

**ECRI webinar on inclusive education in time of COVID-19  
with special focus on migrant and Roma children**

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Speaking points

- While closing down school activities due to COVID-19 affected all children, the lives of refugee and migrant children were particularly touched. For them, going to school, meeting new friends and going out of the refugee camps brought them out of their secluded existence to a sense of normalcy and joy of being together with other children. For these children, school is above all a hope for a brighter future.
- Measures which could be put in place for many children, like online schooling, may be less adapted to children in refugee facilities for obvious reasons linked to lack of necessary technological support and the necessary parental support for homework, for example.
- The situation has put additional strain on education professionals on finding new creative ways to organise an adapted education process for refugee and migrant children outside classrooms.
- Teachers have already been under pressure to develop methods to integrate children in the mainstream education, reflected in my predecessor's mission report to Greece in 2016 and the follow-up training session my office had organised in February 2018 for teachers in Athens. I take this opportunity to thank ECRI and in particular Ms Maria Daniella Marouda, for her personal involvement in the organisation of that training and teaching the module on General Policy Recommendation no. 10. The experience proved the need for exchanges on good practices and multi-disciplinary discussions among teachers themselves, psychologists, social workers.
- Coming back to 2020 and the pandemic, in certain countries, like Bosnia and Herzegovina, education could still be pursued in refugee facilities by setting up teams to support children in small groups to follow online classes and keep up with homework or by taking classes outside in open air. At the same time, the complete lockdown of facilities in other countries resulted in the denial of access to anyone else than camp employees, including NGOs or other third parties providing various support services and education too. To top this, UNHCR and UNICEF have

already voiced warnings that funding for educational programmes is on the verge of running out.

- As we are now slowly emerging from the lockdown and pandemic restrictive measures, continuing education through alternative learning pathways must be a top priority for all children, including refugee and migrant children. In the **short-term** this means ensuring access to learning, through temporary remote, alternative or distance learning.
- In this context it is essential that teachers, parents/caregivers, guardians, communications experts, non-formal education providers are supported in any possible ways: through radio programmes, through development of home-schooling and online learning materials or other innovative approaches. A good resource in this respect are the self-learning courses for education professionals, LEMON courses, developed by the Education Department here at the Council of Europe. Another good resource is the language education toolkit developed so far only for adults, which could perhaps be adapted to children.
- In the **medium term**, it is essential that transitional measures are put in place to help children who have fallen behind in their education to re-join their level of schooling and competency. A buddy system with children from the same class or older could also be a good support solution, as proven by various good practices in the Scandinavian countries (from the compilation on child-friendly approaches in the area of migration). I am sure more good practices exist out there and need to be explored.
- In the **long-run**, and this is pertinent not only for education, but any other sector, it is to set up contingency capacities to mitigate and manage risk in the future. It is important that education is not overlooked while we return to some sort of normalcy. It should not be overlooked in state strategies and in donor strategies. Emergency responses should not prevent constructive learning opportunities which create a safe space for children to learn, grow and regain a sense of hope in their future.