



JRC TECHNICAL REPORT

The school year 2020-2021 in Romania during the pandemic

Country Report

Velicu, Anca

2021

This publication is a Technical report by the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the European Commission's science and knowledge service. It aims to provide evidence-based scientific support to the European policymaking process. The scientific output expressed does not imply a policy position of the European Commission. Neither the European Commission nor any person acting on behalf of the Commission is responsible for the use that might be made of this publication. For information on the methodology and quality underlying the data used in this publication for which the source is neither Eurostat nor other Commission services, users should contact the referenced source. The designations employed and the presentation of material on the maps do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the European Union concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Contact information

Name: Yves Punie
Address: Calle Inca Garcilaso 3, 41092 Spain
Email: Yves.PUNIE@ec.europa.eu
Tel: +34 9544-88229

JRC125444

PDF ISBN 978-92-76-38102-0

doi:10.2760/855006

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021

© European Union, 2021



The reuse policy of the European Commission is implemented by the Commission Decision 2011/833/EU of 12 December 2011 on the reuse of Commission documents (OJ L 330, 14.12.2011, p. 39). Except otherwise noted, the reuse of this document is authorised under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). This means that reuse is allowed provided appropriate credit is given and any changes are indicated. For any use or reproduction of photos or other material that is not owned by the EU, permission must be sought directly from the copyright holders.

All content © European Union, 2021, unless otherwise specified

How to cite this report: Velicu, A., The school year 2020-2021 in Romania during COVID-19: country report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021, ISBN 978-92-76-38102-0, doi:10.2760/855006, JRC125444.

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Foreword..... | 3 |
| Abstract..... | 4 |
| 1 Introduction: The national context..... | 5 |
| 2 Results..... | 7 |
| 2.1 Preparing the school year 2020-2021..... | 7 |
| 2.1.1 Institutional level..... | 7 |
| 2.1.1.1 The infrastructure..... | 7 |
| 2.1.1.2 Teachers' training..... | 9 |
| 2.1.1.3 Hygienic measures and protocols..... | 10 |
| 2.1.2 Teacher's level..... | 10 |
| 2.2 Pedagogies and instructional practices developed during 2020-2021..... | 12 |
| 2.2.1 Adapting the teaching practices and pedagogies..... | 12 |
| 2.2.2 Adapting the evaluation and feedback..... | 15 |
| 2.2.3 Engaging students: the biggest challenge..... | 16 |
| 2.2.4 Enlarging the professional circle/ communities..... | 18 |
| 2.2.5 The hybrid solution: a better option or the worst one?..... | 18 |
| 2.2.6 Extracurricular activities..... | 19 |
| 2.2.7 Risks and opportunities of digital technology in the remote schooling times..... | 19 |
| 2.2.7.1 Risks of online education..... | 20 |
| 2.2.7.2 Benefits and opportunities of remote schooling..... | 21 |
| 2.2.7.3 Teacher and student wellbeing..... | 22 |
| 2.3 Addressing inequalities and vulnerabilities among students and teachers and mapping resilience..... | 23 |
| 2.3.1 Who are the vulnerable students?..... | 23 |
| 2.3.2 Challenges of the online schooling for children living in poverty..... | 24 |
| 2.3.3 Students with special educational needs..... | 25 |
| 2.3.3.1 Approaching hearing-impaired students in remote schooling setting..... | 26 |
| 2.3.3.2 Approaching visual-impaired students in remote schooling setting..... | 27 |
| 2.3.3.3 Approaching students with autism spectrum disorder in remote schooling setting..... | 27 |
| 2.3.4 Other means for approaching vulnerable students..... | 28 |
| 2.3.4.1 Remedial education: School after school program..... | 28 |
| 2.3.4.2 Visiting vulnerable students at home to improve their engagement..... | 29 |
| 2.3.4.3 Other actors involved in addressing inequalities..... | 29 |
| 2.4 Improving education based on 2020-2021 experience..... | 30 |
| 2.4.1 The potential of improvement in a similar situation..... | 30 |
| 2.4.2 Long-term perspective: improving the after-pandemic education..... | 31 |
| 3 Conclusions and recommendations..... | 33 |
| References..... | 34 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Annexes | 35 |
| Annexe 1: Methodology of the study | 35 |
| Annexe 2: Extended summary in Romanian..... | 38 |

Foreword

This report focuses on the school year 2020-2021 in Romania and how, after the first wave of Covid-19 pandemic, schools moved away from *emergency* remote schooling towards a more planned and inclusive approach to education. A number of representatives from education authorities, schools, parents and NGOs involved in education were interviewed.

This report is part of a multi-country study financed and coordinated by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission. The study was conducted from January to June 2021 in Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Romania and Spain. Based on the national reports¹, a cross-country analysis will be published later in 2021.

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, the JRC has initiated various studies in relation to education in the context of Covid-19. The first report looked at the existing literature and recent international datasets to reflect on the likely impact of COVID-19 on education². Next, two new multi-country studies analysed the situation of remote schooling during the first wave of the pandemic. Qualitative data were collected from June to August 2020 focusing on *emergency* remote schooling from the perspective of schools and teachers in five EU Member States (Belgium, Estonia, Greece, Italy and Poland)³.

The second multi-country study, called KiDiCoTi⁴, collected data on children's use of digital media for schooling, leisure time and social contacts. The KiDiCoTi study resulted in a series of reports. One of them is based on online survey data from 11 Member States focusing on how parents and children experienced emergency remote schooling⁵ and another one deepens the view through interviews in 10 Member States⁶. Finally, KiDiCoti has also produced a report on online risks⁷ and has a series of country reports.

All these studies provide a timely trajectory of the current developments in education based on evidence. With the results presented in this report, the aim is to take a step further to learn about the school year 2020-2021 in Romania, and what lessons can be brought forward to make the future of digital education happen.

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed are purely those of the authors and may not in any circumstances be regarded as stating an official position of the European Commission.

¹ Enemark Lundtofte (2021), Monostori (2021), Mägi (2021), Trujillo Sáez (2021), Velicu (2021)

² <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC121071>

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/news/remote-learning-lessons-covid-19-and-way-forward>

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/science-update/kidicoti-kids-digital-lives-covid-19-times>

⁵ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC122303>

⁶ Cachia, Velicu, Chaudron, Di Gioia & Vuorikari (forthcoming)

⁷ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC124034>

Abstract

This report presents the educational response to COVID-19 crisis in Romania during the 2020-2021 school year, a summary in Romanian is found in the annex. Through a qualitative methodology, the project aimed to understand how different educational systems adapted to the pandemic situation in the 2020-2021 school year and to map some good practices in this regard. The report relies on 29 semi structured interviews conducted between March and April 2021 with Romanian stakeholders (e.g., school staff, students, parents, NGOs representatives), with a focus on the compulsory Romanian educational system. The main conclusion is that the 2020-2021 school year was marked by *ad hoc* decisions guided mainly by the public health authorities though centralised approach and less or at all has it answered to education-based reasons. In this context, remote schooling prevailed, and it mostly took the form of synchronous online classes. This marks a plain transition of traditional classes in the new, screen mediated environment. Whereas the main issue discussed in the public space, and partially addressed by authorities, was inequality in access –understood as having access to a digital device and an internet connection– less visible but important issues were neglected. Some of these issues discussed in the report are: the lack of educational digital content and genuine digital pedagogies, lack of curriculum adjustments, lack of profound, systemic and effective inclusive approach for vulnerable students. A hybrid system was also tried, but despite its very promising opportunities, various issues in infrastructure made its implementation flawed.

The first consensus among the interviewees was that although the Romanian educational system managed to take an important step forward on the digitisation path, there is still much more to be improved. Secondly, there was a consensus on how different this school year impacted students, the phrase that best described the situation being: the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer. The report ends presenting some proposals for improving education in a similar situation.

Acknowledgements

This report is financed and coordinated by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission, the JRC team consists of Jonatan Castaño, Romina Cachia, Yves Punie and Riina Vuorikari.

1 Introduction: The national context

After the spring of 2020, when all Romanian schools were kept closed for all students for the second semester, the 2020–2021 school year began with a decentralised approach regulated by the Common Order (5.487/1494/01.09.2020) issued by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health that established three possible scenarios: the *Green* one – allowing face-to-face on-site schooling; the *Yellow* scenario – in which either the hybrid education⁸ is implemented for all grades, or some grades are allowed to go to school (primary school ones and the final classes in a cycle) and all the others would participate in online classes or to the hybrid system; and the *Red* scenario – where school is moved online⁹ altogether.

Local and national authorities would decide upon the scenario based solely on the number of new COVID cases per 1,000 people in that area. In the press release issued on 11th of September 2020, the Ministry of Education talked about 12,610 schools that would start in the *Green* scenario, 4,892 schools in the *Yellow* and 238 schools would start straight online. With the number of cases steadily growing, schools moved slowly from *Green* and *Yellow* scenarios to the *Red* one. On November 9th, 2020, all the schools were closed again for face-to-face classes and education was moved entirely online, following a centralised decision that came with more restrictions (the Decision no. 52 issued by the National Committee for Emergency Situations). All schools continued online¹⁰ until the end of the first term (1st of February 2021). Starting with February 8th, 2021 (the beginning of the second semester) the schools opened in the three scenarios above-mentioned, according to the local situation. Only that, this time, it was stressed on an even more decentralized approach, sometimes schools being allowed to take that decision (for example, school from a *Green* or *Yellow* area could decide to go on the *Red* scenario if there are COVID cases among teachers¹¹; never the other way around, with schools from a ‘*Red* town’ going into a *Yellow* or *Green* scenario). Another important difference is that even in the *Yellow* and *Red* scenarios, pre- and primary school children and those in a final year (8th grade and 12th grade) would attend classes on-site. Because this period overlapped with the so-called “third wave” of COVID infections, an unprecedented solution (i.e. changing the school year schedule during it) was decided upon. The Ministry Order No. 3558 / 29 March 2021 changed the current school year structure and the spring holiday (programmed for the week 2 to 11 of April 2021) extended for all students except for the final years (grade 8th and grade 12th) until the 4th of May. Students from the 8th and 12th grade facing their national exams and respectively the Baccalaureate were allowed to continue their educational activities in an online setting, while all the others took that month-long vacation. A Common Order issued by Ministries of Education and Ministry of Health from April 29, 2021, came up with new regulations for the 2020–2021 school year. Thus, they decided upon keeping only two scenarios, discriminating between essential (i.e., terminal years of the lower and upper secondary school and all the pre- and primary school) and non-essential grades. Students with special needs enrolled in special schools were allowed for the first time since the pandemic started to come to school, regardless of their grade. Another novelty was that special school’s teachers were allowed to use transparent visors instead of opaque masks during class, when “the specific

⁸ The solution of hybrid education was meant for avoiding the overcrowded classes by reducing the number of students who attend at the same time the on-site education; it supposes that classes are split in two and, by rotation, half of the class goes to school and the other half participates to classes remotely, via the internet. The teacher would teach to both groups simultaneously from the classroom, the minimal equipment required being a webcam and a microphone.

⁹ During this report, we will use “remote education” and “online education” for describing the same situation, namely when students attend the classes via the internet (using dedicated software for video conferencing), the interaction between teachers and students and among students being mediated by a screen. Although the provisional situation that has imposed the use of online mediated education would be, according to the literature, an argument for the term “remote education”, in Romania the term that describes this situation legally and in the public discourse is “online education” and this was the term used by our interviews.

¹⁰ By October 2020, some national regulations were issued and parents who have their children (under 12 years old) in online schooling were eligible for taking free days for supervising them at home.

¹¹ If new cases of COVID were confirmed among students (one for pre- and primary school and two for secondary or high school), then only that class would go online. On the contrary, when a teacher was to be confirmed, an epidemiological investigation would take place and the principal would decide together with educational and health authorities on the closure of the entire school for 14 days (Common decision 3235//93/04.02.2021).

teaching / learning / recuperation imposes complete visual contact” (this has been a major request, according to our interviewed teachers; see the section on addressing children with special education needs).

In conclusion, the 2020-2021 school year was marked by *ad hoc*, centralised decisions that were made mainly by the public health authorities, and less based on reasons related to education. By the time when this report was written (i.e., mid May 2021), **some students had not gone to school at all since March 2020, and more than half of the Romanian students went to school for a maximum of two months during this period.** In these health-prioritized conditions, education has found some ways to adapt to the remote conditions, ways that will be described in the following section.

The report is based on 29 research interviews with various Romanian stakeholders (teachers, school principals, school inspectors, students, parents, NGOs’ members, and librarians) that were taken between March 13 – April 23, 2021. The research questions that structured both the interviews and this report are: 1. What pedagogies or instructional practices have educators planned and developed in the 2020-2021 school year? 2. Which type of response has been planned and offered during this 2020-2021 school year for vulnerable students? 3. What are the future implications and recommendations that emerge from the 2020-2021 school year experience for short and long term in education?

2 Results

2.1 Preparing the school year 2020-2021

As the new school year was around the corner, during the summer of 2020, the rhetoric of the Ministry and authorities revolved around the health issues ('Let's try to stay alive and safe and then we'll talk about education', as a student, I19, put it), and only secondly around the access to an online education for disadvantaged students and very few instances, if any, around the quality of the online education. But even in this rather low expectation context, some steps were made –both by the authorities and individual teachers – to address some problems identified during the spring of 2020. These steps covered mainly the infrastructure (e.g., ensuring that all children have access to remote education) and teachers' training in using some digital platforms and apps. Other important issues, such as planning to support disadvantaged students beyond the mere internet access, a plan to monitor students' and teachers' wellbeing and to support it, alternative plans for the screen-based education in remote schooling, curriculum adjustments to better fit the constrained of the online environment or an in-depth training digital pedagogies (apart and distinct from just presenting teachers with some apps) were not reported at all by our respondents.

2.1.1 Institutional level

2.1.1.1 The infrastructure

Creating the educational online platforms for schools. One of the major differences mentioned by teachers between school in spring 2019 and the 2020-2021 school year was the transition from teaching using social media tools (such as FB or WhatsApp groups, see also Velicu, 2020 and Vourikari et al., 2020) to the use of dedicated educational platforms (mostly Google Classroom, but also Microsoft Team or Kinderpedia). This involved creating school-based email accounts for all students and teachers (mostly for Google Classroom), which was totally exceptional in Romania before the pandemic. Sometimes the platform was chosen and implemented by the inspectorates (thus covering all the schools in that area, as mentioned by I1, I16), other times at school level (I15). However, teachers reported not being instructed in the use of these platforms, but learning how to use them on their own, through tutorials, peer support and trial and error.

"We did help each other. If we were to check a zoom connection or that a video is working for the next day's class, we would have called a colleague and had them check it. Or if I did not know how to set a test on Google, I would have asked my colleagues." (I7, primary school teacher)

Moreover, if during the previous year there was no recommendation regarding the platforms to be used, for the 2020-2021, the Ministry recommended the use of a single platform per school, the motivation being, not to confuse students with multiple platforms, apparently as a result of learning from what went wrong during the first part of the pandemic. Some schools took this recommendation as a rule, while others were more permissive with teachers who wanted to use other platforms. I2, who is also the initiator of the Romanian translation of an international educational platform, considers this recommendation inefficient:

"Some platforms are specialized in various subjects and have very good materials already available. Why can't I as a teacher use one platform for English classes, another one for History... Why can't I take the best materials and use them with children? Instead, everyone has to use Google Classroom! Google Classroom is just a tool, an organizing platform, but it does not have any materials to support teaching". (I2, high school, IT teacher)

Worth mentioning, previous to the crisis, unlike public schools, private schools, in order to obtain their quality accreditation, were required to have an online platform (e.g. Google Classroom). That made the transition to the online system very smooth for them (according to a parent and an inspector, private schools went online the very next day after schools close in March 2020).

One computer per classroom, a challenge. Even for the 'good' schools, usually thought to be well equipped with computers, the crisis revealed that not every classroom had a computer. To overcome this problem, with the transition to the hybrid system, computers were taken out of the computer labs, so that teachers could hold their classes in the hybrid system with both groups of students (those on-site and those at home). Other smaller schools have secured funding to equip each class with a computer needed for hybrid

teaching (I4). The situation is still far from being solved, as teachers still used their own devices during the online education period and some schools still lack basic equipment in classrooms (I7).

The device availability for students and teachers issue. Although the Ministry of Education mentioned, in the spring of 2020, that some 250,000 children who did not have access to online school due to lack of access devices, an independent report (IRES, 2020) estimated 900,000 such children. Several programs (of the Government, local authorities, NGOs) have been carried out simultaneously, but lacking any coordination among them, to solve this problem. A wave of enthusiasm emerged then in the speeches by authorities, expressing the hope that no children will be left out in the 2020-2021 school year. The program implementation partially failed, due to local interpretation of requirements – the program was targeted to “each child that needs a device”. The definition of ‘needs’ was problematic; the parents were forced to sign (with legal repercussions in case of false statements) that they do not have any such device in the household, to qualify for such help. Some parents had a smartphone that they needed for their telework during the day and feared to sign such a statement on one’s responsibility (I28). Hence, many parents did not enroll in the program from the start, for this reason only. The second reason of the program’s failure, mentioned by teachers working in disadvantaged areas and by one vulnerable parent, I28, was that should the device break, parents would have to pay a sum that was many times more than their monthly income, so parents gave up altogether these devices. I7 mentions that in her school, in a small, poor village, the school principal induced this fear in parents and advised them to give up the tablets with negative repercussions on children and families. Thus, most parents in that school signed a written declaration by which they renounced the tablets they previously asked for. As a result, children still did not have a dedicated device for attending remote education and logged in from time to time, when their parents’ device was available. The number of absences they accumulated grew and because of this, their family lost the social benefit that was provided by the local authorities (under the condition of school attendance). On the contrary, two of the principals we interviewed were rather realistic about the possibility of these devices to break out. They said that when this happened, they asked parents to bring the device to the school where the IT technician or another teacher would have tried to fix it. In case they could not fix it and if another device was available, the principal would have replaced the broken device. Based on our qualitative data we cannot infer which one from these two approaches was the most common among school principals, but the concern I28 described was very present in the population that badly needed such devices. Finally, another reason was that the purchase of these tablets –which were supposed from the beginning to have an internet connection via a SIM card– was centralized and did not take into account whether the internet providers contracted at the national or a broader local level had internet coverage in the entire area. Hence, some children were not actually able to access the Internet even if they formally had a tablet with an Internet connection. It is also worth mentioning that all the big programs that were implemented opted for the purchase of **tablets**, although as an IT teacher (I2) shows, laptops would have been more suitable for educational purposes (some NGOs or private initiatives at a small level provided children with laptops, as mentioned by I14 and I17).

Worth mentioning, besides providing children with a device, some school leaders (I21, I10), individual teachers (I7) or NGOs (I17) **trained the parents in using/ handling devices** and the special apps for online education.

There has been a lot of talk about students who do not have access to devices, but **less about teachers who do not have access to technology** or to a technology that would allow them to teach their classes in an online setting in optimal conditions. Although this was not the case with the teachers we interviewed, they mentioned that some of their colleagues used their own phones to teach their classes online, as they did not own a laptop or a tablet.

Webcams for hybrid education. Some important devices, in which relatively little money was invested and little has been talked about, were the classroom webcams that allowed students at home to watch classes when they were in the hybrid system. From the students' perspective, one of the negative parts of this hybrid option was that they could not see what the teacher was writing on the board, or, more generally, what happened in the classroom (I19, I27, I28). This happened because, in many schools, the video surveillance systems that were already installed in the classrooms were used for these hybrid teaching activities. Meant initially to discourage cheating at national exams, these systems used low-resolution fixed cameras, not suitable for the hybrid education system. Two examples of good practice are worth mentioning here. I16 recounted that in one of the schools she remotely inspected (attending the online classes in her capacity as school inspector), the principal specifically invested in some high-resolution cameras with a presence sensor. The camera would follow the teacher’s movement in the classroom, allowing children that are at home to better follow the process and feel the togetherness. I16 said that she was able to follow the class that was

given in the hybrid system, in the best conditions from her home, therefore, she considers such a teaching system potentially easy to be implemented (teachers and students had a completely different perception on this issue). Another teacher, I29, said that she used the tablet's camera for streaming lessons for those at home. The tablet, that she always kept in her hand during the hybrid teaching, allowed her to engage more the children in the classroom with those attending from home as she literally moved the camera throughout the entire classroom, facilitating the interaction among students (those from home were 'present' in the classroom on large TV screens).

Not only the infrastructure, but the culture. I19, one of the representatives of students in the National Council of Students said that even if teachers had had all the needed infrastructure (computers, internet connection, platforms etc.) in the Spring of 2020 to make the switch to online teaching, **students and teachers alike lacked a clear vision and preparation of what the online schooling should look like.** Thus, the entire process of adaptation should not be understood only in terms of school's or teachers' preparation, but students' too, because school was not part of their online culture (and, as I19 stressed, this was true not only for the disadvantaged students, but also for those with quite sophisticated online practices and skills).

2.1.1.2 Teachers' training

Webinars. Officially, as mentioned for instance by the school inspector I8, there have been lots of **optional webinars available for teachers**, presenting them with various applications and platforms, and instructing them in how to use them. Others confirmed this, agreeing that *'Only those who did not want it, did not train'* (I5), thus placing **the responsibility for searching among courses on offer and choosing and attending the most suitable solely on the teachers.** Some of the webinars were organised by state's teachers training organisations, some by various NGOs (two NGOs that were involved in our sample provided such webinars and courses), whereas others were organised by the industry, interested in promoting their products. Although the attendance of such webinars was quite broad (I8 said that more than 200 from around 500 primary school teachers from her area attended one such a course), many of the interviewed teachers doubted the efficiency of these webinars, **considering them to be efficient only at an 'information' level** (i.e. the teachers find out the platforms do exist, but they do not learn to use them during such webinars). In order to get familiar with these platforms, to discover and adjust the platform to their own needs, teachers are left to their own devices. Furthermore, some platforms that were initially presented as free during such seminars turned out as requiring access fees after a while, a frustrating situation for teachers who invested time and effort in getting familiar with it and creating content on/for it.

As most communication in the Romanian educational system, information about training opportunities circulated mainly in professional social media groups and less on more formal channels. As learning about these webinars and courses was a personal approach from the teachers' part, those teachers who were not particularly interested in digital pedagogies or those less present on social media, those who did not actively try to find out about these training opportunities did not learn about them (e.g. I1 and I18 said they were not offered any such courses).

"The Ministry gave us a lot of links and websites. But once you enter there, you can notice that an account is required. You create an account and then you find out that you have access for an hour or a day, or you have free access to just two little units, and then it's over, you have to pay for more. I made so many accounts during this period on so many platforms that I got fed up with this." (I7, primary school teacher)

Although officially a vast majority of teachers were trained in using digital technology, the online schooling revealed that this was in many cases only on paper. Almost all the stakeholders (e.g. students, teachers, school leaders or inspectors) we interviewed mentioned this lack of basic digital skills for some teachers. Thus, one reason for the inefficiency of such training webinars was they would pre require a certain level of teachers' digital skills (e.g., *"Present in 50 minutes a great piece of software to someone who never turned on a computer before"* - I2). Secondly, because beyond the mere presentation of the app or platform, teachers need supervised practice in using it, as I6, a librarian, described it had happened during a training program organized by a group of students (among which was I11) in her library during the summer. During that program, four highschool students trained local primary and secondary school teachers in using some platforms. The trainers not only presented the tool to courasant teachers, but took them step by step through the platforms and helped them learn how to use them properly.

