
HOW IS THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL IN EUROPE DEALING WITH THE COVID-19 CRISIS?

Report of the European Committee for Catholic Education
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Comité Européen pour l'Enseignement Catholique

Europees Comité voor het Katholiek Onderwijs

INTRODUCTION

The arrival of the coronavirus, and the Covid 19 pandemic have completely disrupted global social and economic life. Education, and within it Catholic schools, everywhere in Europe (as in the whole world) have seen the school year disrupted, interrupted, sometimes until the start of the new school year in September 2020. Each country, each school system reacted, depending on the intensity of the threat, the national political culture, the analysis of experts, actors and the decision of the political authorities. Everywhere, learning continuity, computer equipment for pupils and teachers, and sustained attention to taking all pupils into account, have been the common threads of the actions undertaken.

In the perspective of our exchanges of information and good practices at the European level within the CEEC, it seemed useful and necessary to us to carry out a survey in order to better understand how each school system, each secretariat of Catholic education in Europe, has reacted to the problems encountered and what solutions it has been able to bring to them. In this way we hope to contribute to the strengthening of international links and solidarity between our associations.

You will find in this document the first results of this survey that have been enriched by the exchanges and sharing of information resulting from the two meetings by videoconference (ZOOM), held on Wednesday 24 and Thursday 25 June. Thank you again for completing this survey and participating in these virtual meetings. This has enabled us to collect this rich information, which we are offering you to read.



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PART I: ANALYSIS OF ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS

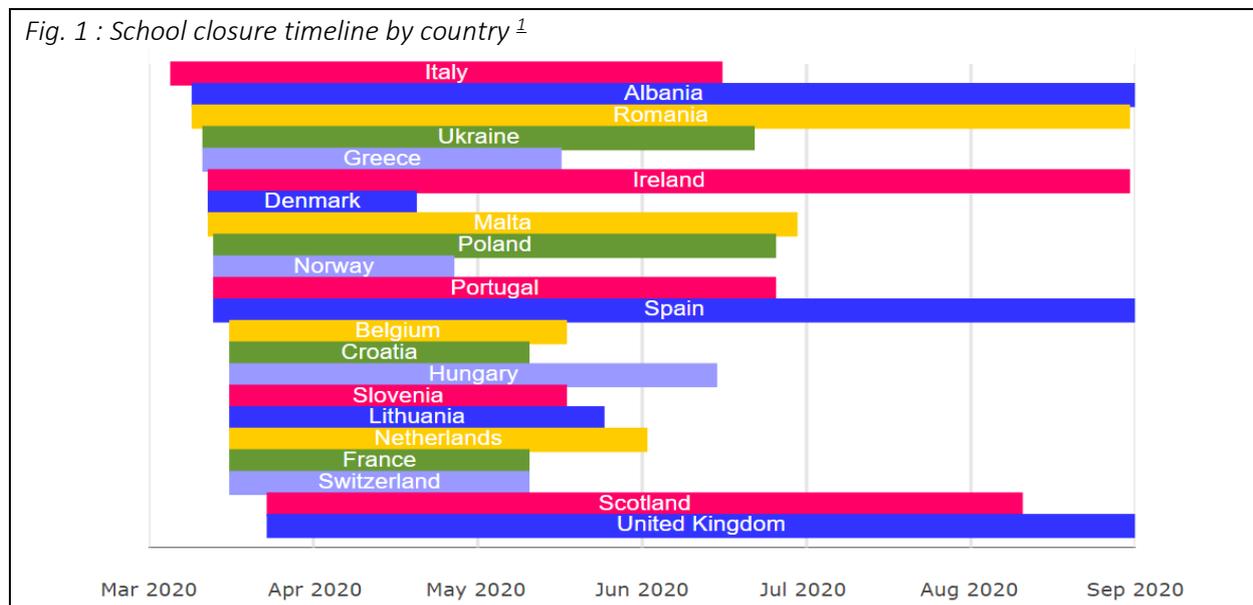
PRELIMINARY INFORMATION

This survey was conducted between 28 May 2020 and 12 June 2020. With a total of 23 respondents, all the member countries of the European Committee for Catholic Education (CEEC) participated, except for Germany, Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Czech Republic. Each country was invited to complete the questionnaire once. The information below is therefore based on a limited sample of individuals. Each of them expressed a general opinion about Catholic schools in their country, and the information received therefore reflects an overall situation.

