Children with Migration Experience and ICT

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6th part of

Be Internet Awesome For All
Developing digital citizenship in children with various educational needs

1   What is Migration?

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines a migrant as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of:
- the person's legal status,
- whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary,
- the causes of the movement or
- the length of the stay.

However, though there is no single legal definition of a migrant, there is a clear definition of a refugee, i.e., a person fleeing armed conflicts or persecution. This is explained extensively on the website of the UNHCR, the United Nations Agency for Migration.

UNHCR data (updated semi-annually at www.unhcr.org) as of mid-2022 shows 103 million people forced to flee their country – representing about 1.5 percent of the world's population at that time. 36.5 million of them were children. One and a half million of them were born as refugees. The population of internal migrants is estimated at more than 53 million. This means one hundred and fifty million people are, to a greater or lesser extent, deprived of family or friends who could provide support in difficult times.

Those who leave their homeland have a difficult connection with their culture, traditions and language, unless they decide to keep in touch with their compatriots abroad. Those who flee armed conflict or persecution can also carry huge emotional baggage.

Can technology address these problems? It should, but not without the participation of experts creating suitable educational resources and not without top-down governmental and international support for education systems in countries hosting refugees and migrants. And not without the effort of all of us, which should lead parents of children who have experienced migration to appreciate the importance of education in the host country and not be afraid to send children to schools.

According to data for mid-2022, around 150 million people world-wide are, to a greater or lesser extent, deprived of family or friends who could provide support in difficult times.

Estimates of the Number of Migrant children in Greece

Over the past decade, the number of minors who have experienced migration has increased significantly in Greece. As one of the major entry points in Europe for refugees and migrants, Greece has received more than a million individuals since 2015, with 37% of them being children.

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As of 30 September 2020, it is estimated that 44,500 refugee and migrant children live in Greece, including over 4,000 unaccompanied minors who are particularly vulnerable. Arriving in Greece without family members or guardians, unaccompanied children are particularly exposed to risks. In addition, many children have either been out of school for several years or even have never attended any kind of formal education.

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In 2020, **44,500** children with refugee or migration experience lived there

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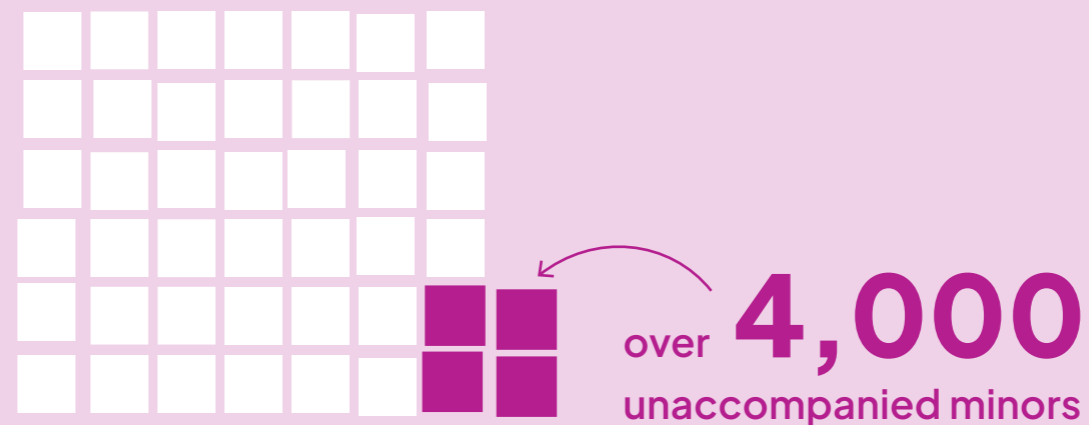
2   Migrant Children and the Internet

Education is one of the important – but also difficult to implement – elements of the integration policy of most countries. Worldwide, just 50% of the children of refugees have access to primary education, compared with 90% overall. Just 1% of refugees enrol in higher education. EU directives require all Member States to include refugee and migrant children in their national education systems no later than three months after the date of submission of the application for international protection and to provide preparatory classes, including language lessons. Including refugee children and young people in national education systems is the most effective and sustainable way to meet their need for high-quality education (Dudinska et al., b.d.)