Long term courses. Some teachers enrolled in longer term classes, while others enrolled in classes on international platforms (e.g., Coursera), those latter ones also being more satisfied with the efficacy of such courses. That was largely due to the quantity of homework or practice they had to do from one session to the other, forcing them to engage with the platform and to practice on it, and not just passively “listen to” an online class. Only one such course was offered by the Ministry of Education. As schools did not cover the cost of teachers’ training, more developed training programs offered for a fee by industry or NGOs were in general not attended by teachers.

2.1.1.3 Hygienic measures and protocols

One important aspect in preparing the 2020-2021 school year was the **implementation of the Covid-related preventive health and safety regulations**. Although the school principal who mentioned it argued for the utility of these procedures, none of the interviewed teachers mention them, which could be read either as a formal procedure that school leaders had to have it checked and or that although it is real and teachers respect it, they had not been part of these translation of the rules at the school level.

“We had to elaborate a procedure that encompassed all the regulations. We had to reorganise the “geography” of the school to create separate entrance-exit circuits to reduce the interactions among students or school staff. We were lucky as we have six entrances in our school, and this helped a lot. We bought all the required hygienic materials. These protocols were necessary for going further with this school year. We had to have everything clear on how we should move around. As a principal, I have to have clear in my mind what I can and should ask from teachers. And this can only happen through a procedure.” (I21, school principal)

Following these anti-COVID procedures is time consuming, as reported by teachers, and this is detrimental for the teaching time, as the breaks were not increased.

“Since we’ve come back to school, the ten-minute break is not enough for children. Because they have to stay in line for the bathroom, we have to disinfect when they go to the toilet, the same when they come back.” (I7, primary school, teacher)

Despite these hygienic regulations imposed by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, teachers and students admitted that these are not followed in most schools. A salient exception is in private schools where, as reported by a mother (I24), the hygienic rules are strictly followed. I7 acknowledged that in her school, older students do not wear a mask in schools and she could not force them to wear a mask. I19, as one of the representatives of students in the Students National Council, supported her statement, saying that it is not officially stated somewhere that teachers are the ones to enforce the mask wearing by students.

2.1.2 Teacher’s level

Very few of the interviewed teachers (e.g., I7) said they did not undergo a special preparation for the 2020-21 school year, most of them indicating one or more aspects in which they took extra-care in preparing.

“I would rather say I didn’t have an extraordinary preparation for this school year. The curriculum content is the same, the handbooks are the same, the school year structure is the same. The only thing that changed was the medium through which I’ve interacted with pupils. So, I can’t see how I could organise or prepare myself differently. Maybe just to add some asterisks on the planning in which to mention that I will introduce some new tools to children.” (I7, primary school teacher)

Learning how apps and platforms work. In preparing for the 2020-2021 school year, most teachers said they had attended webinars and learned how to use different platforms by watching tutorials in a self-driven approach of learning. For many of them (the ‘early adopters’ who also taught their classes in an online setting, during the spring of 2020), this type of preparation started the previous school year. During this stage, peer support was essential, most of them acknowledging they received it, in learning how to use the technology. Some of them acted as trainers for their colleagues, but very few recorded tutorials of their own, demonstrate how to use a platform (I8). Except for a few (in general, school principals), teachers said that they did not find out about these webinars via their school / inspectorate, but by following various professional groups on social media.

Digital content creation. Equally important in preparing this school year, and mentioned by almost all teachers, was the creation of digital educational content to support their teaching in a remote setting. For very few of them this was not a new process; I2 said for instance that she has been using her own account on an

educational platform in the last 14 years and developed quite a few materials during this period. But most teachers mentioned starting this type of preparation only last year. Not all interviewed teachers shared the same understanding on what is a digital educational material and this variation has the potential of generating learning gaps. For I1, an art teacher with a low level of digital skills, this meant preparing a Word document in which she inserts links for videos or images/pictures, whereas for I29, who teaches physics as a supplementary teacher and who is also an alumni of Teach for Romania program, this meant accessing virtual laboratories for conducting experiments in Physics. Moreover, while some just prepared the course support (plain Word document) and uploaded it online, others created quizzes (on Kahoot) and used other educational games that better fitted into the digital pedagogy notion, taking advantage of the affordances digital platforms do offer. Also, some teachers considered that their already available materials fit well to their classes so they just 'digitise' them, using them in the same way as before – only this time, mediated via screens. Around half of the interviewed teachers mentioned they also used the digital handbook provided by the Ministry (a PDF document with very few interactive exercises) and when this was not available, a technology teacher (I18) said he scanned part of it, added some videos (to make up for the lack of the blackboard on which he would have drawn in a face-to-face scenario) and used it in his teaching practices.

Alongside with creating their own content, most of them have reused and adapted other such contents they found online, that they found to be rather satisfactory. Twinkle, a platform that became very popular among teachers during the crisis and which also became populated with educational content in Romanian language, was mentioned as a source of inspiration during the interviews, though adaptation was always highlighted. While some adaptation could be justified –for example, because there are not enough educational materials on the platform for children with special education needs (SEN), therefore teachers had to adjust “general materials” to their students’ special needs–, other times we suspect that teachers’ continuously highlighting on the ‘adaptation process’ could be read as their maladjustment to the new paradigm of authorship (i.e. the culture around the Creative Common licenses) that the culture of the internet 2.0 enabled. For them, ‘taking’ (getting) content as such from the internet is negatively connotated; one needs to customize it to feel legitimated to use it.

On the other hand, as explained by a teacher, the high demands for creating digital education materials paired up with lack of support from the part of the Ministry.

“Teachers felt they were left on their own when they were asked to create their own digital content, with no support whatsoever. It is not officially compulsory for the moment, but at the moment when the Ministry requires one to teach online classes, one needs these materials that are not available for some disciplines. So, the teacher must create them. The Ministry offered, upon a simple Internet search, a list of applications or platforms that could be used, but it’s one thing to create a classroom on these learning management system types of applications and it’s another to get the proper content for online teaching. There are teachers that struggle to make some PowerPoint presentations, but this is not ‘proper content for online teaching.’ There are also some dedicated teachers who really create [it], but I doubt they can do that for all the classes they work with. And I know what I am talking about, I have done this thing for 14 years now.” (I2, IT teacher)

Only two teachers (I2 and I7) were rather critical of the educational content available online, saying that it is poor in quality (“full of methodical and content-wise mistakes”, I7). They argued for having this digital content (that will be used in teaching children) corrected, evaluated, and endorsed by a legitimate state institution (e.g., by having good quality content published on an online national library) or at least peer reviewed by the professional community.

Securing infrastructure for students’ access and for the digital class. In some cases, the preparation of the technical infrastructure for this school year was taken on by the teacher. For instance, at the beginning of the pandemic, I4 –a very active teacher, involved in extra-curricular projects– agreed to redirect some money she had earned in a previous project to provide tablets to the most vulnerable students in her class. Thus, the funders of the grant offered 11 tablets with an internet connection paid up until the end of the last school year (June 2020). The downside of this *ad hoc* solution was that for 2020-2021, the internet connection of their devices expired and the children/ families who benefited last year did not qualify this school year to get a connected device from the Ministry or the municipality as they already have the device¹². Some parents made an effort and paid for the internet connection, whereas others were unable to do so. For these latter cases, I4 offered her own wifi connection, inviting children to her home and allotting each of them

¹² In Romania, the internet connection as a stand-alone service was not offered to vulnerable children by schools.

a corner in the house to respect the safe distancing rule and not to create technical jamming. The use of digital technology out of necessity during this period acted as a trigger for her to switch to a digital class for good. Through her personal network, later the same year (in April 2020), she raised money and offered tablets to all her students, as she had decided to use the tablets in her face-to-face classes too. She then applied for and obtained a smartboard (equipped with the proper software), aiming for a 'school that fits the XXI century', as she put it.

Acquiring devices to improve their teaching practices. Some teachers mentioned they bought professional tablets and e-pens that allowed them to write, draw and provide digital feedback to children's work, the same way as they would have done in school (or even better). For each of them, this represented a big financial effort and was decided for in order to improve the quality of their teaching (especially when they were teaching science).

2.2 Pedagogies and instructional practices developed during 2020-2021

This sample used in this study was built to **map the good practices**. It allowed the researcher to identify some genuine digital pedagogies and some forms of adaptation of the teaching practices to the online environment. Noting that the qualitative methodology of the study does not allow for generalization, **the interviewed stakeholders agreed that generally there seems to be no real adaptation of teachers to the opportunities and constraints of the online environment, but rather a translation of the old pedagogical practices into the new online environment.** Thus, all the classes were translated in almost the same format as before, once in the online environment. Moreover, the general agreement among all the interviewees was that despite the new digital pedagogies that some teachers managed to master and despite the advantages some students obtained from online education, **all of them are looking forward to returning to school, missing the school's "atmosphere" and the social aspects of it (with children and colleagues as well)**, the feeling of being in control of the class, the self-trust feeling of doing what you know best. There were also voices among the interviewed teachers who, despite being enthusiastic at the beginning of online schooling, gave up their hopes and concluded that this is not a suitable alternative to on-site schooling.

"In all reports, there is one common narrative: if we find the right method and adapt our tools, the online education will work and kids will understand and learn. For a while, I believed the same and thought that I hadn't found the right use of tools or the right pedagogy for the digital environment. But it's not that. It simply doesn't work. I don't want to say not to use the internet or the smartboard. But they have to be used parsimoniously, where they fit." (I7, primary school teacher)

2.2.1 Adapting the teaching practices and pedagogies

Synchronous educational activities with children is the 2020-2021 rule. All the interviewed teachers reported they switched to teaching synchronously with the children during the current school year, including those who had not done so the previous year¹³. Some of the teachers said that this was a requirement of the Ministry, others that it was a requirement at the school level or even that there was pressure from other teachers who had already done so the previous school year (where the requirements were not clear, nor mandatory, as to what teachers should do). Only for kindergarten children, the option of asynchronous classes was being considered (in which children are given tasks that they have to solve and send the results to teachers), although sometimes in kindergarten children also have synchronous classes (but shorter, of only 20 minutes each). Although the interviewed teachers said they gave all the classes online, both school inspectors

¹³ I19, a student at a good highschool said for instance that in their school in the spring of 2020, less than 20% of teachers have entered online in synchronous activities with their students. In this situation (good school and almost terminal year), I19 said; 'All of a sudden, students realized they are on their own and either started a truly self-guided study program that is very unusual in the Romanian educational system, or headed towards private paid lessons, but they did not put a pressure on teachers to start doing their jobs, because this is very uncommon in Romania, where the civic culture of one asking for their right to education is not in place'. He added that private tutoring exploded during that period, and though officially 40% of students take such tutoring in the terminal years, probably the percentage is much higher.

interviewed in the project said some parents complained to them that not all teachers held all their online classes, or some classes were not held altogether (for instance, primary school teachers disregarded the art and music class, which are seen as non-essential for future national evaluations, and only gave their pupils the math and Romanian language classes¹⁴). Moreover, as a student described the situation, the synchronous activities meant very different things for different teachers, those who were interested and engaged in the traditional setting continuing to do so in the online system.

"It depends on the teachers. There are some that are well prepared for online teaching and we can understand what they teach us. But there are others who haven't gotten used to the new environment and make use of some... old methods, let's say. For instance, the math teacher writes on a sheet of paper that we can't see and then sends us the picture of that sheet of paper. But in this way the connection between the teacher and students gets lost. And then he doesn't explain to us what's in that picture; he just continues to teach us..." (I11, a student)

Adjusting the initial assessment of the students and covering the learning gaps from 2019-2020.

Because during the previous school year it was difficult for teachers to reach the learning objectives in the curricula, some teachers, especially at primary school level (e.g., I4 and I5), took their time during the summer to design assessment tests that would give them an accurate understanding of the actual learning level of their students, in order to adjust their teaching practices the following year.

"I wanted to understand what they remembered from what I taught them last year during the first term, when we were in school, and what and how much they did remember from what I had done with them during the second term, in remote schooling. As I had expected, their results were poorer, so I adjusted, and I started this year from that level on." (I4, primary school teacher)

But adjusting to children's level and covering the learning gaps from the previous school year proved to be very difficult at the administrative level in the rigid Romanian educational system. Although this aspect was not covered by any official recommendation, some teachers did their best in teaching what was not covered thoroughly or at all, the year before. For primary school teachers, this was easier, as they could juggle between subjects, taking some extratime from some and adding to others. But for secondary school teachers, this was impossible and in the absence of any official relaxation of the curricula, they just admitted that the learning gaps deepened this year.

"I've constantly thought about how I could fill in the learning gaps from last year because it was a disaster. It is very difficult to write this in papers (i.e., the administrative reports and planning teachers do). Because I have to teach third grade on their curriculum. I can not write on my planning that I extensively revise or assess if they have the skills from the second grade. Because they are in their third grade now and I am supposed to teach them new content. I think we as primary school teachers are luckier because we have more hours with the same children and we can adjust and we revise what has been lost, content-wise. But I really don't know how teachers from secondary school onward have dealt with it." (I7, primary school teacher)

Videorecording the lessons. For some teachers (e.g., those who had used digitised content in their teaching practices before the pandemic, such as I2 who has been using her own platform in teaching for more than 15 years), the adaptation consisted mainly in videorecording themselves while teaching and posting online, in an effort of making more online lessons available in the Romanian language. Teachers preferred not to translate already existing videos/ online lessons from English into Romanian, because this would be more time consuming and because they would rather adjust the information to the needs / the level of their students and the Romanian curricula.

Video-recorded lessons could also work as triggers in the learning process; the visual part / the image of the teacher explaining supports the content taught, instead of them merely providing students written notes.

"Some years ago, I had a good student who, every time when I gave them a written test, was staring at me for a few minutes. And when I asked her why, she answered that by looking at me she managed to remember all the explanations I had given them in class". (I2, highschool teacher)

¹⁴ Note that such decisions to reduce the curricula were made individually by some (mostly primary school) teachers and had not been supported by any central recommendations, according to our respondents. As parents complained about them to the school inspectorate, these measures were in the benefit of students, but convenient also to teachers.

Discovering multimodal methods in teaching. Almost all teachers consider the practice of using video or audio teaching materials as being the main gain of online education, given that relatively few schools were already equipped with all the necessary technology before, or, even if the technology was present in the classroom, teachers did not have the habit of looking up digital materials, as they preferred a more traditional presentation (drawing/writing on the board, maps, illustrative drawings, storytelling). **Some teachers acknowledged the superiority of the digital educational resources over their own potential of explaining some subjects** (e.g., for the music classes, in primary school teachers had been more than happy to use videos with professional explanations of the subject).

Digital pedagogy, more than using some applications or platforms. Teachers agreed that digital technology is not a panacea, that they should make informed choices for what is most suitable to their class, to their subject and to themselves. If some were rather enthusiastic about apps and platforms, others stressed on the necessity of adapting the use of apps to their children's needs.

"One doesn't have to use an app just for the wow factor, but for its potential to teach children something" (I5, primary school teacher for special education needs).

"Everyone is fond of online quizzes, but for my pupils these do not work, even when they know the answers by heart, because they take them too playful and don't quite read the question." (I7, primary school teacher)

Other teachers stressed on the idea that they reached a saturation point in learning about 'new and fancy apps' and now they just want to take their time to see how to integrate them properly in their teaching, and how to adopt a genuine digital pedagogy.

"At the beginning, I was eager to learn about as many platforms and apps. And I spent endless nights trying to figure out how they work. Now, if someone wants to tell me about a new app, I would just refuse to listen. I feel like I got to the point of making use in my teaching of what I already know" (I15, highschool teacher)

Without the human touch: Teaching pupils handwriting – online. One of the most challenging skills to teach online to children was handwriting. Romanian educational system still focuses in the first and the second school year on cursive writing (i.e. not just to write "nice" or "neat", but children must use a certain technique, with all the letters penned in a continuous stroke etc.) and it is considered that this skills can only be learned with the teacher's hand physically leading the pupil's hand and showing how to draw letters and words. Thus, it took mastering the digital skills and personally investing in special devices to overcome the distance from the primary teacher's part. Using some virtual board with special types of lines, using a special device to hold the smartphone in order to record the teacher's hand while writing, or using graphic tablets and stylus were some of the solutions mentioned during the interviews. Nonetheless, some of the older teachers well appreciated by parents in a traditional teaching system lacked the capacity to adapt to this new challenge. Although a school inspector (I8) mentioned she personally tried to help one primary school teacher overcome these challenges, her discourse on the situation was rather fatalistic: "that's how things are, and some teachers just perform worse in the online system".

Working in teams during synchronous educational activities. Group work during the classes has the potential to change the communication flow in a class (from one node having the teacher in the center to multiple nodes constituted by groups) and therefore to engage students more. Nonetheless, in the online environment, only few of the interviewed teachers (I15, I29, and I16) said they knew how to set such groups by creating separate rooms on the platform and made use of them. The others, though they said that in a face-to-face setting would have used such pedagogy, **did not know about the availability of such a facility**, nor did not know how to implement it - or just took it for granted as a costly facility (e.g. I2 explained that facilities for working in teams were not "for free", therefore teachers didn't use them much).

The school schedule: between students' wellbeing and educational outputs. Although individually all the interviewed teachers declared being concerned about their students' wellbeing, they admitted they did not do much in this respect, for lack of time. They all denounced the inflexibility of the curriculum and the fact that it was not simplified at the official level¹⁵ to better fit the context of online learning or of the crisis, more

¹⁵ There were some adjustments made especially by primary school teachers who could decide to use, for instance, the time allocated for art or PE classes and do some extra hours on the subjects they considered more important. But this was not possible at secondary school level.

generally. On the contrary, they said, online teaching is more time-consuming than in-school teaching. In general, they did not operate such a reduction in the curricula themselves, because, as some of the teachers have highlighted, at the end of the year or of the school cycle, students are evaluated based on the whole curriculum, and teachers at their turn are evaluated according to the students' grades. Moreover, to prevent children's long(er) exposure to screens, classes were reduced from 50 to 40 minutes, while for primary school children they were cut to 30 minutes; for kindergarten children, hours were reduced to 20-minute online meetings. Although teachers we interviewed agreed that this decision was good for children's health, the reduction of classes put additional stress on teachers, who did not have enough time to finish up teaching the curriculum content.

Sometimes, teachers' struggle with time was also because they did not exploit the benefits of technology and certain class routines were duplicated (for example, taking the register in a traditional way or reading out loud the course material that students would have had access to anyway on the platform – while waiting for students to write down in their notebook exactly what they said). Apart from this class duration adaptation, the schools have not officially changed the schedule to include more flexibility to be left at the teacher's decision. This flexibility was mentioned by teachers (I29, I7, I4) as very useful in working with disadvantaged families in the spring of 2020, when some courses were held according to the parents' schedule (when they could leave the device at the child's disposal) or depending on the time of day when the student was not requested by parents for household chores. In this respect, some teachers said that **for vulnerable students from rural areas, being present at school represents not only being in an educational space, but also a delimitation of education time** that children are not provided with when they are at home and are urged by their parents to participate in the household activities (this was also mentioned by I26, as a frequent situation in his class). Finally, this lack of adaptation of the school schedule partially contributed to some covered absenteeism. As a student (I26) recalled, being present and engaged in classes at 7.30 in the morning is very difficult from home, the temptation of the bed being too strong. So, they usually log into the platform, answer "present" if they are called and then just go back to sleep.

What worked in online schooling according to students and parents. Asked about what the best online class looks like, students agreed that in general teachers who used to be good in the offline system performed well in the online system. Good classes were often linked to the **teacher's investment in devices** and **the availability of online content** for that subject (for instance, student I26 mentioned English classes because there were lots of engaging materials around that his teacher used in the online classes).

'It depends on the subject: the ICT and coding classes are great as the teacher knows well what to do: she shares her screen; we can follow the algorithm or coding lines as she is writing them and we can do the same on our devices. The physics classes are also good; the teacher bought a graphic tablet, and we can see all the pictures she draws and formulas she writes there. What's also good with her classes is that she registers the attendance automatically, so we don't waste time anymore on that.' (I11, student)

From parents' point of view, good classes in an online setting were those in which teachers managed to motivate their students and keep them active and engaged in class.

2.2.2 Adapting the evaluation and feedback

The assessment and the evaluation were considered by all the interviewed teachers the most difficult part in the remote education this year. Whereas the majority of the teachers of older students from our sample complained about students' cheating practices, some tried new forms of evaluation, more engaging and innovative. Some of the primary school teachers interviewed complained about the imprecision of their online evaluation of students, acknowledging that the online assessment situation is much worse than it seems to be.

"During the remote education, I mostly evaluated them orally; and everything seemed OK. They seemed to have learnt, probably because I tended to help them and put in their mouth more than they actually knew and said. But when they came back to school and I gave them a written evaluation, that was a genuine one, then I saw the real picture of their learning gaps." (I7, primary school teacher)

Adapting assessment to prevent the cheating possibilities of remote schooling. When asked about assessment, teachers spoke mostly about trying to circumvent students' cheating during exams/ evaluations. Most teachers mentioned the cheating issue of the 'classical' tests (the way

they would have been if in class, pen and paper-based), only this time, after writing the test on a sheet of paper, children would photograph the test and email it to the teacher, to grade it. The cheating practices (admitted or mentioned also by students), in this online educational setting, are: students sharing the answers in a group via some chat app – sometimes, the answers would even get back to the teacher, if he/she would be in the group – or more knowledgeable peers or relatives could help students with the answers. Faced with this, many teachers adjusted their assessment strategy. Some of them would ask students to switch on the camera during this test and position it such as the near environment to be visible on the camera. Other times, teachers shifted to include more evaluation in class, asking questions to the students or assessing their activity (I2 and I29). And although the teachers trust that these strategies would diminish or even prevent the cheating options, students of older age recounted that they could easily cheat even in this setting (via multiple screens, one for the class and another one to retrieve information online). The cheating options were also discussed in relation to homeworks. Many teachers discovered the benefits of platforms in regards to receiving individual homeworks from pupils. Surprisingly, a digitally skilled primary school teacher kept the common group on WhatsApp as the communication platform for sending/receiving homework, in an effort of making the process transparent for the parents. In her view, the cheating aspect weighed less than the benefits of engaging the parents in the process. Moreover, as she and another teacher argued, for some children who would not do their homework, just copying it from somebody else was already a benefit, learning-wise.

Quizzes as a means to engage students while evaluating them. Teachers also mentioned they discovered quizzes as not only a means to evaluate their students (because they can cheat at quizzes too, teachers and students agreed), but to make them learn at their own pace (as playing quizzes advances students learning), or even to engage them more in having a more critical view of the subject by creating some quizzes themselves (I25). As enjoyable as quizzes are, they are useless for younger children in the opinion of I7 who reported children took them in a much too playful way, just ticking in randomly and not paying attention to questions.

Summative evaluation as a digital cognitive map. Because during the online schooling all the educational activities of children were documented by photographing them (e.g. all the accomplished homework or ‘in class’ tasks were sent to teachers as pictures), I5 created a “cognitive digital map” for each child and shared it with the child and their family. That was a map with the learning objectives and skills children have to acquire at the end of the year and the place where the child is in this achievement illustrated by children’s works. Although this is not an entirely new practice for her, as she used to create children’s portfolios on paper and send them to parents at the end of the term, the digital version was better appreciated by parents and children because of the way in which it was organised, telling the story of children’s evolution during the term. It also helped the teacher to clearly identify each child’s gaps.