1. SCHOOL LOCKDOWN AND CLOSURE

The first country to close its schools was Italy, on March 5, 2020. By 23 March 2020, all other countries had closed their schools, at least partially, with the exception of Sweden.

Fig. 1 : School closure timeline by country¹



Denmark was the first country to reopen schools on 20 April 2020. By the end of June, 16 countries (out of 27) including the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland partially resumed classes. Other countries - including Albania, Scotland, Spain, Ireland and Romania - do not expect to reopen before the start of the next school year in September. At the time of closing the investigation, the United Kingdom had not yet set a date for reopening.

Beyond that, those who reopened classes did not do so at the same pace and did not target the same priority students² : Slovenia and Portugal gave priority to the last-year-students, Switzerland to pupils in the compulsory sector aged between 4 and 15, and France to the youngest... By the beginning of June, 100% of Danes had returned to school, 90% in Greece, 70% in Slovenia and Switzerland.

On average, a bit less than 50% of the pupils were present at the reopening of schools in CEEC member countries. It can be seen that in countries where recovery is slow, the most vulnerable families are those who fear most to let their children go back to school. Among the schools still closed at the time of completing the questionnaire, only the Netherlands and Romania indicated a partial reopening of their schools in the near future³: the former for all schools and the latter in order to prepare the students for certain exams.

¹ See Annex 1

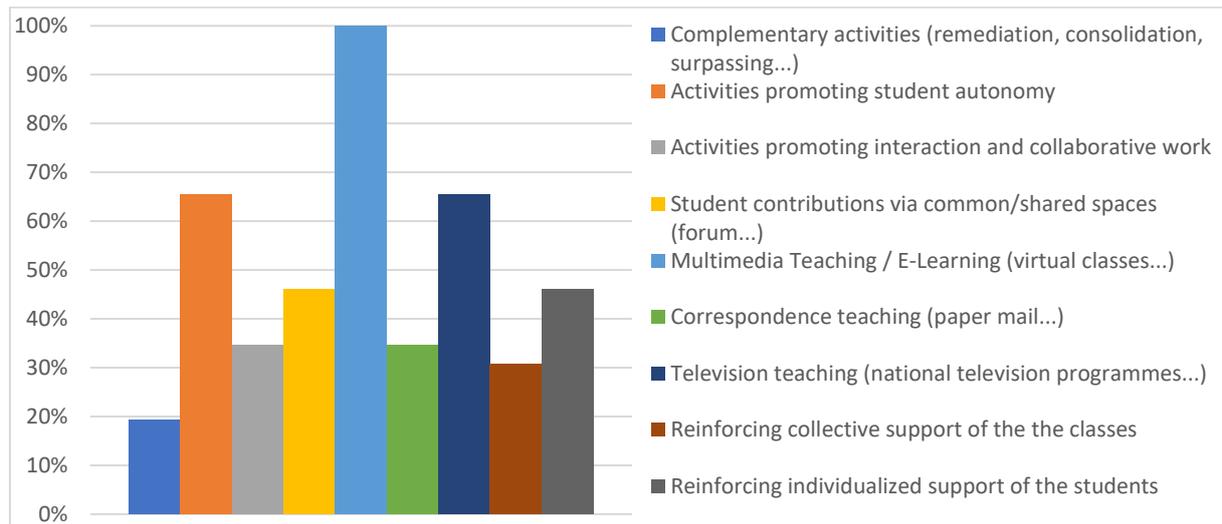
² See Annex 2

³ Albania, Scotland, Spain, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Ukraine.

