profoundly and provoked great variation of reactions from stress and depression to confusion of value system. The combined effect of isolation and online teaching/learning could be summarized as follows:

- Educational inequality increased reflecting the educational and cultural level of parents and families;
- Academic knowledge was acquired at a slower rate and the achieved results were worse;
- Teachers/ educators were not well trained and prepared for online teaching;
- Teachers/ educators needed support to obtain capacity for online teaching;
- The rate of school drop outs continued to increase in lower socio-economic families;
- Parents and family members played a key role in online education;
- Parents and families did not know how to support their children in online learning.

# Methodology

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In response to the developing understanding of the impacts of COVID 19 – negative and positive, this project conducted research to identify how the periods of isolation during COVID-19 were reflected in the development of transferable skills of children between 6 and 12 years old. The aim was to create a common framework to support the development of these skills. Specifically, this research aims to clarify:

- The effects of isolation due to COVID-19 on the development of the selected transferable skills;
- The effects of school closures on learning behavior of pupils and impact of distance and blended learning (online and face-to-face);
- To reveal the readiness of teachers and educators to cope with the required changes of teaching, as well as the difficulties they faced and the support they needed.

The study collected both qualitative information and quantitative data.

**Target groups** of the study were primary school teachers, educators at out of school training activities and parents of pupils aged 6-12 years old who experienced online teaching. The aim was to collect and analyzed mirror information (from teachers and parents) about children's learning behavior, to understand better the effects of social isolation caused by the pandemic and the efficacy of distance learning.

**The basic method for data collection** of the quantitative information was a questionnaire, distributed through google forms. There were two questionnaires – one for educators and one for parents (Annex 1.) Both questionnaires had a set of questions aimed 1) to clarify how children's transferable skills were affected 2) to identify effects of isolation and distance education and 3) the difficulties teachers/educators faced during the rapid implementation of distance and blended teaching. Most of the questions in both questionnaires had mirror characteristics in order to gather perspectives from teachers and from parents about transferable skills development during school closures and distance teaching. To evaluate the effects of the school closure on skills development pairs of opposite effects describing aforementioned skills were offered asking the respondents to choose one of the options.

The questionnaires were designed and created by an expert group of project partners and approved by the project team. The identical translated versions were distributed in all partner countries. The online questionnaires were distributed through educational experts of all partners' networks, parents' associations, partner municipalities, direct personal contacts with directors of primary schools and public and private out of school centers that provided different extracurricular activities such as: school support to prepare homework, sports, different art activities (dance, painting, instrument playing, singing), foreign language activities, etc., all over the partner counties. Also, in Bulgaria the network of **chitalishta** was involved to reach parents of kids who were visiting out-of-school courses.

Most of the communication was conducted by e-mails and phones. Participation in the study was voluntary, anonymous, and snowball sampling. In this case the sample was typologically oriented, with a self-selection bias. Regardless of the limitations, results give a clear picture of the situation in each country. Moreover, the respondents were highly engaged in the education of their kids and had opinions about distance learning during Covid-19 pandemic.

Qualitative information was gathered via individual interviews. They were carried out face-to-face, and through videoconferencing by skype, zoom and other digital solutions. The interviewees

were selected by each partner. The interviews aimed to elucidate actual and substantial information about the items in the questionnaire for deeper understanding and clarification. The interviewees were from the study's targeted group: teachers, educators of out-of-school activities and parents. The interviews were carried out after the analysis of quantitative information. The number of respondents of the questionnaires and provided interviews was presented on the Table 1.

Table 1.

Country	Number of respondents – teachers/ educators	Number of respondents- parents	Number of interviewed teachers/ educators	Number of interviewed parents
Bulgaria	129	182	8	4
France	46	123	5	2
Greece	51	51	6	3
Iceland*/	7	15	4	
Italy	46	50	6	6
Spain	50	50	4	2
Total	329	471	33	17

*\*/ The data collected by NORTH Consulting (Iceland partner of the project) conducted a different study because of the different situation in education in comparison with the other partner countries during Covid-19 pandemic. The data analysis is presented separately.*

As demonstrated above there was a variation in respondents among the partner countries which was mainly based on voluntary participation and snowballing open dissemination of the questionnaires that was usually happened during online data collection.

Data collection took place over a **two-month** period between March-June 2022 based on the academic year in each partner country.

The study followed ethical protocols at all stages (requesting consent of the responders, providing privacy protection, equal treatment, transparency, validity, and reliability). Results were provided to any respondent who requested to see them.

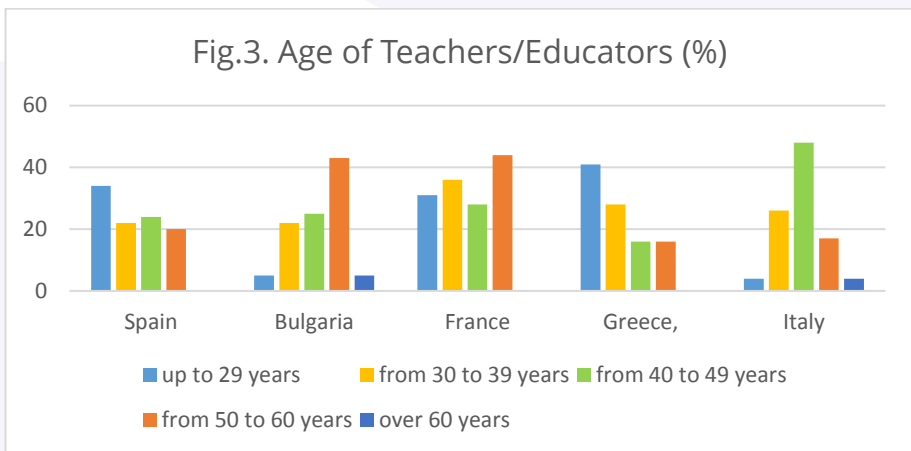
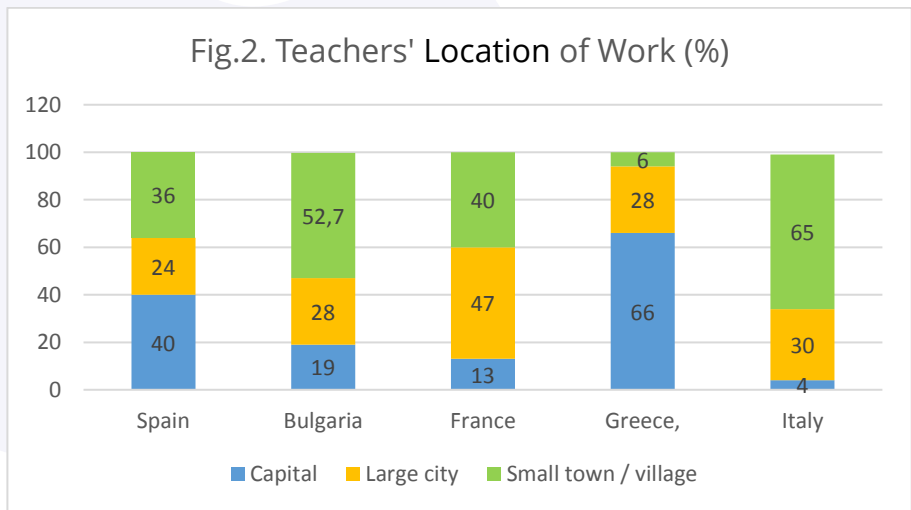
## Quantitative Results

### Profile of respondents

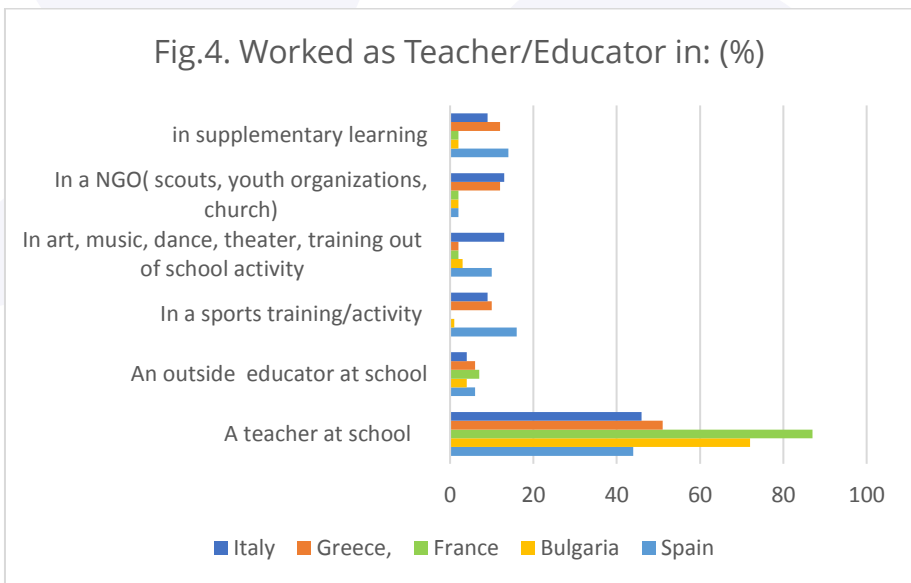
#### Profile of teachers/educators

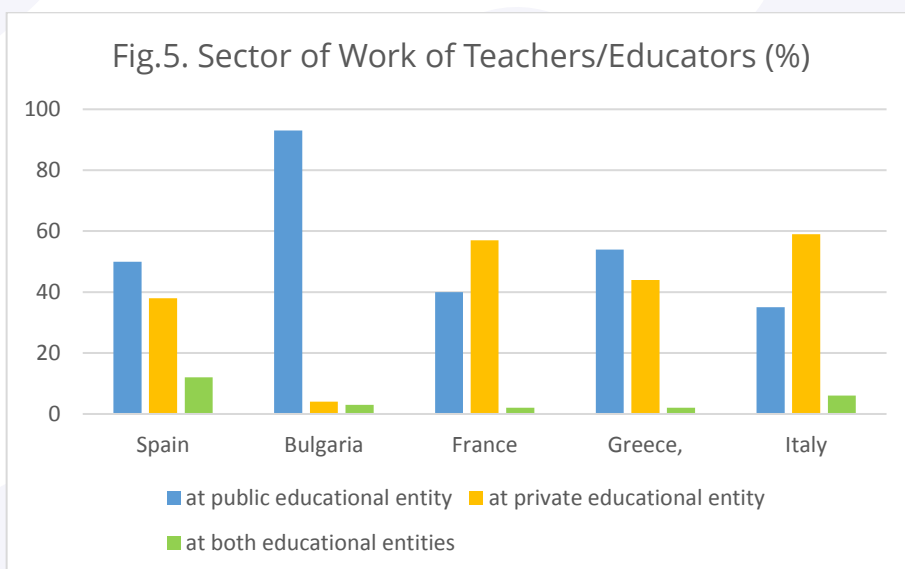
The study focused on two target groups: parents and teachers/educators at primary school and educational private centers working with children 6-12 years old. The questionnaire was completed by 329 teachers of which, on average, 78% were female and 22% were – males. Females were much more as it is well known teacher's profession in the partner countries is a female profession, but recently more men found it challenging. In Italy men were 39% of respondents and in Bulgaria they were only 7%. There was a balance between teachers who worked in large cities and in small settlements, except in Greece and Italy. (Fig.2)

The age group of the responders was diverse with the majority falling into 40-49 and 50-59 years old (Fig.3). In Bulgaria and Italy there were a few respondents over 60 years of age.



The majority of teacher respondents work in primary schools, most of them work in public schools. In some instances, there were teachers who worked at both – private and public educational entities (Fig.5.). In addition, the respondents reflected educators from supplementary training centers and chitalishte, some whom are resource teachers working with children with special educational needs; some are teachers of foreign languages, arts, music, dance and sports. All these additional trainings were traditional extra curricula education in partner counties (Fig.4 and 5).