2.2.3 Engaging students: the biggest challenge

The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer. The common idea mentioned by almost everyone is that students who were engaged with school before the pandemic have thrived in the online setting, whereas those who were not interested/engaged before, in general, did not show interest in the new setting either. In other words, there was a difficulty in implementing online measures to solve lack of engagement. The situation was regarded as ‘normal’, unchanged, and unsurprising by some of the respondents, whereas others stressed that in fact the gap between the two groups of children has broadened hugely during this period, with the impossibility of the latter to catch up with the first or with school in general. Just two exceptions were noticed by teachers, with some shy and introverted students who have thrived in the online environment (mentioned by I15) and with a child with autism spectrum disorder (enrolled in the special educational system) with whom the parents worked more, individually, during this period and the child evolved very well.

Engaging and supporting students in the classroom. Getting feedback from students’ about their understanding and supporting their learning was difficult in the online environment when the practice of using the whiteboard to assess students’ understanding was missed.

“Sometimes the teacher would name a student and ask them to show how to solve a problem and the teacher, if she or he has a graphic tablet, would write down what the students said, if that is correct” (I11, a student).

Nonetheless, because this way precious time is lost or they simply do not have time at all, teachers gave up on checking children’s understanding from class. That came with the surprise that when they were again face-

to-face with their students, teachers realised that some of them did not get anything from the online teaching, as I13 said.

The absent student and the looming drop out problem. Because in the state of emergency of the last school year teachers were advised not to register the absenteeism of children as it could have been due to the lack of technical means to access the online school, a precedent was created and some students and parents (according to teachers' saying) believed the same to be true for 2020-2021. If some teachers are stricter in recording all the absent pupils (e.g., I18) others are more reluctant in using such constraining tools, as in the end these turn against their students. For instance, I13 who teaches children with autism spectrum disorder said that if she recorded the absence of her students in the online schooling, they would lose the financial aid that they really need. Nonetheless, she is convinced that this is not the beginning of dropping out, but when the crisis is over, her students will come back to school. Other interviewees, especially when referring to older students who started working during this period as couriers or other small jobs, were not so optimistic about the return of these students to school.

Not having a face: the present-absent student. Due to what was perceived as being "the stuttering" in the Ministry's recommendations regarding having cameras on or off (that changed often during the year), the teachers did not know exactly when they had the right to ask students to turn their cameras on and when students had the right to keep it off. Students in general preferred to keep their cameras off. By Ministry Order 6.200 / 16.12.2020 (for which I19 says that an important contribution was made by the Student Council) it was stipulated that as long as they meet the requirements and answered their teachers's requests, students must be considered present even if they kept their camera off – that they have this right of privacy. However, students are required to have their cameras turned on when they are assessed. But many teachers felt totally unmotivated to teach in front of a screen on which they could only see coloured squares or dots with their students' names or initials on. "*I'm talking to some polka dots on the screen*" says I1, while I16 says she feels like being in a spiritualism séance, invoking the unseen spirits of students behind the screen: "*George, are you there? George, answer me!*" Other teachers consider that it depends on the teachers' ability to convince children to turn on their cameras. I2, I4 or I25 said that, in their classes, almost all the children have their cameras on. On the other hand, if teachers do not have too high expectations, they are satisfied with this situation.

"It's clear that students are getting more and more bored and silent, especially those who have been online all the time. But there are always two or three to talk to. And it also depends on how you activate them, what you ask them. But you ask them things by naming them, because you see their names up there if you don't already know them". (I3, teacher and counselor, secondary school)

Although everyone acknowledged that there is no way to check students' real engagement in class if they have their camera off ('*I was told by parents that they stumbled upon their children watching Netflix or playing video games while officially they were logged in the class*', said an Inspector, I8), **there is no real attempt to change this situation, other than throwing the responsibility on the parents' shoulders** ('*It's up to parents to be more involved and check on their children's engagement*', I8). Finally, there are teachers who do not even try to engage their students in discussions, who keep on having a frontal teaching style (i.e., dictating from behind the screen and having the children write on the notebook). In the latter case, teachers do not turn on their camera either, resulting in a total lack of engagement of children in class.

Worthmentioning, some teachers adopted a variety of digital applications with the potential to engage and attract students (e.g., quizzes, animations, virtual labs, games).

On the other side, there are students, parents and even teachers and school inspectors who said that sometimes there are good reasons for which the camera stays off, one of them being that some children are ashamed of the poverty in which they live, and they do not want this to be visible for their colleagues and teachers. Very few teachers framed the issue in privacy terms; most of them mentioned as acceptable excuses the especially embarrassing conditions in which some students live. Likewise, when arguing for having their camera on, the argument used is not the institutional and official relationship and situation of being 'at school' (although online), but a more interpersonal/ethical rule of reciprocity. An interesting solution to this problem was found by a teacher from a school for children with SEN (I5), who said that they set a (virtual) 'class weekly background' that all students put on their Zoom, which is meant to equalise the setting, but also to recreate a uniform and unitary atmosphere of a classroom. Although this solution seems to work in her case, other teachers (e.g., I7) do not agree with this, as they said this kind of background would require better devices than those the children in poverty have.

In these conditions, many teachers expressed frustration that they either failed to convince students to turn on their cameras or that they had to put a considerable amount of time and emotional resources into this persuasion work. With students' cameras turned off, most of the time teachers failed in engaging students in classes, which is indicative of the lack of feedback on whether students understood or not what was discussed and, in time, teachers lost their self-confidence in their pedagogical practices.

Switching roles: students as teachers. To engage students more and in line with their new pedagogy approaches they favour, some teachers encouraged students to have a self-driven approach to learning and together with using the flipped classroom approach. For these special classes, students prepared individually; teachers said it was easy for them to provide them with online feedback, in this process (I25). Other teachers also reported that encouraging students to create quizzes themselves for their peers was a better way of engaging students and improving their learning (I29, I25).

Engaging the students through video games in the in-school educational setting. Since February 2021, the primary school pupils have been allowed to come back to school and some teachers recounted how they still use digital technology in this setting to engage with students. For example, I4 talks about how she engaged her students in some math games during the breaks (when they are not allowed to play together as a hygienic measure) in which they competed against each other, each on his/her own tablet. Not only did they learn math in this way, but they also interacted (virtually and in the real world too, by talking and laughing together).

2.2.4 Enlarging the professional circle/ communities

Teachers' communication and collaboration. Although the online world is supposed to cancel the space distance and transform the world into a global village, most of the time the translation from the teachers' staffroom to a bigger professional community did not happen with this forced digitisation. Teachers reported a simple translation of the in-school relationships to a WhatsApp group relationship. Nonetheless there were some interesting exceptions, described below.

Using the digital content developed in the Republic of Moldova¹⁶. The example of the Republic of Moldova was mentioned in different interviews, from all over the country, teachers and librarians praising Moldavian national database/ library for the digital educational content that was created by teachers. Developed by the Moldavian government, on this platform there are 20-minute video-recorded lessons for various school subjects, especially for Romanian / Moldavian language.

Opening the classroom towards the world. Some teachers mentioned that with the switch to online schooling they joined projects with schools from all over the world. Other teachers and librarians recounted how they took advantage of the internet and invited well known researchers or writers to their classes (e.g., I29 invited an ultrasound doctor to talk to students in the physics class). Although this kind of activity can hardly be seen as innovative, the context of the online learning made it possible because it contributed to the 'normalisation' of online meetings.

2.2.5 The hybrid solution: a better option or the worst one?

Seen initially as a middle-ground solution, between the normality of 'in school' education and the online remote education, the 'hybrid solution' generated a variety of feelings, from all the interviewed parts. **The issues with the hybrid system mentioned by students were related to technical problems** – poor quality and mostly fixed webcams and the microphone used for broadcasting, or internet connection issues. I11, a student, mentioned that **parents from some classes invested in buying better cams and mics** to improve the quality of the training process for children from home when attending hybrid education.

"I remember that it was an evaluation test when we were in this system and the differences between those at school and those at home was very visible; just because those who had been at home simply did not understand what the teacher had taught. I can say that the online method is clearly better than the hybrid one. At least we all receive the same quality of training." (I11, student)

From teachers' side, the problem was linked with the extraordinary effort teachers had to put into working simultaneously with two groups of children with two different approaches and pedagogy. Teacher I15 said that the most dramatic moment that challenged and changed her initial enthusiasm for online schooling was

¹⁶ The Republic of Moldova has as official language, Romanian.

when, suddenly in the middle of a class held in the hybrid mode, she realised that she 'had forgot' about her students from class and addressed for some good minutes only the students from home, looking to the camera. She felt this as a betrayal of her students.

Alternative types of hybrid settings. Alongside the official understanding of the hybrid system (see the footnote in the National context section), there has been another local proposal. This proposal, that was finally accepted in some schools, was to have days or parts of days dedicated only to online education, even when most of the classes could and would take place in school. This solution was mentioned in relation with the coding classes or those for the ICT use, which could no longer be held in optimal conditions in school, after the dismantling of computer labs, or when the classes taught by teachers too health-vulnerable, to be held online, even when the conditions would allow for the so-called *Green* scenario (I2).

Some teachers (I2, I29) had a critical view on the Romanian authorities' understanding of the hybrid system.

"The hybrid system means part of the activity happens online, and part of it it's the students working independently at home, each at its own level. By no means it doesn't mean half the class is at school and the other half at home." (I2, IT teacher, highschool)

Favouring some groups for on-site education. Starting with the second semester (February 2021), the Ministry of Education proposed a new approach, allowing pre- and primary school children and also students from the final years in a cycle (8th and 12th grade) to come to school even in the *Red* scenario, whereas all the other grades (5-7 and 9-11) stayed online, when the number of new cases grew above 3/1000. If this decision was met with full approval for the younger children, for those in their final grades opinions were divided. Some teachers (e.g., I2) considered that prior to their national exams, the most profitable for students would be to be left at home, to only focus on those subjects of their finals (only three of fourteen subjects they have in their curricula) and not to waste their time on the way to school and back, or with subjects considered less important (than the exams' subjects). Health issues were also mentioned, as students would be more exposed to COVID risks, in a very important period for them. On the other hand, the argument is that although it might not be in the advantage of hard-working and privileged students, who would train alone or with private teachers if they stayed at home, the decision benefits vulnerable students who have disconnected from school during this period; by bringing them to school, they are helped to reconnect and prepare for those exams.

Many teachers agree that a better solution would have been to bring to school students in their first year of a school cycle (5th and 9th grade) as those are especially vulnerable years, starting online would have risked their lack of integration in the new class (they faced new colleagues, new teachers and sometimes new ways of being taught, especially as they move on from the primary to the secondary school, from a single teacher to different teachers for each discipline).

2.2.6 Extracurricular activities

The teachers and school principals reported that, when it was possible to move them online, the extracurricular activities continued during the pandemic as well. As reported by parents, the situation varied according to how important the benefits are for the child in parents' view. For instance, I24 said that all the extracurricular activities of her daughter (6th grade in a private school) stopped, whereas I23 said that her daughter continued her riding classes, because they are very important as a form of therapy. An interesting example was provided by student I11, who was engaged in such an activity as a trainer. Being a member in two robotics clubs, one within the library of her village and one at her highschool, during the pandemic she was active in providing online classes (in 3D design) and on-site tutoring in both clubs. The highschool club has offered these classes before the crisis too, but *in presentia*. During the pandemic, they gave lessons online, with less effort and better attendance; she gave ten such online classes in the month before the interview.

2.2.7 Risks and opportunities of digital technology in the remote schooling times

In this section we will map the risks and opportunities students and teachers encountered, in the context of the intense use of digital technology and the extensive period of online learning that characterised the 2020-2021 school year. The section is framed by the EU Kids Online theoretical model that states that online risks come together with online opportunities and are both generated by more use (Livingstone et al., 2011; see

also Lobe et al., 2021 and Velicu, 2021 that both show an increase of online risks for children during the lockdown). Although in general the literature talks about children's online risks, our research showed that there are also some risks for teachers and some that are encountered by teachers and students alike.

2.2.7.1 Risks of online education

Risks for teachers: **Lack of control of the class at different levels.** Due to technical problems or due to lack of digital skills, some teachers complained about not being in control of the online class, as I1 recalls: in one of her last classes, because she could not generate a new link and was told by the school's IT counselor to use the old one, she lost the position of 'host' in her online meetings with students, and therefore the control over the class. Having the old link, the student who first entered the class before her was automatically the host of the meeting and ended the meeting for all when he left the meeting in the middle of the class). Other times, as reported by parents, teachers and school inspectors alike, **strangers were reported entering the online class** and either saying licentious words or writing over the virtual board or even streaming inappropriate content, taking hold of the class. In these situations that are detrimental for students and teachers alike, some teachers are totally lost. I23, a parent of a child with SEN who always joins with her daughter (5th grade) in online classes, reported such an event. As I23 rushed to the computer to mute the class in order not to expose her daughter to that language, she noticed that the teacher panicked and did not know what to do. Luckily, because they were in the hybrid system with some children in the classroom and others online, one boy came to the computer and fixed the situation. Other such episodes were described as **cyberbullying and were traumatic for teachers**, as reported by I11, who said that her history teacher refused to do online classes with her students after this episode (and she only uploaded materials on the platform) and had finally decided to retire.

Another issue raised by teachers was that one can only believe the reason for a student's absence and have to trust their story. Following a tacit consensus among teachers, the technical issues (e.g. lack of internet connection, power outage) or (temporarily) lack of access to digital devices were considered as excusable reasons for school absenteeism. But some teachers complained that students abused this reason (which, according to a student's report, is true) and that they as teachers do not have any possibility to check on students.

"We couldn't control if they really lost their internet connection, as they claimed to have or they just didn't feel like attending the class at that moment." (I2)

"I also teach two classes at secondary school. There were times when only two or three students connected to the online class. Many times, they connected late or disconnected earlier, sometimes in the middle of the class if I had asked them something, and then I got a message on the WhatsApp group in which they would say they had a power outage or that they lost the internet connection. And this doesn't happen only in our poor village. My sister told me that in a big city where she is a teacher at a good school, students do exactly the same. And you as a teacher cannot do anything to fix this problem." (I7)

For students, the most encountered risks, as reported by teachers and school staff and not by students, were **cyberbullying** and exposure to **inappropriate content**. I3, in her capacity as an educational counselor, considered that cyberbullying emerged as a new risk for her students in lower secondary school, although she admitted that in highschool, this is already an old issue.

I3 also reported **the increased exposure of students to pornographic content**, and she denounced the difficulties of approaching the issue of sexual content students might encounter online during her counselling hours. Though, this difficulty is not a new thing as officially, this sort of discussion, including the sexual education, can be approached in Romanian schools only with parental consent, which was more difficult to get with the shift to online education. These discussions are even more necessary during this period of intense use of the Internet by children, who are therefore more exposed to online risks (Lobe et al., 2021). As I3 reported, during this period even primary school children encountered online pornographic content that they did not know how to deal with. At the same time, obtaining parental consent to start such a discussion with children was out of the question, in her view, as parents do not want to acknowledge the problem.

Privacy issues. Although every once in a while some privacy issues were mentioned at different levels, there was no systematic concern and approach of these problems. For instance, if some teachers and school inspectors said that for creating the online school's platform they connected to the Students' National Register (a secured database managed by the Ministry with all the students data), others mentioned that some teachers from that school or external people who would want to help, or even even some parents

manually introduced in the platform all the students' data made available to them by the school leaders without any concern for formal privacy aspects (as mentioned in GDPR). Privacy issues were also mentioned in relation with students' videos that circulated on social media. One of the representatives of students, I19, said that the Students' National Council received some complaints, especially from girls, about videos that were meant for physical education classes with students performing some gym movements that leaked to alternative social media platforms. The problem was not addressed by strict regulation. Worth mentioning is that some teachers discussed privacy issues raised using the online platforms, highlighting the professional context of the use (i.e., for school only).

The pressure of always being on: the dictatorship of instant messaging school groups. On all levels of communication (between them, at school level or in larger professional networks; hierarchically, with principals / inspectorates; with students and parents), **teachers have fully adopted communicating through instant messaging apps of social networks** (the most used of all being Whatsapp). This means of communication (which could end up in a hundred messages an hour, from different groups, at any given time of the day or night, many of them being just noise, but requiring a permanent curation) blurred or even canceled the boundaries between private and professional time, with the spatial boundary between the two worlds was already minimal. Many of the interviewed teachers denounced this type of communication as one of the main factors of the digital exhaustion they felt during this period, but, except for I2, who refused to send or receive professional messages on his personal phone and argued for the need to adopt email as a professional communication tool, the rest of the teachers viewed WhatsApp as a 'necessary evil'.

I2 explains teachers' reluctance or even outright opposition to using other communication channels as a refusal to learn using a new tool, given that they found the one in use convenient (due to the mainstream use of this mode of communication and its simple way of sharing/passing on information) and, finally, by the fact that they do not realize the importance of protecting their personal data.

2.2.7.2 Benefits and opportunities of remote schooling

As bad the online schooling has been for some, it helped children to stay in touch with school and, generally, made them feel that teachers cared about them, helping them at a social level. Apart from these, some specific benefits for students and teachers were mentioned during the interviews.

Better time management and self-development. In relation with students, this type of benefit, mentioned by teachers and students alike (I2, I11, I19), appears at older students and for those mostly interested in school and learning, whereas in the other cases, the opposite situation was considered to be true.

"I think some students have really benefited from this period. Even if it seems like a disaster to us, they have won on the side of personal development. They learned, not all of them, of course, but many, to manage their time, to have a more flexible schedule, to understand that they have to adapt to the conditions of society. The students managed, and now I refer to the good ones, to have that freedom to learn more than they are given in the classroom and to overcome boredom. In online [schooling], they are present in class, but in downtime (e.g. when teachers evaluate other colleagues) they may be working on their own, on other subjects of interest." (I2, IT secondary school teacher)

I11 recounted that she hugely improved her math grades not because the teacher would explain better in the new environment (he explains bad in both systems, according to I11), but because now she got used to watching video tutorials with math classes and has a self-driven approach toward learning. For her, being in the online system is an opportunity, as she enrolled in online classes on learning platforms (that have become more accessible remotely as they moved online), or went further on her own with learning subjects she was interested in and not paying attention to the subjects she was not interested in (such as music or religion classes) though formally she attended those classes too.

But as a primary school teacher from a poor area highlighted, the requirements of a good online education (e.g. discipline, self-studying skills) are rather infrequent in the Romanian population of students. Therefore the benefits of this form of education are reaped by very few Romanian students.

"They have to be good students, very disciplined and autodidact. But how many children qualify for this? Maybe 1% of the Romanian children would be able to study, research, learn by themselves, at home. Because this is the clue of online learning. Teachers have to send the educational material previously, a quality one, students read it, do other research and solve some tasks alone and then the teacher and the students will discuss in a synchronous meeting online and fix what is still unclear."

But how many children could do that? Some of them lack the previous knowledge to build on, whereas others lack the discipline to do that or both.” (I7, primary school teacher)

More engagement with school for students with health problems. All types of stakeholders we interviewed agreed that some of the digital tools and approaches that were discovered out of necessity during this crisis could be used in the future, to keep **students that are having health problems** engaged with school. From the hybrid solution to the use of a school platform where all students can have access to their **homeworks and the educational materials that teachers upload, and where they are also able to upload their solved homework, these solutions are seen as useful tools for the future.** The same tools were also considered useful for children who are not so interested in school and might not take good notes in class, but who would be able to have online access to all the materials teachers considered relevant and would upload on the platform.

Digital skills. Improvements in students’ digital skills was mentioned as a benefit especially at early ages (primary school children) or for those vulnerable (e.g. those who would not have had access to such technology had it not been provided by school). For all the students (but especially for those who did not have a model of using the technology for work in their parents), another frequently mentioned gain was reconsidering digital technology and discovering their opportunities as educational tools as opposed to a merely entertaining tool. For many teachers, this pandemic times represented a challenge; they reported not being prepared with digitised content to convey to children, or not having enough digital skills. Because of these initial shortcomings, one benefit of this period teachers acknowledged is the improvement of their digital skills and developing the digitised teaching materials.

Collateral benefits. Some other benefits for students and teachers that were triggered by the remote schooling situation (although they should not necessarily be seen as opportunities of online learning) were the **time saved** for not having to commute anymore (in the conditions of a very bad public transportation in some parts of Romania) and the **reconsideration of the importance of school**, in the context where the school’s prestige in the Romanian society was in decline. Worth mentioning, some teachers (I1, I3) really appreciated the benefits of the **silence in class**. I3: *‘It’s so good! It’s quiet in the classroom! They are all muted. They have to be muted, otherwise a hysterical howling is created. You only see them hopping and moving through those little squares.’*

2.2.7.3 Teacher and student wellbeing

There was no real and systematic concern (on the part of principals, school inspectorates or the Ministry) to provide counselling and emotional support to teachers, although many teachers stated that they would have needed such counseling. Moreover, although in schools there is an educational support counselor who could provide support to teachers, they generally avoid asking for this support, being afraid that this would be perceived as a personal failure. This reluctance in asking for help did not change during the pandemic, I3’s services not being formally asked by teachers for themselves. However, I3 was asked to provide advice to colleagues, but informally, as a peer.

“Even if the teachers felt insecure about their potential of adapting to the new environment, they did not formally ask for help. However, this is not a new thing: even in the past, some help was requested only when the situation dramatically worsened, because it is perceived as a failure of the teacher. They would rather handle the situation on their own than look vulnerable.” (I3, educational counsellor)

The improvements in the professional training and in the infrastructure reported by teachers for the 2020-2021 school year did not automatically lead to an increase in their wellbeing. The teachers’ willingness to learn about new platforms and to improve their teaching practices diminished from the previous year to 2020-2021, in parallel with a drop in their wellbeing, as reported independently by some teachers (e.g. I2, I15).

“Before the summer vacation, yes, I was in high demand [for training her colleagues in the use of online platforms] and there were days in which the phone rang continuously. My colleagues really wanted to do something, they were really interested. In the summer, I detached myself from school and probably other colleagues did too. And in the fall, when all of them realized, although they did not want to believe it, that it would continue like this, no more requests came from my colleagues to help them. I offered to train my colleagues, but people don’t want to anymore, they still hope that they will return to school. They are overwhelmed. I tell you, last year they wanted to learn and do things as well as possible. But not seeing any organized, rigorous and substantial change at the

institutional or system-level, not only those checked on paper, they lost their enthusiasm and got into a mediocre routine.” (I2, IT teacher, highschool)

Exiting the system. The retirement. Some teachers (I3, I7) reported that more teachers than usual retired this year once the conditions were met. Whereas in other years teachers at the retired age would have continued to teach out of necessity (for the system's need and for their financial reasons), this year more teachers hurried to retire as they did not feel able or comfortable with the online teaching.

“There are some teachers who really believe that it's something wrong with them as teachers that impede them to perform well in the online environment, when they see that their students don't understand. They believe it's their fault and that they are not good enough. And there are not few of those, and they suffer. Some of them just gave up teaching entirely and left the system.” (I7)

Although all interviewed teachers said that individually, they tried to address children's wellbeing, they also stressed on the fact that their first concern was to 'finish the handbook' or to be sure they taught children all the educational content from the curricula. In their discourse, with few exceptions, the focus was not reaching the educational outcomes children were supposed to reach, but on the fact that in the end they, as teachers, are made responsible for 'covering' all the educational content from the curricula.