2. NEW PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES

All countries⁴ indicated that they have adapted to the Covid19 crisis by developing new practices. Among the options proposed, multimedia teaching was favoured by all respondents. Activities promoting student autonomy and televised teaching were also highlighted.

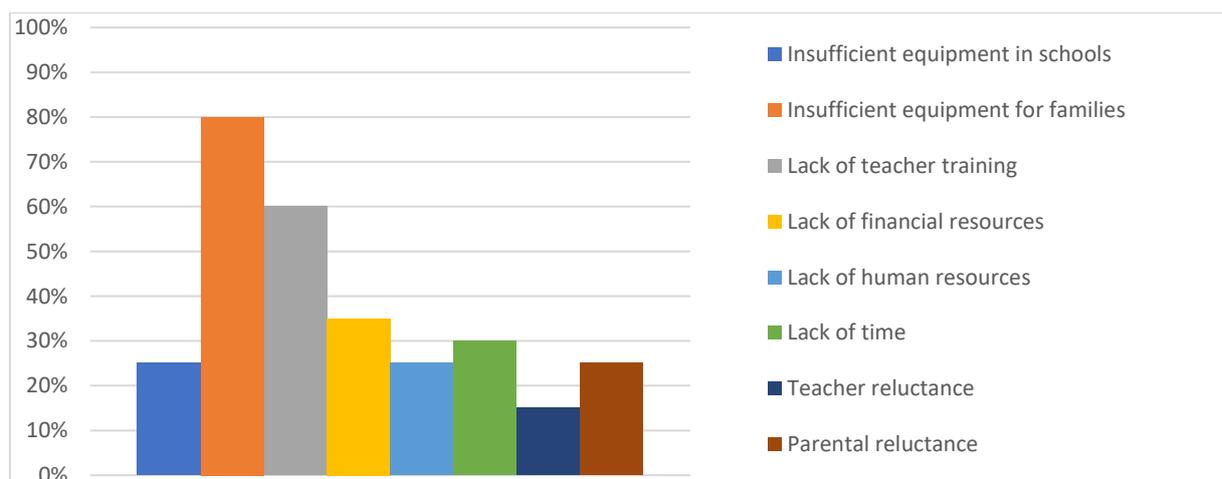
Fig. 2: new pedagogical practices put in place



However, 20 respondents⁵ pointed out that they had difficulty implementing these new practices.

Most countries⁶ indicated that one of the reasons for these difficulties was the lack of equipment for families. Lack of teacher training was also a difficulty listed by many countries.

Fig. 3: Difficulties in implementing new pedagogical practices



⁴ See Annex 3

⁵ See Annex 4

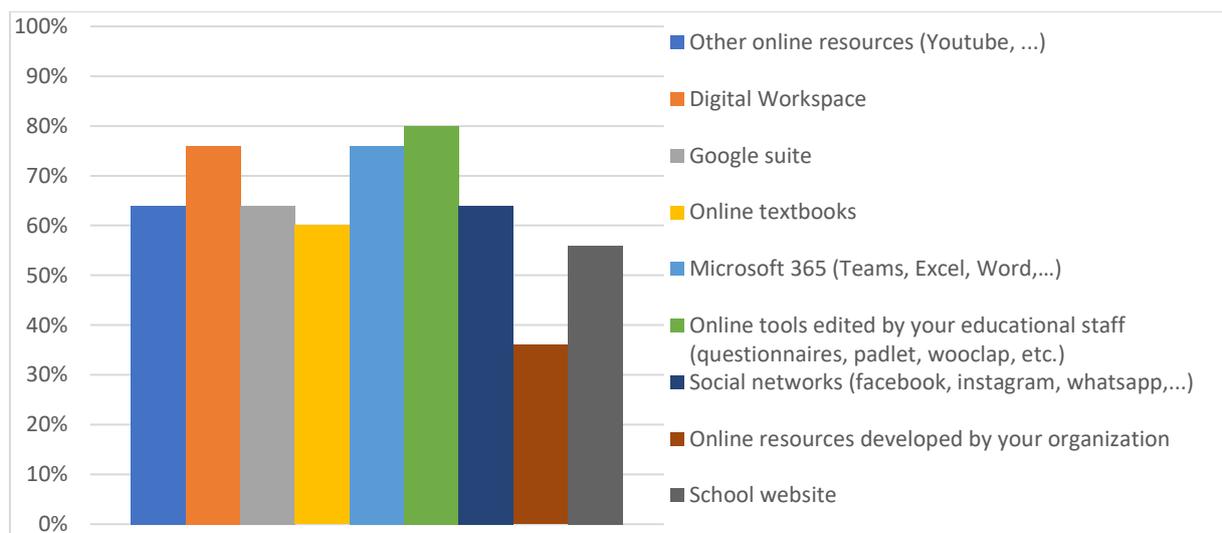
⁶ Exception for Albania, Denmark, Greece, the Netherlands and Switzerland.