Meanwhile, access to education is fundamental because it affects people's perspectives in life, their economic and civic engagement, and – when it comes to migrants – even the degree of integration because it can help overcome various forms of discrimination and stereotypes. Therefore, educational infrastructure and preparing teachers for accepting migrants pose a major challenge.

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Access to Education in the Case of Migrant Children in Greece

According to the Ministry of Education, for the 2021–2022 school year, a total of 16,417 refugee students enrolled in the Greek schools and 12,285 attended classes [...].

Although all children have a fundamental right to basic education, in practice the type, quality and duration of schooling offered to asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children depend more on where they are in the migrant/asylum process than on their educational needs.

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For example, let's suppose that the children of migrants and refugees have equal access to a local school and – in an optimistic scenario – have received language support, but their teachers fail to accurately assess the children's access to the internet and electronic devices. In that case, such students may still have significant problems with learning. For example, a study of migrants in Spain has shown that even if children have their own smartphones and can use Wi-Fi at school, the only access to the internet at home is often their parent's phone, and students themselves do not have access to a computer or other device that would allow for more creative and productive educational activities (Karrera, Garmendia, 2019). What is more – and this was also noticeable in the first months of working with Ukrainian students in Poland – mobile phones encourage accessing entertainment rather than educational content. They also do not offer many opportunities to improve one's digital competencies. Therefore, teachers shouldn't assume that because migrant students have mobile phones, they will be able to fully participate in ICT-supported education.

Additionally, in some cultures, there is a visible gap between boys' and girls' access to new technologies. The latter are often closely monitored by parents and often have to share their equipment with others. Girls may not be allowed to set up social media profiles (for example in the Roma community), while boys enjoy greater freedom (Karrera, Garmendia, 2019).

The digital skills of parents are also a significant factor. In countries where the popularity and availability of potentially harmful content online don't lead parents to educate themselves about online safety, children are left to their own devices when it comes to acquiring knowledge and experimenting. Following a move to a country with a more developed market and increased availability of low-quality entertainment there is some danger that such children will feel insecure in the digital reality.

Clearly, the social position of families – gender, ethnicity and social class – determines the digital competencies of its individual members (as well as access to digital devices and the internet). Migrant families very often (especially at the

In countries where the popularity and availability of potentially harmful content online don't lead parents to educate themselves about online safety, children are left to their own devices when it comes to acquiring knowledge and experimenting.

beginning of their stay in the host country) receive social benefits. This further emphasises their weak economic position. Because such factors can impede the development of digital competencies among families at risk of social exclusion, the need for digital education aimed at this group is significant. Of course, this process of empowerment should take place within the formal education system, but at the level of individual relationships, teachers should pay attention to it and be aware of the many dimensions of intercultural differences in this field.

3   Risks and Opportunities

Beyond what is a derivative of cultural differences, when we talk about the role of technology in everyday life and the education of children with migration experience, we take into account the same risks and opportunities as when analysing the relationship with technology of children without migration experience. From access to devices and infrastructure (including affordable, high-speed internet) to digital competencies, most opportunities and threats are the same. Nevertheless, it is worth emphasizing that when it comes to migrants (especially adults), the coupling of not knowing the language of the host country (if that's indeed the case) with the great need for quick access to reliable administrative information and the one allowing to manage basic life needs can be a major barrier.

Specific Risks

Among the potential challenges for the use of ICT in the education of migrants and refugees, we can also include:

- **lack of infrastructure and devices for the use of digital resources** (or devices with insufficient educational potential);

- **inadequate psychological support** (for students, parents and teachers);

- **risk of insufficient quality control** and difficulties in determining the quality of educational materials and adapting materials to the existing level of student knowledge;

- **the risk of misunderstandings and/or cultural conflicts**;

- **lack of expert knowledge** about the pedagogical models best suited to particular situations.