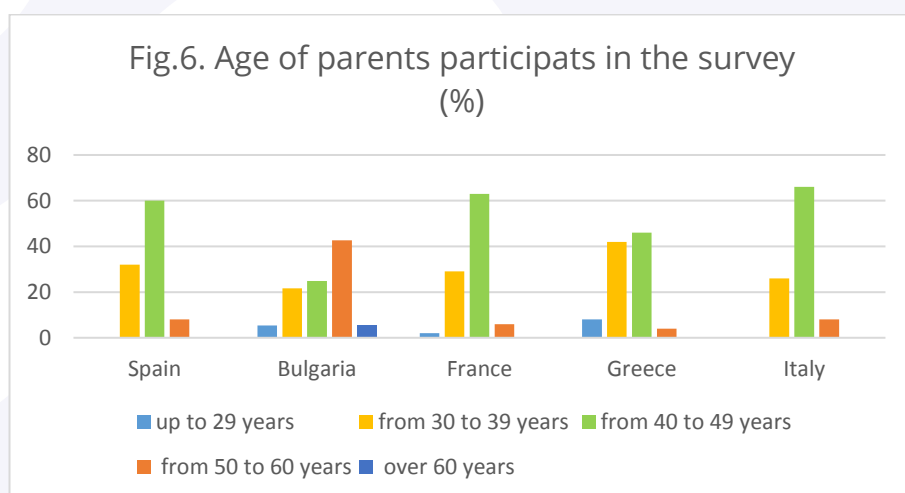


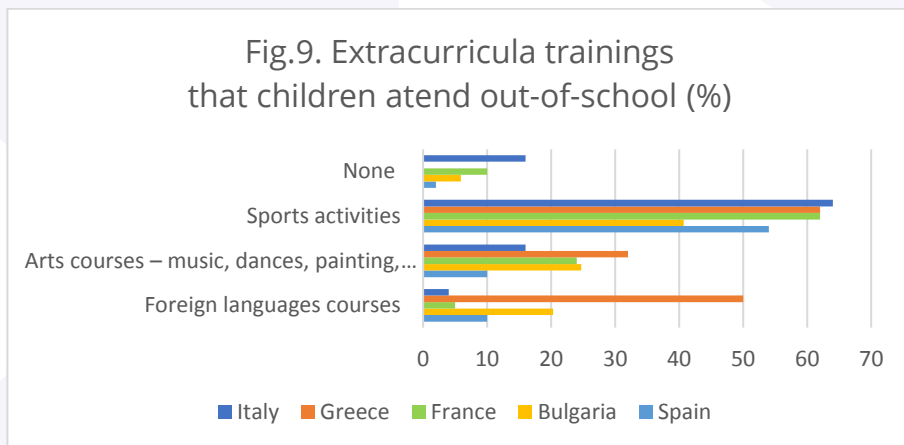
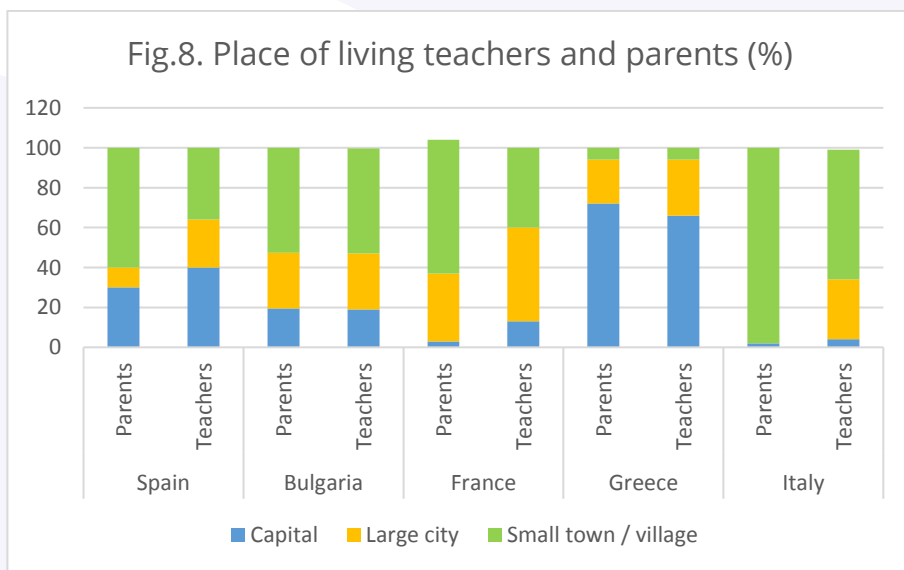
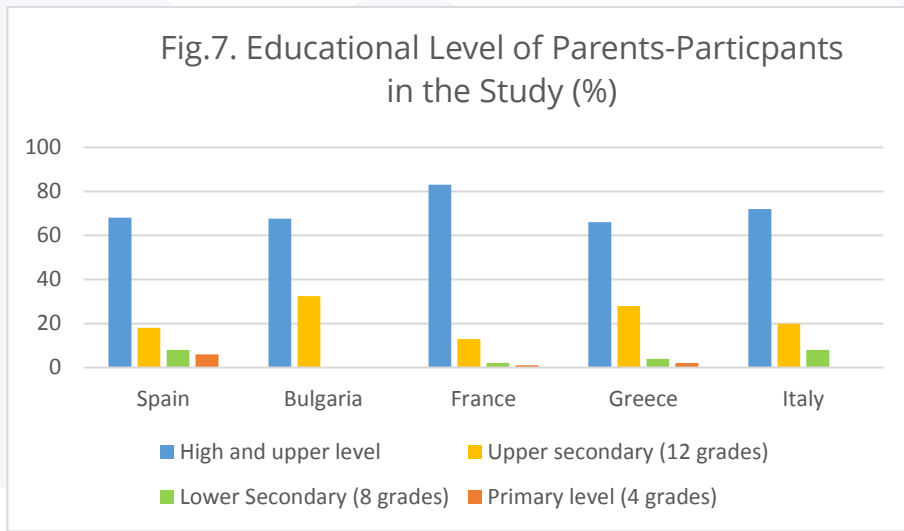
### Profile of parents

The questionnaire addressed to parents of children between 6 and 12 years of age was answered by 471 respondents, of which, on average, 86% were mothers and, 16% were fathers. In Italy and Bulgaria a small number of responders are describing their family condition as an extended, while the majority identify their families in a nuclear setting. The majority of respondents represented families were nuclear type of family with two children.

The age of respondents was similar in all partner countries (Fig.6.). Most of the respondents had completed higher education and a relatively large group had completed secondary level of education: gymnasium and professional schools (technical school.) No respondent in Bulgaria and Italy reported lower than secondary educational background and only one respondent reported so in the following countries: Spain, France and Greece. (Fig7.) So, by and large the study sample represents an educated group of parents, parents for whom education is a value, who are committed in curricula of their children.

Parent respondents reflected similar geographic regions as the educator respondents (Fig.8.). As a result of this geographic similarity, the data is treated as comparable among the parent and educator group. It gave us the right to accept and interpret the study data received by the two target groups – teachers/educators and parents as a mirror data, showing different aspects of one and the same study item – effect of school closure and implemented blending teaching on pupils’ learning behavior and especially on skills development.





It is important to note that the great majority of the interviewed parents said their children usually attend various extra curricula trainings; most of the children attended sport trainings, followed by art activities and foreign language courses. (Fig.9) Some of children combined several out of school trainings which usually are sport and art trainings. As more than a half of the parents – participants in the survey had higher education they valued their kids to take additional trainings and have put their efforts to ensure proper education at school and out of it. It is a tradition kids to have additional to public primary school trainings but it strongly depends of the educational

level of parents and family economic situation as these training are paid. In Bulgaria the network of chitalishta ensure various extracurricular training on relatively low fees that could be afforded by the families. The other reason is that there are chitalishta in all small settlements and so they are situated close to the places of living and it makes them a comfortable place for out-of-school activities.

Summarizing the samples of the study, the two target groups were typical for the general picture of educators in all countries: the majority of educators are female, the largest group is teachers aged between 40-59 years. Respondents lived in well distributed the representation of town, cities and rural areas. In Italy most of the respondents were living and working in small towns and villages, and in Greece – the majority of respondents live in the capital. The distribution of parents was similar: almost all they had completed a high level of education. The profiles of respondents from Italy and Bulgaria shared the most similarities in between. Thus, the *typology sample* of the study reflects the general picture of the social groups – target group of the project. The received data could be compared as well as to make some conclusions related to the over-all professional group – educators.

# Teaching/learning during Covid-19, evaluation the achievements of pupils

Covid-19 pandemic was the trigger for online education<sup>24</sup> to be widely implemented at schools, including primary schools in all European countries. Neither teachers nor families were ready for online education which suddenly became the norm of studying for a relatively long period.

Primary education system in all countries focused on oral lessons, explanations and exams, as well as some additional written papers in a few cases. Thus, online teaching was accompanied by introducing very different ways of teaching that were new to pupils and teachers alike. Online education became a challenge for teacher, children and their families. Teaching and communication was difficult for everybody. The lack of face-to-face contact between teachers and pupils made it difficult to truly assess learning outcomes during online learning. Both – teachers and pupils put a lot of effort based on their personal understanding about online teaching/learning to land the classical organization as well as possible.

*“The goals during the online education changed. The requirements of the teachers towards the students were less, and we tried not to overload the students in order not to stress them more. We gave them less homework and the level in the class got lower because we as teachers couldn't have the overall supervision of the students. We couldn't really evaluate the development of the students and sometimes we didn't know if the students were participating or not if they understand or if they need further explanation.”*

Teacher, Greece

*“It was very difficult. I could not get feedback with the pupils. Some of them missed online lessons, but they also missed face-to-face classes. We at school decided to give them more homework to push them to do something. But we did not get support from parents. Periods of online teaching for pupils was a holiday.”*

Teacher, Bulgaria, small town

*“It was difficult. First, as it happened to everyone, because of the initial uncertainty. We didn't know what was going to happen or how it was all going to end. Then, adapting a lot of activities or ideas that we had thought of to do in class, as always, adapting them to a digital format. [...]. It was also very difficult, for example, me with my students, we said “come on, let's have a meeting by Skype or Zoom or whatever. And at least we see each other, we talk, we play a board game together, I don't know...”. And as I was saying before, many didn't have the means, others, if I said “we'll connect at 12 o'clock”, would still be asleep and wouldn't connect. It was complicated, we lost a lot of rhythm because we couldn't control what was being done one hundred percent. It was difficult to keep control from home.”*

Educator, Spain

*“For me as a teacher the transition period from teaching at class to online teaching was very difficult. I had totally to change the lesson design presentations; I was not sure what pupils understood at all. In the beginning, I saw them on the cameras but later – they managed to fix cameras in a way not to be seen. Kids are very quick and well oriented working with digital technologies. My pupils are in 3 grade and they are very smart. For me, the most difficult was to evaluate what they have learned. So, when we were back to in-person education I had to reassess everything. In parallel to the new teaching*

24 Online education, distant and remote education in the text is used as synonymous.



*program, I had to make a revision – let us say – revision, but in fact it was teaching unknown study material..... Blended teaching is not suitable for primary and even for secondary schools.”*

Teacher, Bulgaria, the capital

*“It has been a real challenge because there have been teachers who have had to adapt to the circumstances and start using platforms that we had not used until then. This was on the part of the teacher. We also faced the difficulty that sometimes we had to modify the class timetable because not all students have free access to the internet in a total time slot, but they have had to limit themselves a little to the circumstances at home.”*

Educador, Spain

*“It was really not easy to teach remotely. On the one hand, I did not have sufficient computer skills to offer original media such as padlet, or a youtube channel, which limited the content I offered. On the other hand, it seemed really impossible to evaluate the students during this period. I really enjoyed the return to face-to-face teaching.”*

Teacher, Primary school, France

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Teachers were highly engaged to teach their pupils online effectively and many of them worked with individual pupils who need more support, voluntarily nevertheless that it needs extra time and efforts.

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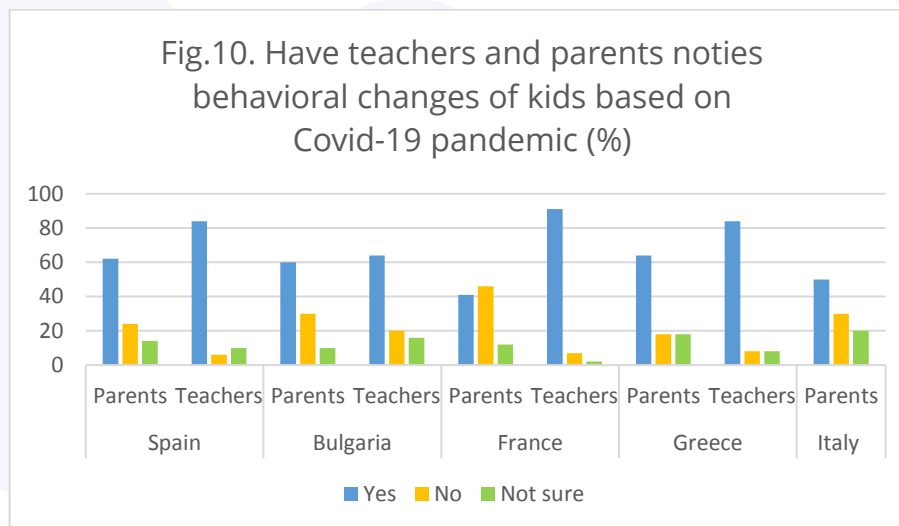
Almost half of the teachers-participants in the study worked additional time with pupils in Bulgaria, France and Spain. **Such additional work was offered usually by teachers themselves when it was possible, nevertheless it involved extra time and effort.** In Greece and Italy teachers also worked additional time during online teaching periods, whoever they contended with restrictions which limited their ability to do so more often. Restrictions in the partner countries varied and depended by the level of pandemic disseminations.

The impact of online teaching were better recognized when the pupils returned back to the classrooms. For some pupils it was after 1-3 weeks (FR, SP) during the beginning of Covid pandemic. In other countries pupils didn't go to school for the whole second semester during the first pandemic year (2019-2020) and continued to have periods of school closures during the second academic year, 2020-2021 (BG, GR, IT).

The periods of total school closures were different by country (see Fig.1) but the findings of the effects on acquired knowledge, on soft skills development and on pupils' behavior were similar. Both teachers and parents appraised that they saw visible changes in the pupils' behavior as a result of school closures and the periods of staying at home with limited contacts with peers (Fig.10). The results of study carried out in Iceland (see below) also reported behavioral changes of pupils even though face-to-face teaching had not been interrupted.

Educators/teachers and parents predominantly assessed these changes as negative, although both of them identified some positive impacts as well. Educators found out that some skills were forgotten. A potential area for increased exploration is that children had more unstructured (or free of studding) time in which to explore their own interests, unencumbered by the expectations of after school activities and the adults running them. **This revealed result rises a fundamental question about the optimal balance between structured and unstructured time for creativity development and in general for personal development; what could be such balance in different ages.** It could be a task for further studies.

The main positive effects of online learning reported by teachers and parents concerned their pupils increasing IT knowledge and diversifying the pupil's use of computer technology beyond gaming. There were only a few shares about other positive effects of online learning but they could



related to innate character of the child and his/her type of multiple intelligences determining the social behavior.

*"On the part of some students I have noticed an increased desire to get in touch with me and have a discussion on various issues, those strictly educational but not only."*

Teacher, primary school, Italy

*"My child accepts new information much better through computer, feels calm and undisturbed during lessons. I think that he learns more than in class teaching. He likes to be alone and to study alone. Of course, he asks me questions when he does not understand and I explain.... I am at home during on-line lessons, but do not stay together with him. ..."*

Mother of a boy, primary school, Bulgaria

*"Let's say that the pandemic has meant a before and after for learning and adapting. Most of the teachers have taken up some instruments, some platforms, which we started to work with because of the pandemic. For example, classes through the EducaMadrid platform, the virtual classroom... I think that the use of these platforms that were not used so much in some schools has increased and today in the schools it has been seen that "they were successful, we are going to incorporate them". [...]. In general terms, we have taken what was done in education before and what was done during the pandemic. There is a mix. We have taken the best of everything."*

Educator, Spain

*"I make a positive evaluation. I don't know if this is also related to the child's maturation in recent years, but before the pandemic he had a lot of difficulty working independently and since the pandemic he works more independently. And I think the pandemic made a big difference. Whether it was more mature or not.... I think that having to work from home, having to be in charge, or the fact that we [referring to the parents] were also working at home... that has worked. I make a positive evaluation of the pandemic."*

Mother of a pupil, Spain

*"As a family, we took this opportunity to spend time with each other at home, exercise as much as we could, and play games. [...] During that time, my kid had stopped the extra curriculum activities."*

Parent, Greece

*“Socialisation period bonded us as a family, we had the chance to spend time all together. I don’t think that it was bad for our family, we found ways to spend our time in a creative way. [...] During that time, my kids didn’t have extra curriculum activities.”*

Parent, Greece

It is worth mentioning that Covid-19 pandemic had also some indirect effect on pupil’s development. Parents reported increased time with their families for communication. During Covid-19 pandemic time communication inside the family was increased and at the same time social contacts were limited; Covid-19 has created tension and fear in society that marked people’s behavior. Children had to orient themselves in this new living environment. Social living conditions had also indirect impact on children’s adaptation to pandemic restrictions.

In the countries in which there was total limitation of social contacts and all family members were obliged to stay at home for long periods, which was not usual for most of them, the social isolation provoked conflicts, tension between family members, that impacted the children. These are examples of indirect effects of Covid-19 on education, which could be topics for future research.

*“During the time we were obliged to stay at home of course we had more time to communicate with our children. They /kids/ liked it, we spend more time together. But we have to stay all the time closed inside. And it began to stress all of us.”*

Mother of two pupils, Bulgaria

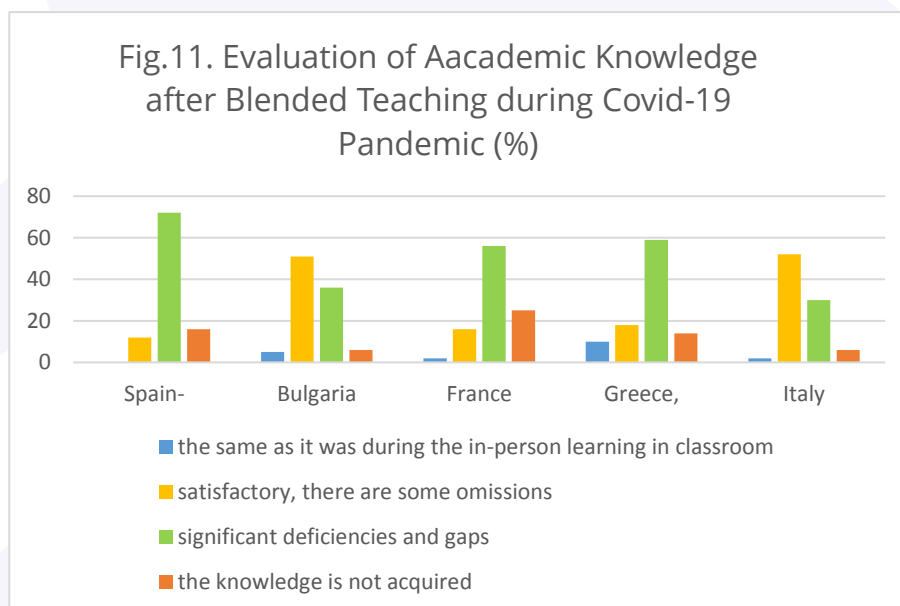
It is possible that educators were more negative in their evaluations than parents because they were predominantly focused on evaluating the learning outcomes of their pupils. In contrast, parents were looking the general effects of social isolation and turning their home into a study and working spaces.