3. DIGITAL TOOLS

All countries⁷ reported that the health crisis had encouraged the use of digital tools, except for Denmark, which stressed that digital tools were already part of the daily lives of schoolchildren.

Among the digital tools proposed, three stand out in particular: the digital workspace, online tools edited by teachers and Microsoft 365. Social networks and online resources such as YouTube, for example, were also ticked. Norway chose all the proposed boxes, which would indicate a wide variety of solutions implemented in this country.

Fig. 4: Digital tools used



The percentage of students (or parents) having computer contact with their school and/or teachers is generally quite high in most countries: on average, 80% of students (or parents) have kept in touch with their teachers in the CEEC member countries.

If we look at these figures in more detail, we can see that Croatia, France, Romania and Italy reported rates between 70% and 80%, while Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Switzerland all reported rates above 80%. Albania, the United Kingdom and Ukraine, however, reported rates below 50%.

Switzerland points out that "there are big differences between the private sector, which has responded better (especially at the level of gymnasias), and the public sector. But, in general, all schools kept in touch with their pupils".

⁷ See Annex 5

4. PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

Most countries reported that their public authorities (governments, ministries, administration, etc.) have been involved in the introduction of new practices, except for the Netherlands and Slovenia.

The countries where the authorities were not involved gave some details:

- In the Netherlands, this is seen as the responsibility of schools.
- The government in Slovenia just made a few recommendations and decreed that all schools should implement e-learning.

The countries where the government was involved also provided some details:

- For example, in the Flemish community in Belgium, the government and some organisations provided laptops to pupils and students. In France, the Ministry of National Education has introduced virtual classrooms. In Lithuania and Romania, computer equipment was distributed to families in need.
- In Ireland, the school leaving certificate examination, which decides on entry to the third level has been completely overhauled: students directly receive a mark set by their teacher.
- In Spain, the majority of resources were provided by the schools themselves or by their own organisations.
- In Malta, a joint national committee has been set up to decide how to proceed, which includes representatives of the State Church, independent schools, the teachers' union and ministry representatives.
- In Sweden, the authorities have 'offered resources for online studies'.
- In Poland, the public school system has received grants for the purchase of electronic equipment such as tablets and laptops for distance learning.

Among the countries that reported that their authorities had been involved in the development of new practices, only half⁸ reported that these authorities had allocated similar resources (financial, material, digital) to Catholic and public schools.

5. TUITION FEES AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Concerning countries where some school fees are borne by parents, 17 respondents⁹ indicated that the covid 19 crisis has impacted or limited the payment of these fees. 19 respondents pointed out that their Catholic schools were affected in their financial resources by the covid crisis: Albania, Belgium, Croatia, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Spain.

However, 21 respondents¹⁰ believe that Catholic schools in their country will not necessarily experience a worse school start next September in terms of student enrolment. Countries that think the opposite believe that a drop of up to 35% could occur.