In their turn, students did not feel teachers paid any special attention to their wellbeing, but they also did not mention they would have expected any such extra-concern. As mentioned above, teachers who work with special educational needs in special schools did take extra care to their students' (and their families) wellbeing.

2.3 Addressing inequalities and vulnerabilities among students and teachers and mapping resilience

2.3.1 Who are the vulnerable students?

When talking about vulnerable students in Romania, some categories stand out, and for the purpose of this report, we tried to look into each of them, in order to understand how much their specific educational needs have been addressed during this period. We will start by listing them (randomly) and offering a short description of the local context. Then we will discuss at length the data in the following subsections, showing how these cases have been approached by teachers and whether and how their vulnerabilities changed (increasing or diminishing) as a result of remote schooling.

Children living in poverty or extreme poverty. In 2019, 35.8% of Romanian children were at risk of poverty or social exclusion¹⁷ (Eurostat, 2020). Moreover, according to studies into digital deprivation of children, Romania has the highest percentage of children digitally deprived among the European countries, with a rate of 23.1% (Ayllon et al., 2021). Many of these children have had difficulties in accessing remote schooling due to lack of equipment (access device with an Internet connection), sometimes due to lack of electricity or Internet signal in the area (or, mentioned in the interviews, there was Internet connection around, only from a different provider than the one that was contracted by the Ministry). Even though there have been other governmental or local programs aimed to address these issues, a number of difficulties, bureaucracy or even mistakes in implementing these programs have ultimately meant that not all children have had access to these technologies. Moreover, even if the technical problem of access was solved for some, in many cases there was no support from the family to 'push' the child to participate in this form of schooling or the family lacked the competences in this respect. In Romania, children who could not access the school and whom the teachers could not contact were not only those from the rural areas, but also in the very poor neighborhoods of big urban areas. For example, in Bucharest, houses that were nationalized during communism and are in litigation over landlords have sometimes been abusively occupied by disadvantaged families who do not have documents attesting their dwelling. Some of these people might have a high mobility, sometimes going to seasonal work abroad. Parents often enroll their children in a neighborhood school in these areas, but teachers lose contact with the family when the family moves out or moves around. Telephone contact with the families is also lost almost each month, because they do not afford a long-term subscription (and do not

¹⁷ This percentage is even bigger in the Roma minority, the access to education of Roma children and the high school dropout rate being already an issue.

qualify sometimes to one, as they lack property papers) and therefore they use the prepaid sim-cards that may come with a new telephone number. I3, I10, I12 mentioned these children as especially vulnerable, children that were lost to school in its online version because they can no longer come to school and the school cannot reach them. Sometimes the parents of these students did take the tablets given by school, but the children still have not entered the online classes. **For example, at such a school, out of 150 students, 40 did not attend the online activities at all, by the time of the interviews, during the 2020-2021 school year.** Of these, only five enrolled in the remedial form of education, once that was available.

Children with a certificate for school orientation enrolled in general (mass) school. For these children, after a medical evaluation that assesses their degree of disability or deficiency, an individual orientation scholar path/ career is designed by class teachers together with the support teachers. The latter are employed in general by the nearby special school (they are also called 'itinerant teachers') and have to work with these children in school, a number of hours weekly. This certificate attests that the child has a physical or mental impairment, but also a 'learning impairment' following a low stimulation from the part of their family (social aspects). The certificate has to be renewed every two years. Obtaining such certificates involves a difficult procedure (visiting around ten specialists, some of whom are not local, who have to evaluate the child) and some costs are beyond what families afford to pay. Thus, many children with special educational needs end up not being considered as such by the system, which results in them lagging behind their peers.

Children with special needs enrolled in special schools. Children with serious impairments (hearing, visual, autism spectrum disorder etc.) are recommended to attend special schools, where they would benefit from a specific training along the general national curriculum. Because in Romania there are not so many special education needs schools, out of necessity some are boarding schools.

Lastly, some teachers and students we interviewed mentioned among vulnerable students those students that **lack discipline in studying** and would have performed better in the traditional school, mainly due to peer or family pressure. In this respect, I19 denounced **the lack of teachers' involvement in supporting these students in finding motivation and ways to navigate through this difficult time** (as opposed to just teaching them some subjects focusing only on finishing the curricular content).

Though apparently neatly categorised above, for analytical reasons, the reality of these vulnerabilities is less specific, many of them overlapping.

2.3.2 Challenges of the online schooling for children living in poverty

All our respondents agreed that **children living in poverty lost the most during this school year.** Although policy makers claimed the access issues had been fixed, as shown in a previous section about the preparation at the infrastructural level, **flaws in designing these policies** (e.g., the fact that only families without any device would have qualified for obtaining a device, forgetting the fact that parents' devices are not always available for children to access the school, or the fact that help with data plans/ internet subscription was not foreseen for those who already had a device, but not an internet subscription) and **flaws in implementing them** (see the description of the situation with parents giving up tablets offered by state via school) **made that access to remote education to still be an issue for many children.**

But, apart from access to the internet, one of the most important, although basic, things that impede children living in poverty to attend or to participate in good conditions to remote schooling was the absence at home of a **time-slot and a space exclusively for schooling.** Many of the interviewed teachers from the rural are reported on their flexible approach from the spring 2020 in reaching some children: they would have reached some students in the morning, according to the school schedule, but they would contact and teach others in the evening when either a device would have become available or the child would have come back home from work.

"I couldn't teach them in the morning because if children were at home, parents couldn't accept they have to do classes. Parents would put children at work, to take care of animals, or to gather some wild plants from the forest to have something to eat because these families were severely hit by the crisis. It was a surviving issue for them." (I29, secondary school teacher)

Another teacher, referring this time to the 2020-2021 school year, showed the shortages of remote schooling for children living in poverty and **framed the issue in terms of limiting children's rights to education.**

*“School from home is not a solution. In our area, families live in one room: they cook there, they have a wash there, they sleep there, they do school there. Around children there is an awful noise and they don’t have any headset. In fact, this way, we take away from these children their right to education, their right to come to school. I had a child in my class who attended the class standing for three months until I realized this. He complained at a point that his legs hurt and I joked asking him whether he writes using his legs. And then, another colleague told me that in fact he stands up for hours during the online school because he doesn’t have enough space to put a chair on the corner of a cupboard where he put his books and his phone for attending the class. I felt horrible, especially because I scolded him several times when he moved away from the phone and I couldn’t hear his answers well. I then realised that in fact he was trying to take a rest on the bed at that moment. This kid, at school, is the smartest. But when at school, he has a chair and a desk that he doesn’t have at home. **The online schooling sounds great from the Ministry office, but it is not a solution for these children.**” (17, primary school teacher)*

For some of these issues (i.e. lack of internet access), teachers looked for alternative solutions (that were also requested by authorities) and provided children with additional paper-based educational materials. But this covered only partially and not the essential part of the problem, as **parents were in these cases not knowledge-wise able to support their children**. Although less acknowledged by the authorities but often mentioned by the interviewees, parents, at least those of younger children, had to be entirely on board for supporting their children in remote schooling, for fixing technical problems, for ‘pushing them out of bed and placing them in front of the screen’, but also for complementing or sometimes even replacing teachers explanation. In this light, the gap between disadvantaged children and the rest can only deepen.

“I have had two girls in my class who didn’t connect at all at online classes. I sent them some worksheets, because the Ministry said so. I don’t think this was necessary, because they had their handbook at home and could have worked from them. But one of the moms called me and told me: ‘I’m sorry, but I don’t understand anything from those worksheets’. Regardless of how many explanations I put in these worksheets, parents who usually are disadvantaged themselves and lack education don’t understand. Another one told me that he doesn’t know the multiplication table so he can not help his child.” (17, primary school teacher)

2.3.3 Students with special educational needs

(Lack of) Adaptation for children with special educational needs (SEN) enrolled in mass school.

Most of our respondents consider these children had basically lost a school year. Moreover, almost all the teachers said they were not able to properly address children’s SEN as they would have done *in situ*, acknowledging that these children became more vulnerable during this period. On the one hand, it is more difficult for children to pay attention and stay focused in the online classes, and on the other hand it is more difficult for the teacher to give them the attention they need, in the online system.

“I failed to engage the three children with SEN that I have in my class. Because for them it becomes more boring in an online setting when you [as a teacher] need to talk with the other children. As a teacher I don’t have proper feedback from them on how attentive they are. Especially for those with ADHD, you can’t just keep them engaged. They start to draw, to play while you talk with other children. For these children, it’s like they haven’t been to school at all for one year. Teachers couldn’t approach them individually in this setting. In the classroom, I would have reached them several times during each class, and while the others would have worked at a task, I could have spent some time working with them at their level. But this was not possible in the online environment. They were lost.” (14, primary school teacher)

But in those very few situations (reported for instance by the parents of such a child, 123) in which these children had the support at home (e.g. the family was well equipped, the parents were always available and able to help the child with all educational tasks) it happened that the child thrived during this period. These are unfortunately only **exceptions and the results of family efforts, not of school system practices**.

All teachers or support staff from special schools who were interviewed said that one of the biggest achievements of this period was to team up with parents and create an effective working team in order to address children’s wellbeing and development. If before the crisis most parents relied only on teachers and school to address the special educational needs of their children, starting March 2020, they had to take charge of this challenge by themselves. In these special cases when children were enrolled in special schools, the first step schools made was to train and counsel the parents. *Ad hoc* groups with parents were formed

online, at school level (on Facebook or Whatsapp mostly) and twice a week parents were offered counseling (at the beginning of the crisis only a few people attended these groups, but as time went on, at the end of the 2019-2020 school year, the attendance was around 24%). Parents were catered at that moment with videos in which the teachers had recorded themselves doing some activities that either should be shown to children or replicated by parents and students together. During the 2020-2021 school year, the situation settled for this population too and the online schooling went on rather smoothly, everyone moving to an educational platform (mostly Google Classroom), with synchronous activities and sticking with the school schedule. The therapy and online counseling school's groups (on social media) for parents also closed and for any requirement or need for help, parents continued to keep in touch with the teachers of the class on the GC platform. Considering of course that this period has had a negative influence on everyone, it is worth mentioning that these teachers from special schools were the most confident that their students were treated as well as they could be.

One thing all teachers from this system mentioned was the adaptation of their activities to the materials students have available in their home environment.

Working with groups that are at the same level at different times. I5 mentioned she split the class in two groups based on children's level/ needs and sometimes met them at different times and worked with each of them separately, whereas in a face-to-face scenario she would still split the class and work separately with them, only at the same time.

Team up for children's needs. If teachers and school inspectors from the 'mass schools' did not know whether and how exactly children with special needs were helped during the online schooling by the support teachers, in the special schools teachers teamed up with the support staff (e.g. therapist, special therapist, pedagogues) in a more systematic way. Moreover, one of the biggest achievements of this period mentioned by all teachers from special schools interviewed here was the improvement in the relationship they have with the students' families, who became genuine partners for teachers.

2.3.3.1 Approaching hearing-impaired students in remote schooling setting

If in the Spring of 2020 I5 said she adjusted by asking very basic activities such as drawing (still, very important to develop their graphic abilities), during the 2020-2021 school year, the school schedule was more strict. All the school subjects and therapy sessions that are normally in the school schedule are being held, this time, online (from 20 of October 2020 to at least 8 of February 2021). In these conditions, one of the adaptation I5 mentioned was to craft asynchronous activities, in an attempt not to keep children always online.

'It's very tiring for a child to stay for such a long period of time connected to a webcam' (I5).

Because in these cases the visual aspect of learning is very important, I5 said she did not have any refusal from children to keep their camera on. On the contrary, the problem came for her once children returned to school *in presentia*, when all of them, children and students alike, had to wear a mask. Despite their requests to the Ministry of Education and to the Ministry of Health in which they asked to be allowed to wear a transparent visor that would allow children to read their lips, initially there was no understanding of their situation (the answer she got being that health is more important than education). She obtained some special, partially transparent masks, from someone in the UK after I5 posted on FB a photo in which she was wearing a normal mask (from what that person said to I5, in the UK it is not allowed to teach hearing-impaired children wearing a mask). It is worth mentioning that the situation changed after the interview and according to an end of April Ministry Order, teachers were allowed to wear transparent visors in these special conditions.

Gaps in children's achievements during this period: apart from the general learning gaps widely accepted for the pandemic period, for hearing-impaired students the sound emission was one of the biggest gaps in this period. Other shortages of online schooling for these children is a smaller attention span and a deficit of motivation/ determination.

Children's achievements during this period: they became more autonomous in learning and they practiced more and became more proficient in the gestual language during this period.

2.3.3.2 Approaching visual-impaired students in remote schooling setting

Approaching visual-impaired students (especially the younger one) remotely through a screen needs more assistance from parents' or carers' part, as these children have not been so familiarised with screen-based technology. Moreover, part of their therapy involves training their dexterity and the tactile sense that is difficult to be done remotely so once again, the parents had to be fully engaged in the remote schooling. As reported by I22, a therapist at such a special school, most parents were on board, helping teachers with the activities that had to be done and sending back to teachers the videos with children performing the tasks (for instance, in order to develop their fine motor skills, they had to fill bottles with grains of different sizes, to knead the dough etc.). It has to be said that teachers from special schools were those who stressed most on the necessity of **formative assessment**. I22 highlighted many times that she needed those videos with the child performing the tasks not necessarily as a proof (which was the case, for instance, with the videos I26 would have sent to the football trainer), but as a **means for her to know how to design and adjust the following tasks** to the child's evolution. Using the common tools and materials was possible in these cases and though I22 said that in her office at school she would have used coloured beads for such tasks, it was easy to adapt to what is normally available in a house. Many times, she would have filmed herself performing the activity that was expected to be later performed by the child and send the video to parents (e.g., using a clothes peg for catching cardboard of different thicknesses or passing through obstacles or following a line drawn on the ground). **The parental presence was necessary** not only for helping children with the technological setting and with the video recording part, but also to prepare all the needed materials and to clean after. Naturally, where the parental support was higher and children practiced more during this period, their development did not halt. But for the few children whose parents did not get involved, this period represented an involution.

Some children – with complete blindness, who are fluent in Braille and whose parents declared they will be responsible for any possible deterioration of the machine – **got from school a Braille typewriter to use it during remote schooling**.

2.3.3.3 Approaching students with autism spectrum disorder in remote schooling setting

Because children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in general oppose/ cannot stand wearing a mask because they have a hypersensitivity of skin, the rule at the beginning of school year was that they entered directly in the online schooling scenario. A petition was advanced to the Ministry asking to approach these children differently because of the high risk for them of staying too long in front of a screen. It was even suggested in this petition that a special training would help these children get accustomed with a mask, but no answer was received. Therefore, one of the biggest challenges I13 mentioned was that teachers could not have a face-to-face initial evaluation at the beginning of the year with these children, some of them being new students for their teachers (and vice versa).

If for other types of impairments children have a sort of autonomy, for children with ASD, the parental presence and prompt was a must during the online classes, although some of them were using tablets before the online schooling (e.g., for entertainment and, for more severe cases, for general communication purposes).

Gaps in children's achievements during this period. At the behaviour level, many stereotypical behaviours and fixations that children had have strengthened during this period, because of the long periods they spent in front of the screen (and lack of diversity).

Achievements in children's wellbeing. The involvement of parents in children's education was the achievements of this period, according to our respondents. Some parents (depending on the degree of disability the child was having) get an allowance from the state to act as a full-time personal assistant for the child and in this capacity, they can attend the classes next to their children, to assist and help them. But in the traditional setting, at school, this would not have happened: parents would have stayed in the school to be available in case they were needed, but would not have participated in classes, not because they were not allowed, but because they preferred not to get involved in the on-site education, letting the school staff in full charge of it. During the crisis, in the online system, the parents (not all of them, but most) were there, actively assisting children in online classes and managed to understand much better the educational and therapeutic needs of their children and how they could help them. The line between home/ private space and activities and school / institutional help blurred even more, parents asking for guidance or feedback from teachers and school support staff for activities previously considered private (e.g. going shopping). The line is therefore crossed from both sides: parents attending classes and teachers participating with advice in private events or activities.

2.3.4 Other means for approaching vulnerable students

There have also been other public, private or even individual initiatives to complement schools attempts to deal with vulnerable students, initiatives that tried to fill in the learning gaps that deepened during this period, to engage children with school or even to help teachers improve their skills in order to be able to better teach these children. In the following, we will present and discuss at length a national program implemented by the Ministry of Education (The School after school program) and shortly describe other initiatives that were mentioned by our respondents.

2.3.4.1 Remedial education: School after school program

The remedial education is a pilot program that was initiated by the Ministry of Education on February 19, 2021, for children at risk of school dropout, repeating the school year, those who need correction or those who did not have access to the education during the remote schooling (in the first semester of 2020-2021), due to not having access to technology. It is aimed towards primary and secondary school students (up to and including the 8th grade). Students eligible for the program should have at least one vulnerability (out of three eligibility criteria); the enrollment follows a parental official request (if parents do not explicitly ask for this, even the most vulnerable students cannot benefit from the program). Although (the necessity of) the program had been discussed for a long time, I4 said that the implementation was done in a hurry. In less than a week since the methodological norms had been released, the following steps had to be solved at school level: informing parents about the program, receiving applications from parents, assessing the eligibility of each student, making the final list of potential students, identifying the teachers (from those already employed) who were willing and eligible¹⁸ to teach in the program, setting up the calendar, sending all this information to the inspectorate and actually starting teaching the classes.

As a general perception of the teachers that we interviewed, the program is not as popular in the urban area, as it is in the rural area. Although initially it was meant to have just one initial enrollment session, the rule changed quickly and new enrollments were allowed every month. The downside of this continuous enrollment is that teachers lack continuity in working with the group. The positive part of it is that it gives a chance to other students in need to join the program. Some teachers stress that **this program, which was well-intended, can fail because of the way in which it is interpreted and implemented by middle institutions** (inspectors and school leaders) that came up with some restrictions that are not present in the Ministry Order (e.g., imposing an inflexible schedule; see below).

Challenges of the program

The groups are too large for teachers to be able to really work individually with students and adjust to their needs (I4). While the Order specifies the maximum number of 12 students in a group, the pressure from inspectorates is to go to the maximum limit (or even go over it) of children in a group (in order to reduce costs). Moreover, children are grouped together from several classes, or even grades (e.g. students from the first and second grade in the same group), so that the teacher often ends up not knowing them and their problems / weaknesses.

Schedule issues: the regulations of this remedial program only specifies the number of monthly hours to be done (which is 20). But some or even most principals and inspectors understood or interpreted that one hour a day must be done with the group. However, this agreement posed timetable problems (either not all classes ended at the same time so that some students should have waited in school for the start of remedial class, or students and teachers were already tired after 4-6 hours of their regular classes). I4, after countless phone calls to the Ministry and the inspectorate, managed to get permission for these classes to be held on Saturday. Although I4's attempt to provide feedback and change the program in a more sustainable way has been successful, in general teachers are skeptical about such initiatives and do not offer bottom-up feedback, considering it useless.

¹⁸ For instance, substitute teachers many times do not have the proper qualification for the job and they are not eligible for teaching in this remedial system (although they are allowed to teach in class). The issue here is that in schools from disadvantaged areas, substitute teachers are prevalent. The result is that schools in which children need this intervention the most can not organise remedial education because they do not have qualified teachers (as reported by I29).

The parental request: The Order sets that the parents are the ones who decide to enroll their children in this remedial program. When parental openness or interest lacks or when the parents themselves are away (many times they work abroad, leaving behind their children with other relatives, without formally mandating someone to represent the child's interests), even if the teacher recommends it, the student cannot be enrolled in this form of education (I3, I4, I10, I17, etc.). Although at a general level it is a good thing to involve parents in the educational route of their children, this neoliberal approach in which parents are the only responsible for the child's well being lacks efficiency when it is needed the most: for the vulnerable children who are in that situation especially because parents cannot help them or are not invested in helping them. Again, in these situations, the decision makers have a rather resigned approach, leaving children behind: *'If parents don't get involved and invested, we can't do anything; it's up to the parents'*, I8)

Only specially trained teachers are allowed in the program. Another problem mentioned by I29 is that only specialized teachers have the right to teach these classes. Thus, in poor communities where there are many substitute teachers, without specialized training and/or all the degrees, there is no available staff to do these remedial classes, despite requests from parents. In the cases in which the trained staff is lacking (either because there is no specialized staff in schools, or there is no desire of the staff to carry out these classes), the children enrolled are rounded up at other schools. However, the parents are the ones who often give it up, because it is difficult to get their children to those schools (I10, I29).

Too high standards for evaluating this program, that do not take into account the very harsh reality of those who need such a program.

"We can see progress. If you take a 4th grade student (10 years old) who literally didn't know how to read a word or if he read it, he didn't understand it and after working with him he gets to read a sentence, even if stumbling, that's progress. But much more [than that] is required on paper." (I4, primary school teacher)

2.3.4.2 Visiting vulnerable students at home to improve their engagement

Some teachers (e.g. I5 and I29) explicitly said they did home visits to their students, especially in the cases where children did not show up in the online classes. During these visits, they catered the families with items they needed (sometimes providing parents with SIM cards, as I29 recounted) but also pressed the parents to be more involved in the remote schooling. I5 for instance visited the most vulnerable, yet not engaged, families every two weeks to convince them to join the school classes online. In June 2020, she felt it was her responsibility to visit her students and did so even for those living 250 km away from Bucharest.

Moreover, some teachers mentioned that during the crisis a range of stationery was given to some very in need families (I13, I29).

2.3.4.3 Other actors involved in addressing inequalities

Some programs were launched (by NGOs or private companies) to help disadvantaged students fill in the knowledge gaps (and not only) that have widened due to the pandemic. We interviewed in the project three NGO representatives and two librarians that offered us a more complete image on remote online schooling in Romania.

Students training teachers. One project stands out by the fact that: 1. It was funded by a private company through a competition for highschool students from rural areas who wanted to address a community problem; 2. The project, in which the student I11 (together with other three students) and the librarian I6 were involved, set out to give some demonstrative online classes for primary school students and then to train some teachers (15 teachers attended the workshops) to use some platforms and apps that had been used in the classes; 3. The training part was done during the summer of 2020, in a face-to-face setting in the library, allowing genuine guidance in recurrent training sessions.

Students for students. The Students' National Council moved online all their advocacy work and also tried to address some of the issues the online school posed to students. Some of their activities during this period were: 1. signaling the situations in which the hygienic conditions lacked in schools; 2. drafted the regulation for how students' cameras should be set during the online classes; 3. Promoting among students some self-guided study methods; 4. Asking for a set of quality standards for online education and monitoring their implementation (this was a part of the 'Decalogue of the online education' that they issued during the 2020 summer; in I19 view, this has not been achieved yet).

NGOs activities. The main activities for supporting education of the NGOs whose representatives were interviewed in the project were **training teachers** and filling in the gaps of **access to technology for disadvantaged children**, that seems to be an ongoing issue; I17 said that they still supply children (via schools) with technology even at the moment of the interview, though at the official level the problem is solved. A very uncommon activity was **education for health**, with a specific focus on COVID-19 health related problems. Although this type of education is needed during pandemic times, surprisingly it was not mentioned by school related staff, but only by I17, a representative of an NGO. She highlighted that although health education is being one of the pillars of their association, as they saw the need for it during the lockdown times especially in disadvantaged communities and noticed that schools do not cover it (except for the informative posters), they developed more dedicated such workshops during the summer camps they organized.