Training Teachers of Migrant Children in Greece

The Greek Be Internet Awesome team at FORTH has set the goal of raising awareness among the immigrant community about online safety, positive online content, cybersecurity and protection from fraud. To this end, we have conducted workshops dedicated to educators and facilitators in schools and other venues where immigrant children participate. More specifically, we invited 40 social structures and NGOs that provide support to refugee and migrant children to a workshop where we introduced the 'Be Internet Awesome' program. The workshop was specifically designed for the educators and facilitators working with these organizations.

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Some of these challenges became obvious at the start of 2022 the arrival of numerous refugees from Ukraine to Poland. Research conducted in schools by the School with Class Foundation (2022) illuminates the situation of students and teachers in connection with the need to admit new children to primary and secondary schools.

> For many teachers, working with students from Ukraine was their first professional experience of working with students from other countries/cultures or an entirely new experience in terms of scale, the result of having little previous experience in this field (…) This is also compounded by potential issues regarding communicating with Ukrainian students. Almost 88% of teachers don't speak Ukrainian or speak very little Ukrainian, 11.4% of respondents know it poorly, and only one person in a hundred knows it well or very well.

The report also draws attention to the poor wellbeing of migrant students and the fact that teachers are not properly trained to work in multicultural classes (especially working with children experiencing war trauma). There are also some risks associated with the use of computers, smartphones and the internet. Lack of supervision in classrooms, not speaking the language and difficult peer relationships at the beginning of the stay, combined with enormous stress, can result in inappropriate and excessive use of online/mobile entertainment (as well as following news from the homeland, a country at war) and a greater risk of deteriorating mood.

This is also related to the varying levels of digital competencies among refugees.

> While many refugees have some technical knowledge, many also have a low level of digital competence and face an array of socioeconomic, language and cultural barriers that may hinder their use of technology. (…) People whose only link to the digital world is a smartphone (…) can connect with family members abroad, but may not know how to fill in and submit an online job application. (Potocky, 2021).

Specific Opportunities

Some of the above challenges can be addressed with the use of technology and appropriate digital tools. However, it seems that the most important task is maintaining the right balance between the support provided via ICT and developing relationships with teachers and students from the host countries. The role of a mentor is understood as crucial for each student's productive participation in technology-enhanced learning, and the effectiveness of ICT-based education also depends on appropriate teacher training. Thus, only well-designed educational programs will actually help migrants and refugees instead of further excluding them.

According to UNESCO, effective education programmes for refugees and migrants not only combine the use of technology with student-teacher interactions, but also incorporate different learning methods that can provide a flexible response to student needs. Refugees from environments where learning relies almost exclusively on lectures may be confused by seeing, for example, learning pathways based on students working together in groups (Joynes, James, 2018).

Information and communication technologies offer the possibility of delivering educational content almost anywhere, at a low cost. ICT can safeguard the continuity of curricula and data recording systems, e.g., assessments/grades or other information that can then 'follow students', help locate students who cannot attend school, and combine digital content with national curricula in the students' home country or host country. Importantly, the latter should be adaptable to the level and context of students, and implemented in accordance with the local curriculum. There is also a demand for materials in local languages and materials complying with international teaching standards.

In addition to facilitating learning, technology can also be helpful in training teachers, sharing materials and guidance, evaluating and documenting learning, and certifying educational achievement. Data collected digitally can provide means to quickly assess and map the educational situation of students and provide parents with basic information about their progress – and most importantly, this form of providing information allows for rapid (and increasingly better quality) translation with the use of online tools.

Finally, while ICT in education may encompass a range of technologies, its new applications in the context of migrants and refugees focus on the potential of two ways of using such technologies. First, personal smartphones, tablets, and other mobile devices are commonly utilized in mobile learning in both formal and informal contexts. Secondly, there are solutions for schools that combine portable devices, ICT and digital educational content for use in classrooms Especially if these resources are open (i.e., published under

Creative Commons licenses allowing them to be legally, freely and openly distributed and sometimes modified) they can be shared quickly and cheaply and can be adapted locally to the specific needs of a particular target group. Precisely because they are open, they can be incorporated into any digital learning platform.