⁸ Belgium (NL), Croatia, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Romania, Scotland, Slovenia, United Kingdom

⁹ Albania, Spain, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Ukraine

¹⁰ Belgium (FR), Croatia, Denmark, Scotland, Spain, France, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Poland, Romania, United Kingdom, Slovenia.

6. SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS SCHOOL LIFE

In most countries¹¹, moments of recollection, prayers, masses, ceremonies and religious and pastoral activities have taken place online, be it via social networks, website, national channel, video-conferencing, etc. It should be noted that for Ireland, these broadcast ceremonies brought the pupils together. To another extent, as Danish schools were only closed for a short period of time, no initiatives were taken.

Despite the closure of churches and schools, religion and catechism classes were for the most part given electronically. In this respect, the Flemish, Scottish and Spanish secretariats report that tools and teaching materials have been provided to schools to accompany them. The period of lockdown has also been a source of pedagogical innovation for some teachers, especially in Malta where spiritual and creative projects and activities have been carried out with pupils.

Specific and individual support was provided to pupils, as well as accompanying them in the event of the death of a close relative (e.g. in Flanders).

Collaboration between schools, pastoral care and religious bodies has been strengthened, especially in Scotland where the bishops have created a road map for pastoral ministry, in line with the phases of progressive un-lockdown, to offer pastoral support to parishes and lay people in view of the "new reality" towards which we are moving.



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¹¹ Albania, Belgium, Croatia, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Scotland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom

7. CURRENT NEEDS

On the one hand, one of the priorities put forward is training. Albania, Belgium, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia point to the need for those involved in education to develop their digital skills and above all to be (better) trained.

On the other hand, many countries are asking for more support, whether psychological, relational, financial or logistical, but also in terms of scientific research. Members reported that the period of lockdown was difficult for families and students from more distant backgrounds. Some have suffered abuse and it is therefore essential to accompany them and to recreate a relationship with them. Many are asking for financial assistance (from public authorities or Europe) to offset against the losses of the schools. Ireland also suggests supporting scientific research to better determine the risks of transmission and contamination for children.

Finally, the countries ask for more equipment in schools (computers...) and families (WiFi access for all, possibility of printing, ink cartridges...). Some, such as Belgium, Ireland, Malta, Slovakia or Slovenia, advocate clearer communication from the authorities in order to best prepare the return to school while respecting social distancing and hygiene standards. Indeed, several unknowns remained in some countries before the resumption of classes, in particular the question of evaluation.

8. INNOVATIVE PROJECTS

Many projects were initiated during the covid-19 health crisis and as a result of the lockdown measures put in place. Several respondents, including Albania, France, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom, stressed that these various initiatives had made it possible to strengthen solidarity, cohesion and collaboration, but also support (especially psychological support) within and between networks, between religious communities, school-student-families.

In addition, the increased use of digital means has given rise to innovative actions and technological innovations. In French-speaking and Dutch-speaking Belgium, Scotland, France, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Poland and Slovakia, the development of this knowledge and teaching material is noteworthy, and this digital progress is perceived very positively for the future.

Secondly, Scotland, Ireland, the Netherlands and Romania mentioned the *Blended Learning approach*. In other words, many schools have developed classroom teaching combined with the use of online technologies.

Finally, the idea of slowing down and reflecting has been quite present in school projects, especially in Ireland. In Lithuania, the development of pupil autonomy in learning is emphasised. As for the representatives of Portugal, they praised the responsiveness of educational teams and pupils, as well as the concern of those involved in education to guarantee the integral formation of the person, from a human, spiritual and religious point of view. The notions of the heterogeneity of family situations and equity between pupils and schools were also highlighted in the answers. In this respect, French-speaking Belgium stresses that the degree of innovation also depends on the initial situation of the schools. Some projects are considered innovative for the school given its background, whereas the same type of initiative will not be considered innovative by other schools.