2.4 Improving education based on 2020-2021 experience

The informants were asked what are the lessons learned from the 2020-2021 school year regarding the things that need to be improved in education in a similar situation (or if the crisis still continues) and for a normal, on-site education. Many times, they listed the same items as solutions for both short and long term, considering that the crisis made some older issues of the system more visible.

2.4.1 The potential of improvement in a similar situation

In general, teachers agreed that, despite the big steps forward on the digitisation path Romanian educational system took in this remote schooling process, there is still room for improvement, and they suggested some directions.

Improvements in **better collaboration between teachers from the same subject** (e.g., Romanian language or Maths) for sharing their (good) practices and needs, in adapting their pedagogy to the online environment. In these groups, teachers could share their digital educational content with others, releasing the pressure to create their own content for each class. We should note however that no one mentioned the necessity or their willingness for a collaboration across subjects, which can be indicative of the lack of such transdisciplinary practices among Romanian teachers.

Some teachers asked for fewer, centralised but **curated platforms with digital educational content available for teachers**, that is **reviewed** and properly **indexed** to allow searchability (e.g., on grades, difficulty level, subjects, topics/ units etc.).

The transition of the school-related communication from social media to **some dedicated online school platform** that would structure the communication and rule it, not urging teachers and students to be always on, therefore delimiting some sense of privacy/ private time.

Some teachers are still dissatisfied with their **ability to engage children in the online lessons**, and feel they must improve on this aspect (I1, I3). Although in this report we mapped some good practices of engaging students in an online setting (e.g., group work, quizzes, virtual labs), they were rather infrequent, as reported by students and parents alike. A better circulation of these practices among teachers – not only of the apps used, but also of exactly how they are used, in which moment of the lesson, for how long, in which setting etc. – is needed.

Some teachers are still **anxious about their digital skills**. Surprisingly, this anxiety is not necessarily linked with their real skills (as it was expressed equally by proficient teachers and not so digitally skilled ones), but to their ideal-type of how a digital class should look, showing that **their confidence in their digital skills could be a proxy for their skills, but also for their desire to use them / positive attitude for the use.**

Learning about **as many platforms as possible**, to be able to adjust them to the class needs and subject (though, as detailed above, other teachers reached a saturation point in this regard). Again, it has to be said that this is not true for all; some teachers reached a saturation point in this regard and want to learn more about how to adapt their pedagogies.

More **clear, strict, and centralised regulations** issued by the Ministry about how the online education should look like, in order to reach a common ground among teachers. Should it be considered a legitimate

engagement from teachers' part to just upload some content online, but not enter in synchronous teaching meetings with their students? How long should an online class last and what should happen when students do not attend an online class? Or what does attendance mean in the first place? Many of our interviewees (e.g., I8) considered that these aspects should be strictly regulated, to avoid personal interpretations. Nonetheless, a minority of teachers consider, on the contrary, that the regulations are too centralised and they did not allow teachers enough freedom in deciding and adjusting to class'/ children's needs. (I4). **Students also asked for some regulations**, especially in **setting some quality standards** for online education.

On the same note, the existence of a **monitoring and control system** at the school level that would check for teachers and students attendance to the online schooling was seen as a possible improvement. There was a clear feeling from their discourse that teachers, principals and inspectors missed, each at their respective level, the feeling of being in control of the situation. This was also asked by a representative of students, I19, who complained about the **lack of control on the quality of educational act during this period**. Although some online inspections were done (but mainly as part of teacher's evaluation for promotion), clear, adapted quality criteria that would fit to the new setting (either online or hybrid education) were not issued by the Ministry. He also mentioned the necessity of **monitoring and regulating students' behaviour in online classes** that has become an issue in his view.

As expressed by most respondents, after so many months of online schooling, teachers and students alike entered routine, both negatively and positively. On the positive side, everyone knows what to do: turning on their devices, logging in the platform, turning their mics on and off, teaching or listening in front of the screen and so on. Most of teachers and students overpassed their emotion in front of the screen in this period. But, on the negative side, this routine also means that they lost their initial enthusiasm of learning something new and improving their online teaching and learning methods. In these conditions, **a sort of reset is needed**, to restore their motivation.

Thus, when longer online schooling was looming, I5 and other teachers, especially of vulnerable students, proposed to break them by **short sessions of face-to-face meetings, for a thorough evaluation** of children's achievements. As argued, a correct understanding of children's achievements or learning gaps is necessary for teachers to adjust their pedagogy and teaching practice to the needs of children; the online evaluation was considered problematic for all children, but especially for those with special needs. Organised according to strict hygienic conditions, these face-to-face on-site sessions would also help increase children's and teachers' wellbeing.

Students (I11, I19 who said this is also part of the 'Decalogue of the education in the pandemic time') **proposed that the curricula should have been adjusted** (in the sense of diminishing it) for the online schooling period, because sticking with the very loaded / rich / detailed curricula is inefficient in the online system. This was a general requirement meant to improve the Romanian educational system, so it is listed as a long-term solution as well. While the issue of a too loaded curriculum is an old one in Romania and although the interviewed teachers expressed many times their concerns and even anxiety that they cannot cover the entire curriculum content in the online setting in which they taught for most part of the 2020-2021 school year, unlike students, teachers did not propose a reduction of curricula, possibly as a resignation sign from their part.

Finally, a change in attitude and a true partnership between the Students' National Council, Parents' associations, Teachers associations on the one hand and the Ministry and decision-making people on the other hand. The latter have to accept the fact that many of the problems flagged by the former are systemic problems in the Romanian educational system that have to be addressed and not covered and treated as singular cases that can be fixed by blaming some individuals.

2.4.2 Long-term perspective: improving the after-pandemic education

Most of the lessons learned in this period that have the potential to improve the Romanian educational system in the future are connected with the benefits of a (more) digitised system. The following were mentioned by our respondents as being elements worth taking further from this pandemic time:

1. **The school online platform**, where all the relevant information –e.g., the syllabus and relevant educational content, the homework and tasks or students' grades– should be made available to students and their parents. Although keeping such a platform up to date could be seen as an extra work for teachers in a 'normal' time, the school online platform is

considered very useful for keeping track of the educational processes that happens on-site by those children who sometimes cannot attend education in the classroom.

2. Linked with the previous idea, the possibility to **make the class available to children who, for various reasons, cannot attend on-site school** was praised by many during the interviews. **The hybrid system**, that would, hopefully, engage students attending the class from home or at least give them the possibility **to have the lessons video recorded and available to students** were expressed as beneficial in 'normal' times. But despite the enthusiasm in noting these possible opportunities and despite the fact that, when constrained by the situation, teachers implemented these solutions, some recent testimonials from an online Facebook group ('Părinții vor schimbare' – 'The parents want a change') show that once things got to 'normal' and everyone got back to school, some teachers are not willing to invest time and effort in hybrid education when at stake there are only two or three children who are at home (e.g. they do not take care if these children can see or hear what happens in the classroom).
3. Using some **digital tools for in-classroom education**. Using educational video games, online tests or virtual labs were mentioned as such tools that have the potential of keeping the children engaged in class. **Not only they have the capacity to make the classes more enjoyable for students, but they can replace some expensive educational materials** (such as historical or geographical maps, physics, chemistry, or biology laboratory). But for this purpose, the financial investment should not be limited to the hardware devices, an investment in software and digital content being requested too.
4. The online system left students to their own devices, and this allowed some students (especially the gifted ones) to take control of their educational path. Many of them developed a self-driven approach, actively searching for more educational resources not only outside their schools' virtual premises, but sometimes looking up more advanced courses, from universities abroad. **Acknowledging students' individual needs and possibilities and, as a teacher, adjusting to and supporting them** if possible was listed as one of the lessons that has to be learned by a system that too many times tends to level students up.

Teachers also mentioned **multimodality or visual learning** – bringing visual aids in class (I3) that were not so much part of the Romanian education paradigm prior to the pandemic (with few exceptions) – and the **outdoors education** (again, a very unusual practice in Romania). I4 mentioned that this pandemic context made her consider going out of the school with her classes and transforming the school garden into a **multidisciplinary space**.

I8 who, in her capacity as a school inspector, assisted at some on-site classes after the schools 're-opened' reported that she already noticed 'a new habit' in teachers' practices of using digital tools in class and therefore she showed confidence that the education will improve in the future, based on the 2020-2021 school year. Yet, most of the other respondents were rather pessimistic in this regard.

3 Conclusions and recommendations

The 2020–2021 school year was clearly an exceptional one in the history of Romanian educational system. It generated new practices and a lot of emotions, both positive and negative, among teachers, students and parents. It also made more visible some old and latent problems of the system and offered solutions for some others. Based on the portrait we drew relying on the interviews, we draw the following some general conclusions and recommendations.

The digitisation of the Romanian educational system has started. Schools and students' access to technology, though not entirely fixed, was partially addressed. Most schools now have an online platform that proved to be workable if the situation enforced its usage. Most teachers handle digital tools for online classes, and some proved to be innovative in their online teaching. **But there is still room for improvement.** Apart from what has been mentioned by our respondents as possibilities to improve the education in a similar situation (see above), understanding and taking advantage of the online learning possibilities would be of added value. For instance, teaching children how to learn and encouraging their autonomy in learning together with the reconsideration of teachers' role as facilitator of learning (and not as a repository of content) would make it possible to have genuine online learning when needed, with a balanced ratio of individual asynchronous work and synchronous meetings with students. As expressed by a teacher, **Romanian students lack more than devices for online learning; they lack self-studying skills and autonomy in learning.**

From all the interviews came out that **teachers' main concerns were covering the curriculum and grading students.** Both aspects were challenged by the online and hybrid system. Less was reported about how to address students' wellbeing (and teachers', as a matter of fact) or adjusting the curriculum (by reducing it) and the assessment methods (by favouring the formative assessment against the grades-oriented approach) to be sure that students really learned in the new settings. The **inflexibility of the system to adjust to the new situations and the centralises decision** made most of the interviewees rather pessimistic regarding their students' achievements during this year, though there was a general acknowledgement that **most teachers did their best at the individual level.**

One of the gains of the pandemic situation was **the strengthening of the partnership among stakeholders.** In many situations **parents were on board to support their children** and this was very useful, especially for vulnerable students. But it must be said that for various reasons **some parents are not able to support their children** (from lack of time or other types of resources, to lack of knowledge) and the education system should not make them entirely responsible for their children's education; instead, the system should adjust their policies to support in a systematic way these vulnerable students and their families.

Although some steps forward were made to support **vulnerable students** during these harsh times, they were rather small when compared with the difficulties these children faced, the conclusion being that **their learning gaps deepened.** For some of them being at school means more than having access to some content that could be made available via online learning anyway. It also means to have access to a time and a space for education that is not granted for them while at home. Understanding vulnerable students' real needs and designing sustainable solutions for ensuring their right to education must be a pillar of the inclusion policies.

Moreover, **a true partnership with students and listening to their voices is needed. Teachers also feel they are unheard, or their opinion is not considered.** Thus, sometimes even well-intended programmes from the policy level do not work effectively as they are implemented in a rushed manner, without consulting stakeholders already knowledgeable in the field and also without providing a mechanism of support that the school might need.

Finally, using **new digital technology in education is a moving target.** Our interviews pictured a very broad understanding of what is new technology and what it means to use them in education. Therefore, teachers have to be always tuned in, to learn about these technologies, their opportunities in education and their risks and constraints – be it pedagogical, legal, or ethical. Permanent available training that would present them with these new solutions, but also teaching them to integrate the solutions in their teaching practices, to be reflexive and critical about them are a must, as digital education is not only about digital tools, but also about digital pedagogies.

References

- Ayllón, S., Holmarsdóttir, H.B. & Lado, S. (2021). Digitally deprived children in Europe. (DigiGen - working paper series No. 3). doi: 10.6084/m9.figshare.14339054
- Cachia, R., Velicu, A., Chaudron, S., Di Gioia, R. and Vuorikari, R, Remote schooling during Covid-19 spring 2020 lockdown. JRC Technical report (forthcoming).
- Enemark Lundtofte, T., The school year 2020-2021 in Denmark during COVID-19: country report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021, ISBN 978-92-76-38653-7 (online), doi:10.2760/41171 (online), JRC125452.
- Eurostat (2020). Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Children_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion)
- IRES, FVL & FePAL. (2020). ȘCOALA ÎN STARE DE URGENȚĂ: ACCESUL COPIILOR ȘCOLARI DIN ROMÂNIA LA EDUCAȚIE ONLINE. Policy paper. Retrieved at: https://ires.ro/uploads/articole/ires_accesul-elevilor-scolari-la-educatie-online_policy-paper_mai-2020.pdf
- Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K. (2011). Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full Findings. LSE, London: EU Kids Online.
- Lobe, B., Velicu, A., Staksrud, E., Chaudron, S. and Di Gioia, R. (2020), How children (10-18) experienced online risks during the Covid-19 lockdown - Spring 2020, EUR 30584 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021, ISBN 978-92-76-29763-5 (online), doi: 10.2760/562534 (online), JRC124034
- Mägi, E., The school year 2020-2021 in Estonia during COVID-19: country report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021, ISBN 978-92-76-38674-2, doi:10.2760/52883, JRC125454.
- Monostori, J., The school year 2020-2021 in Hungary during COVID-19: country report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021, ISBN 978-92-76-38671-1, doi:10.2760/062696, JRC125455.
- Petrescu, C. (ed.) (2020) EVALUARE RAPIDĂ A SITUĂȚII COPIILOR ȘI FAMILIILOR, CU ACCENT PE CATEGORIILE VULNERABILE, ÎN CONTEXTUL EPIDEMIEI DE COVID-19 DIN ROMÂNIA. Runda 4. Retrieved at: <https://www.unicef.org/romania/media/3551/file/Evaluare%20rapid%20a%20sitiua%C5%A3iei%20copiilor%20%20famiiliilor%20cu%20accent%20pe%20categoriile%20vulnerabile%20%C3%AEn%20contextul%20epidemiei%20de%20COVID-19%20din%20Rom%C3%A2nia%20%E2%80%93%20runda%204.pdf>
- Trujillo Sáez, F., The school year 2020-2021 in Spain during COVID-19: country report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021, ISBN 978-92-76-38645-2 (online)(ENG), doi:10.2760/729245 (online)(ENG), JRC125453.
- Velicu, A. (2020). Școala la distanță (primăvara 2020) și folosirea tehnologiilor digitale de către copii. Opiniile părinților și ale copiilor din România. Raport *KiDiCoTi*. București: Institutul de Sociologie. Disponibil la https://www.insoc.ro/institut/Raport_Scoala_KiDiCoTi%20_RO.pdf
- Velicu, A. (2021). *Viețile digitale ale copiilor în timpul COVID-19 (primăvara 2020). Riscuri și oportunități. Raport KiDiCoTi pentru România*. București: Institutul de Sociologie. Available at https://www.insoc.ro/institut/Raport_kidicoti_final_RO.pdf
- Vuorikari, R., Velicu, A., Chaudron, S., Cachia, R. and Di Gioia, R. (2020). How families handled emergency remote schooling during the time of Covid lockdown in spring 2020 - Summary, EUR 30425 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020, ISBN 978-92-76-24519-3 (online), doi:10.2760/31977 (online), JRC122303.

Annexes

Annexe 1: Methodology of the study

This report is based on 29 semi-structured interviews conducted face to face or using a Video Conference System between March 13th and April 23rd, 2021, with Romanian stakeholders for education. As can be seen in the Table 1, teachers, school principals, school inspectors, students, parents, NGOs representatives and librarians were interviewed to understand how the Romanian educational system adapted to the COVID-19 related situations and to map some good practices of this adaptations to inform the policy makers in designing and implementing future politics. The sample was designed to reflect a diversity of opinion, and to capture as much as possible the situation of vulnerable children, as previous studies showed that these children were the most negatively impacted by the crisis (Petrescu, 2020). Therefore, efforts were put into including in the sample teachers, personal support staff or school principals from special schools for special educational needs children or from schools in severely deprived areas.

The interview guides were elaborated in collaboration by the researchers from the five countries involved in the project (i.e., Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Romania and Spain) under the coordination of the Joint Research Centre. The interviews lasted between one and two hours and they were audio recorded. Subsequently, the interviews were thematically analysed following a commonly agreed among researchers analytical grid that was in line with the research questions of the study. This grid was enlarged with some codes that emerged from the interviews.

Given the qualitative approach of the study, the results presented in this report are not expected to be representative for the whole population and should not be generalized. Nonetheless, they represent a solid ground to guide policy makers in designing more inclusive and efficient educational policy for similar situations.

Table 1: Romanian sample description

| I No. | Role | Type of school / subject | School level | Region / location |
|-------|------------------|--|---------------------------|--|
| I10 | School principal | primary school teacher, newly appointed principal | Primary & lower secondary | Bucharest, school in a poor neighborhood |
| I12 | School principal | Romanian teacher, newly appointed principal | Primary & lower secondary | Bucharest, school in a poor neighborhood |
| I21 | School principal | Special educational needs school | Primary & lower secondary | Bucharest |
| I6 | Librarian | Extra-curricular robotic activities / classes | Public library | Medium village, south of the country |
| I9 | Librarian | Extra-school reading activities / classes | Public library | Medium city, central part of the country |
| I14 | NGO | Educational NGO, in rural area | NGO | Small village with very poor population |
| I17 | NGO | International NGO that addresses vulnerable children | NGO | Active in the entire country |
| I20 | NGO | NGO involved in community issues more at policy level; during the pandemic it has focused on education | NGO | Bucharest |

| | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------|---|---|--|
| I24 | Parent | the child is in grade 6th, in a private school | Secondary school | School in Bucharest, living in another town |
| I23 | Parent of a SEN child | Normal/ mass school, grade 6th | Secondary school | Bucharest |
| I8 | School inspector | Primary school inspector +2 classes French | Primary school | Bucharest |
| I16 | School inspector | Primary school inspector + teaching 2 classes (social studies) (former trade union representative) | Primary school | Bucharest |
| I13 | Teacher & counselor for SEN | Special education teacher, working with children with autism spectrum disorders | Special educational needs school, primary & lower secondary | Bucharest |
| I22 | Teacher & therapist for SEN | Special educational needs school; working with visually impaired children | Primary & secondary highschool | Bucharest |
| I5 | PSS / teacher, SEN | SEN school; working with hearing impaired students | Special educational needs school, primary & lower secondary | Bucharest |
| I3 | Teacher & counselor | Educational counselor (mass school) + 2 classes social sciences | Primary & lower secondary | Bucharest |
| I11 | Student | Involved in robotics classes (and offered such classes to other students online); participated in a program to train teachers in using online platforms in teaching | High school | School in a town in the South-West part of the country, living in a village nearby |
| I19 | Student | One of the representatives of Students' National Council | High school | A town from the South-East part of the country |
| I26 | Student | Sportive profile, grade 11 | High school | |
| I27 | Student | Sports profile, 9 th grade | High school | A town from the East part of the country |
| I1 | Teacher | Arts teacher | Lower secondary | Bucharest |
| I2 | Teacher | IT (coding) and ICT (usage) | High school | |
| I4 | Teacher | Primary school teacher, Merito teacher | Primary school | A town in the West part of the country |
| I7 | Teacher | Primary school teacher | Primary school | Small and poor village in the South |

| | | | | |
|-----|---------|--|-------------------------|---|
| 115 | Teacher | Romanian language teacher | High school | Bucharest |
| 118 | Teacher | Technology teacher | High school | Bucharest |
| 125 | Teacher | Math teacher at a vocational / sports school | Secondary & high school | A town from the East Region |
| 129 | Teacher | Physics and technological education | Lower secondary | A town from the central part of the country |

Annexe 2: Extended summary in Romanian

Rezumat

Acest raport prezintă modul în care sistemul educațional din România a răspuns în anul școlar 2020-2021 situației create de pandemia de Covid-19. Studiul este parte a unui proiect de cercetare internațional, coordonat de Joint Research Center, centrul de cercetare al Comisiei Europene. Folosind o metodologie calitativă, proiectul a urmărit să descopere modul în care sisteme educaționale din diferite țări s-au adaptat situației pandemice în anul școlar 2020-2021 și, de asemenea, să identifice bune practici pedagogice generate de această adaptare. Raportul se bazează pe 29 interviuri semistructurate realizate în perioada martie-aprilie 2021 cu diferiți actori sociali implicați în sistemul educațional românesc (e.g., profesori elevi, părinți, etc). Principala concluzie a studiului este că anul școlar 2020-2021 a fost marcat în România de decizii *ad hoc* luate în principal la nivel centralizat, de autoritățile de sănătate publică, decizii care au avut foarte puțin sau deloc de-a face cu argumente ce țin de educație. În acest context, școala la distanță a prevalat, iar aceasta a luat de cele mai multe ori forma întâlnirilor online sincron dintre profesor și elevi. Practic s-a realizat o tranziție a lecțiilor/ orelor din sistem tradițional în mediul online, predarea fiind mediată de ecran.

În timp ce principala problemă ridicată de școala la distanță discutată în spațiul public și parțial rezolvată de către autorități a fost asigurarea accesului la internet (i.e., asigurarea unui dispozitiv de acces și a unei conexiuni la internet) și deci, la școala, pentru toți elevii vulnerabili, probleme mai puțin vizibile dar nu mai puțin importante au fost neglijate. Unele dintre aceste probleme, discutate în cadrul raportului sunt: lipsa unor conținuturi educaționale digitale și a unor pedagogii digitale, lipsa unor ajustări la nivelul conținutului curricular ținând cont de faptul că predarea în mediul online este mai consumatoare de timp decât cea față în față, precum și lipsa unei abordări inclusive sistemice și eficiente care să îi vizeze pe elevii vulnerabili. Un sistem hibrid de educație a fost încercat dar a fost în general considerat ineficient datorită dificultăților tehnice.

În aceste condiții, participanții la studiu au fost de acord că deși sistemul educațional românesc a făcut în acest an școlar pași înainte în digitalizare, mai există multe de făcut. De asemenea, în ceea ce îi privește pe elevi, concluzia a fost că aceștia au fost afectați în mod diferit de școala la distanță, cei într-o poziție privilegiată în raport cu școala reușind să se adapteze cu succes la noile condiții, în timp ce elevii vulnerabili s-au vulnerabilizat și mai mult. La finalul raportului sunt sugerate câteva soluții de îmbunătățire a școlii într-o situație similară și pe termen lung.

Contextul național

După primăvara lui 2020, atunci când școlile din România au fost închise pentru toți elevii până la sfârșitul anului, anul școlar 2020-2021 a început cu o abordare mai descentralizată reglementată de Ordinul Comun

5.487/1494/01.09.2020 al Ministerelor Educației și al Sănătății, care stabilea trei posibile scenarii de desfășurare a școlii: scenariul *Verde* – care permitea prezența tuturor elevilor și a profesorilor la școală, scenariul *Galben* – în care fie era implementată educația hibridă¹⁹ pentru toate clasele, fie pentru anumite clase (e.g. clasele primare și cele de sfârșit de ciclu școlar) era permisă prezența la școală, în timp ce restul claselor participau online sau în sistem hibrid la școală – și scenariul *Roșu*, în care toate clasele participau la școală în sistem online²⁰.