Despite this potential, there is still a lack of evidence regarding, e.g., the success rate of ICT-assisted education in refugee centres or during major crises. Some researchers admit that in countries affected by crises, more and more educational programmes rely on information and communication technologies, but there is no solid evidence of the advantage of these tools over others (Joynes, James, 2018). Often, such evaluations cannot be carried out due to the difficult or unstable living conditions of refugees. Instead, the conclusions are based on observations and anecdotal evidence.

Opportunities

→ effective education programmes combining the use of technology with student-teacher interactions

→ delivering educational content almost anywhere, at a low cost

→ combining digital content with national curricula in the students' home country or host country

→ training teachers, sharing materials and guidance

→ giving means to quickly assess and map the educational situation of students

→ providing parents with basic information about their children's progress

→ utilizing personal smartphones, tablets, and other mobile devices in mobile learning

→ quick and cheap adaptation of digital open educational resources to a particular target group in crisis situations

4   Recommendations

Planning the education of children who have experienced migration should focus primarily on levelling the opportunities for access to good quality schools, trained teachers and the fast and effective learning of the language of the host country, which significantly reduces the risk of breaks and disruptions in education. Technology and digital assets can play a significant role in levelling the playing field, but the process still requires the help of parents and teachers.

The main areas in which digital resources and ICT can help level the playing field are:

- learning a new language;
- maintaining contact with the culture, language and family in the country of origin;
- therapeutic work with children and families;
- expanding civic and law education pertaining to the host country;
- establishing and maintaining contact with others through games, discussions, forums, art;
- reinforcing empathy.

Technology has the potential to engage difficult-to-reach students, break down language barriers, improve engagement, facilitate the distribution of knowledge and personalized learning, and help displaced young people feel connected to communities already living in exile. Refugee children should have access to digital educational resources that would enable them to improve their skills, increase future employment opportunities and develop new contacts. However, educational materials should be offered in both online and offline formats, in order to reach more students and facilitate learning in different contexts.

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Ensuring Access to Educational Resources for Children Who Do Not Know the Local Language

We conducted a survey [...] to determine the prevalent languages most widely spoken and comprehended by immigrant children in Greece, as well as the individual educational needs these children might have.

The survey revealed that **Arabic and Persian (Farsi) are the most widespread languages among migrant and refugee children in the social structures across Greece,** and highlighted the issues that are most relevant and need a response in the community of migrant and refugee children such as hate speech, cyberbullying, sexting, sextortion and scams.

With Google-Hellas, we translated the entire 'Be Internet Awesome' curriculum into the Persian (Farsi) language, since the Arabic curriculum was already available. Furthermore, we collaborated with interested NGOs to gather educational material that we had previously developed on the aforementioned topics of interest, to translate them into Arabic and Persian.

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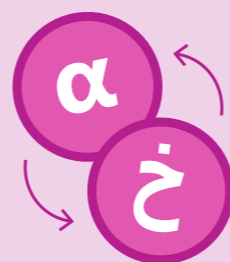
School principals have a leadership role to play – they should provide students with the required support and services and demonstrate that the school is a welcoming place for all students. Teachers can start to make an impact by creating and maintaining a positive and welcoming environment as soon as children and youths with refugee experience arrive. Psychologists and educational counsellors can provide additional information and support in understanding the emotional needs of the student, and can help refer students to social welfare agencies and mental health centres. Numerous **free online courses on working with multicultural classes and students** lacking sufficient language competencies can help schools and local communities create such teams.

Examples of such courses and materials can be found, among others, on websites such as:

- 'Recommendations on ICT use in Teaching a Second Language to Illiterate or Low-Educated Migrant Students' ⧉

- a course on the 'Use ICT to Integrate Migrant Students in your Classroom' ⧉

- 14 Tips For Helping Students with Limited Internet Have Distance Learning ⧉

- projects and sources financed by the European Commission ⧉

Collaborating with Local Governments for the Purpose of Effectively Reaching Migrant Communities with the BIA Curriculum

We organized an event in Thessaloniki, in collaboration with the Municipality of Menemeni, where we invited the migrant and refugee children of the surrounding area. With the assistance of a translator (Greek to Arabic and Greek to Persian), we conducted an educational seminar about online safety based on the curriculum of the 'Be Internet Awesome' program.