9. ANNEXES

Annex 1 : School closing and reopening dates (planned) by country (DD-MM -YYYY)

Countries	Closing	Reopening
Italy	3-5-2020	6-16-2020
Albania	3-9-2020	9-1-2020
Romania	3-9-2020	8-31-2020
Ukraine	3-11-2020	6-22-2020
Greece	3-11-2020	5-17-2020
Ireland	3-12-2020	8-31-2020
Denmark	3-12-2020	4-20-2020
Malta	3-12-2020	6-30-2020
Poland	3-13-2020	6-26-2020
Norway	3-13-2020	4-27-2020
Portugal	3-13-2020	6-26-2020
Spain	3-13-2020	9-1-2020
Belgium	3-16-2020	5-18-2020
Croatia	3-16-2020	5-11-2020
Hungary	3-16-2020	6-15-2020
Slovenia	3-16-2020	5-18-2020
Lithuania	3-16-2020	5-25-2020
The Netherlands	3-16-2020	6-2-2020
France	3-16-2020	5-11-2020
Slovakia	3-16-2020	5-18-2020
Switzerland	3-16-2020	5-11-2020
Portugal	3-16-2020	6-26-2020
Scotland	3-23-2020	8-11-2020
United Kingdom	3-23-2020	Pas de date fixée

Annex 2 : Countries that answered 'Other' to the question "If the schools are partially open, to what extent?«

Belgium (NL): Teachers provided remedial learning and pre-teaching using digital platforms. From 15th of May schools reopened partially.;

Greece: Half pupils day by day;

United Kingdom: Vulnerable children and children of key workers;

Slovakia: pre-schools, 1. - 5. year of primary schools, but it was optional for the school founders to open or not and still it is optional for parents to send their kids to school or not

Switzerland : For the entire compulsory sector (4-15 years old);

Annex 3 : Country answers to the question "If so, of what order?"

Correspondence teaching (paper mail...): Albania, Belgium (NL+FR), Spain, France, Ireland, Poland, Ukraine.

Television teaching (national television programmes...): Albania, Belgium (NL+FR), Croatia, Spain, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Ukraine.

Multimedia Teaching / E-Learning (virtual classes...): everyone

Activities promoting interaction and collaborative work: Scotland, Spain, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway, Portugal, United Kingdom.

Activities promoting student autonomy: everyone except Belgium (NL+FR), Albania, Malta, Denmark and Romania.

Students contributions via common/shared spaces (forum...): Albania, Belgium (FR), France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Scotland, Slovenia, United Kingdom.

Reinforcing collective support of the classes: Spain, Greece, Ireland, Norway, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, the United Kingdom.

Reinforcing individualised support of the students: Belgium, Spain, Lithuania, Norway, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Slovenia, Sweden.

Complementary activities: Netherlands, United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, Romania.

Other: Poland - "Individual tutorials at school respecting safety rules"

Annex 4 : Country answers to the question "If yes, what difficulties in implementing the new practices can you identify?"

Lack of time: Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden

Teacher reluctance: Malta, Norway, Portugal, Ukraine

Parental reluctance: Albania, France, Lithuania, Norway, UK, Ukraine

Lack of financial resources: Albania, Scotland, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania, Ukraine.

Lack of human resources: Scotland, Norway, Portugal, Romania, United Kingdom, Slovenia.

Insufficient equipment in schools: Albania, Scotland, France, Hungary, Norway, Romania

Insufficient equipment for families: everyone except Albania, Denmark, Greece, the Netherlands and Switzerland

Lack of teacher training: Albania, Belgium (FR), France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Ukraine

Annex 5 : Country answers to the question "If yes, what digital tools are used?"

Digital Workspace: everyone except Albania, Denmark, Malta, Ukraine

School website: Albania, Belgium (NL), Croatia, France, Greece, Portugal, Poland, Romania, Scotland, Slovenia, Spain, UK, Switzerland, UK.

Online tools edited by your educational staff (questionnaires, padlet, wooclap, etc.): everyone except Albania, Denmark, Italy, Switzerland and Ukraine

Online textbooks: Spain, France, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Poland, Romania, United Kingdom, Slovenia, Sweden.