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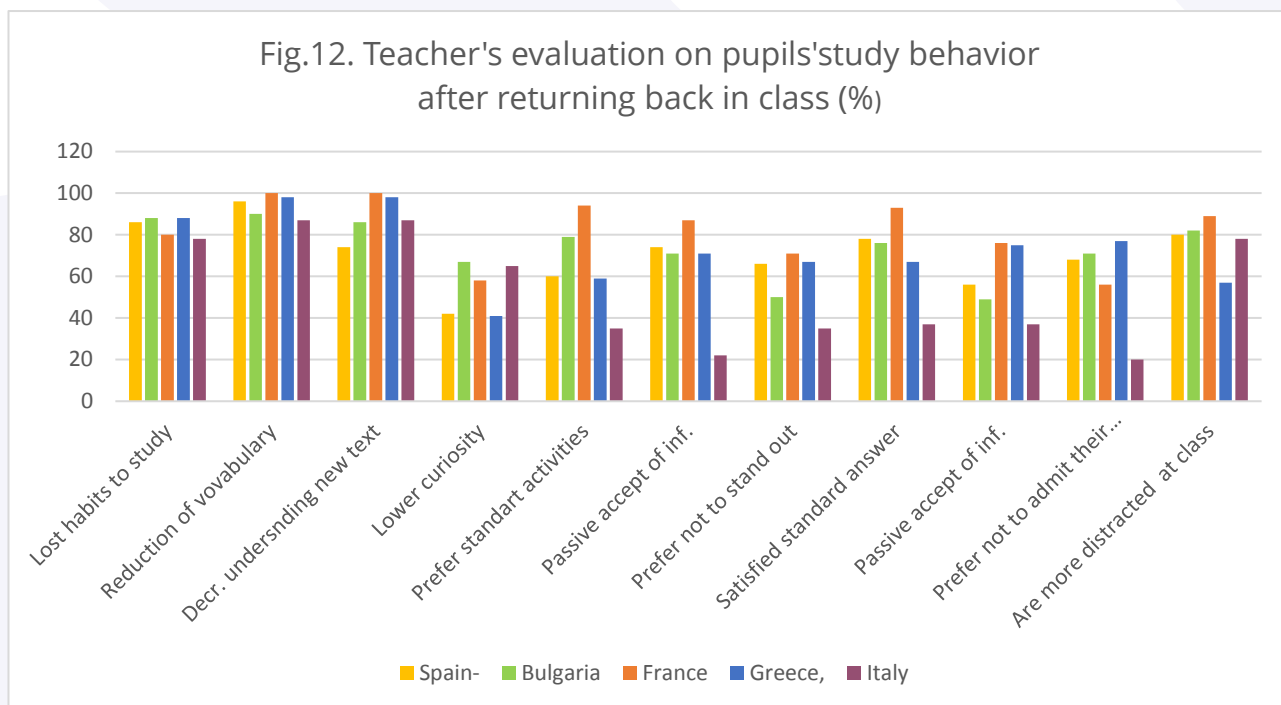
The majority of teachers/educators shared that there were visible negative changes after the periods of school closures. They reported *“significant deficiencies and gaps of knowledge”* and whether *“any knowledge was not acquired”*.

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In Spain, France and Greece evaluators were more critical and demanding of pupils than in Bulgaria and Italy (Fig.11.) The presented satisfactory level may be due to lower criteria and demandingness of teachers, which is associated with an effort to empathize with pupils placed in the uncomfortable Covid situation. *Blended teaching was not capable to replace traditional teaching at class.*



In addition to the report of decreasing knowledge, the impact on transferable skills was reported as even worse (Fig.12). Teachers/ Educators indicated that returning to class pupils had lost their interest in studying, especially reading books. As such pupils' 'active vocabulary became limited, most of them faced difficulties in expressing themselves. The pupils' understanding a new text worsened; pupils didn't demonstrate critical thinking and passively accepted any new information. They had become more secluded and less certain. At the same time, the majority of pupils preferred not to admit their mistakes with the, exception of pupils in Italy. About half of the teachers observed that the pupils were less interested in standing in front of the class, in expressing their own ideas, or explaining and defending their decisions. About half of the pupils were satisfied with standard answers. There were differences in the assessment that could be based on variations of the educational approaches in the countries, but the overall trend was the same.



In parallel of decreasing the knowledge the impact to transferable skills was even worse (Fig.12). Teachers indicated that returning back in class pupils had lost their interests on studying and especially on reading books and so pupils 'active vocabulary became limited, most of them faced difficulties to express themselves. The understanding of a new text has worsened; pupils rejected to think critically and prefer to accept passively any new information; they had become more closed in themselves and uncertain. At the same time, the majority preferred not to admit their mistakes, except kids in Italy. About half of the teachers recognized that the pupils became less interested to stand out in front of the class and to express any own idea or to stand for their own task decisions. About half of the pupils were satisfied with standard answers. There were differences in the assessment that could be based on variations of the educational approaches in the countries, but the over-all trend was the same.

In general, educators/teachers pointed out that pupils were less attentive during the lesson, were easily distracted and seemed to be bored. Teachers/Educators in all countries observed an increase in pupils' anxiety and some of them shared that they requested the help of psychologists to cope with the existing alarming situation after Covid-19.

*"It was very difficult to return pupils' behavior towards learning at class. They were so anxious, nervous, worried ... They did not hear anything what I was saying. We did not know what to do. The director decided to ask for help te psychologist and together to solve the problems. ... Psychologists identified a very high level of anxiety in most of the pupils. We had to work together with parents.... It was very difficult to explain to them the problems. ... it took a long time to reestablish a normal learning environment at class."*

Teacher Bulgaria, small town

*"I think my daughter became closed herself during that time and easily started to be bored with the online school. In the beginning, she liked it, because the pandemic brought all the family members together and we got to spend more time with each other. I understood that my kid was more afraid now than before, even if we discussed the pandemic and we tried not to stress her out. She was wearing the mask even in places where it was not mandatory to do so. At the beginning of the school year, I think it took her 1 month to adapt to the school environment and she had good contact with her classmates"*

Mother, Greece, the capital

*"After the return to face-to-face learning, the gaps between students had widened. Some students had not worked for various reasons; Some did not have a computer or had to share it with their siblings, others had parents who were unavailable to accompany them during online work. And other children with enormous progress because they had been able to benefit from good supervision from the parents."*

Teacher, France

*"Also the attention. They struggle to pay attention to a task for 5 minutes. I have also noticed a greater irritability. A greater irritation about everything. In general, I have noticed more nervousness."*

Educator, Spain

As an educator from Spain focused on Covid-19 pandemic effects on changing communication skills and stopped the personal development of children:

*"Children now communicate very well with adults, or prefer to be sheltered by adults, rather than communicate with each other [...], they don't know how to communicate with other children"*

Educator, Spain

There was no doubt that Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the education to all students and pupils from lower grades suffered a lot. Moreover, pupils have lost transferable skills significantly as well as the attitude for studying. UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank warned of a global education crisis and have sounded a strong alarm: *"The longer the school interruption, the larger the learning loss"*. Some research stressed: about 64% of pupils demonstrate a decreased abilities in reading comprehension, and only a third of 10-year-olds are able to read and understand a simple written story. The research showed that about 30% of pupils feel loneliness, uncertainty, irritability; 20% reported their anxiety and sadness<sup>25</sup>. The parents had a key role children to overcome the Covid-19 crisis with less negatives.

25 Impacts of the COVID-19 on preschool and school education in Bulgaria, June, 2020, UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/bulgaria/en/media/11011/file>; Covid-19 Recovery, Working Together to Restore our Shared Humanity, Giannini, St., Jenkins, R., Saavedra, J., 100 weeks into the pandemic: the importance of keeping schools open and investing in learning recovery programs, 2022 (Jan). <https://web.archive.unesco.org/web/20220315161142/> <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/>

## Changing pupils' educational behavior – parents' opinion

Distance learning completely changed the education model during the closures. Parents, and respectively other family members, became completely accountable for their children's education and observed the changes in their learning habits. While teachers/educators focused on the pupils' level of academic knowledge and focused more on the shift in learning attitudes and loss of skills such as responsible decision making and critical thinking, parents focused on the ways their children studied on-line at home. All parents, in all countries, pointed out that their children needed support to complete their online lessons, and this support was usually given to them by someone person, at home, who was next to the child during lessons.

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Everyone- teachers/educators and parents in all countries pointed out that pupils could not learn alone and needed support to study online.

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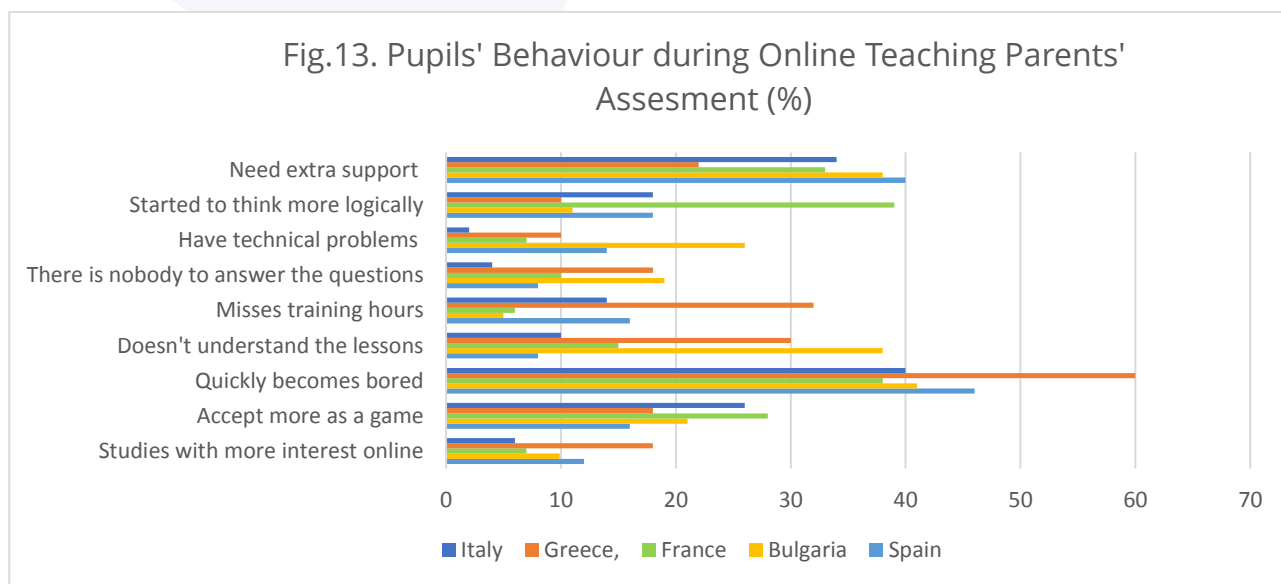
Parents shared that their children often didn't understand what the teacher expected them to do, and usually they did not have enough time to answer to what the teacher had asked for. Often the pupils did know the answer and even they know the answer they did not have enough time to reply. Parents pointed out that their children very quickly became bored and could not follow the teaching process, did not understand the lessons and needed additional explanations. Some parents could help, others were not able to do so. (Fig.13.)

During on-line lessons children were interested in doing other things. When they wanted to move they got up and did so by walking around the room, going to the toilet, or to get something to eat. During the interviews, parents shared that their children, especially those that were 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, usually had toys in their hands during lessons, and some even refused to study on-line and often missed lessons.

*"...For kids, meeting online was a game. They started showing the things they have at home to each other and it was difficult to stay quiet and concentrate. He always wanted to move across the room, but he couldn't concentrate, he felt at home so he thought he could do whatever he wanted".*

Mother, Greece, the capital

Fig.13. Pupils' Behaviour during Online Teaching Parents' Assesment (%)



*“Overall it was difficult for the parents to support their children during the pandemic since we are not educators, teachers, or professionals to give proper guidance to the children. At the same time, it was difficult for the children to follow some routines, wake up on time and be in a program. Sometimes they were late to attend the class and they needed a lot of push from our side.”*

Mother, Greece, the capital

*“To study online for my girl was a game. Before the lessons she took her favorite toy... they bot – she and the toy were at school...”*

Mother, Bulgaria, large town

*“I found that my daughter had become more independent during this period. My husband and I also had to work remotely and we didn't always have the opportunity to make ourselves available to accompany him in his school work.”*

Mother of a 10-year-old daughter, France

Some parents hired tutors to cover the educational program, others asked teachers to work individually with their children. Families had to decide by themselves how to support their children during on-line teaching. “Parents had to become teachers”, “now our home is a school”, could be heard everywhere very often. Some people said that with approval, others with criticism about the existing educational reality. Essentially, the study revealed the importance of creating of “a study home space” to mark the space for the children and to help them concentrate on learning<sup>26</sup>. The role of a defined space is somehow to replicate the classroom by setting the appropriate environment. During distance learning parents didn't know the importance of creating a study space and they needed help to understand it and to make such study home space. Distance learning revealed while the majority of pupils had personal electronic devices at home, it was not enough to create a study environment.

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Creating a defined space for school to take place at home is an important tool that helps children differentiate between home time and school time.

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It is worth to mention that pedagogical approaches was an important factor pupils to keep and strengthen already formed skills. When the pedagogical approach gives the pupils more time for solving less structured tasks <sup>27</sup> (guided by teachers/educator and parents usually out of class), pupils were more free in their decisions and were able to cope in a new situation by themselves, such as the Covid pandemic was. And the opposite – if the teaching methodology focuses mainly on structured tasks it is expected pupils to be more limited in their decision making and to be less able to cope in a new unknown situations.

The Covid-19 pandemic made visible to everyone that parents had to be intimately involved in the children's education. Teachers and parents have to collaborate, be partners in the personal development of the children. Teachers without parental support could not fulfil the roles.

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26 The same results published Arnou,Ch, Cornelis , G., Jan Heymans. P., et al.2021. COVID-19 and educational spaces: Creating a powerful and social inclusive learning environment at home, Acad. paper

27 Less structured tasks are usual practice in some schools. Pupils spend more time out of school per week with their families, not only during regular vacations and weekends. It is also time for studying as they have to visit museums, gardens (botanic and zoo), art galleries, open air ecological activities, etc. which is a part of the educational program. As it is a regular practice – a part of the education system parents accepts their role and collaborate with teachers.