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Note: This event has also been showcased as an impact story through a video in English and Greek (see the effects of the Greek's teamwork in the 'Impact stories' tab on bia4all.eu)

When welcoming refugees in our schools, it is also worth working to improve the qualifications of teachers in the field of formative assessment, which will greatly improve providing feedback to children who do not know the local assessment system and will only make progress after some time.

Digital resources and tools can also help with:
- gradually introducing new students to the school system,
- guided tours around the area,
- first contact between students (translation apps),
- informing new students about school events so that they feel included (also in national languages),
- introducing teachers and other school staff to the parents,
- providing students with accessible information about the cultural background of the newly arrived children.

Most of these can be created/implemented by the entire school community with the support of ICT (discussion groups, educational apps, online translation tools, etc.). Individual local government units also create useful resources for schools. Here is an example of resources (including student welcome packs in several languages) created by the Team for teaching foreign national children in Warsaw. ⧉

Schools could, for example, offer mentoring programmes for migrant children, additional ICT training for children and parents, or connect families in need of learning support with those who are able to provide it.

Another recommendation concerns the learning environment, which is understood as more than just the formal classes at school. Schools – which local communities often consider not only as hubs for education but also self-help and community interaction – could, for example, offer mentoring programmes for migrant children, additional ICT training for children and parents, or connect families in need of learning support with those who are able to provide it. In particular, it seems important for children to seek out mentors or tutors to help them learn. Children whose parents are unable to support them in learning at home (including due to the language barrier) are much less likely to graduate than those supported by adults.

Effective initiatives for the digital integration of migrants should focus on entire families, including beyond the school environment, where people of different ages with common needs or interests from the same community or family could learn together. These include:

- classes featuring plenty of practical activities corresponding with the interests of the students,
- additional classes containing little theory so as not to deepen language barriers,
- meetings to create educational materials (small modules, simple and clear tasks, videos, short texts),
- allowing independence from teachers and supporting independent learning,
- meetings on topics that are not sufficiently addressed in traditional school settings, based on a prior needs assessment (e.g., resolving conflicts, discussing cultural differences.)

However, these issues require further research – especially one that shows the effects of the interventions undertaken over the long term. All the above recommendations should be supplemented with recommendations **concerning the prevention of online violence**, which are described in detail in another chapter of this publication.

Moreover, an **ethical approach to the design of educational resources** is perhaps even more important. Children who have experienced migration are particularly exposed to unethical behaviour and abuse of their trust, are vulnerable in many ways and are subject to a number of extremely stressful procedures and situations. So, if we want to build educational programmes and create learning resources, they must be based on the highest standards of design focused on the end-users – their needs, concerns and competencies, as well as traditions and culture. Since many such projects are developed by (or under the supervision of) NGOs or government agencies, the risk of abuse is not as great as in the case of profit-generating entities. Still, such risks do exist and, therefore, there is a need for universal and well-considered standards and guidelines that can be applied when designing educational resources for children with migration or refugee experience.

There are additional benefits when the resources used in ICT-supported education are **open access**, i.e., published under licences allowing free and legal modification and further sharing. This means that they can be freely translated into other languages and encourages and strengthens the cooperation between all stakeholders. Such materials can be created in response to a particular situation, and can be easily updated and adapted later to suit a different context or circumstance.

When designing tools and resources aimed at supporting the education of migrant children, it is worth taking into account several further principles:

- migrants and refugees are a more diverse target group than home students, which is why the personalization and individualization of tools and resources play an even greater role,
- when possible, migrants and refugees should be involved in the design of educational resources (e.g., providing feedback on their usefulness and educational value to authors who should then take this feedback into account),
- migrants and refugees may need more direct contact with teachers than home students,
- educational resources for migrants and refugees should, on the one hand, relate to cultural similarities between them and the host countries, but also teach entire communities how to deal with existing cultural differences.