Online resources developed by your organisation: Scotland, Spain, Greece, Netherlands, Portugal, Poland, Romania, UK.

Other online resources (Youtube, ...): Albania, Spain, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, United Kingdom, Ukraine

Microsoft 365 (Teams, Excel, Word,...): Everybody except Albania, Belgium (FR), Croatia, Poland and Ukraine

Google Suite: Croatia, Spain, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Romania, UK, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine

Social networks (facebook, instagram, whatsapp,...): everyone except Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and Ukraine

PART II: EXCHANGE WITH MEMBERS

PRELIMINARY INFORMATION

Two videoconferences were organised on 24 and 25 June 2020 in order to allow the members of the European Committee for Catholic Education to present and exchange on the results of the survey. More specifically, members were invited to answer the following two questions:

- Can you give some information about the situation of Catholic schools in your country (region) today (schools open, closed, continuity of learning during the period of closure...)?
- What are the main innovations, new resources, difficulties you have encountered during this period?

Feedback from members has been summarized and translated below. Please note that these comments have been transcribed as accurately and concisely as possible, taking into account the meeting conditions and the quality of the recording.

1. AL – ALBANIA

Since the last report (see CEEC newsletter of May 2020), the situation of Catholic schools in Albania has worsened. Since mid-May, schools have gradually reopened. However, the rate of people affected by the coronavirus is increasing, and with it the fear of a new crisis and new lockdown. Pupils in the final year of general secondary education attended classes at the end of the year in order to pass their maturity certificate. It should also be noted that kindergarten schools reopened on 1 June but were particularly affected by the economic crisis and not all of them were able to resume classes. Indeed, due to a lack of financial resources, many headmasters were forced to fire teaching staff.

Nowadays, schools are closed for the summer, and everyone hopes that the school year in September can be organized. Unfortunately, several challenges still remain. On the one hand, following the survey of teachers and headmasters of Albanian Catholic schools, the results showed a lack of equipment for educational staff. Indeed, teachers mainly used their smartphone during the lockdown to provide distance learning. The principals therefore requested that activities be organized during summer to equip and train teachers in the use of computers. In parallel, the National Commission of Albanian Catholic Schools is currently working on the creation and implementation of a secure online platform, as well as a clear procedure to avoid abuse. On the other hand, the economic situation of Albanian schools remains very problematic as they are still considered as non-profit organisations and are not eligible for state financial support. KKEKSH is therefore lobbying the government to provide their school with financial support. In this respect, the Catholic schools have fortunately received little help from the Bishops' Conference.

2. BE – FRENCH-SPEAKING BELGIUM

The schools were closed from 16 March to 18 May with a gradual resumption of classes by grade, in compliance with safety standards and measures dictated by the government. During lockdown, about 80% of Catholic schools were able to establish contact with students and families. These figures reflect a phenomenon of segregation, since it is with families from more disadvantaged backgrounds that contact has been the most difficult to establish. Principals and teachers were asked to be as encouraging, understanding and flexible as possible.

The external tests and evaluations were all cancelled for compulsory education, and the students' final marks were then based on an average of the results obtained before 16 March.

The government intends to maintain some kind of distance learning which should then be structural in education. Finally, the start of the September school year is considered under several scenarios depending on the evolution of the health situation.

3. BE – DUTCH-SPEAKING BELGIUM

Courses were suspended from March 16, and distance learning was the norm. From 20 April, teachers were asked to integrate new content into their online courses to prepare students for the resumption of face-to-face classes. Since mid-May, schools have been gradually and partially reopened, including following pressure from the Ministry of Education to get primary school students back to school.

The situation has been a little chaotic, and teachers are calling for a better organized start at the next school year. It has been decided that the National Security Council will agree on one of the 4 "security codes", which range from code green (students returning to school in person) to code red (the strictest scenario), through code yellow and orange. The advantage of this code system is that schools have a clear idea of the measures to be considered and can prepare effectively for the start of the September school year. It should be noted that even if the code red is launched, the primary schools will remain open.