¹⁹ Soluția hibridă a fost propusă pentru a decongestiona clasele reducând numărul elevilor care sunt prezenți în același timp în spațiul clasei. Ea presupunea împărțirea clasei în două și prezența la școală a celor două grupe, prin rotație (o săptămână sau două). În perioada în care o grupă nu era la școală, copiii din respectiva grupă participau la școală online, profesorii predând în același timp celor de la școală față în față și celor de acasă în sistem online, echipamentul minim cerut fiind o camera web și un microfon.

²⁰ În acest raport vom folosi termenii de “educație la distanță” și “educație sau școală online” pentru a descrie aceeași situație și anume atunci când elevii participă la ore prin mijlocirea internetului (utilizând aplicații dedicate de videoconferință), interacțiunea dintre profesori și elevi și cea dintre elevi fiind mediate de ecran. Deși situația provizorie care a impus în România această soluție a școlii online ar fi, conform literaturii de specialitate un argument pentru folosirea termenului de “educație la distanță”, dat fiind că în spațiul public s-a impus termenul de școală online, vom prefera să le folosim pe amândouă.

Autoritățile locale și naționale decideau în care dintre scenarii se desfășoară școala doar pe baza numărului de cazuri noi de infectare cu COVID-19 / 1.000 locuitori din respectiva zona. Dacă încă din septembrie unele școli se aflau în scenariul Roșu, încet, încet, cele mai multe școli au trecut spre Roșu și, în 9 noiembrie 2020 toate școlile s-au închis și educația trecut în online până în semestrul doi, care a început în 8 februarie. Decizia a fost, din nou, centralizată. Semestrul al doilea începe sub aceleași reglementări (i.e. cu cele trei scenarii), doar că de această dată se accentuează ideea că există o decizie și la nivelul școlii, în sensul impunerii unor reglementări mai stricte, dar nu în sensul relaxării lor. O altă modificare importantă în reglementarea semestrului al doilea este aceea că și în scenariile Galben și Roșu prezența este permisă la școală pentru copiii din ciclul preșcolar, primar și clasele terminale. Deoarece începerea școlii a coincis cu așa numitul „al treilea val” de infecții COVID-19, structura anului școlar a fost schimbată în mers și pentru toate clasele cu excepția celor terminale vacanța de primăvară s-a extins de la prima săptămână din aprilie la toată luna aprilie. Clasele terminale au continuat în acest timp învățământul online. Întoarcerea din vacanța prelungită a elevilor a fost reglementată printr-un nou ordin comun al ministerelor responsabile (Educației și Sănătății), ce a presupus restrângerea scenariilor la doar două. Printre elevii cărora le este permisă prezența la școală indiferent de scenariu îi găsim de această dată, alături de preșcolari, pe cei din ciclul primar și pe cei din clasele terminale, și pe elevii cu cerințe educaționale speciale înmatriculați în învățământul special, indiferent de clasa în care sunt.

În concluzie, anul școlar 2020-2021 a fost marcat de decizii *ad hoc*, luate la nivel centralizat, majoritar de către autoritățile de sănătate publică foarte puțin sau deloc bazate pe motive ce țin de educație. La momentul scrierii acestui raport (jumătatea lunii mai, 2021), existau elevi care nu mai fuseseră la școală din martie 2020, iar cei mai mulți dintre elevi fuseseră la școală mai puțin de două luni în toată această perioadă. **În aceste condiții în care sănătatea a fost principala preocupare**, educația a găsit unele modalități de adaptare la școala la distanță, modalități pe care le vom descrie și discuta în continuare. Vom descrie situația așa cum a reieșit din cele 29 de interviuri pe care le-am efectuat între 13 martie și 23 aprilie 2021 cu profesori, directori de școli, inspectori, elevi, părinți, bibliotecare și reprezentanți ai unor ONG-uri.

Rezultate

Pregătirea anului școlar 2020-2021

În această retorică centrată pe problema sănătății, problema educației a fost abordată în principal din perspectiva asigurării accesului tuturor copiilor la educația la distanță și mai puțin sau deloc din perspectiva asigurării unei educații de calitate în mediul online. Chiar și în acest context al așteptărilor foarte reduse de la educație, câteva acțiuni s-au evidențiat în pregătirea anului școlar, atât la nivel instituțional, cât și la nivel individual (al profesorilor).

La nivel instituțional, accentul s-a pus pe dezvoltarea infrastructurii, pregătirea profesorilor și implementarea regulilor de igienă pentru combaterea răspândirii COVID-19.

În ceea ce privește infrastructura, cea mai evidentă pregătire menționată de majoritatea respondenților a fost cea de **creare a platformelor educaționale online** la nivel fiecărei școli și trecerea educației la distanță de pe platformele de social media (Velicu, 2020, Vuorikari et al., 2020), pe platforme dedicate. De menționat că, din spusele profesorilor intervievați aceștia au trebuit să învețe pe cont propriu folosirea acestor platforme. Tot în ceea ce privește infrastructura au fost menționate de asemenea pregătiri în **dotarea școlilor cu tehnologie digitală** (e.g., asigurarea prezenței unui computer dotat cu camera video și conexiune la internet în fiecare sală de clasă pentru desfășurarea orelor în scenariul hibrid, dacă era cazul) și **asigurarea accesului la internet a copiilor aflați în dificultate**. Profesorii au fost mai puțin vizati de astfel de programe de dotare cu dispozitive digitale necesare predării în bune condiții și mulți dintre respondenți au menționat eforturile financiare făcute în mod individual de către profesori în acest sens. Chiar și în condițiile mai multor programe care au vizat rezolvarea celor două probleme menționate anterior, respondenții au fost de acord că acestea nu sunt încă rezolvate. De exemplu, multe săli de clasă au fost dotate cu calculatoare din laboratoarele de informatică ale școlilor, ceea ce reprezintă doar o rezolvare provizorie și *ad hoc* a problemei. Asigurarea accesului la internet a copiilor aflați în dificultate a eșuat parțial, în viziunea participanților la studiu. Pe de o parte, eșecul parțial s-a datorat unor **greșeli în modul în care au fost concepute politicile de sprijin**. De exemplu, faptul că eligibile pentru un astfel de sprijin erau doar familiile care declarau că nu dețin niciun dispozitiv digital, când de fapt situația putea fi mult mai nuanțată sau faptul că nu a fost imaginat și un sprijin doar pentru conexiunea la internet, în cazul în care o familie ar fi avut astfel de dispozitive, dar nu și un abonament la un furnizor de internet nu în ultimul rând, opțiunea inițială pentru tablete în defavoarea computerelor, mult mai potrivite pentru folosirea în educație, a fost

criticată de unii profesori. Pe de altă parte, respondenții au denunțat greșeli **în implementarea acestor politici, cum ar fi** comunicarea defectuoasă a responsabilității părților, ceea ce a dus la retragerea cererii de ajutor din partea mai multor părinți care ar fi avut nevoie de acest sprijin. Mai puțin (mai exact o singură dată) a fost menționată investiția în camere web performante necesare predării în sistem hibrid (deși eșecul parțial al acestui sistem s-a datorat, în percepția participanților la studiu tocmai problemelor tehnice) și nu a fost menționată deloc dotarea copiilor cu căști, dispozitive strict necesare mai ales copiilor care trăiesc în familii în care mai mulți frați participă la școală la distanță.

În ceea ce privește **pregătirea profesorilor**, aceasta a stat sub semnul alegerii individuale (nu a existat obligativitatea urmării vreunui curs) și avut loc mai ales prin webinarii (care au abundat în vara lui 2020) și mai puțin prin cursuri de lungă durată, care au fost disponibile în proporție mult mai mică. Problemele cu acest tip de instruire au fost următoarele: formatul general (care presupunea lipsa de interactivitate și prezentarea într-un timp scurt a unor soluții pentru a căror folosire profesorii ar fi avut nevoie de mai multă practică ghidată), lipsa de comunicare și informare din jurul lor și plasarea responsabilității de a căuta și decide pe umerii profesorilor. Acest din urmă aspect, împreună cu inflația de astfel de webinarii, unele de calitate mai slabă, altele prezentând soluții tehnice care în fapt necesitau un cont plătit i-au făcut, în timp, pe mulți dintre profesori să fie destul de refractari față de aceste webinarii (deși inițial a existat o destul de mare deschidere față de ele). De menționat de asemenea că majoritatea acestor webinarii s-au axat pe prezentarea soluțiilor tehnice și nu au abordat modulele de integrare didactică a acestor soluții în oră sau pe elemente de pedagogii digitale, elemente despre care unii dintre profesorii respondenți spun că ar fi avut nevoie.

Despre implementarea **măsurilor igienice și a protocoalelor sanitare împotriva răspândirii Covid-19** au vorbit doar directorii de școli, semn că în acest proces profesorii sau chiar elevii nu au fost luați ca parteneri. Această lipsă de implicare a tuturor actorilor a fost vizibilă și a avut repercusiuni în deresponsabilizarea actorilor în ceea ce privește monitorizarea respectării acestor norme. Profesori și elevi au vorbit astfel despre nerespectarea unora dintre norme (în special purtarea măștii), dar și despre lipsa unor instrumente coercitive în acest caz și a unor responsabili de implementare regulilor (profesorii nu considerau că era de datoria lor să supravegheze purtarea măștii în timpul pauzelor, de exemplu). Nu în ultimul rând, a fost denunțat faptul că respectarea protocolului sanitar cerea mai mult timp și nu a existat o ajustare a orarului pauzelor în acest sens, așa că se făcea în detrimentul orelor de predare.

La nivel individual, majoritatea profesorilor au menționat pregătiri speciale pentru acest an școlar. Aceste pregătiri au vizat mai ales **îmbunătățirea cunoștințelor digitale**, mai exact învățarea lucrului cu platformele online și cu aplicații educaționale, în general într-o proces autoghidat (prin urmărirea tutorialelor disponibile online) sau cu ajutorul colegilor. La rândul lor, profesorii intervievați au oferit sprijin altor colegi. **Crearea de conținut educațional digital** a fost menționat ca formă de pregătire a acestui an școlar, sau, de către unii profesori, ca pregătire a “perioadei predării online” (adică încă din primăvara lui 2020, când s-a instaurat criza). Înțelegerea a ce înseamnă conținut educațional digital a variat foarte mult, unele dintre aceste materiale fiind destul de puțin atrăgătoare pentru elevi, având astfel potențialul de a genera disparități în cunoaștere (e.g., unii profesori cu competențe digitale mai reduse, au menționat documente word pe care le pregătesc pentru elevi ca suport de curs și pe care le proiectează pe ecranul comun în timpul orelor, elevii trebuind să urmărească informațiile din aceste documente). Au existat însă profesori mult mai adaptați mediului online, care au creat sau au folosit materiale educaționale cu potențial de angajare a elevului (e.g., au creat teste în Kahoot, sau au folosit laboratoare virtuale de fizică sau alte jocuri educaționale) care se potrivesc mai bine cu ideea de pedagogii digitale. La mijloc au fost acei profesori care și-au “digitalizat” materialele educaționale create de-a lungul anilor, adaptate curriculei românești și testate cu succes pe elevii proprii. Cam jumătate dintre profesori au menționat că au folosit în această perioadă și materialele digitale disponibile pe site-ul Ministerului Educației. Majoritatea profesorilor au menționat că **au folosit de asemenea materiale educaționale disponibile online**, (Twinkle, fiind una dintre platformele deseori menționată), după o prealabilă adaptare la specificul clasei. Doar **doi profesori au exprimat îndoieli față de calitatea acestor materiale disponibile online**, sugerând că este nevoie de o prealabilă evaluare a lor. Nu în ultimul rând, în pregătirea noului an școlar, unii profesori au menționat achiziționare din fonduri proprii a unor echipamente care să îi ajute în susținerea orelor online (tabletele grafice fiind cele mai frecvent amintite) sau chiar achiziționarea (prin eforturi proprii) a unor noi echipamente pentru dotarea clasei sau a unor elevi din clasă (e.g. achiziționarea unei table smart).

Practici pedagogice folosite în anul școlar 2020-2021

Construirea eșantionului a urmărit, pe lângă o înțelegere a situației generale a școlii românești în anul școlar 2020-2021, identificarea de bune practici pedagogice în contextul special impus de situația pandemică. Din acest motiv, și dată fiind metodologia calitativă a studiului, avertizăm împotriva oricărei încercări de generalizare a acestor practici, multe dintre ele fiind chiar singulare, dar nu mai puțin importante pentru îmbunătățirea unor practici comune dar inadecvate.

La nivel general, consensul printre respondenți a fost **că nu a existat o adaptare reală a profesorilor și a practicilor de predare și evaluare la oportunitățile și constrângerile mediului online, ci am asistat la o translatare a vechilor practici la noul mediu** (cu ținerea tuturor orelor, inclusiv a celor de dirigenție în online). Mai mult, toți respondenții au declarat că așteaptă întoarcerea fizică, la școala, **lipsindu-le ‘atmosfera’ / aspectul social al școlii** (contactul fizic cu colegii și cu elevii, respectiv profesorii). Chiar și profesorii care au declarat că inițial simțiseră un entuziasm pentru școala online au denunțat o „**oboseală digitală**” și dorința de revenire la școala tradițională.

Adaptarea practicilor de predare

Orele online ținute sincron au reprezentat, în general, regula în acest an școlar. Deși toți profesorii intervievați au spus că au ținut toate orele în acest fel, mărturiile ale inspectorilor intervievați despre plângerile părinților sau interviuri cu directori de școli dovedesc că de fapt au existat profesori care nu s-au conectat sincron cu elevii, unii dintre ei mulțumindu-se să posteze scurte materiale educaționale pe platforma online. Activități educaționale asincron au fost recomandate și asumate formal la nivelul ciclului preșcolar (deși și la acest nivel au existat de multe ori și clase sincron, doar că ajustate ca timp). Din nou, deși toți respondenții au declarat că au participat sau au oferit astfel de ore sincron, practicile pedagogice au variat enorm, cu grade diferite de interacțiune profesor-elevi sau elevi-elevi, și cu grade diferite de eficiență în “transpunerea” / “transmiterea” informației (e.g. profesorii care au investit în tablete grafice au putut să înlocuiască cu succes table fizică, din clasa, în timp ce în alte cazuri, profesorii scriau pe o hârtie rezolvările pe care ulterior o fotografiau și trimiteau elevilor, cu e eficacitate minimă în transmiterea informației).

Încercarea de adaptare la nivelul real de cunoștințe al elevilor –în contextul semestrului doi al anului școlar precedent când elevii au acumulat lipsuri în educație– deși extrem de importantă, a fost menționată ca fiind una dintre provocările maxime (datorită rigidității și lipsei de adaptare a curriculei), posibil de realizat doar la nivelul ciclului primar și doar informal. Alte ajustări ale practicilor pedagogice menționate au fost: **înregistrarea video a lecțiilor** și punerea lor la dispoziția elevilor și **folosirea metodei multimodale** în predare.

Printre **lucrurile care au lipsit profesorilor în noul mediu online** se numără: adaptarea reală a pedagogiilor dincolo de folosirea unor instrumente sau aplicații digitale, suplinirea “atingerii umane” și a “ghidajului” în diferite etape ale învățării (un exemplu în acest sens a fost învățarea scrierii literelor în primii ani de școală) sau lucrul în echipe, o facilitate despre care doar trei dintre profesori știau. Deși la nivel formal toți profesorii, directorii de școli sau inspectorii s-au declarat preocupați de starea de bine a elevilor, aceștia s-au declarat neputincioși în a aborda în mod concret această problemă. Pe de o parte, sufocați de programa stufoasă și total neajustată situației curente și, pe de altă parte, constrânși de situația predării online (care este și mai consumatoare de timp și în care au și mai puțin timp la dispoziție deoarece orele s-au scurtat pentru a reduce timpul petrecut de elevi în fața ecranului), singura preocupare reală a profesorilor care transpare din interviuri este de a își acoperi materia și a se asigura că elevii au notele necesare pentru încheierea situației. Profesorii au deplâns nu doar lipsa de ajustare a conținutului curricular, ci și a orarului școlar. Astfel, mai ales în medii defavorizate, mulți profesori au menționat că în anul precedent și-au ajustat orele de predare orarului familiei. Nevoia de ajustare a fost justificată uneori, mai ales în cazul elevilor mai mici, de lipsa unui dispozitiv personal și nevoia de coordonare cu părinții, existând perioade restrânse de timp când copiii aveau acces la dispozitivul părintelui; în cazul elevilor mai mari, ajustarea orarului era impusă de faptul că fiind acasă aceștia trebuiau să ia parte la treburile gospodăriei, școala fiind mai puțin importantă în ochii unor părinți. Un element foarte important de avut în vedere de către decidenții politici într-o situație similară este că, **pentru elevii vulnerabili mai ales cei din zona rurală, a avea acces la școala fizică înseamnă și a avea asigurat un timp și un spațiu dedicat acesteia**.

În viziunea elevilor, majoritatea profesorilor “slabi” (un termen destul de lax prin care erau desemnați fie profesorii care nu explicau lecțiile pe înțelesul elevilor, fie cei care aveau ore monotone, lipsite de

interactivitate) din perioada anterioară / “normală” au performat la fel și în mediul online; totuși, reciproca nu este valabilă. “Poveștile de succes” în adaptarea școlii la mediul online aveau în spate de asemenea investiții personale ale profesorului în aparatură digitală (lucru de care elevii erau conștienți) și conținuturi educaționale digitale de calitate.

Adaptarea evaluării și a notării

Evaluarea elevilor, fie în scopul notării, fie în scopul ajustării predării, a fost una dintre provocările profesorilor în acest an școlar, mai ales în timpul școlii la distanță. Cel mai frecvent profesorii s-au plâns de **încercările elevilor de a frauda în aceste evaluări** și de modul în care ei ca profesori au trebuit să contracareze această tendință. În acest context, mulți profesori au făcut notarea pe baza activității la ore sau au realizat evaluare orală, în detrimentul celei scrise. Unii profesori s-au plâns însă că **evaluarea elevilor online nu a arătat adevărata situație** a nivelului elevilor, oferind o imagine mai luminoasă decât cea reală. Alte strategii de a preîntâmpina copierea în evaluările scrise au avut în centrul lor folosirea camerei web care permitea profesorului să monitorizeze elevii precum și folosirea unor instrumente digitale de evaluare (teste online / **quizzes**). Deși acestea din urmă nu au fost lipsite de încercări de fraudare, mulți profesori le-au apreciat pentru potențialul de angajare al elevilor (având o oarecare componentă ludică sau datorită **elementelor de gamificare**). O abordare interesantă de evaluare sumativă a elevilor în încercarea de a oferi sprijin acestora și în contextul în care întreg parcursul acestui an școlar era documentat în format digital a fost prin realizarea unei hărți cognitive în format digital unde au fost marcate obiectivele de învățare și locul unde se află elevul în raport cu ele.

Participarea activă a elevilor la ore, o provocare majoră

Consensul printre respondenți a fost acela că elevii care erau într-o poziție privilegiată în raport cu școala înainte de criză și aveau o participare activă la ore au continuat să fie astfel și în mediul online, în timp ce elevii dezavantajați sau neimplicați au continuat în același fel. Dacă însă în situația școlii față în față, în format fizic, profesorii ar fi reușit prin eforturile făcute să îi implice mai mult pe elevii slabi pentru a nu îi lăsa în urmă, în timpul **școlii la distanță diferența de cunoștințe dintre cele două grupuri s-a mărit, majoritatea profesorilor considerând că au eșuat în a îi menține pe toți elevii interesați sau implicați**. Un aspect esențial în lipsă de implicare, aspect despre care vom discuta pe larg în continuare, a fost faptul că elevii țineau camera web oprită, fapt care pe de o parte îi lipsea pe profesori de feedback-ul necesar în ceea ce privește înțelegerea lecției, și, pe de altă parte, îi demotiva.

Elevii fără față: între prezență și absență. Precedentul creat în primăvara anului 2020, atunci când nu s-au trecut absențe copiilor care nu intrau în orele online, precum și rezolvarea doar parțial a problemei accesului copiilor aflați în dificultate la internet, precum și problemele tehnice asociate acestei forme de învățământ (de la pană de curent, la întreruperea internetului) au făcut ca în multe locuri situația să se perpetueze și anul acesta și să existe o înțelegere mai mult sau mai puțin formală pentru elevii care absentau. În aceste condiții, mulți profesori au spus că există **o subraportare a ratei de absentism** (deși au existat și profesori care au spus că au făcut prezența și au înregistrat absențele cu strictețe) și că doar în viitor se va vedea dacă anul acesta a generat și o rată mai mare de abandon școlar. Impoteza abandonului școlar a fost sugerată în mai multe interviuri ca fiind valabilă pentru elevii foarte vulnerabili sau pentru cei aproape de ieșirea din sistem care, în această perioadă, au început diferite slujbe. De multe ori, chiar dacă elevul era formal prezent (în sensul că era logat pe platformă), acesta nu avea camera sau microfonul deschise așa încât profesorul nu putea avea certitudinea că el este cu adevărat prezent, situație care din nou, în viziunea profesorilor maschează un absentism ridicat și posibil început de abandon școlar. În plus, mulți profesori nu știau care este exact procedura –dacă pot trece elevul absent– în cazul în care, deși logat, elevul nu răspunde solicitărilor profesorilor. Lipsa de control asupra clasei în sistem online i-a demotivat pe mulți dintre profesori până într-atât încât unii dintre ei au făcut ei înșiși eforturi minime de antrenare a elevilor, ținându-și la rândul lor camera video închisă. Pe de altă parte însă, au existat și profesori care au încercat folosirea diferitelor instrumente digitale avute la dispoziție pentru a schimba aceasta situație și a îi implica pe elevi și a obține participarea activă a lor la ore.

Trebuie spus însă că au existat multiple voci care au recunoscut că pot exista motive valide pentru care unii elevi preferă să aibă camera video închisă, condițiile de trai de acasă și/ sau dreptul la viață privată fiind

printre ele. O adevărată dezbatere la nivel de societate sau printre persoanele implicate în sistemul educațional românesc despre unde se încadrează cu adevărat situația în care sunt copiii atunci când accesează școala la distanță pe o platformă educațională securizată și dedicată (e.g. sunt ei într-o situație privată sau se află într-o situație publică?) nu a existat, la fel cum nu a existat nicio discuție despre ce date se colectează pe aceste platforme și ce se întâmplă cu ele. Argumentul dreptului la viață privată al elevilor ca justificare a refuzului de a deschide camera în timpul orelor online a apărut în contextul folosirii platformelor de media sociale pentru școală și nu a fost repus în discuție odată cu trecerea pe platforme securizate și dedicate sau din perspectiva argumentelor educaționale (e.g. demotivare profesorilor și a elevilor și slaba interacțiune, toate cu repercusiuni în procesul educațional).

Lărgirea comunităților de profesori și extinderea colaborării

Școala la distanță a permis profesorilor noi forme de colaborare. Au fost menționate colaborări între profesori, mai ales de la aceeași școală, pentru învățarea soluțiilor tehnice, în timp ce profesorii de aceeași materie, de la școli diferite sau din județe diferite, au colaborat la crearea resurselor educaționale digitale. Un element recurent în ceea ce privește colaborările a fost colaborarea profesorilor români cu profesori din Republica Moldova, care se pare că sunt mai avansați pe drumul resurselor educaționale deschise. Nu în ultimul rând, profesorii au menționat că noul format online le-a permis să deschidă clasa către lume și să invite experți care să vorbească copiilor despre diferite subiecte (de la literatură, la ultrasunete și folosirea lor în ecografie).