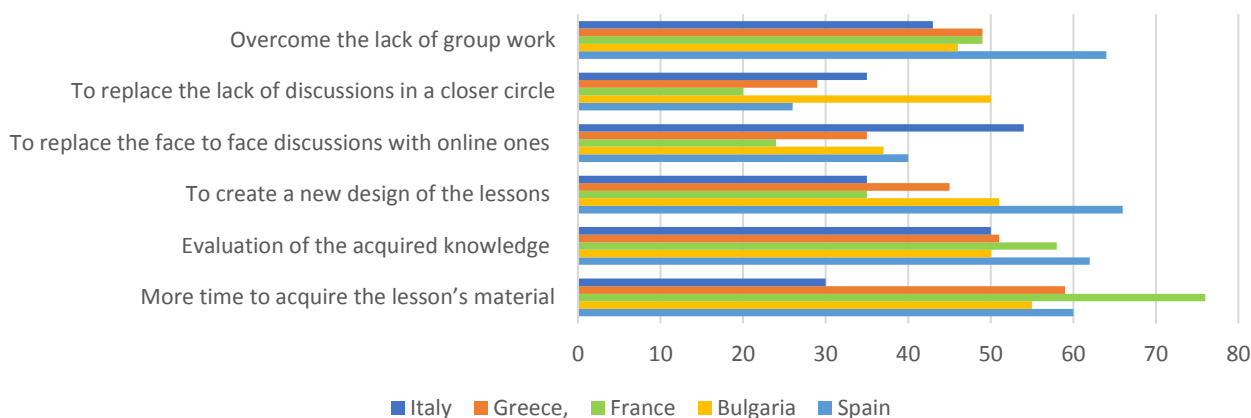
## Blended education, changes and difficulties in teaching

It is already well known that Covid-19 pandemic and the implemented blended education caused a significant change in the teaching process. In hindsight, it is obvious that teachers/ educators were not prepared for this rapid change. Teachers/educators were faced with a situation in which they had to adapt to distance and blended teaching, to use the online platforms and to rearrange their methods of presenting the lessons material. They had, to teach themselves how to create virtual classrooms, how to communicate with pupils during virtual lessons, how to get feedback and to evaluate pupils' achievements, etc. For the majority of them this was a period of *self-learning by doing*.

The study aimed to identify the changes that teachers/educators faced to adapt lessons for online teaching, difficulties that teachers / educators encountered implementing these methods, and the needs they had during the period of online teaching. It was important to understand what type of help teachers/ educators expected to get. Results by country are presented in Fig. 14. They revealed the changes that teachers /educators had to undergo in each country. Some of teachers / educators were more prepared to transfer in-class teaching into virtual teaching (FR and IT), others had less difficulty organizing virtual discussions (GR). Teachers /educators in Italy needed less time to transfer to virtual teaching as they got immediate external support from various institutions. The results reveal that getting feedback and evaluating pupils' achievements was new and unknown territory and they didn't have any good practices to follow.

Further analyzing the changes that teachers/ educators had to implement, the study revealed that teachers' qualifications were not sufficient and most of them stated that **they had many difficulties in their transition to teaching on-line**. (Fig.15). The main difficulties were related to the changes they had to cope with to: adapt study materials for online teaching, learn how to use the existing potential of the digital technologies (available software) for lessons presentations, organize pupils to work in groups, encourage individual participation, and to find forms for interactive virtual teaching, etc. To keep pupils' attention and concentration during a virtual lesson was a challenge for most of them. They highlighted that it was most difficult to keep their pupils' active and engaged with the lessons.

Fig.14. Changes That Teachers Have to Make for Blended Teaching (%)





The most difficult for teachers during online learning is how to maintain the active participation of each pupil, to keep concentration of his attention to the assigned tasks.

Evaluating the pupils' achievements during online teaching was also very tricky as virtual classroom had many variations depending on the pupil's family. In fact teachers could not get real feedback of pupil's knowledge, could not follow pupils' achievements as there wasn't evaluating mechanism available for online teaching. Evaluation of pupil's skills was made by teachers using their self-created methods, which in general were based on practical experiences. It was not possible for teachers to use evaluation methods they were using in classroom, as they could not watch and examine pupils' behavior during online lessons.

It is worth to mention to use educational platforms was not a problem for teachers. In all countries teachers either had no problems using educational platforms or if they had such – it was easily surmountable.

Today, after a two years implementing blended teaching teachers can exactly determine what kind of support they need. The majority of them believed they needed various types of technical support to be capable to use software and digital platforms that could enrich teaching in more attractive ways. (SP, GR) Also, they stressed the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents for an effective teaching-learning process for pupils, they needed external support in developing evaluation mechanisms (Fig.16). **An important help that educators needed was to find appropriate methods to keep the balance between active and interactive learning both – during online and face-to-face classrooms.** There had been revealed differences between countries which could be based on variations in national criteria for evaluation, existing already external and in-school organized support, possibility for informal aid, etc. Anyway, the study revealed that the greatest need was a new mechanism for online evaluation focusing on skills and feedbacks with pupils to be created and so, teachers to have an applicable adequate tool. It could be with or without parents' involvement.

There was no doubt that blended education could be a key decision for continuing teaching during extreme and risky social and health circumstances. Blended education is an option also to find ways to deal with existing limitations for some students when couldn't go to school and at same time not missing lessons. Covid-19 pandemic was a social crisis during which blended education was rapidly implemented. As it was above mentioned – the infrastructure more or less

Fig.15. Differences Teachers Face During Blended Education (%)

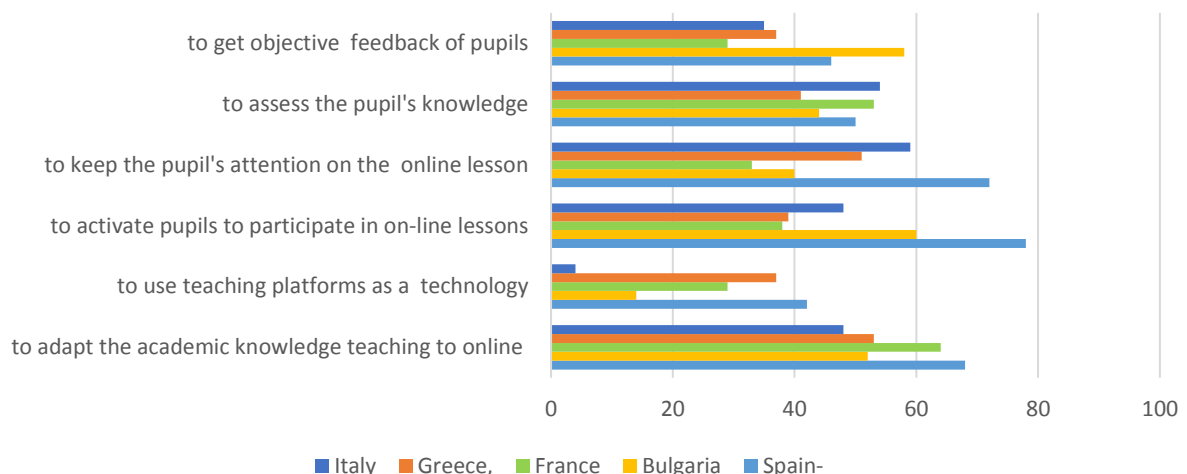


Fig.16. Teachers' Expectations for Support (%)

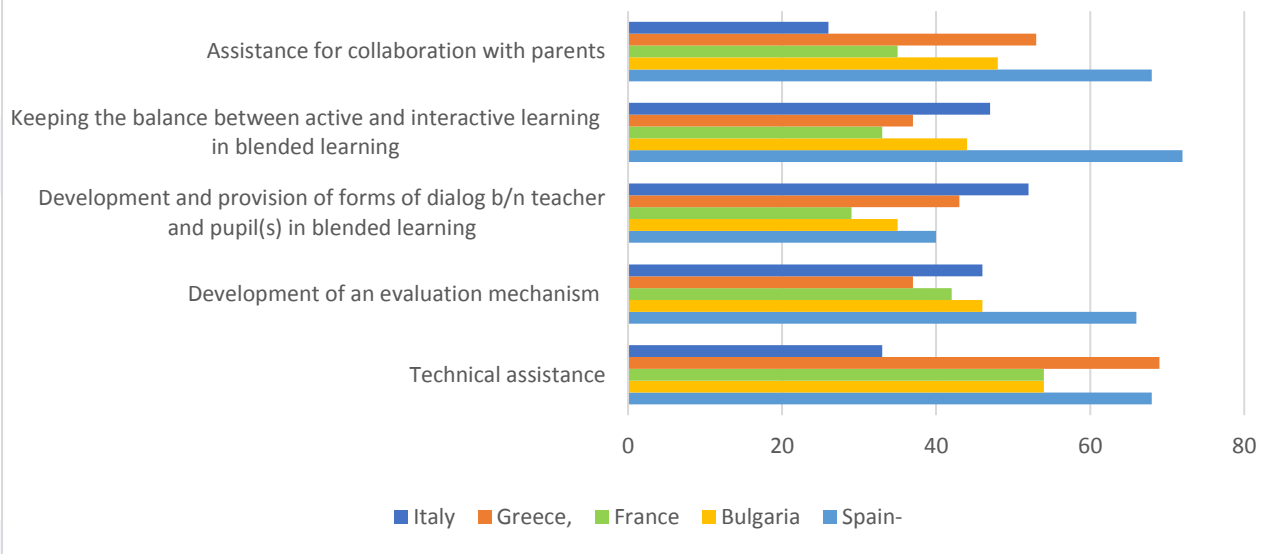
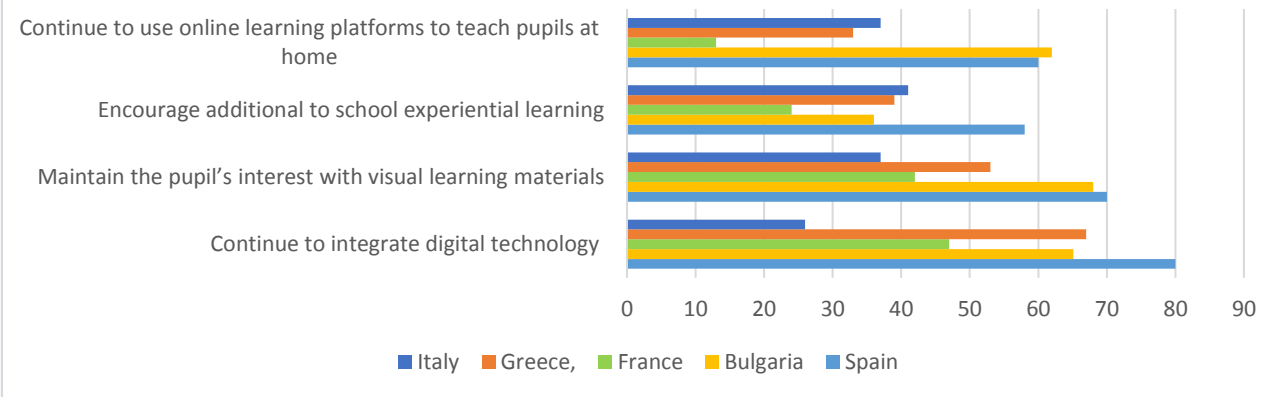


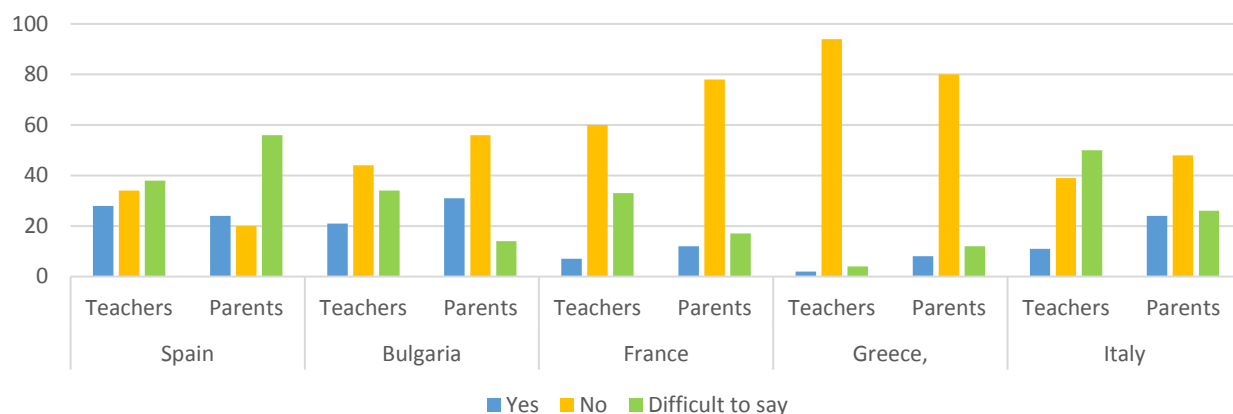
Fig.17. What Teachers Plan to Use from Blended Education in the Future (%)



certain as IT sector was prepared to face the needs of the society, governments took measures to ensure access to the needed infrastructure. But the actors in the online education – teachers, pupils and families, were not prepared. Nevertheless, teachers evaluated the usage of IT in teaching as positive and facilitating pupils’ understanding tool when it is implemented during in-person study (Fig.17.) Moreover, it is a digital technology that children are already accustomed with and like it.

At the same time, neither teachers nor parents believe that blended education could be used in the future as a norm. Parents were more negative as they evaluate online learning, not online teaching (Fig.18.). Both, teachers and parents accepted blended education as a form of teaching only in crises and during special needs like epidemic, long-term disease of some pupils with special educational needs (SEN). Online teaching could not replace and ensure in-person full education for all students and especially for pupils.

Fig.18. Blended Education Could Become an Educational option in the Future (%)



Teachers at primary schools shared:

*“Kids cannot be taught online. They cannot stay alone in front of the computer and learn what I am teaching. Even if they are together with a family member it is very difficult for me to be sure that the child hears and understands what I am saying. Most difficult for pupils and also for me is to teach them writing skills. The new combination – computer, paper and a pen disorganizes the learning process. Mathematic lessons are easier and the dialogue with the child is much clear, but still I don’t know who is answering to my questions – the child or the family person next to him. The teaching-learning online situation is always confusing especially in first grade..... No, blended teaching is impossible at primary schools.”*

Teacher, Bulgaria, small town

*“For me as a teacher the transition period from teaching at class to online teaching was very difficult. I had totally to change the lesson design presentations; I was not sure what pupils understood at all. In the beginning, I saw them on the cameras but later – they managed to fix cameras in a way not to be seen. Kids are very quick and well oriented working with digital technologies. My pupils are in 3 grade and they are very smart. For me, the most difficult was to evaluate what they have learned. So, when we were back to in-person education I had to reassess everything. In parallel to the new teaching program, I had to make a revision – let us say – revision, but in fact it was teaching unknown study material..... Blended teaching is not suitable for primary and even for secondary schools. “*

Teacher, Bulgaria, the capital

*“Blended teaching, yes it is difficult but it is also a challenge for me. In the beginning I was very enthusiastic, putting a lot of efforts to prepare lessons for online teaching ,and thinking about how to make lessons attractive for my pupils. Later, difficulties began to appear. The contacts between me and the pupils were not defined, the efforts to organize the online team-work failed, and parents instead of helping the learning process unconsciously they impeded it by answering instead of their kids. It was difficult to evaluate pupils achieved knowledge, not talking about skills development.”*

Teacher, Bulgaria, small town

*"I have a love-hate relationship with new technologies and so on. I think they are a very useful resource, very important [...], but making them the only basis for everything seems a bit risky to me. In the end they (the children) lose a lot of things, including these social skills of contact, of closeness"*

Educator, Spain

*"It's harder for children to think or take initiatives because they are quick to look for information on the internet".*

Educator, Spain

Parents were even more negative about blended teaching to become an option of traditional education. Interviewed parents complain that online learning did not stimulate the curiosity of their children, and decreased their attitudes to study.