5   Emerging Issues – New Trends

The education of children with refugee or migration experience is an extremely delicate area. In addition to placing great emphasis on efforts to create equal opportunities for these children in access to good quality education, it should also take into account elements of multicultural education, support for tolerance, learning how to navigate the new reality, language learning and psychological support. All this means that one of the most important postulates for the creation of policies and – more directly – the educational materials themselves, should be the idea of interdisciplinarity.

In this context, an interesting trend may be the use of virtual reality to create and cultivate projects supporting the development of empathy, which is crucial when welcoming migrants (especially from other cultures). One project with such potential is '1000 Cut Journey' – an immersive virtual reality project created at Stanford University in which participants embody a Black male, Michael Sterling. Wearing VR glasses, we see for ourselves (though still in a safe space) how a boy experiences discrimination from the first grade of

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primary school. We then see him growing up and experiencing new forms of discrimination – in the sports team, on the street and at work. Thanks to this, we are able to see the 'other side' of social reality and realize that seemingly innocent remarks can be devastating for others and affect their entire later life. Imagine, then, a world in which each parliament building featured such technology. This would allow politicians to empathize with the social effects of any proposed new legislation before making any decisions impacting a given community.

In their latest report, Anna Triandafyllidou and Usha George include a matrix that shows how different themes related to the lives of migrants can be supported by technology at different levels of stakeholder engagement (state, local organizations and individuals) – from creating new tools and resources, to presenting or interpreting existing ones (Arya et al., 2022). According to the authors, education is a field for the creative endeavours of medium-range entities (i.e. organizations and local governments) – i.e., those that are able to respond to the individual needs of migrants, but at the same time create a certain scale of action.

In summary, education is an essential part of the efforts undertaken by governments and migration-related organizations. **Language competencies are one of the most common educational objectives, often alongside competencies related to employment and social skills.** Traditional information and communication technologies in the form of websites, seminars and online education and similar tools are used for this purpose and are mainly addressed to adults.

There are a number of services and support programmes aimed at newly arrived migrant and refugee **children**. These include counselling, various community activities and support groups, storytelling, and creative workshops. There are reports that indicate the value of expressive, engaging, and fun-based activities for the education of migrant and refugee children. However, not many studies have focused on the role of digital media and interactive entertainment in facilitating

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their adjustment. Some research suggests that digital media and interactive technologies do not have a statistically significant impact on educational outcomes, but many teachers use them anyway to deliver information in a more engaging way (Herold, 2019; Pane i in., 2014).

Computer games are also used to support children with individual educational needs, for cultural and behavioural learning, for developing cognitive skills and providing learning experiences in different fields and for different age groups. However, these areas have not been properly explored, and the findings drawn from existing studies are insufficiently conclusive. As in the case of 'ordinary' ICT-supported education, we must continue to **be attentive, empathetic and focus on creating relationships with children to meet their educational and emotional needs**.

6   Lessons from Emergency Remote Education

Despite many governments' strong responses to COVID-19, many students were left without sufficient help in March 2020. Access to online education has posed a challenge for about one in four secondary school students in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as Central Asian countries. At the start of the pandemic, one in ten students in this region had no access to the internet. Unfortunately, data on the actual lack of participation in school activities is difficult to obtain and compare. However, even inconsistent data suggests that children experiencing educational exclusion (including migrant and refugee children) were less likely to continue their education. In Ukraine, only 1% of students did not participate in remote learning, but 20% of pupils from Roma communities left school. Some countries took a decidedly offline approach – in Hungary, schools delivered homework and other educational materials to students' homes once a week, then collected them the following week. In Montenegro, schools provided printed materials for students who needed it. Television programmes and video lessons were provided for those who were most difficult to reach (Uzbekistan ran video lessons on state television in Uzbek and Russian, with translation into sign language; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2022).