Școala hibridă, între speranță și realitate

Considerată inițial ca soluție de mijloc între școala în format clasic, față în față, și cea online, soluția hibridă a urmărit decongestionarea claselor prin împărțirea elevilor în două grupe și aducerea lor la școală în mod alternativ, câte o săptămână sau două, grupa care nu este prezentă urmând să participe la școală online. Deși părea o soluție care măcar parțial rezolva problema lipsei interacțiunii sociale și permitea accesul la educație și copiilor care se aflau în grupe de risc, din cauza infrastructurii deficitare și a efortului foarte mare pe care îl presupunea din partea profesorilor, cei mai mulți respondenți au fost de acord că soluția nu este potrivită din punct de vedere educațional. Totuși ea a fost văzută ca fiind o posibilă soluție pe termen lung care ar permite o incluziune școlară mai bună elevilor cu probleme medicale.

De asemenea, într-o situație similară, dacă școlile ar fi parțial închise din nou, păstrarea școlilor deschise pentru elevii vulnerabili social ar trebui avută în vedere. Privilegierea anilor terminali în raport cu restul anilor din învățământul gimnazial și liceal a fost privită în mod diferit, unii profesori și elevi admitând că în acest fel sunt ajutați acești elevi, în timp ce alții au găsit că unii dintre cei mai defavorizați erau elevii din ani începători, care nu își cunoșteau nici profesorii și nici colegii și care în sistem online nu au reușit să se integreze.

Riscuri și oportunități ale folosirii tehnologiei digitale în școala la distanță

Confirmând teorii anterioare care leagă riscurile și oportunitățile internetului de o utilizare mai intensă a acestuia (Livingstone et al., 2011), cercetarea a evidențiat faptul că în contextul școlii online, aceste riscuri și oportunități sunt de ambele părți ale catedrei, vizându-i în mod separat sau împreună pe profesori și pe elevi.

Printre riscurile care îi vizau pe profesori trebuie menționat pierderea controlului asupra clasei la diferite niveluri. Astfel, datorită competențelor digitale reduse a unora dintre profesori au fost raportate situații în care elevii preluau rolul de "gazdă" (host) a întâlnirii, având astfel puterea să închidă întâlnirea oricând sau să facă diferite alte acțiuni (e.g. reducerea tuturor la tăcere prin funcția "mute"). Au fost raportate de asemenea situații în care străini au intrat în clasa online și au folosit limbaj licențios sau au proiectat imagini neadecvate. Toate aceste situații au fost **trăite de către profesori ca forme de cyberbullying**. Lipsa de control a fost percepută de profesori și în ceea ce privește motivele absențelor. Datorită consensului tacit care s-a instaurat în anumite zone precum că absențele din motive tehnice nu ar trebui marcate, mulți profesori au declarat că le lipsește instrumentul coercitiv al absenței, pe care îl foloseau în mod tradițional, pentru a ține clasa sub control.

Pentru elevi, unele dintre riscurile internetului cu care aceștia s-au întâlnit în această perioadă au fost **cyberbullying-ul și expunerea la conținuturi neadecvate**, mai ales la conținutul pornografic (la care au fost expuși în multe cazuri și elevi foarte mici, de ciclul primar). Un consilier școlar intervievat a vorbit despre faptul că **pentru foarte mulți copii de vârste mici nu există nimeni în familie care să le vorbească și să le “dezvrăjescă” aceste conținuturi pornografice la care au fost expuși în această perioadă**. Mai mult, psihologii și consilierii școlari sau chiar profesorii întâmpină dificultăți birocratice în a aborda acest subiect cu copiii, ceea ce duce la lăsarea copiilor fără sprijinul de care ar avea nevoie. Riscurile legate de expunerea unor elemente care țin de viață privată (**privacy risks**) au fost menționate în diferite contexte, de la cel al reglementărilor asupra ținerii camerei web închisă sau deschisă în timpul orelor, la filmulețele cerute de profesorii de sport pentru a documenta efectuarea unor exerciții fizice, filmulețe care uneori au circulat apoi în media sociale. Totuși un singur profesor a menționat problemele legate de privacy (GDPR) în ceea ce privește crearea platformelor online la nivelul școlii, în fazele inițiale sau în anumite zone acestea fiind făcute manual, cu o ignorare totală a oricărui aspecte legate de securitatea datelor personale (ulterior a fost menționat folosirea în acest sens a registrului național al elevilor, o bază de date integrată și securizată).

În fine, un ultim risc menționat atât de profesori cât și de elevi a fost cel al **presiunii de a fi în permanență online, risc care a emers din folosirea mesageriei instant și a rețelelor de media sociale pentru comunicare**. Folosirea email-ului instituțional, disponibil odată cu crearea platformelor școlare online, ar fi rezolvat această problemă, delimitând astfel un timp privat.

Printre beneficiile și oportunitățile oferite de folosirea tehnologiei digitale în educație au fost menționate **autodezvoltarea** la nivelul profesorilor și a elevilor și folosirea mai bună a timpului disponibil, cu un accent pe dezvoltarea autonomiei în învățare la nivelul elevilor mai mari sau a celor buni la învățătură. Aceștia au reușit în perioada școlii online să ‘iasă din clasă’, participând la diferite cursuri online, unele de pe platforme universitare, într-o abordare auto-ghidată a învățării. De asemenea, **păstrarea contactului cu școala pentru elevii sau profesorii cu probleme de sănătate** a fost considerat un alt avantaj al școlii la distanță. Cele mai prețuite sub acest aspect au fost **platformele online ale școlilor**, un spațiu care adună toată informația legată de școală și o face disponibilă tuturor elevilor (în condițiile ținerii la zi a acestor platforme). **Îmbunătățirea competențelor digitale**, atât pentru elevi cât și pentru profesori, a fost un alt avantaj direct al acestei perioade.

Câteva dintre beneficiile colaterale menționate de respondenți au fost: economisirea timpului pierdut pe navetă / transport, reconsiderarea importanței școlii de către mulți dintre părinți și elevi și recunoșterea misiunii dificile pe care profesorii o au. Din partea profesorilor, unii dintre ei au apreciat **liniștea din clasă**. Motivată tehnic, pentru a evita microfonia și a permite derularea orelor, punerea tuturor elevilor pe ‘mute’ a oferit o pauză de la zgomotul școlii pentru mulți profesori excedați anterior.

Starea de bine a profesorilor și elevilor

Așa cum am mai spus, nu a existat o preocupare sistematică pentru asigurarea stării de bine a elevilor sau a profesorilor, deși la nivel individual, colegial au fost făcute unele eforturi. Mai ales **odată cu prelungirea perioadei de școală la distanță, mulți profesori au spus că ar fi simțit nevoia unui sprijin suplimentar emoțional și psihologic**. Deși formal există sprijin de specialitate (consilieri școlari și psihologi) la nivelul școlilor, lipsa de cultură /obișnuință în a cere ajutorul de specialitate precum și subdimensionarea sistemului de sprijin (în zonele rurale existând un astfel de profesori la câteva școli) au făcut ca acest ajutor să nu fie solicitat și nici oferit. O preocupare sistemică și **un ajutor oferit în mod automat**, chiar în lipsa solicitării lui ar fi fost poate de dorit.

În ceea ce îi privește pe elevi, profesorii au admis că preocuparea lor centrală a fost legată de parcurgerea întregii materii și că nu au putut să se aplece asupra altor nevoi pe care poate elevii le-ar fi avut, iar recomandări clare în acest sens nu au existat.

Abordarea elevilor vulnerabili sau cu nevoi educaționale speciale

Studiile anterioare (Petrescu, 2020) au identificat ca fiind în mod deosebit vulnerabili în timpul școlii la distanță copiii trăind în sărăcie și copiii cu cerințe educaționale speciale. Cercetarea de față a încercat să identifice metode specifice de abordare pentru ambele grupuri, precum și care au fost provocările pentru

profesori, copii și familiile acestora. Datele Eurostat (2020) vorbesc despre 35,8% dintre copiii din România ca fiind în risc de sărăcie sau excluziune socială (acest procent fiind mai ridicat în cadrul comunității Roma), în timp ce Ayllon și colegii (2021) găsesc că, conform datelor din 2019, România are cel mai mare procent al copiilor privați digital de la nivelul Europei (23,1%). În aceste condiții, în ciuda eforturilor făcute de autorități sau de ONG-uri (eforturi despre care am arătat deja că au fost uneori viciate la nivel de elaborare sau de implementare), problema accesului la internet pentru nevoi școlare a rămas încă nerezolvată pentru mulți copii, nu doar din zonele rurale, ci și din urban. Mai mult, chiar dacă aspectele tehnice legate de acces au fost rezolvate, de multe ori a lipsit sprijinul din partea familiei, datorită lipsei competențelor (digitale sau ținând de materia școlară) sau a dezinteresului. Spre exemplu, la o școală din zona centrală a Bucureștiului, din 150 de elevi înscriși, până la momentul realizării interviurilor, 40 nu accesaseră deloc orele online, în ciuda faptului că majoritatea fuseseră dotați cu tablete cu conexiune la internet. Mai mult, datorită mobilității foarte mari a unora dintre familii (care nu au forme legale de locuire) sau a schimbării foarte dese a datelor de contact (deoarece folosesc mai ales cartele SIM reîncărcabile pe care le schimbă lunar) profesorii și directorii au pierdut în unele cazuri legătura cu aceste familii.

Copiii cu cerințe educaționale speciale (CES) pot fi înscriși în școli de masă (cu un traseu educațional adaptat) sau în școli speciale unde beneficiază în general și de terapie (pentru autism, deficiențe de vedere sau de auz etc.). În ceea ce privește pe cei din învățământul de masă, majoritatea profesorilor au fost de acord că cei oficial înregistrați ca atare sunt mai puțini decât cei care au nevoie de o astfel de ajustare (datorită birocrăției și a costurilor pe care obținerea unui astfel de certificat le implică). De menționat de asemenea faptul că mulți dintre elevii cu nevoi speciale înregistrați în școli speciale sunt interni, locuind în căminele acestor școli. Școala la distanță în cazul lor a reprezentat o povară uriașă pentru familiile de multe ori nepregătite să preia responsabilități educaționale în ceea ce îi privește.

Nemenționați în studiile anterioare dar deveniți vulnerabili în timpul școlii la distanță sunt acei elevi considerați în general „slabi” cărora le lipsește disciplina studiului individual. Dacă în sistemul tradițional aceștia ar fi fost sprijiniți de profesori pentru a îi motiva, în timpul școlii la distanță, majoritatea profesorilor nu au putut să adreseze acest aspect.

Deși din motive analitice am specificat aici fiecare dintre grupuri în mod separat, în realitate vulnerabilitățile multor elevi se suprapun.

Provocările școlii la distanță pentru copiii care trăiesc în sărăcie

Toți participanții la studiu au fost de acord că **acești copii au avut cel mai mult de pierdut** în timpul acestui an școlar (și a celui trecut). Deși s-a încercat rezolvarea problemei accesului la internet pentru elevii trăind în sărăcie, aceasta nu a fost rezolvată în totalitate, datorită, așa cum am arătat mai sus, atât **erorilor în conceperea acestor programe de sprijin** (e.g., faptul că doar familiile fără niciun dispozitiv s-ar fi calificat pentru un astfel de ajutor, faptul că nu a fost conceput un ajutor pentru conexiunea la internet independentă de dispozitiv), cât și a **erorilor în implementarea lor** (a se vedea părinții care au renunțat la acest ajutor de frica unor costuri ulterioare). Mai mult, pentru mulți copii cu risc de excluziune socială, **școala poate reprezenta nu doar accesul la educație, cât și asigurarea unui timp și a unui spațiu dedicate educației și, nu de puține ori, asigurarea sau suplimentarea hranei zilnice**. Copii care au învățat în case supraaglomerate, în picioare, sau care se logau la școala online de pe câmp unde îi ajutau pe părinți la treburile gospodărești au fost menționați frecvent în interviurile făcute. Unii profesori au prezentat aceste situații ca reprezentând în fapt **privarea copiilor de dreptul fundamental la educație**, argumentând că ar trebui politici ajustate pentru acești copii.

Nu în ultimul rând, părinții copiilor care trăiesc în sărăcie sunt la rândul lor privați, de multe ori cu o educație precară care nu le permite să-și sprijine copiii în sarcinile școlare, profesorii neavând la rândul lor timp, în formatul școlii la distanță, să ofere un sprijin individualizat.

Elevii cu cerințe educaționale speciale

(Lipsa de) Adaptarea la elevii cu cerințe educaționale speciale (CES) înscriși în învățământul de masă. Unul dintre rezultatele îngrijorătoare ale studiului este acordul cvasi unanim asupra pierderilor educaționale pe care copiii cu CES din școlile de masă le-au acumulat în perioada acesta. Aceasta deoarece:

1. Pentru unii dintre acești copiii statul în fața ecranului pentru perioade lungi nu este recomandat medical; 2. Unii dintre ei prezintă deficit de atenție sau sunt hiperactivi; 3. Profesorii de la clasă nu au timp să se ocupe în mod special de ei atunci când școala are loc la distanță. Totuși, în cazul în care părinții au fost disponibili și dispuși să complementeze eforturile profesorilor (fiind în permanență alături de copil atât în timpul orelor online cât și ulterior, în pregătirea temelor), atunci copiii nu au rămas în urmă.

Parțial, această concluzie este valabilă și pentru copiii cu CES înscriși în școlile speciale despre care profesorii intervievați au afirmat că **cea mai mare realizare în această perioadă în ceea ce îi privește este parteneriatul creat cu părinții**. Dacă de cele mai multe ori înainte de criză terapia și educația acestor copii era exclusiv în sarcina școlii, unii dintre ei stând în mod normal la internat pe parcursul anului școlar, odată cu închiderea din primăvara anului 2020, **părinții au trebuit să devină „prelungiri” ale profesorilor în spațiul casei și să lucreze cu copiii după indicațiile oferite de profesori de la distanță**. Profesorii din școlile speciale cu care am vorbit au fost foarte rapizi în a se adapta situației noi încă de anul trecut, imediat ce s-au închis școlile făcând grupuri *ad hoc* cu părinții pe platformele de media socială (pe care erau foarte activi înainte pentru a îi ține la curent pe părinți despre evoluția copiilor). Pe aceste grupuri ofereau sfaturi, sprijin psihologic, materiale educaționale și informații despre ce anume trebuie să facă părinții pentru a-și sprijini copiii în această perioadă dificilă. De asemenea mulți profesori s-au înregistrat video performând diverse activități necesare în terapia copiilor și au trimis înregistrările familiilor. În anul școlar 2020-21 s-a făcut trecerea spre platformele educaționale dedicate (e.g., Google Classroom) dar legătura cu părinții a continuat să se mențină, în cele mai multe cazuri, deși grupurile de pe social media s-au închis și contactul s-a păstrat în totalitate pe platforma școlară. **Profesorii de la școlile speciale au dat dovadă de o abordare mult mai flexibilă decât cei de la școlile de masă**, atât în adaptarea activităților la resursele care pot să fie în mod natural în gospodăria, cât și în lucrul cu copiii. O profesoară vorbește de faptul că a împărțit clasa în două grupe, în funcție de stadiul de dezvoltare al copiilor și nevoile acestora, și s-a întâlnit online cu cele două grupe în momente diferite. Acest gen de maleabilitate în abordarea copiilor vulnerabili nu am întâlnit-o în școlile de masă în anul 2020-2021, deși profesori care lucrează cu copii dezavantajați (în special economic) au menționat-o în anul anterior, în timpul lockdown-ului.

Abordarea în condițiile școlii la distanță a copiilor cu deficit de auz

Una dintre adaptările menționată de profesorii care lucrează cu copiii cu deficit de auz a fost încercarea de a imagina mai multe activități pe care copiii să le realizeze asincron, într-un efort de contracarare a timpului excesiv petrecut de copii în fața ecranului și a camerei video, în condițiile în care și orele școlare și cele de terapie se întâmplau la distanță. Deoarece pentru copiii cu dificultăți de auz vederea este foarte importantă, problemele legate de a ține camera web deschisă nu au apărut deloc în aceste cazuri. Din contră, problemele au apărut când, odată întorși la școală, au trebuit să poarte cu toții, profesori și elevi, măști neadaptate, care nu le făceau gura vizibilă pentru ceilalți (făcând astfel dificilă comunicarea). În ciuda demersul susținute ale profesorilor de la astfel de școli pentru semnalarea acestei probleme, doar la începutul lunii mai acest aspect a fost rezolvat într-un ordin comun al Ministerului Educației și al Ministerului Sănătății, prin care în anumite cazuri profesorii erau lăsați să poarte viziere transparente în locul măștilor. Profesoara cu care am vorbit reușise să își procure din Anglia unele măști adaptate (parțial material de măști chirurgicale, parțial transparente) și aflase că în Anglia nu le era permis profesorilor să predea copiilor cu dificultăți de auz folosind măști normale (opace). Pe lângă rămănerile în urmă larg acceptate în ceea ce privește conținutul educațional, o importantă pierdere în această perioadă pentru copiii cu dificultăți de auz a fost legată de emiterea sunetelor. Pe de altă parte, conform spuselor profesorilor, copiii au câștigat în această perioadă în autonomia în învățare și și-au îmbunătățit limbajul gestual.

Abordarea în condițiile școlii la distanță a copiilor cu deficit de văz

Datorită lipsei de familiarizare a acestor copiii, în mod special la vârste mai mici, cu tehnologiile digitale pe bază de ecran, sprijinul din partea părinților pentru participarea la clasele online era mult mai necesar decât în cazul altor copii. Mai mult, ajutorul părinților era necesar și pentru activitățile implicate de terapie (e.g., pentru dezvoltarea dexterității și a simțului tactil), pentru a pregăti și a strânge materialele de care aveau nevoie copiii (e.g., sticle cu apă, boabe de diferite granulații etc.). Conform interviurilor cu profesorii acestor elevi, cei mai mulți dintre părinți au fost total implicați în activitățile de terapie, efectuând și înregistrând cu

copiii activitățile trimise de profesori și trimițând profesorilor înregistrările realizate (feedback). Aceste înregistrări nu erau însă în logica verificărilor (așa cum funcționau lucrurile în învățământul de masă, ci erau necesare profesorilor pentru **evaluarea formativă**, ca **mijloace necesare profesorului pentru a înțelege evoluția copilului și a își ajusta următoarele sarcini pe care le imagina pentru acesta**. De multe ori, acești profesori se înregistrau făcând respectivele sarcini și trimiteau părinților înregistrările pentru a fi siguri că instrucțiunile sunt urmărite întocmai, deși acele activități puteau să nu aibă sens în viziunea părinților (e.g., prinderea materialelor de diferite grosimi, de la hârtie la cartoane din ce în ce mai groase, cu un cârlig de rufe). În aceste condiții, atunci când părinții au fost implicați, copiii nu au stagnat, ba unii au și evoluat; din contră, unde părinții nu au fost implicați, copiii au prezentat o involuție clară. În fine, pentru copiii cu cecitate totală și fluenți în Braille, școală a pus la dispoziție familiilor mașini Braille pentru folosirea în perioada școlii la distanță.

Abordarea în condițiile școlii la distanță a copiilor cu tulburări de spectru autist

Datorită unei hipersensibilități la nivelul pielii, pentru mulți dintre copiii cu autism purtarea măștilor este imposibilă. În aceste condiții și deoarece nu s-a dat nicio derogare de la regula purtării măștii în spațiul școlii, acești copii au fost *ab initio* repartizați școlii online/ la distanță. Până la momentul interviurilor, nimic nu se schimbase, în ciuda solicitărilor profesorilor care scriseseră la Minister pentru a cere derogare și a oferi soluții (de exemplu, realizarea unor programe de instruire specială în care să îi obișnuiască cu purtatul măștii), în condițiile în care copiii cu autism le era cel mai contraindicată petrecerea unor perioade lungi de timp în fața ecranului.

Astfel, una dintre provocările majore a fost că profesorii nu au putut face o evaluare inițială *in presentia* acestor copii, atât pentru foștii elevi pentru a vedea unde sunt după semestrul al doilea al anului trecut care a fost petrecut în lockdown, cât și pentru o evaluare inițială a elevilor noi.

Dacă copiii cu alte tipuri de deficiențe au un grad mai mare sau mai mic de autonomie în fața ecranului, pentru cei cu autism prezența părintelui și sprijinul lui continuu este obligatoriu, conform profesorilor intervievați.

Cele mai mari pierderi ale copiilor cu autism au fost la nivel comportamental, unde datorită lipsei de diversitate a stimulilor și datorită timpului îndelungat de expunere la ecran, comportamentele stereotipe și fixațiile pe care deja le aveau au fost întărite și nu diminuate, cum ar fi trebuit. În ceea ce privește câștigurile acestei perioade, dezvoltarea relației cu părinții și împuternicirea lor să lucreze cu copii au fost singurele mențiuni. Între școală și familie s-a dezvoltat în perioada pandemică un parteneriat puternic care a făcut ca linia dintre cele două instituții de socializare se fie estompată și să existe transgresări atât din partea școlii înspre familie (școala la distanță), cât și dinspre familie spre școală (părinții căpătând încredere în profesori și cerându-le sfatul și pentru activități și evenimente private).

Căi alternative de sprijinire a elevilor vulnerabili în perioada pandemică

Au existat programe, dezvoltate de ONG-uri, biblioteci sau Minister, care au urmărit să completeze și completeze eforturile școlii de a îi ajuta pe elevii vulnerabili, contribuind astfel la diminuarea efectului negativ pe care această perioadă l-a avut asupra lor. Raportul a analizat programul de educație remedială "Școala de după școală", program al Ministerului Educației și a menționat pe scurt alte inițiative.

Programul școală de după școală

Pornit pe 19 Februarie 2021, programul se adresează copiilor (din ciclul primar și gimnazial) cu risc de abandon, de repetenție celor care au dat semne de involuție în parcursul lor școlar în această perioadă sau care nu au avut acces la internet pentru a participa la școala online. Elevii eligibili erau cei care aveau cel puțin una dintre cele trei vulnerabilități menționate; părinții erau cei care trebuiau să facă cererea de înscriere a copiilor în program. Deși despre acest program remedial se vorbea de mult timp (inițial, înaintea pandemiei, în context mai general, ulterior legat de problemele apărute odată cu școala la distanță), participanții la

cercetare au denunțat implementarea lui în grabă. Astfel, în mai puțin de o săptămână de la aprobarea Normelor Metodologice de Aplicare, părinții trebuiau să fie informați despre program, să facă cererile de înscriere a copiilor în program, să fie evaluată eligibilitatea cererilor la nivelul școlii, să se finalizeze la nivel de școală listele de elevi înscriși în program și să se trimită la inspectorate și de asemenea să se identifice profesorii doritori și eligibili să participe în program, să se stabilească calendarul și să se pronească programul. Această grabă inițială a putut fi corectată ulterior, prin acceptarea înscrierilor continue în program.