*"Online learning is not for pupils. Yes, they became very smart dealing with digital technologies but it is not knowledge. Because of my control they stayed in front of the computers during online lessons but what they were doing - it is the problem. I think that they were missing most of the lessons as they were only physically there. Teachers had to find more interesting forms of teaching.... Blended teaching... No, it is not a solution. Online education for kids is unexpected vacation, time for play."*

Mother of twins, Bulgaria, the capital

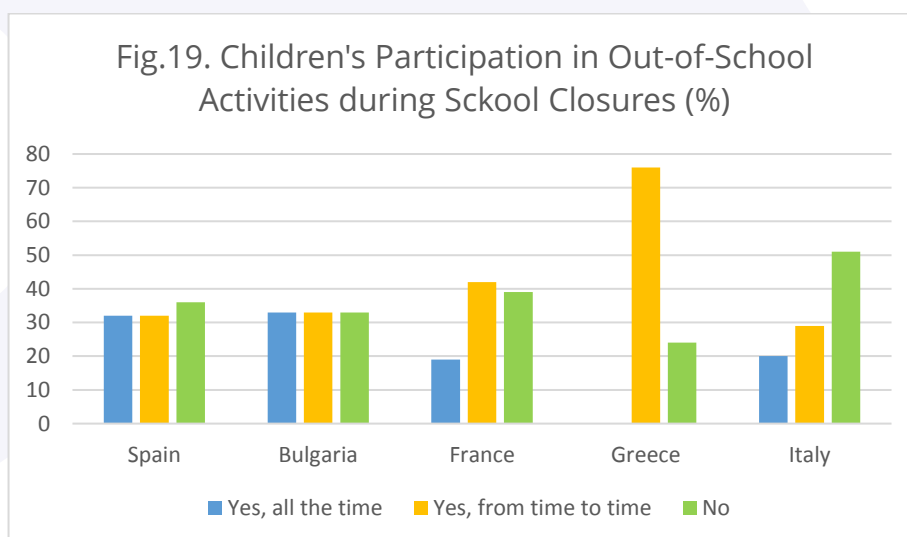
*"Well, I think they have been allies perhaps during the pandemic (in reference to the new technologies). They have allowed them (in reference to the children) not to isolate themselves too much, but no, I think that they are a temporary fix for those moments. However, where there is physical contact, face-to-face contact... [...]. I don't think the screens will ever replace that. And certainly not at that age"*

Mother, Spain

# Out-of-school activities during COVID-19 pandemic (2020/2021 and 2021/2022 school years)

Traditionally children attend different out of school activities like: foreign languages in private courses, sport exercises, participate in different art courses: dances, ballet, and painting. (Fig.9.) Only a few of the parents – participants in the study, said that their children did not have any out-of-school's educational activities and about 30% said that children attend more than one out-of-school activity. All these out-of-school activities as well as extracurricular activities at schools provided after the lessons were even more limited by the anti-pandemic measures than regular schools. All these activities were closed for long periods in all countries. No one of the respondents reported these private courses transferred their teaching into online teaching. Some training courses – especially teaching foreign language changed their organization of teaching. Group teaching was transferred to individual one. This gave educators and children the opportunity not to stop learning but do it in a changed learning environment. There was no communication with peers during lessons as learner was alone with the teacher. Educators quickly had to design another model of teaching. But not all of the foreign language courses continued to function during the closure periods of educational entities.

The wish of parents was out-of-school trainings to continue to function during the periods of school closures. Parents were ready to support different organizational and pedagogical changes that facilitated pupils attendance to out-of-school trainings: on average about 30% continued to go regularly to the out-of-school activities, other 30% said that they go from time to time and 30% – stopped to attend any trainings. Anti-COVID pandemic measures did not totally closed out of school activities neither in the capital and large cities nor in the small towns and villages (Fig.19). But out-of-school activities were more reduced in small towns. Only in Greece there was strong closure of these trainings and there were no possibility kids to go out of their homes.



The study revealed that sport and art activities were the most reduced ones. Some of the courses closed and did not open any more or they continued to function only with a few children.

*"After Covid restrictions kids that continued to participate in my trainings were only a quarter of the usual participants."*

Educator of sport dances, Bulgaria

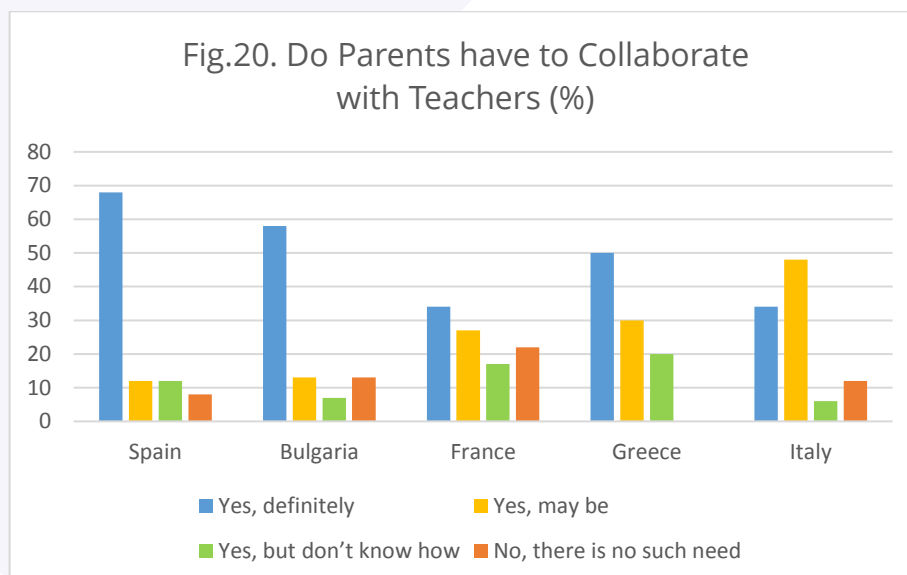
*"Children that came back after the periods of closure decreased a lot. From about 40 children organized in 4 training groups today (May 2022) – an year after the start of the Covid pandemic, they are only the half, organized in 2 training groups."*

Ballet Educator, small town, Bulgaria

The decrease of pupils' participation in out-of-school training was based to complex reasons like: demotivation of children themselves to continue to go to trainings, financial difficulties for parents to continue to pay for additional trainings as some of them had lost their jobs, re-assessment of family priorities during long stay at home, changing the style of family living during social communication limitations periods. Some decisions to stop attending additional trainings based also the insecurity healthy actuality in the communities as schools were open but Covid virus continued to be active. Related to the level of skills development, educators said that kids had forgotten almost everything and the training had to start from the very beginning.

# Parents' and teachers' collaboration

Definitely one of the positive effects of online teaching was that parents and teachers started to collaborate. For a long time teachers tried to involve somehow parents in education of their children, but there was no great success. Wide spread opinion was that schools were responsible for education and if there were problems – parents argued with teachers about their work. Today most of the parents (families) had a clear understanding that they have to collaborate with teachers in developing to ensure good educational level for their children (Fig.20). Covid-19 pandemic and online learning helped parents to look at their role in a different way. Concerning forming the transferable skills it was obvious that teachers, educators in extra curricula activities and parents must be in collaboration. Only a few of parents still were thinking to stay outside of education of their children and believed that it was not their responsibility. It is worth to mention that some of the parents who were ready to collaborate with teachers didn't know how to do it and so prefer to be passive. The figures revealed some differences that were a reflection of the already existing schools' regulations between parents and school professionals.



Here is what one educator said during the interview in Spain about the need of collaboration between teachers and parents:

*"You try to work in class in one way. But if you get to the children's home, and in their family space they do completely the opposite, that continuity is lost. [...] So that's the way they can help us. Because, let's say that if what the children learn is only going to be worked on at school, it's not going to motivate them".*

Educator, Spain

Still there is a task to find forms for bettering such collaboration and to involve parents as outside supporters of school extra activities, but there have to be visible rules and democratic decisions. Parents needed knowledge and information to find their best way to support the education of their children.

All around the world there are different practices for collaboration but the main is informal existing rules at the community and society. According to parents – participants in the current study, available access to free resources like: concrete information and knowledge, time, information materials, free consultations with professionals could stimulate their collaboration with teachers. Creating informal groups (virtual and/or physical space) where parents to be able to exchange information and good practices was also considered as a motive to increase teacher-parent interaction.

# Iceland Covid-19 pandemic and Soft Skills<sup>28</sup>

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Due to the fact that Iceland, one of few countries in the world, did not have systemic and long term shutdowns of schools during the Covid-19 pandemic, which is quite different from the context of the other participating countries in the Erasmus+ SOUL project, it is prudent to present the Icelandic findings separately from the main Analytical Report.

## Icelandic Context During Covid-19

Most of Europe experienced significant school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, Iceland took a very different approach. There were no long term, uniform school closures across Iceland for children in pre-primary and compulsory schools. Children in compulsory schools (6-16years) were thus able to maintain some semblance of their school routine intact throughout the pandemic. [UNESCO](#) has reported that Icelandic schools were partially closed during the first quarter of 2020 but according to [Statistics Iceland](#):

1. "Almost one-third (32.2%) of pupils in compulsory schools (ages 6-16) in Iceland in 2019-2020 did not miss any teaching days due to the pandemic, and over 22,700 pupils (49.1%) missed one or two days due to school closures.
2. On the other hand, more than 250 pupils missed more than 20 teaching days in 2019-2020 due to the pandemic, the maximum being 26 days.
3. On average, compulsory schools were closed due to Covid-19 for 2.6 days. There were 13.9 days with reduced attendance and 5.5 distance-learning days during the 2019-2020 school year."
4. Many schools opted for reduced attendance and shortened days at certain times, "Almost 37,600 pupils had reduced attendance days during the pandemic, from one to 43 days. Thereof reduced attendance days were more than 10 for over 32,500 pupils."
5. About 1/3 of pupils received some form of distance learning for 10-15 days in total. "In the 10th grade almost 61% of pupils had *some distance education but almost 16% of pupils in the 1st grade.*"

As such, Iceland represents not only a different schooling approach during the pandemic, but also different observations of impact of the pandemic on school children. In Iceland, children were most impacted by decreased socializing inside and outside of school and the cancellation of their various after school activities periodically. Students were confined to their own classrooms as per restrictions posted [April 14 2020](#) and were limited in their interactions with other students at school and at home. While pupils in Iceland did not experience the extreme school closures that pupils across the globe experienced, they did experience significant disruptions to their social lives with restrictions on socializing after school and periodic closings of after school activities. Iceland was regularly responsive to COVID numbers and were both restricting activities and releasing those activities throughout the pandemic. Examples of these restrictions can be found on Iceland's official Covid site. Some examples include: the [cessation of sporting activities and pool closures](#); the [re-opening of after school activities](#); and [leisure activities](#).

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28 This section is written by María Kristín Gylfadóttir and Andrea Cheatham Kasper



In 2020-2021, schools largely remained open with children attending school regularly with their classmates. There were periodic, short term closures, as well as prohibitions of after school activities.

## Icelandic Educational system

The Icelandic school curriculum for compulsory schooling (6-16 years) is based upon six fundamental principles: literacy, sustainability, health and welfare, democracy and human rights, equality, and creativity. The fundamental pillars refer to social, cultural, environmental and ecological literacy so that children and youth may develop mentally and physically, thrive in society and cooperate with others. The fundamental pillars also refer to a vision of the future, the ability and will to influence and be active in maintaining society, changing it and developing. Embedded in these principles are many soft skills.

It is recognized that non-formal education, such as through the afterschool leisure centers, through sports, music and dance schools, scouts activities, youth center activities etc, plays a role in the development of a diverse set of social skills that are both meaningful for learning but also for an active life in a democratic society. In addition, it is recognized that through play children develop their creative and communication skills (Kolbrún Pálsdóttir & Steingerður Krisjánsdóttir, 2017). Interviews with after school educators indicated that many understand that they are working on a diverse skill set with their students beyond the specific skill of that activity (ex. gymnastics, playing an instrument, dancing). Students in after school activities are working in teams, and practicing better communication, cooperation skills, problem solving, creative thinking and always practicing managing their emotions.

## Data Collection and Discussion

NORTH Consulting, ehf, the Icelandic partner, ran an online survey with after school teachers and parents of children ages 6-12. The survey was disseminated and open in March and April of 2022. Nine teachers and fifteen parents responded. This seemingly small response has to be contextualized for Iceland's small population. For context, in 2022 Iceland had 376,000 inhabitants; 33,191 of them were children ranging from the ages of 6-12; in 2020 there were 5,563 teachers in compulsory schools (teaching ages 6-16). Following the survey, NORTH conducted four one-on-one interviews with educators (3 after-school and 1 classroom educator) for increased understanding of the situation they were facing. Those were conducted in May 2022.

Teachers and parents in the online survey experienced their children's and pupils' skill development incredibly differently. Parents responded that they observed a marked increase in their children's independence, curiosity, and communication during the Covid-19 pandemic. They only reported that reading decreased during this period.

- **83% of parents reported that their children's interest in new information increased**
- 58% of parents reported that their children make decision independently
- 73% of parents reported an increase in their children's self-confidence
- 58% of parents reported that their children's interest in reading decreased

A potential hypothesis is that children had more unstructured time in which to explore their own interests, unencumbered by the expectations of after school activities and the adults running them (this was noted by the classroom teacher during the interview). Perhaps in this less structured environment when children had ample time to explore their interests at their own pace (such as

in methods like Reggio Emilia, Montessori and Waldorf), they demonstrated an increased curiosity and willingness to learn. Considering the literature connecting curiosity to sustaining intrinsic motivation (Gruber, Gelman, Ranganath, (2014)) and learning this is a poignant observation on the part of the parents.

During the educator interviews one educator spoke to the pupils' increased time with their parents, being at home, exploring their country and released from the constant direction of adults. This type of unstructured play has been shown in (Colliver et al., 2022) and the following sites (government of [Northern Ireland](#), [UNICEF](#)) to positively impact cognitive, physical, social and emotional development

*“What I think happened in Covid and they had more time with their family. They really liked it, they liked that the parents took them out visiting places around Iceland, spent more time together. I think the extra time they got with their parents gave them a lot. Not stressful days full of activities. You could go home and just relax, you didn't **have** to do anything.”*

Teachers on the other hand, reported a marked decrease across all of the areas in which parents noted an increase. Teachers in the survey and in the interviews agreed that they observed a negative difference in student behavior since Covid-19 across a whole set of transversal skills including reading, vocabulary, expression/communication, tolerance for mistakes and curiosity. This closely reflects the findings in the other partner countries whose students did experience long-term and systemic school closures. Teachers report that their pupils are increasingly distracted and bored in class.

- 87% of teachers reported that pupils showed a negative change in their behavior since COVID
- 75% of teachers reported that pupils were less expressive and used less vocabulary
- 67% of teacher reported that pupils were less curious and excited about trying new things.