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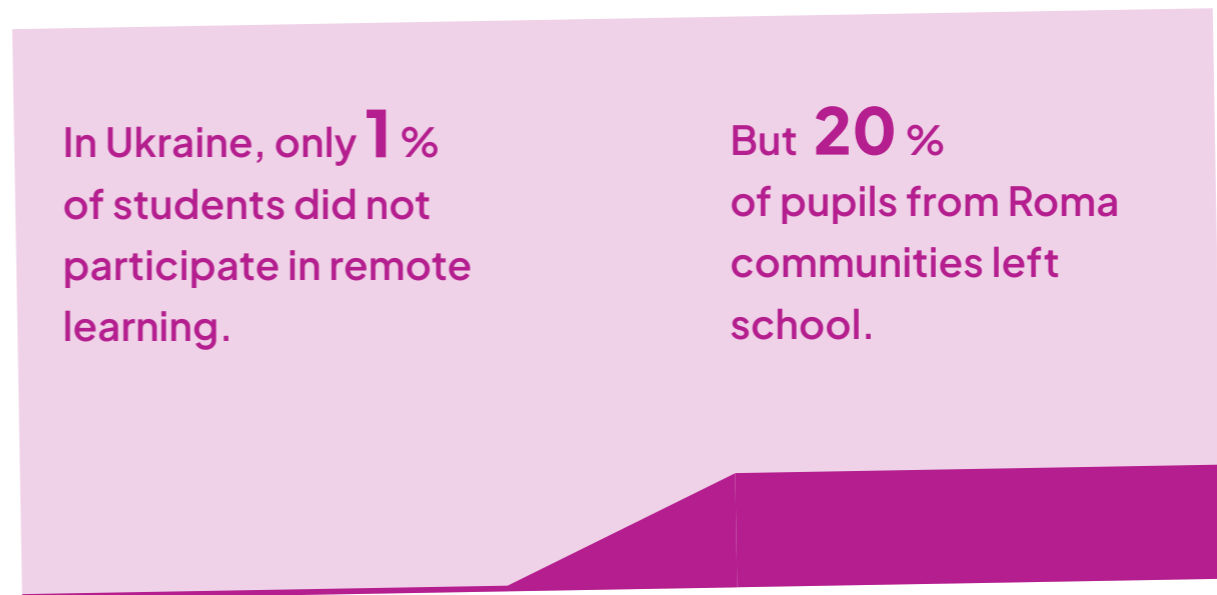
Over half of Polish teachers reported some difficulties with using digital tools.

Teachers also had to learn how to use technology. A survey of about 1,000 primary school teachers in Poland revealed that 52% had some difficulties with using digital tools (Centrum Cyfrowe, 2020). Innovative solutions were required, for example: teacher networks and cooperation with students, who became a source of necessary knowledge for some members of the school staff. Still, the worst consequences of the pandemic were just around the corner. Standard forms of distance learning are directed at motivated and more independent students. Those who were previously unable to learn on their own encountered many obstacles. This was reflected not only in their progress, but above all in their well-being. During the remote learning period, as home environments and parental support became increasingly important, disadvantaged students risked continuing to stay behind. In Ukraine, when boarding schools sent students home, social workers were instructed to keep in touch with their parents and even visited to ensure social and sustenance needs were being met. In some countries, some students were left without pedagogical support, and the responsibility for the continuity of education of students with individual needs rested solely with the parents.

All these struggles have exposed the pre-existing problems of many educational systems. If we had not noticed children excluded in terms of access to education before, it was now difficult to ignore this fact. The COVID-19 crisis has shown that equal access to education for all during the pandemic is not just a matter of solving the issue of digital exclusion. Education systems have been verified for their ability to ensure continuity of education at many levels: adaptability of curricula, ways of teaching and grading, teacher training and support for households, especially regarding students with learning difficulties and those lacking motivation.

Still, one of the most important lessons from the pandemic – and one that is important in terms of education involving children who have experienced migration – is the need to focus on the socio-emotional aspects of children's lives. Many pedagogical communities have understood that taking care of the mental well-being of children allows them to grow into independent, self-sufficient, motivated and content citizens. Many teachers have seen their students in a new light and this helps them to adapt their methods to welcome refugee and migrant children today.

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