Percepția printre profesorii intervievați în cadrul proiectului a fost că programul este mai popular în mediul rural decât în cel urban (dar nu se poate generaliza dată fiind natura calitativă a studiului). Unii profesori au catalogat **programul ca fiind unul bine intenționat dar parțial compromis de instituțiile intermediare în implementarea lui.**

Printre provocările programului și greșelile în implementare menționate au fost: 1. **Grupurile prea mari de copii** (deși inițial a fost conceput pentru grupuri de maxim 12 elevi, profesorii au denunțat presiunea inspectoratelor școlare și a direcțiilor de a forma doar grupe la nivelul maxim sau chiar peste, grupând elevi de clase diferite). 2. **Obligativitatea cererii părinților pentru înscrierea în program.** Această cerință a fost denunțată de profesori ca fiind discriminantă pentru copiii care ar fi avut cea mai mare nevoie de programul remedial, și anume cei ai căror părinți au un dezinteres total pentru școală, ca și pentru copiii cu părinții plecați la muncă în străinătate și care nu au mandatat în mod legal reprezentarea intereselor copilului altei persoane. Abordarea neoliberală de degrevare a statului de responsabilitate prin considerarea părintelui ca fiind responsabil de educația copilului este inefficientă și în detrimentul copilului atâta timp cât nu există modalități de control asupra respectării obligațiilor ce rezultă din această responsabilizare. 3. **Lipsa de personal eligibil să predea în program.** Mai ales în școlile din zonele dezavantajate, unde foarte mulți profesori sunt suplینitori, școlile s-au confruntat cu lipsa personalului eligibil să predea în program, ceea ce făcea ca aceste școli să nu poată găzdui programul remedial și să trebuiască să aloce elevii doritori și eligibili la alte școli. Aceasta ducea la renunțarea la program din partea familiei, datorită navetei pe care o presupunea participarea în programul remedial. 4. **Stabilirea unor standarde de performanță prea ridicate și nerealistice.** Încă dinaintea pandemiei, unii dintre elevii dezavantajați erau mult sub nivelul la care ar fi trebuit să fie, perioada școlii la distanță accentuând și mai mult rămănerile în urmă ale acestora. În aceste condiții, găurile educaționale pe care profesorii din program le aveau de umplut se extindeau mult peste materia de două semestre (dacă îl socotim și pe cel din semestrul doi al anului trecut, în lockdown) pe care programul trebuia să le acopere în mod formal. Astfel, în ciuda avansului vizibil înregistrat de mulți dintre elevi, aceștia erau încă în urmă.

Alți actori sociali implicați în adresarea inechităților din sistemul educațional

Alte programe implementate de ONG-uri, companii private sau biblioteci au urmărit de asemenea conectarea copiilor la educație (în sens mai larg) în această perioadă și diminuarea rămănerii în urmă pentru elevii vulnerabili.

Spre exemplu, printr-un program finanțat de o companie privată, o echipă de elevi de liceu susținută de biblioteca publică dintr-o comună a oferit în vara lui 2020 cursuri de pregătire în folosirea aplicațiilor digitale pentru profesorii din localitate, susținând de asemenea ore demonstrative cu elevii. Prin designul programului (e.g. cursuri practice, în format fizic, cu mai multe sesiuni de lucru) și prin evidențierea posibilităților de folosire a respectivelor aplicații la clasă, aceste cursuri au fost, conform bibliotecarei care a supervizat echipa de elevi instructori, mai eficiente decât webinarile discutate mai sus.

Consiliul Național al Elevilor a fost de asemenea activ în sprijinirea elevilor în această perioadă, deși programele lor îi vizau pe elevi în general, nu doar pe cei vulnerabili. Dintre activitățile lor, merită amintite: monitorizarea și semnalarea situațiilor când lipseau condițiile sanitaro-igienice din școli, co-elaborarea reglementărilor referitoare la folosirea camerei web pe parcursul orelor online sau promovarea unor metode de studiu auto-ghidat printre elevi. Una dintre cele mai importante acțiuni a **CNE în această perioadă a fost cererea de stabilire a unor standarde de calitate ale învățământului online și monitorizarea respectării acestor standarde** (parte a Decalogului educației online), în condițiile în care, unul dintre reprezentanții elevilor intervievați în cadrul acestui proiect a afirmat că există diferențe majore între profesori în ceea ce privește înțelegerea a ceea ce înseamnă învățământul online și implementarea lui.

Principalele activități de susținere a educației incluzive desfășurate de ONG-urile ai căror reprezentanți au fost intervievați în proiect au urmărit instruirea profesorilor în utilizarea aplicațiilor digitale în cadrul școlii la distanță și oferirea accesului la tehnologie (și deci la școala online) copiilor dezavantajați (o problemă continuă). De asemenea, aceste ONG-uri au încercat să suplinească educația pentru sănătate mai ales în comunitățile dezavantajate, o problemă pe cât de actuală în perioada pandemiei cu COVID-19, pe atât neglijată de autorități (sau redusă la sfaturile de spălare pe mâini).

Îmbunătățirea educației din România pe baza experienței din anul școlar 2020-2021

Îmbunătățirea educației într-o situație similară

În ceea ce privește potențialul de îmbunătățire pentru o situație similară, mulți profesori au menționat **o mai bună colaborare între profesori pentru crearea materialelor educaționale digitale și pentru împărtășirea de bune practici**. Deși acest tip de colaborare și comunicare a început deja, mulți profesori au spus că s-au simțit singuri și nepregătiți în fața provocării școlii la distanță. În ciuda aceste deschideri spre colaborare, este de remarcat că nu au fost menționate colaborări transdisciplinare (deși condițiile școlii la distanță ar face-o cu atât mai prielnică).

Unii profesori au argumentat pentru realizarea unor platforme online centralizate (girate de Minister sau de asociațiile profesionale) care nu doar să găzduiască materialele educaționale digitale, ci să le organizeze, indexeze (pe nivel, clasă, subiect/ temă, disciplină etc.), evalueze și corecteze dacă este cazul, pentru a reprezenta o resursă reală pentru profesori.

Deși menționată de mai puțini profesori, merită atras atenția asupra sugestiei de **folosire a platformelor educaționale digitale pentru toate activitățile de comunicare** care au legătură cu școala (i.e., între profesori și elevi, profesori și părinți, comunicarea pe verticală sau pe orizontală între profesori). Deși marea diferență dintre școala în primăvara lui 2020 și școala în anul 2020-2021 a fost renunțarea la folosirea media sociale pentru predare, acestea au continuat să fie folosite în comunicarea școlară. Totuși, trecerea comunicării pe platformele școlare dincolo de aspectele legate de protecția datelor personale, **reprezintă delimitarea unui timp privat, în afara celui profesional**, în contextul unui deja problematic mixt al spațiului privat și cel profesional/ public.

Unii profesori și-au exprimat **lipsa de încredere în abilitățile lor de a ține elevii activi și implicați în timpul orelor online**, dorind să îmbunătățească acest aspect. Deși în cadrul proiectului am reușit să identificăm practici pedagogice care reușeau cu succes acest lucru (de la folosirea lucrului în echipă, a jocurilor educaționale, a laboratoarelor virtuale), se pare că aceste practici nu sunt cunoscute (deși, uneori, aplicațiile digitale care le fac posibile sunt cunoscute, cum anume ar trebui folosite practic la nivelul orelor reprezintă o necunoscută pentru mulți profesori). În aceste condiții, o mai bună diseminare a lor printre profesori, precum și o pregătire în vederea folosirii lor în situații concrete este de dorit.

Îmbunătățirea competențelor digitale atât ale elevilor cât și ale profesorilor a fost unul dintre câștigurile perioadei. Cu toate acestea, **unii profesori au menționat neîncredere în competențele lor digitale**. De asemenea, unii dintre profesori și-au arătat în continuare deschiderea de a afla despre cât mai multe instrumente educaționale digitale, deși au existat și profesori care au respins categoric genul acesta de informație, spunând că sunt mult mai **interesați să învețe să integreze pedagogic instrumentele deja cunoscute** decât să cunoască altele noi. Trebuie spus că această lipsă de încredere în propriile competențe digitale a fost menționată atât de profesori cu competențe digitale scăzute, cât și de cei cu competențe digitale avansate, nefiind neapărat determinată de nivelul real al competențelor, ci de cât de mare era distanța între nivelul la care erau și cel unde ar fi vrut să ajungă. În aceste condiții, cursuri continue de îmbunătățire a competențelor digitale ale profesorilor sunt necesare.

În mod cu totul surprinzător, **mulți profesori au cerut reglementări mai stricte**, clare și centralizate oferite de Ministerul Educației în ceea ce privește cum ar trebui să arate educația online. Ar trebui considerat că profesorul participă în școala la distanță dacă acesta doar încarcă niște materiale educaționale pe platformă dar nu intră niciodată în întâlniri sincrone cu elevii? Care ar trebui să fie proporția dintre activitățile individuale sau de grup realizate asincron de către elevi și întâlnirile sincron cu profesorii? Nu cumva translatarea întregului mod de predare tradițional în mediul virtual ratează de fapt oportunitățile oferite de acest mediu? Ce înseamnă participarea la educația la distanță pentru elevi? Mulți participanți la proiect - profesori, elevi, părinți - consideră că aceste aspecte ar trebui reglementate, în condițiile în care situația este încă nouă și e necesar să se evite interpretările personale și posibilele abuzuri. Elevii de asemenea au susținut

necesitatea stabilirii și implementării unor standarde de calitate pentru învățământul online. Totuși au existat câțiva profesori din eșantionul nostru care din contră **au denunțat abordarea prea centralizată, neadaptată situației reale** și condițiilor specifice de la clasele lor, argumentând pentru necesitatea unei libertăți mai mari. Deși cele două cerințe par contradictorii, ele sunt reacții normale în fața unei situații noi, unde unii profesori lăsați liberi reușesc să se adapteze, în timp ce alții au nevoie de îndrumări. Provocarea reală a decidenților este să imagineze politici care să țină cont și să armonizeze ambele nevoi, fără să sacrifice pe una în favoarea celeilalte.

Mulți dintre respondenți au menționat ideea că, **după atâtea luni de școală online la distanță, s-a ajuns la un fel de rutină**, care are atât conotații pozitive, cât și negative. Ca aspect pozitiv, toată lumea știe ce are de făcut în acest nou mediu, în general chiar și copiii mici deprinzând competențele digitale operaționale. Medierea interacțiunii prin ecran nu mai este o noutate și, în general, a preda și a asculta lecțiile în fața ecranului au ajuns „normale”. Cei mai mulți dintre elevi și profesori și-au depășit trercul și emoțiile inițiale din fața camerei. Totuși, în partea negativă, rutina înseamnă de asemenea o blazare și o diminuare a entuziasmului inițial, precum și a interesului de a învăța ceva nou, de a se îmbunătăți permanent și de a evolua. În aceste condiții s-a vorbit despre nevoia unei remotivări.

Deși pe termen scurt învățământul la distanță poate să funcționeze, menținerea lui pentru perioade îndelungate este problematică, trebuind căutate soluții de a îl întrerupe cu sesiuni față în față. Acestea sunt necesare mai ales pentru evaluarea evoluției elevilor (evaluarea online a acestora a fost considerată lipsită de eficiență), având un important rol în adaptarea predării. O neînțelegere a nivelului real al elevilor sau, mai rău, o ignorare a acestuia și axarea doar pe parcurgerea materiei este o abordare greșită dar des întâlnită în cadrul interviurilor.

Nevoia de ajustare (în sensul diminuării) a conținutului curricular în perioada școlii la distanță (mai consumatoare de timp decât școala clasică) a fost de asemenea menționată. Surprinzător, deși profesorii cer acest lucru de foarte mult timp ca strategie de îmbunătățire a educației românești în general și deși s-au plâns de nenumărate ori în cadrul interviurilor de lipsa timpului și dificultăți în acoperirea materiei, această sugestie de ajustare a venit doar din partea elevilor, profesorii părând resemnați în privința curriculei stufoase și supraîncărcate.

În fine, ca sugestie de îmbunătățire a educației, s-a vorbit despre necesitatea unui parteneriat real între părțile implicate, asociațiile de elevi, părinți și profesori pe de o parte și Ministerul Educației și Inspectoratele școlare pe de altă parte. Astfel, nevoia de a aborda constructiv problemele semnalate de primii și considerarea lor ca probleme sistemice și nu simple situații punctuale ar fi o abordare care lipsește de cele mai multe ori în detrimentul educației și al elevilor.

Îmbunătățirea educației pe termen lung: școala post-pandemie

Majoritatea lecțiilor care ar trebui învățate din anul școlar 2020-2021 pentru îmbunătățirea sistemului educațional din România țin, în viziunea respondenților noștri, de beneficiile digitalizării sistemului. Astfel, au fost menționate:

1. **Menținerea în funcțiune a platformelor școlare online, chiar și după întoarcerea la școală**, ca loc unde toate informațiile legate de școală (teme, lecțiile predate, note etc.) sunt accesibile elevilor și părinților. Cu atât mai mult, această platformă este văzută ca utilă în vremuri „normale” pentru copiii care, din motive de sănătate sau din alte motive nu pot frecventa orele. Deși actualizare unor astfel de platforme poate fi văzută ca o sarcină în plus pentru profesori, dată fiind utilitatea lor, ar trebui găsită o formă de integrare a acestor extra-sarcini în activitățile de bază.
2. Legată într-un fel de ideea precedentă, a fost menționată ca fiind utilă pe viitor **posibilitatea de a face lecțiile predate la clasă disponibile sincron (în sistem hibrid) sau asincron (prin înregistrări video) elevilor care nu pot frecventa școala**. Deși **sistemul hibrid**, așa cum a fost implementat în România a fost considerat un eșec (majoritar din cauza inadecvării elementelor de infrastructură și a lipsei pregătirii profesorilor), posibilitățile oferite de acesta au continuat să fie apreciate de respondenți. Trebuie menționat însă că, din nou, implementarea acestor soluții cere mai mult decât bunăvoința unori profesori. Astfel, mărturiile ale părinților de pe grupurile dedicate de pe media sociale au arătat că, după întoarcerea la școală puțini profesori au fost dispuși să investească timp și efort pentru a face educația accesibilă copiilor de acasă în sistemul hibrid.

3. Tehnologia digitală poate fi folosită eficient nu doar în școala la distanță, unde ea a fost necesară, ci și în predarea la clasă. Beneficiile ei depășesc simpla motivare a elevilor fiind de multe ori un instrument eficient de predare care suplinește lipsa diverselor materiale educaționale (e.g., hărți, atlase, laboratoare de fizică, chimie, biologie etc.). Pentru aceasta însă, dincolo de investiția în echipamente hardware, trebuie de asemenea investit în conținut educațional.
4. Pe parcursul perioadei școlii la distanță, unii dintre elevii dedicați au abordat un demers autoghidat, participând la cursuri ale unor facultăți sau folosind materiale educaționale din străinătate. Recunoașterea nevoilor individuale ale fiecărui elev și ale posibilităților diferite de învățare, precum și ajustarea predării la aceste diferențe ar trebui să fie o prioritate și o practică curentă printre profesori.
5. Alte elemente menționate de profesori ca fiind descoperite sau folosite în această perioadă din necesitate, dar benefice pe termen lung au fost: **metoda multimodală** care transmite informația și în formă vizuală, educația în spații exterioare, o formă de învățământ pe cât de apreciată în țările nordice, pe atât de neglijate la noi, precum și crearea **spațiilor de învățare multidisciplinare**.

Concluzii și recomandări

Anul școlar 2020-2021 a reprezentat un an excepțional în istoria sistemului educațional românesc, suscitând noi practici educaționale și emoții puternice (atât pozitive, cât și negative), în rândul tuturor actorilor sociali implicați. Anumite probleme vechi și latente ale sistemului educațional au devenit vizibile în acest an școlar, în timp ce pentru altele s-au găsit soluții. Pe baza imaginii oferită de interviurile efectuate, în cele ce urmează vom avansa câteva concluzii generale și recomandări.

Digitalizarea sistemului educațional românesc a început. Accesul școlilor și al elevilor la tehnologie, deși nu în întregime rezolvat, a fost totuși adresat în bună măsură. Majoritatea școlilor au acum o platformă online care și-a dovedit eficacitatea și funcționalitatea dacă situația a impus folosirea ei. Cei mai mulți profesori folosesc uneltele digitale și unii s-au dovedit chiar inovativi în predarea online. **Dar este încă loc suficient de îmbunătățiri în acest domeniu.** Dincolo de ceea ce respondenții noștri au menționat ca posibilități de îmbunătățire a educației într-o situație similară (vezi secțiunea anterioară), cunoașterea, înțelegerea și folosirea tuturor oportunităților pe care învățământul online le oferă ar fi dezirabilă. De exemplu, a pregăti copiii pentru un demers mai autonom în învățare și a îi încuraja în acest sens, împreună cu reconsiderarea rolului profesorului (și) ca facilitator al învățării (nu doar depozitar al unor conținuturi) ar face posibilă o educație online de calitate. Aceasta ar trebui să balanseze proporția de muncă individuală (în diferite etape ale învățării) cu întâlnirile online și nu să se reducă la acestea din urmă. Din păcate, așa cum unii dintre respondenți au sesizat, **elevii români nu sunt pregătiți pentru un astfel de demers, lipsindu-le nu doar dispozitivele digitale, ci competențele de studiu individual și autonomia în învățare.**

Din toate interviurile a reieșit în mod clar că principala grijă a profesorilor români este de a își „termina” materia și de a se asigura că elevii au note. Ambele aspecte au fost puse la încercare de mutarea educației în mediul online. De puține ori profesorii au menționat starea de bine a copiilor ca fiind o prioritate, la fel cum nici directorii sau inspectorii intervievați nu au menționat starea de bine a profesorilor ca fiind o prioritate pentru sistem. Ajustarea curriculei sau ajustarea evaluării și favorizarea evaluării formative nu au fost adoptate la nivel de politici de ajustare în această perioadă, deși ar fi fost nevoie de ele pentru a fi siguri că asistăm la o reală evoluție a elevilor în timpul școlii la distanță. **Lipsa de flexibilitate și adaptare a sistemului educațional din România, precum și centralizarea excesivă a deciziilor** a făcut pe mulți dintre intervievați mai degrabă pesimiști cu privire la progresul educațional al elevilor în acest an școlar, în ciuda consensului generală că **cei mai mulți dintre profesori au făcut tot ce le-a stat în putință la nivel individual.**

Unul dintre câștigurile situației pandemice a fost întărirea parteneriatelor dintre părțile implicate în educație. În cele mai multe cazuri părinții au fost implicați în susținerea copiilor în școala la distanță și acest lucru a fost foarte util mai ales pentru elevii vulnerabili. Dar nu trebuie neglijat faptul că (fie din cauza lipsei timpului, a competențelor sau din alte varii motive), **uneori părinții nu își pot sprijini copiii. În acest caz sistemul educațional trebuie să cunoască și să recunoască acele situații și să fie gata să își asume responsabilitatea** și să îi sprijine pe acești copii. Astfel, o abordare sistemică a elevilor vulnerabili și ai familiilor acestora de la nivel de politici la nivel practic trebuie avute în vedere. Acest an școlar a arătat că în lipsa acestor abordări sistematice și concertate, elevii vulnerabili riscă să se vulnerabilizeze și mai tare.

Deși anumiți pași înainte în abordarea elevilor vulnerabili au fost făcuți în anul școlar 2020-2021, acești pași sunt mai degrabă insuficienți când îi comparăm cu dificultățile cărora acești copii trebuie să le facă față și care, neadresate, duc la rămâneri în urmă și mai mari. Pentru mulți dintre acești copii, școala înseamnă mai mult decât accesul la informații care într-adevăr pot fi transmise și în mediul online. Înseamnă de asemenea **rezervarea unui timp și a unui spațiu pentru educație**, timp și spațiu care nu le sunt întotdeauna garantate acasă. Astfel, înțelegerea adevăratelor nevoi ale copiilor vulnerabili și elaborarea de soluții pentru asigurarea dreptului la educație ar trebui să fie un pilon de bază în politicile incluzive în educație.

Mai mult, **un parteneriat real al decidenților cu elevii** și reprezentanții acestora este necesar în continuare. **Profesorii, de asemenea, simt că vocile lor nu sunt ascultate la nivel decizional**. Acest lucru face ca, de multe ori, chiar politici și programe bine intenționate să eșueze la nivel de implementare. Întărirea acestor parteneriate în continuare, precum și consultarea cu toate părțile implicate este de dorit în general și cu atât mai mult în situații speciale ca cea din acest an școlar, când o permanentă monitorizare a situației și o adaptare rapidă la evoluția ei sunt foarte importante.

Nu în ultimul rând, trebuie înțeles faptul că **utilizarea noilor tehnologii în educație este o țintă în permanentă mișcare**. Intervenițiile noastre au arătat de altfel o înțelegere foarte diversă a ceea ce înseamnă noi tehnologii și cum pot fi ele utilizate în educație. În consecință, profesorii trebuiesc informați și pregătiți în permanentă pentru din ce în ce mai noile tehnologii. Înțelegerea adecvată a oportunităților și riscurilor pe care aceste tehnologii le oferă educației (sub aspect pedagogic, juridic sau etic) este la fel de important ca învățarea folosirii lor. Este strict necesar astfel ca profesorilor să li se ofere cursuri de perfecționare la un nivel mai complex decât simpla inițiere în folosirea noilor tehnologii de comunicare, cursuri care nu doar să le prezinte soluțiile tehnice ci și integrarea lor în practicile pedagogice sau folosirea lor critică. Acest lucru presupune însă înțelegerea faptului că școala online este, dincolo de folosirea uneltelor digitale, folosirea unei pedagogii digitale.

Metodologia studiului

Acest raport are la bază 29 de interviuri semistructurate realizate cu diferiți actori sociali implicați în sistemul educațional din România, interviuri realizate între 13 martie și 23 aprilie 2021. Metodologia studiului a fost elaborată în comun de experți din cinci țări europene participante în proiect (Danemarca, Estonia, România, Spania și Ungaria), împreună cu cercetători ai Centrului Comun de Cercetare al Comisiei Europene (vezi Lundtofte, 2021; Monostori, 2021; Mägi, 2021; Trujillo Sáez, 2021). Analiza interviurilor a fost făcută pe baza unei grile menită să ofere răspunsuri la întrebările de cercetare, căreia fiecare țară i-a adăugat coduri necesare descrierii situației specifice. Acest raport urmărește să dea seama de situația din România și va sta la baza raportului de cercetare internațional.

Deși cele 29 de interviuri realizate au dus la atingerea unui punct de saturație, dată fiind natura calitativă a cercetării rezultatele acestui raport nu trebuie generalizate. Cu toate acestea, ele reprezintă un fundament solid care să îi ajute pe decidenți în elaborarea de politici educaționale mai incluzive și eficiente.

GETTING IN TOUCH WITH THE EU

In person

All over the European Union there are hundreds of Europe Direct information centres. You can find the address of the centre nearest you at: https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en

On the phone or by email

Europe Direct is a service that answers your questions about the European Union. You can contact this service:

- by freephone: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (certain operators may charge for these calls),
- at the following standard number: +32 22999696, or
- by electronic mail via: https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en

FINDING INFORMATION ABOUT THE EU

Online

Information about the European Union in all the official languages of the EU is available on the Europa website at: https://europa.eu/european-union/index_en

EU publications

You can download or order free and priced EU publications from EU Bookshop at: <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publications>. Multiple copies of free publications may be obtained by contacting Europe Direct or your local information centre (see https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en).

The European Commission's science and knowledge service

Joint Research Centre

JRC Mission

As the science and knowledge service of the European Commission, the Joint Research Centre's mission is to support EU policies with independent evidence throughout the whole policy cycle.



EU Science Hub
ec.europa.eu/jrc



@EU_ScienceHub



EU Science Hub - Joint Research Centre



EU Science, Research and Innovation



EU Science Hub



Publications Office
of the European Union

doi:10.2760/855006

ISBN 978-92-76-38102-0