This complete divergence in reporting is of note and supports the hypothesis that perhaps once students returned to their regular classroom structures and full days there was a decrease in their free, unstructured time and they were less able to explore and follow their own interests. By and large Icelandic parents (from 50-83%) in the survey reported an increase in their children's: curiosity, communication with friends, independence in decision making and self-expression following the pandemic. This possibly, again, points to the difference for children in learning and exploring at their own pace, following their own interests and not having to compare themselves to other learners or be assessed by the adults around them. Student lack of perseverance has been linked to several factors, including: not being given sufficient voice and choice in how they learn and what they do, they don't have reasons to value the outcomes or the process, their relationships with educators are strained or nonexistent, and they feel excluded ([Make Me! Understanding and Engaging Student Resistance in School](#), 2015). While Icelandic students didn't experience school closures, they were still impacted by a global pandemic, social isolation, and a diminished connection to their schools and teachers as well as the diminishing well-being of those in their families and schools. The findings of one study ([Sigursteinsdotir, Rafnsdottir, 2022](#)) of primary school teachers shows an increase in their stress and a decrease in their mental and physical well-being. In a longitudinal study of adolescents ([Thorisdottir, et.al 2, 2021](#)) it was found that there was an increase of depressive symptoms and worsened mental wellbeing. The study conducted surveys in 2016, 2018 and 2020 (during the pandemic). It is essential when considering the impact COVID had on children in Iceland to take into account how their environment was impacted in addition to social isolation caused by the cessation of after school activities.

## Interviews

The conversations with educators (1 classroom and 3 after school educators) during the interviews were insightful on many levels and lead to important suggestions below. The after school educators reported that they work on several transversal skills and named: communication, creativity, taking responsibility and decision making, and working together as a team. They do this by working on critical thinking skills and helping children find their own solutions; physical fine motor, memory, listening, music literacy, oral skills (especially well developed among the boys watching lots of videos – great memory/recall), group dynamics, how to listen, work as a group, and better self-management. They take the time to explain processes of group work, reinforce group behavior and work on inclusion.

*“Most of the things that we try to do, we try to make the kids be able to communicate well with each other and we want them to basically be able to not get stuck in the environment. We train a lot, especially when we are outside, to be able to use different spots and find new things to do. We learn certain movements but it’s about how you use them, goes with creativity, not just being able to do what was learned, but being able to connect them together and utilize them in different spaces.”*

*“Definitely I would say the critical thinking and trying to figure out solutions, I want to make the kids try to think for themselves, not just tell them all the time what they need to do and then the older they get they can do this more, with the youngest they need to learn this because they haven’t done this before, that’s the main thing.”*

They report that Covid-19 created a lot of inconsistency and the sense that things don’t matter has persisted beyond any closures and quarantines. In the interviews the educators noted that it was challenging for students to work within a structured environment, they wanted to do their own things. Additionally, they all observe increased absenteeism and that the children seem less engaged with what they are doing. They also reported an increase in bullying and teasing. Additionally, they see a lack of what they termed “basic” skills. These include skills such as coming on time and wearing appropriate clothing for the activity. One coach observed that there is a wider skills gap now than what he remembers before Covid-19. Finally, they all reported that children show less tolerance to work through difficult skills; they feel there is an increased fear of failure, and a difficulty for the children to accept that one learns by making mistakes.

*“Before I felt like everyone in the group was their age. The younger group was less developed than the older group. There was a difference between those who understand, and those who can ask. Now some of them are older but they feel the same age, like they are at the same level in these skills.”*

Finally, they all reported that children show less tolerance to work through a difficult skill; they feel there is an increased fear of failure, and a difficulty for the children to accept that one learns by making mistakes.

*“I was there at the start of Covid now and there seems to be an increase in the fear of failure, unless I can do it perfectly I don’t want to even try, inability to accept we learn through practice and making mistakes, noting them and changing them, I tried and it didn’t work and now I’m not going to do more.”*

When asked what they would like to see happen and the kind of support they would like with the development and assessment of transversal skills they had several thoughts to share.

*“I want to be able to assess not just how good in the sport the student is but that we see, is this a person who shows up, works hard, etc....It’s not just about physical talent, that’s not the standard, I want to see that they progress because they are interested in progressing. It’s the attitude that I am looking for.”*

The coaches, who are often overseeing 200 children, would like to see an easy to use rubric that can be used to assess the transversal skills of the children, specifically for transversal skills. He emphasized that it has to be very quick and very easy to use with 200 children to assess. In contrast, the classroom teacher feels that too much attention has been paid to assessment and not enough to skills development. She observes increased anxiety among pupils and wants them to learn to develop a growth mindset which emphasizes that they are good enough and not lacking. She would like more support for developing these important skills.

The three afterschool youth workers/coaches mentioned the importance of raising the awareness among families and children of the diverse transversal skills that they are developing in these activities, that go well beyond the skill of that particular activity. One coach specifically said he would like to learn ways of speaking with the children about how there are many valuable skills developed that are beyond the gymnastics skills, so that they can understand it.

*"I don't know, hard to measure, hard to know how much it helps them and in what way, one thing could be talking about it with the kids more, and having a way to talk to them, so they understand that they aren't there only for a back flip, and see more value in doing it."*

They also think it would be great to have the parents understand and know about these other skills that are being developed while they are in practice. They would like parents to help children reflect on what they did after practice and not only by focusing on the specific activity skills.

*"I think the parents play a really important role when the kids get home, that they ask about the practice, and not only about the skills, but: did you have fun? and what did you do? and what beyond the gymnastics? Let the kids talk about it and follow up with them, so the kids start reflecting on what they have done."*

## Suggestions

### Needs of Educators:

Educators are asking for methods to talk about , develop and assess soft skills. Most importantly all after school educators need to **gain a clearer understanding of what these skills are**, and how they are already working on these skills to fully appreciate the importance of their work. Then they will benefit from **increasing their knowledge of various methods and tools** to help them speak about and intentionally develop those skills among their students. Finally, **clear and direct methods for assessing those skills** will help those educators plan their activities according to the needs of the students and **better communicate about the student's soft skills development**.

Additionally, working on creating learning environments in which students' voices are encouraged and heard, where students feel safe to make mistakes and reflect in them, and in which they are willing to take risks is essential. **Training in engaging and diverse participatory methods, that can include blended learning, are important for building this type of learning environment.**

### Unstructured Free Play:

Icelandic Leisure centers which are run as part of the compulsory schools in each municipality offer students from first through fourth grade a safe place to be, among peers after school. These centers provide an essential function for parents who are working, they also often coordinate the children's movement from the center to after-school activities (such as sports, music, and dance); and **importantly they often offer a space for unstructured, free play**. The literature supporting

the importance of play on the development of both cognitive and soft skills is strong and the observations of parents in this survey reflect much of that literature. There are important questions to consider in terms of **how to create moments of free play within even structured activities such as sport, music and dance, that will intentionally allow the students this type of freedom to explore and learn at their own pace.**

Icelandic schools focus on the rights of the child and work to increase student choice as they get older through a system of study electives from 8<sup>th</sup> grade on. Expanding the definition of choice, and incorporating it in various formats to younger ages, allows pupils not only to choose the method of doing a particular project, but also the choice of content.

# Conclusions

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Distance learning is a new technological approach that is very new for teachers, parents and pupils. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was the first time that online learning was widely implemented in schools including primary schools in many countries. The political decisions were taken without adequate knowledge and under the pressure for effective health measures to cope with the corona virus. Current study was carried out after two years of beginning the pandemic which is characterized by periodical school closures and blended education implementation as measures against Covid-19 pandemic. The focus is on the educational results of pupils of distance learning, since the respondents were from the social group that was provided with the needed infrastructure for distance learning thanks to the efforts of governments to ensure an infrastructure for distant education. Access to the internet and digital platforms was provided widely in the countries. Many digital devices had been given for free to those who were in need through schools.

The current study results pointed to a lot of variations in the implementation of online education which are determined by different circumstances in communities, regions, and countries. A detailed Strength-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threat (SWOT) analysis of blended/hybrid learning summarized the main positive and negatively risky factors that policy makers have to keep in mind for the future. (Annex 2)

Overall, parents and teachers have mentioned various changes in the pupils' behavior and performance as a result of online education and of social isolation as an indirect impact on education. It is well known that school is a place not only for acquiring knowledge but school is an important space for social interaction and experiential learning; these aspects can be difficult to replicate in a remote learning environment but maybe it is not necessary. Moreover, online teaching excludes tacit knowledge which is an integral part of learning, important for both the teacher and the pupil.

Study revealed a vigorous negative impact of online teaching on knowledge acquirement. The negative effect on transferable skills development was even more robust. Teachers were more negative in their evaluations than parents because they were predominantly oriented on evaluation of achieving academic knowledge and skills development as they compare the results between in-person and online teaching. Parents were looking at more general behavioral effects of social isolation and transferring home to a place for studying.

Analyzing the reasons for the impaired learning the study revealed the following:

- There were significant gaps in academic knowledge identified and even worse was the development of transferable skills. Skills such as decision-making, comprehension, self-expressions, among others, have been negatively affected by school closures. Moreover, returning back to school pupils were distracted, bored and stressed with communication problems. Pupils in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades have lost comprehensive skills and learning habits.
- There is no ability for pupils to participate in online lessons without synchronic support of adults. They became very quickly tired, losing interest, accepted lessons as a game, didn't have learning attitude as they were home. Pupils understood distance teaching difficult and always need lessons to be explain by parents after the online lessons. But parents were no educators: some of them could be supportive, others could not. The result was a lost a lot of academic knowledge and skills.
- A special study space must be created at home during online teaching and so pupils can make differences between home as a space for relax and games and time at home for studding. Thus, in general learning could be more effective, including online one. Teachers can help parents to establish the learning home space.

- The role of parents in the education of their children has been changed. In different communities it is on different stages but still in establishing. Parents understand that have to become more involved and responsible for education of their children, to collaborate with teachers, to communication more with children. Many parents are ready to collaborate with teachers, but they expect clear rules of interaction to be developed, channels for information exchange to be acceptable, and consultations with specialists when necessary to be available. Others still continue to believe that the responsibility for the education of children is entirely on school. Covid-19 pandemic put on public discussion the role of parents in education of their children.
- Online learning goes together with social isolation that provokes lack of communication with peers and adults outside of the family, emotional intelligences suffered a lot. Existing social situation based on Covid-19 pandemic as unknown and unpredictable danger for people creates tension and fears of children also. Indirectly it influences on motivation for studying.

Online teaching was a period of rapid transforming lessons and style of teaching from a traditional form in-class to virtual one. Teachers faced a lot of difficulties that had to overcome mainly through self-learning and collaboration between colleagues. The good was that needed infrastructure had been prepared and it was not a task for schools. A school responsibilities was to qualify teachers for remote education and to support them to teach in the “new normality”. Organized numerous online training courses were not very helpful for practice. Time to get qualified to teach online was limited and teachers were in a situation “*learning by doing*”. **Teachers had no problem to use digital platforms, but huge problem was to get real feedback from the virtual class and to evaluate the achieved knowledge and skills by pupils. The known tools for evaluation were not applicable, and the new ones were not available yet.** Totally new and unknown to the teachers was also the process of organizing and keeping active participation of pupils during online lessons, and to organizing team work and collective activities during virtual lessons.

All the revealed negative effects of distance learning on academic knowledge and skills development of pupils and difficulties that teachers faced to adapt themselves to remote teaching which in their majority had been unsuccessful, moulded the general opinion that blended education as an option of traditional education after the Covid-19 pandemic is not acceptable for everybody. The negative impact was so strong and the positive elements were rejected also.

Theoretically online learning can be a very useful methodology but not for primary school. IT are already using in traditional face-to-face lessons, but still they are not a part of every public primary school. At private schools and out-of-school courses smart lessons with using IT in combination with tools developing skills are more and better used. For pupils aged 6-12 years IT in smart lessons could have only a supporting role. Traditional in-person class is very important for pupils as it is the time for development of basic skills and step by step upgrading with transferable skills. It is time for creating learning habits and time for socialization. The study reported definitely that for primary schools online teaching is not applicable at all. There are many other measures that could be implemented when the social environment requires them.

Study reveals also some positive effects of online education during social isolation periods and the Covid-19 crisis. In summary, the major general positive effects are as follows:

- Collaboration between teachers and parents increased. Parents began to look for teachers' advice and help and also understood that have to be supportive to teachers.
- Online teaching stimulates teachers to improve their knowledge and skills to use IT during lessons and to make it more attractive and understandable for the pupils during teaching in-class.

- Children learned that digital devices could be used not only for games but to help to find and understand different new information including – learning lessons. Thus, the first steps for self-education were introduced to the pupils.
- Educational software is developing, digital communication tools and platforms are developing as easy friendly tools. Opportunity to incorporate digital technologies as an educational tool in the “new normal” environment is increasing. Uncertainty remains about the possibilities of future school closures, and the passed period could be useful how to create effective and resilient distance learning when schools are forced to close.
- Online teaching is option students with special educational needs to continue to study when they cannot be at school.

Covid-19 pandemic and online teaching made visible a fundamental pedagogical issue: the role of free (unstructured) learning time for creativity development of pupils and the optimal balance between unstructured and directed learning time. There are already empirical data showing the role of “free” time for self-decided activities as a part of educational program is important for pupils creativity and their sustainable curiosity. Practice shows that unstructured or “free” study time is the time for deep understanding the reality, for looking available solutions; it is the time for making sense of the new information. Some schools experiencing new teaching approaches already pay attention on monitoring the so called *unstructured study time* and try to investigate when and how it is sensible and rational to be implemented.

In general, analyzing the study results we could conclude: *teachers’ predominated opinion was that pupils had lost a lot of academic knowledge and transferable skills during school and out-of-school closures; blended teaching in the form that it was carried out could not cover and could not compensate the studying at classrooms. Mechanism for pupil’s evaluation has to be new and to meet the need to evaluate the level of skills development, communication between teachers and learner during on-line education is totally different. The important role of parents for education of their children was understood by both: teachers and parents. Collaboration had been started but it has to be stimulated.*

*Covid-19 pandemic catalyzed some educational process and revealed some invisible problems in current educational systems.*



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## Glossary

**Asynchronous learning:** allows flexibility of learning at anytime from anywhere; learners have access to course materials at their pace.

**Blended education:** used to describe traditional, face-to face teaching enriched by the integration of online materials. The use of technology frees up class time for class discussions and group work, and allows learners to become more independent through access to interactive activities.

**Competences** – the ability to do something successfully or efficiently (English Language Dictionary, Collins Cobuild). There is no single understanding about the meaning ,but there is an accepted common agreement that it is the knowledge, know-how and ability to applicate the skills in everyday life. “An important skill that is needed to do a job”

**Core competence** – a skill that is necessary to be able to do a particular activity or job:(Oxford’s English dictionaries)

**Competence-oriented education model-** it is a model implementing personalized teaching at school. It is presented as an alternative type of teaching to traditional education system. It is also described as a type of education on predetermined “competencies,” which focuses on outcomes and real-world performance. It is described as “a system of instruction, assessment, feedback, self-reflection, and academic reporting that is based on students demonstrating that they have learned the knowledge, attitudes, motivations, self-perceptions, and skills expected of them as they progress through their education.” ([www.aacnnursing.org/](http://www.aacnnursing.org/) definition of competency based education)

**Distant education**, also called **distance education**, **online learning**, form of way of education in which the teachers/ educators and students are physical separated during lessons and contacts are based on the use of various technologies to ensure student-teacher and student-student communication. Distance learning started with focusing on nontraditional students, such as full-time workers, nonresidents or individuals in remote regions who are unable to attend classroom lectures.

**Formal education:** Formal education refers to the structured education system that runs from primary (and in some countries from nursery) school to university, and includes specialised programmes for vocational, technical and professional training. Formal education often comprises an assessment of the learners’ acquired learning or competences and is based on a programme or curriculum which can be more or less closed to adaptation to individual needs and preferences. Formal education usually leads to recognition and certification (Definition provided by the Council of Europe, The Youth Foundation, 2022).

**Interdisciplinary study:** refers to combining or involving two or more academic disciplines or fields of study.

**Multiple Intelligence theory:** a new concept of “multiple intelligences” created by H.Gardner introduces an understanding of the holistic oriented educational approach and learning process and new understanding about equality in education, based on the 8 types of cognitive competences named intelligences: linguistic, visual, logical-mathematical, naturalist, body-kinesthetic, musical, intrapersonal and interpersonal. Everyone has a combination of dominated types of intelligences through which accept and accumulate information easier. Equality in education is based on ensuring each pupil to get teaching materials through his/her dominated abilities. Everyone has all 8 type of intelligences, but they could be developed up to a various level, and people differ themselves by the levels of development of their abilities and their combinations. These types of intelligences are the core of competences development (Gardner, 2011)

**Non-formal education:** Non-formal education refers to planned, structured programmes and processes of personal and social education for young people designed to improve a range of skills and competences, outside the formal educational curriculum. It happens in places such as youth organisations, sports clubs and drama and community groups where young people meet, for example, to undertake projects together, play games, discuss, go camping, or make music and drama. (Definition provided by the Council of Europe, The Youth Foundation, 2022).

**Remote learning** is where the student and the educator, or information source, are not physically present in a traditional classroom environment. Information is relayed through technology, such as discussion boards, video conferencing, and online assessments. Remote Learning can occur synchronously with real-time peer-to-peer interaction and collaboration, or asynchronously, with self-paced learning activities that take place independently of the instructor. <https://tophat.com/glossary/r/remote-learning/>

**Skills** – it is the knowledge and ability that enabled you to do something such as a job, game, or sport very well; it requires special training and knowledge. A special ability to do something (Cambridge dictionary): An ability to do an activity or job well, especially because you have practiced it (Cambridge dictionary);

**Cognitive skills:** Skills that have to do with “thinking” and include the ability to concentrate include the ability to focus; problem solving, decision making and setting plans and goals (Definition provided by UNICEF in the Global framework on transferable skills, 2019, p.10).

**Emotional skills:** Skills that relate to understanding and regulating one’s own emotion, cope with stress, understanding emotions of others, and the ability to empathize with others (Definition provided by UNICEF in the Global framework on transferable skills, 2019, p.10).

**Hard Skills:** skills that are considered as more technical, highly specific in nature and particular to an occupation, and that can be (generally) taught more easily than soft skills (Definition provided by UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2022)

**Soft skills (by UNESCO):** Term used to indicate a set of intangible personal qualities, traits, attributes, habits and attitudes that can be used in many different types of jobs. As they are broadly applicable they are also seen as transferable skills. The term is also used in contrast to ‘hard’ skills. (Definition provided by UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2022). They are also known as transferable or transversal skills.

**Soft skills (by Oxford Learner’s Dictionary):** personal qualities that enable you to communicate well with other people (Definition provided by Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, 2022).

**Soft skills (by Cambridge Dictionary):** people’s abilities to communicate with each other and work well together (Definition provided by Cambridge Dictionary, 2022).

**Soft skills (definition given by the Manual, based in UNESCO, Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, Cambridge Dictionary and OECD (2015) definitions):** set of personal qualities and attitudes that can be applied in more than one area and that allow the individual to achieve success in society and positive life outcomes.

**Social skills:** skills related to interaction with others including the ability to communicate, collaborate, resolve conflicts, and negotiate (Definition provided by UNICEF in the Global framework on transferable skills, 2019, p.10).

**Socio-emotional skills (information based on OECD (2015):** The interaction and cross fertilization of social and emotional skills with cognitive skills empowers children to succeed both in and out of schools and achieve positive outcomes. They are malleable during childhood and adolescence which allows policy makers, teachers and parents to support their develop-

ment by providing appropriate learning environments. Although their importance is widely known, often not enough work is done to measure and foster them.

**Synchronous Learning:** refers to online learning in which all participants log on at the same time.

**Virtual classroom:** refers to a digital classroom learning environment that takes place over the Internet rather than in a traditional classroom.

## Questionnaire oriented to teachers (educators)

## Assessment of the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on children's transferable skills and the needs of educators to cope with it

Dear Mr/Mrs,

Please answer the following questions related to the effects of the Covid-19 period on transferable skills development of pupils. The study aims to identify how isolation periods established during Covid-19 is reflecting on pupils skill's development; the impact of blended teaching and school closures on pupils' attitude to learn; to reveal readiness of the teachers and educators to deal with the changes as well as what type of support and qualification teachers need so, to be capable to overcome quickly the effects of the isolation periods . The results will be used to design a methodology to help educator in their work with children.

Participation in the study is individual. The aim is to collect personal opinions of the educators and teachers. It does not aim to assess the situation of the schools and educational entities in which you teach/are engaged. Your replies will not be used individually. The information will be used only in aggregate form. Your identity will not be publicly accessible. The survey is conducted online. Participation is voluntary.

The study is provided in the frame of an Erasmus+ project. It is a comparative one and it is simultaneously done in Bulgaria, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Spain and France – partner countries in the project.

It will take you approximately 10 minutes to fill it in.

Thank you in advance for your time and participation!

### Preliminary information – What is Transferable skill and their indicators to be evaluated

Through their life, people acquire new knowledge, form their attitudes and values, and form their skills. Combined, these are person's competences. There are many types of skills and the acquisition of most is a process that starts from a very young age.

Transferable skills of pupils are forming in parallel to acquiring new knowledge (academic and general) and/or everyday information. It is worth understanding that transferable skills are not possible to be developed separately as a single one without relation to knowledge acquisition. As a rule, transferable skills are formed together in a set of different combinations determined by the type of activity and learning tasks. The nature of transferable skills is that they are grouping in a special way and the driver element of the group set is the preferable one by the child's way of expressions, based on his/her innate characteristics. It is not possible to have absolute differentiation of the skills. All skills are combinations and they determine the child's behavior in their integration. As skills could not be developed on an equal stage, the most developed ones could be better recognized during evaluation.

Pupils form their transferable skills step by step through solving different tasks given to them by the tutor in school and out of school educational training programs.

There is a decomposition of the skills which are subject of the evaluation. The suggested decomposition is conditionally separated only for evaluation purposes.

## List of Transferable skills and its elements relevant to pupils at primary schools

### Comprehension skill (written and oral texts):

- Understanding any oral or written text, ability to recognize main ideas,
- Ability to put logical questions to the text,
- Skill to summarize the text and reveal its message, moral, conclusion.

### Analytical and critical thinking:

- Gives own interpretation of any text and oral stories,
- Reveal and evaluate the information of any text (stories),
- Find the explicit meaning of the any text (stories),
- Reveal the attitude of the author of the text – a positive and negative messages of the author,
- Can invent another title of the text,
- Ability to embed the message and moral of the text in different contexts.

### Decision making and taking responsibility:

- Ability to give different adequate solutions of a task,
- To draw relevant conclusions based on specific information (instructions),
- To evaluate the task summarizing different relevant information concerning the task,
- To make a broad summary with potential task's consequences,
- To stand up for his/her decisions,
- To be autonomy while expresses his/her opinion.

### Evaluation skills:

- Ability to analyses and evaluate what is going around him/her in a sense how to act,
- Ability to estimate behavior of friends (others),
- Ability to estimate own behavior,
- Ability to predict events and consequences of his/her acts,
- Ability to ask for help when it is needed,
- Ability to admit when s/he is wrong.

### Communication skills:

- Ability to express to somebody his/her own opinion and to stand up for it (defend, justify with arguments),
- Prefer (like) to work in a group,
- Ability to hear and take in mind opinions of the others,
- Likes to take the role of a leader, find ways to organize group work.

### Creativity skills:

- Invent non-standard solutions (for games, stories, paintings, logical tasks ...),
- Usually gives different answers to one question,
- Reveals different associations in storytelling,
- Design innovation models, 3D modeling,
- Creates various endings of a story.

### Self-learning (Curiosity):

- Likes to put a lot of questions,
- Can interpret a text in different understandings,
- Likes to invent stories,
- Likes to find unusual (unbelievable) decisions, fancy stories,
- Ability for making assumptions.

### Self-control of the body

- Ability to keep self-control of the spontaneous body movements,
- Ability to adhere to behavior rules in class.



# QUESTIONNAIRE

## Section 1.

1. Have you noticed any changes in the behavior of the children you work with, since the Covid-19 pandemic hit?

- 1.1. Yes
- 1.2. No
- 1.3. I am not sure / don't know

2. How do you assess the level of academic knowledge acquisition of the pupils during the period of blended (distance) teaching based to Covid-19 and other impact of pandemic restrictions?

*(Please select the most true statement)*

- 2.1. the same as it was during the in-person learning in classroom
- 2.2. satisfactory, there are some omissions, but not significant
- 2.3. significant deficiencies and gaps are identified
- 2.4. practically, the knowledge is not acquired  
*(distance education results to a large extend in learning loss)*
- 2.5. Other, please explain .....

3. In your opinion, how Covid-19 pandemic is reflecting on the following statements:

*(Please, answer to each pair of statements by choosing only one answer per pair)*

- 3.1. A. Pupils have lost some learning habits and behavior in class  
B. Pupils have not lost their learning habits
- 3.2. A. Pupils have more difficulties to express themselves, observed reduction in vocabulary  
B. Pupils have a richer vocabulary
- 3.3. A. Pupils understand better new texts (oral and written)  
B. Pupils decrease understanding new texts (oral and written)
- 3.4. A. Pupils have lower curiosity related to new information  
B. They are eager to try new things
- 3.5. A. Pupils are looking for different effective solutions to task-related problems during the training activities  
B. Pupils are more satisfied with the standard answers
- 3.6. A. Pupils are able to make their own choices with confidence related to learning topics  
B. Pupils accept passively the information during the lessons

- 3.7. A. Pupils willingness for self-expression have enhanced
  - B. Pupils prefer not to stand out (*more anxious with lower self-esteem*)
- 3.8. A. Pupils have stronger desire to look for various answers of the assigned task
  - B. Pupils are more satisfied with the standard answer
- 3.9. A. Pupils ask more questions based on learning topics
  - B. Pupils don't ask any questions and accept the given information
- 3.10. A. Pupils can easily admit their mistakes
  - B. Pupils prefer not to admit their mistakes
- 3.11. A. Pupils are more distracted and/or bored during working at class
  - B. Pupils interest to learning materials has increased.

4. In your opinion, what are the greatest changes in teaching that you had to do during blended and mixed education?

*(Please give more than one answer)*

- 4.1. More time is needed to acquire the lesson's material
- 4.2. Evaluation of pupil's acquired knowledge is much difficult
- 4.3. To create a new design of the lessons and the forms to present new information
- 4.4. To replace the lack of discussion with classmates in class with the one online
- 4.5. To replace the lack of discussions in a closer circle with friends
- 4.6. Lack (restriction) of group work, and the pupil studies at home, alone
- 4.7. Other, please specify .....

5. Have you worked individually with pupils during blended education?

- 5.1. Yes, it was my desire
- 5.2. Yes, after a parent's entreaty
- 5.3. No, as there was no need
- 5.4. No, it was impossible to do that
- 5.5. N/A as there was no education change

6. What are the difficulties you faced as an educator (teacher) during blended learning due to Covid-19 restrictions?

*(Please give more than one answer)*

- 6.1. to adapt the academic knowledge teaching to online
- 6.2. to use teaching platforms as a technology
- 6.3. to activate pupils to participate fully in on-line lessons

- 6.4. to keep the pupil's attention on the online lesson
- 6.5. to assess the pupil's knowledge
- 6.6 to get objective feedback of pupils
- 6.7. other, please specify .....

**7. In your opinion, with what and how should the teachers (educators) be supported in order to help the pupils developing their transferable skills?**

*(Please give more than one answer)*

- 7. 1. Technical assistance, including software for attractive teaching (presentation in interesting and understandable form) of the academic knowledge
- 7.2. Design and development of an evaluation mechanism for blended education (compatible to the one in-person schooling)
- 7.3. Design, development and provision of forms of dialog b/n teacher and pupil(s) in blended learning
- 7.4. Keeping the balance between active and interactive learning in blended learning ( both – on-line and face-to-face one)
- 7.5. Assistance for collaboration with parents concerning their supporting role for pupil's education
- 7.6. Other, please describe .....

**8. In your opinion, what is the positive effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on education and pupil's development?**

*(Please, describe the most frequently one that you have recognized)*

.....

.....

**9. In your opinion, could blended learning improve personalized teacher-learner relations?**

- 9.1. Yes
- 9.2. No
- 9.3. Don't know

**10. What will you transfer from the blended education applied during to the Covid period going back to the traditional one?**

*(Please give more than one answer)*

- 10.1. Continue to integrate digital technology as a complement to traditional teaching activities in the learning process
- 10.2. Maintain the pupil's interest with visual learning materials
- 10.3. Encourage additional to school experiential learning with tasks/homework (incl. extra-curricular and home activities with parents/family members)

10.4. Continue to use online learning platforms to teach pupils at home if it is necessary

10.5. Other, please specify .....

11. In your opinion, after the Covid pandemic will blended learning could become one of the traditional educational options?

11.1. Yes

11.2. No

11.3. Difficult to say

12. In your opinion, have pupils become more open minded and more curious as a result of Covid-19 pandemic period and related to it restrictions in the country

12.1. Yes

12.2. No.

12.3. I don't know/ Could not estimate

## Section 2. Information about the respondents

1. You are:

1.1. Male

1.2. Female

1.3 Other

2. You are a teacher (educator) in an entity located in:

2.1. the Capital

2.2. a large city

2.3. a small town / village

3. Your age is:

3.1. up to 29 years

3.2. from 30 to 39 years

3.3. from 40 to 49 years

3.4. from 50 to 60 years

3.5. over 60 years

4. Currently, you are engaged with children (pupils) as:

4.1. A teacher at school

4.2. An educator at school with outside classroom settings and activities

4.3. In a sports training/activity

- 4.4. In art, music, dance, theater, training out of school activity
- 4.5. In a Non-profit organization activity, e.g. scouts, youth organizations, church etc.
- 4.6. An educator in supplementary learning
- 4.7. Both (work partly as a teacher at school and partly at out of school activities)
- 4.8. Other, please specify .....

5. You are currently working:

- 5.1. at public educational entity
- 5.2. at private educational entity
- 5.3. at both educational entities

## Assessment of the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on children's transferable skills and the needs of parents to cope with it

Dear Mr/Mrs,

Please answer the following questions related to the effects of the Covid-19 period on the behavior of your child (children) and their transferable skills development. The study aims to identify how isolation periods established during Covid-19 reflected on children skill's development; the impact of blended teaching and school closures on pupils' attitude to study and for their personal development; to reveal how quickly to overcome the effects of the isolation periods and how parents could participate in it. The opinion of parents is crucial as you would recognize in a best way any behavioral changes of your child. The results will be used to design a methodology to help educator in their work with children, to find ways for collaboration between educators and parents.

Participation in the study is individual. The aim is to collect personal opinions of parents whose children are studding at primary school. It does not aim to assess the situation of the schools and educational entities in which your child is. Your replies will not be used individually. The information will be used only in aggregate form. Your identity will not be publicly accessible. The survey is conducted online. Participation is voluntary.

The study is provided in the frame of an Erasmus+ project. It is a comparative one and it is simultaneously done in Bulgaria, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Spain and France – partner counties in the project.

It will take you approximately 10 minutes to fill it in.

### Preliminary information – What is Transferable skill and their indicators to be evaluated

Through their life, people acquire new knowledge, form their attitudes and values, and form their skills. Combined, these are person's competences. There are many types of skills and the acquisition of most is a process that starts from a very young age.

Transferable skills of children are forming in parallel to acquiring new knowledge (academic and general) and/or everyday information. It is worth understanding that transferable skills are not possible to be developed separately as a single one without relation to knowledge acquisition. As a rule, transferable skills are formed together in a set of different combinations determined by the type of activity and learning tasks; they are forming at school and in the family in parallel.

The nature of transferable skills is that they are grouped in a special way and the driving element of the group set is the preferable one by the child's way of expressions, based on his/her innate characteristics. It is not possible to have absolute differentiation of the skills. All skills are combinations and they determine the child's behavior in their integration. As skills could not be developed on an equal stage, the most developed ones could be better recognized during evaluation.

Children form their transferable skills step by step through solving different tasks given to them by the tutor in school, out of school educational training programs and by family during their everyday life.

There is a decomposition of the skills which are subject of the evaluation. The suggested decomposition is conditionally separated only for evaluation purposes.

## List of Transferable skills and its elements relevant to pupils at primary schools

### Comprehension skill (written and oral texts):

- Understanding any oral or written text, ability to recognize main ideas,
- Ability to put logical questions to the text,
- Skill to summarize the text and reveal its message, moral, conclusion.

### Analytical and critical thinking:

- Gives own interpretation of any text and oral stories,
- Reveal and evaluate the information of any text (stories).
- Find the explicit meaning of the any text (stories),
- Reveal the attitude of the author of the text – a positive and negative messages of the author,
- Can invent another title of the text.
- Ability to embed the message and moral of the text in different contexts.

### Decision making and taking responsibility:

- Ability to give different adequate solutions of a task,
- To draw relevant conclusions based on specific information (instructions),
- To evaluate the task summarizing different relevant information concerning the task,
- To make a broad summary with potential task's consequences,
- To stand up for his/her decisions,
- To be autonomy while expresses his/her opinion.

### Evaluation skills:

- Ability to analyses and evaluate what is going around him/her in a sense how to act,
- Ability to estimate behavior of friends (others),
- Ability to estimate own behavior,
- Ability to predict events and consequences of his/her acts,
- Ability to ask for help when it is needed,
- Ability to admit when s/he is wrong.

### Communication skills:

- Ability to express to somebody his/her own opinion and to stand up for it (defend, justify with arguments),
- Prefer (like) to work in a group,
- Ability to hear and take in mind opinions of the others,
- Likes to take the role of a leader, find ways to organize group work.

### Creativity skills:

- Invent non-standard solutions (for games, stories, paintings, logical tasks ...),
- Usually gives different answers to one question,
- Reveals different associations in storytelling,
- Design innovation models, 3D modeling,
- Creates various endings of a story.

### Self-learning (Curiosity):

- Likes to put a lot of questions,
- Can interpret a text in different understandings,
- Likes to invent stories,
- Likes to find unusual (unbelievable) decisions, fancy stories,
- Ability for making assumptions.

### Self-control of the body

- Ability to keep self-control of the spontaneous body movements,
- Ability to adhere to behavior rules in class.



# QUESTIONNAIRE

## Section A.

1. Have you noticed any changes in the behavior of your child/children, since the Covid-19 pandemic hit?

- 1.1. Yes
- 1.2. No
- 1.3. I am not sure / don't know

2. In your opinion, how would you assess the process of learning (behavior) of your child (children) as result of on-line teaching due to the Covid-19 pandemic?

*(Please give more than one answer)*

- 2.1. Studies with more interest online
- 2.2. Looks at it more as a game than as learning
- 2.3. Usually quickly loses interest and becomes bored
- 2.4. Does not understand the lessons
- 2.5. Misses training hours
- 2.6. S/he has questions, but there is nobody to ask
- 2.7. S/he has problems with the technique and fails to respond to the evaluation tests even if knowing the answer
- 2.8. Thinks more logically and seeks solutions independently and / or with the help of family members
- 2.9. S/he needs extra support and assistance
- 2.10. Other, please specify .....

3. In your opinion, what is the principal change in the learning during distance education?

*(Please give more than one answer)*

- 3.1. More time is needed to learn the lesson's material
- 3.2. Evaluation is difficult
- 3.3. To create a new design of the lessons and presenting new information
- 3.4. To replace the lack of interactions with classmates in class
- 3.5. To replace the lack interpersonal relations with peers and friends
- 3.6. To lack of group work, and has to study alone at home

#### 4. How does your child (children) usually study online?

*(Please give more than one answer)*

- 4.1. Studies alone in front of the computer (screen)
- 4.2. Needs support by a family member (parent)
- 4.3. Has a personal electronic device at home (e.g. ipad, computer)
- 4.4. Shares an electronic device with a sibling
- 4.5. Prefers to study through television lessons

#### 5. Is the child additionally engaged (individually) in order to master the learning materials?

*(Please give more than one answer)*

- 5.1. Yes, online lessons are always further explained by parents (family member)
- 5.2. Yes, the child studies with a co-tutor privately
- 5.3. Yes, when it is necessary the teacher works individually
- 5.4. No, it doesn't do much
- 5.5. There is no such need

#### 6. In your opinion, how would you evaluate the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on your child (children) transferable skills

*(Please, answer to each pair of statements by choosing the most appropriate one related to your child (children))*

- 6.1. A. Easily uses electronic devices (computer, mobile phone, and tablet) to look for information and to study  
B. Does not want to work with electronic devices, tries to avoid them
- 6.2. A. The child loses interest in reading  
B. The child interest in reading books – traditional, electronics, audio increased
- 6.3. A. The child has lower curiosity related to new information  
B. The child has increased his/her curiosity to everything, asks more questions: „why“
- 6.4. A. Has more desire to communicate with friends, peers, elderly  
B. Prefer to stay alone at home, does not look to contact his friends
- 6.5. A. Started making more often independent decisions  
B. Usually expects to get support by somebody else to make a decision
- 6.6. A. Retells and shares more often stories at home  
B. Closes inside himself, became more anxious with lower self-esteem
- 6.7. A. The child becomes more independent, self-confident in thinking, acting and fulfilling  
B. The child becomes more uncertain and unsure in his/her actions
- 6.8. A. The child improves the ability to express to you his/her own opinion and to stand up for it with arguments

B. The child becomes more introverted, silent and reluctantly accepts different opinions without resisting

6.9. A. The child can easily admit his/her mistakes

B. The child prefer not to admit his/her mistakes

7. During Covid pandemic does your child (children) participate in out of school training/ activities?

7.1. Yes, all the time

7.2. Yes, from time to time

7.3. No

8. In your opinion, what is the positive effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on your child's (children's) development?

*(Please mark the 3 most appropriate statements)*

8.1. The child understands that electronic devises (digital technologies) are not only for games

8.2. We, as a family had more time for communication

8.3. As a parent, I am much more involved in the child's education and could support it

8.4. The child learns to look for replies of different questions, using books, encyclopedias, digital sources, etc.

8.5. As a parent, I could understand better my child

8.6. I have found forms to collaborate with the teachers of my child

8.7. Other, please specify .....

8.8. I could not recognize positive effects

9. Have you communicated with the teachers (educators) of your child (children) during Covid pandemic?

9.1. Yes, more than usual

9.2. Yes, only when the teacher (educator) needs to discuss something

9.3. No, there was not possibility

9.4. No, there was no need

10. Do you think that you as a parent have to work together with the teachers (educators) for developing transferable skills of your children?

10.1. Yes, definitely

10.2. Yes, may be

10.3. Yes, but don't know how

10.4. No, there is no such need

11. If the answer to the question 10 was YES in any form, what do you think can ensure better cooperation with the teachers (educators) for the child's transferable skills development?

11.1. Access to available free resources

11.2. Possibility to speak and get support by a professional (teacher, educator, councilor, etc.)

11.3. To create parents peer group for practice exchange

11.4. Other, please specify .....

12. In your opinion, after the Covid pandemic would the blended learning become one of the traditional educational options?

12.1. Yes

12.2. No

12.3. Difficult to say/I don't know

13. Will you be supportive blended learning to become a part of the traditional education (as an option)?

13.1. Yes

13.2. No

13.3. Difficult to say/I don't know

## Section B. Information about respondents

1. You are:

1.1. Father

1.2. Mother

1.3. Other family member

2. Your age is:

2.1. up to 29 years

2.2. from 30 to 39 years of age

2.3. from 40 to 49 years of age

2.4. over 50 years of age

3. Your education level is:

3.1. Higher education

3.2. Upper Secondary (College, Gymnasium, 12 grades)

3.3. Lower Secondary (second stage of basic education, 8 grades)

3.4. Primary (first stage of basic education, 4 grades)

4. You are living:

- 4.1. In the Capital
- 4.2. In a large city
- 4.3. In a town / village

5. How many children do you have

- 5.1. One child
- 5.2. Two children
- 5.3. Three children
- 5.4. More than three

6. Do you live in a nuclear family or in an extended one (together with parents of one of the spouses)

- 6.1. in a nuclear family
- 6.2. in an extended family
- 6.3. single parent family

7. How old is your child (children)

- 7.1. 6-7 years old
- 7.2. 8-9 years old
- 7.3. 10-12 years old

8. Does your child (children) attend out of school trainings:

- 8.1. Foreign languages courses
- 8.2. Arts courses – music, dances, painting, choral singing
- 8.3. Sports activities
- 8.4. Other, please specify .....

# Child after the Social Isolation due to Covid-19

## SWOT analysis

Effects of School closures and social isolations on children aged 6-12 years

Blended education implementation

STRENGTH	WEAK
<p>Useful experience for teachers and learners;</p> <p>Individual approach to each learner;</p> <p>Easy access to share practices with colleagues;</p> <p>Improvement digital skills for educators to use IT for teaching online and in-person;</p> <p>Pupils understand that there is online education;</p> <p>Learners could easier accept and understand lessons materials, based on virtual environment;</p> <p>Possibility for self-organization time;</p> <p>Communication between teachers and parents increased;</p> <p>Parents are more engaged in education of their children;</p> <p>Responsibilities about education of children is shared between teachers and families (parents);</p> <p>Strength and weaknesses of education system are identified quicker.</p>	<p>Lower quality of learning knowledge;</p> <p>Lack of life communications;</p> <p>Lack of technical aids’;</p> <p>Low knowledge of digital competences for educators and learners;</p> <p>Home transferred into a learning space without proper infrastructure;</p> <p>Undeveloped (Insufficient) evaluation mechanism about achieving knowledge to be used by teachers during online teaching;</p> <p>Differentiation of skills development;</p> <p>Creates more inequality in the society;</p> <p>Face technical problem to use IT;</p> <p>Inability of children/pupils to focus on screens, demotivate for learning;</p> <p>Pupils miss online lessons;</p> <p>During online learning, the teacher cannot have a feedback of each student.</p>

OPPORTUNITY	THREATS/RISKS
<p>To reveal strengths and weaknesses and bottle necks iat education system;</p> <p>Challenge for both – educators and learners;</p> <p>Promote professional development for educators;</p> <p>Online learning is an option during a lockdown of school based on different reasons;</p> <p>Development of new online resources adequate for teaching (Development virtual learning environment);</p> <p>Easier than ever to invite guests (public persons, writers, painters, etc) into a classroom to participate virtually (with appropriate safeguarding measures);</p> <p>Contacts with peers from other country, discover other cultures and helps to self-identify in European cultural variety.</p>	<p>Difficulties to organize learning process: active pupils’ participation, to keep child’s attention and concentration, team working;</p> <p>Transferring lessons materials for online teaching;</p> <p>Misunderstanding learners’ emotions and reactions during online teaching;</p> <p>Technical problems - unstable internet, electricity interruptions;</p> <p>Reduces learning habits;</p> <p>Worsen creativity and communication skills;</p> <p>Reduces forming the skills for self-organizing and self-management.</p>

## Project consortium

**Association “Platform AGORA” (AGORA)** is a non-governmental, not-profit organization working for building active communities for sustainable development in Bulgaria, registered in 2008. The main activities are: development of the Bulgarian national culture identity as part of the multi-culture European community; elaboration and application of approaches for incorporation and support of socially expelled community groups; support the real involvement of children and young people into the public processes through development of their personal, artistic and civic potential. The Platform’s network has more than 100 cultural centers (Chitalishte) from all over the country, many of which have good practices and capacities in community development, adult training and learning, organization and holding of musical, dance and food festivals. The AGORA’s vision is that culture is a factor for change and development, personal and creative development of children, youth and adults.

**Athens Network of Collaborating Experts (ANCE)** is a non-governmental, non-profit organization based in Athens, Greece. It was established in 1996 by a group of Greek experts in international development cooperation and technical assistance and today has succeeded to create an extensive network of collaborators and volunteers for the promotion of sustainable development and the support of vulnerable social groups in the European Union and the developing countries.

**DEFOIN – Desarrollo para la formación e inserción SL** (Training for Develop and Integration) was born in 2009 in Spain with the idea of promoting the Training for Employment and Insertion of employed and unemployed workers. Today DEFOIN is a training center with a large experience in the design, implementation, development and evaluation of training programs at national, regional and local level.

**Fondazione Hallgarten Franchetti Centro Studi Villa Montesca**, Città di Castello, Italy. Experimental workshop for pilot projects on new didactic methods and pedagogic perspectives addressed to various educational levels and to support students with special needs. Among its objective the Foundation promotes a democratic space of education and supports the educational inclusion of students with special, personal and social needs. The Foundation enhances the European cooperation in the fields of education, audio-visuals and culture, building on the valorization of diversity.

**GIS-TC Foundation** is a non-profit independent public non-governmental organization based in Sofia (Bulgaria) with mission to stimulate transfer knowledge form academic institutes to SMEs and vice versa since 2000 year. Today GIS-TC is a network of 29 Centers for knowledge transfer that is initiating and stimulating the innovation in different areas: natural, social and engineering research and development. As an Erasmus+ project coordinator GIS-TC works for innovation in educational sector like presenting innovative alternative educational methodologies to public schools and gives new knowledge and skills to teachers to ensure the achieving of better functional literacy of pupils and increasing the quality of education.

**J&MSynergie** is a profit company from France. Its main mission is related to development innovative alternative pedagogical methods, training and communication with adolescents, as well as implementation of specific methodologies related to multiple intelligence theory.

**NORTH Consulting (Iceland)** is a small non-profit boutique consulting firm committed to educational excellence from policy to the classroom, the development of entrepreneurial and innovation skills, and the expansion of the creative industries. NORTH was founded in 2018 by Maria Kristin Gylfadottir, who has over 20 years experience in working within the European and national education and culture funding programmes and was the Manager for the Erasmus+ National Agency in Iceland 2013-2017. NORTH works with different organizations, municipalities and start-ups on strategy planning, policy making (write education and cultural policies), on writing grant applications to different national and international funding programmes and on training and capacity building in different areas, such as leadership, working in a multicultural classroom and entrepreneurial thinking.



## Authors

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# SOUL Skills Project



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