During the lockdown, the government has supported schools, for example by providing computers to children, and by developing e-learning platforms. More recently, the authorities have given schools the means to organise summer schools. For its part, the Katholiek Onderwijs Vlaanderen has developed its website by offering and sharing tools for e-learning, management of situations of increased stress, playful learning activities, etc.

4. CH – SWITZERLAND

The Swiss system is composed of 26 "departments" (one for each canton) which make decisions about education. In this case, the closure of schools from 16 March was decided at a federal level. Since 11 May, compulsory education (all networks combined) has resumed, i.e. from kindergarten to lower secondary level (15 years). As for non-compulsory upper secondary education (general and vocational education), schools did not reopen until 8 June.

A survey was conducted, with a response rate of 50%. Respondents pointed out the greater efficiency and responsiveness of private schools (of which Catholic schools are a part) compared to public schools, especially in terms of maintaining contact with families and according to the type of education concerned. The period of lockdown was facilitated by sufficient equipment of schools and families. The educational teams are on the whole satisfied with the work done during the lockdown. They showed great creativity and developed their digital skills. These technological aspects will be further developed in the future, also at a federal level. The crisis has in fact accelerated an already existing process of digital use in schools.

Secondly, the resumption of lessons varied from canton to canton: either all pupils were in class or half of the pupils were in class while the other half were working from home. Nevertheless, teachers and students were happy to resume face-to-face classes. Spiritual and religious activities were also organized when classes resumed, since during the lockdown, it was mainly a matter of communicating information on organized actions.

In terms of relations with the public authorities, there were great differences from one canton to another, since Catholic schools are (or are not) subsidised by the state, depending on the canton. Moreover, non-subsidized schools are afraid for the start of the new school year, since some parents will be unable to enrol their child in the school or will have to seek and obtain a grant to enrol him or her.

5. DE – GERMANY

Schools were closed from March to May. The resumption of face-to-face classes was carried out in compliance with security measures, particularly with regard to the size of the class groups. The pupils are currently on holiday. As elsewhere, the resumption of classes in September will depend on the evolution of the spread of the virus. Three scenarios are envisaged: "green" with a return to school in person, "orange" with a partial return (in small groups etc.), "red" with distance learning.

On the one hand, lockdown has widened the gap between students in terms of equipment and parental support for e-learning. Therefore, 500,000 euros will be released by the federal state for the implementation of an emergency programme to support students who are poorly or under-equipped in terms of digital education. This programme will enable pupils to acquire digital skills after the summer holidays. On the other hand, schools have faced a number of difficulties: the implementation of health and safety measures; the introduction of teaching partly in class and partly online; the lack of staff. In addition, the period of lockdown has allowed the development of digital learning, which has been managed brilliantly by the schools thanks to their flexibility and commitment.

6. FR – FRANCE

Lockdown began on March 16. This period accelerated educational and economic phenomena that would not have been experienced for 3 or 4 years. Therefore, it was necessary to reflect on the issues raised in a shorter period of time. During the lockdown, the emphasis was placed on welcoming the children of hospital staff. The General Secretariat of French Catholic Education then found that the majority of these children were enrolled in their schools.

On 11 May the primary schools (from the age of 6) reopened for some classes. Despite a complicated implementation due to the strict rules of distance and hygiene, the educational teams showed a real commitment. In mid-May, the middle schools reopened. This gradual resumption was accompanied by a gradual relaxing of the sanitary rules. At the same time, psychological and spiritual support for the children was provided to the schools, for example via webinars on the notion of resilience. These moments have enabled the educational teams to offer an appropriate welcome to the pupils, taking into account the various experiences each one had during the lockdown. The capacity to accommodate students was greater in Catholic schools than in public schools.

At present, 80% of the pupils have returned to school. A majority of the schools have resumed face-to-face courses, although in some schools distance education is still being used because distance pedagogy has been perceived as more effective than combined pedagogy or face-to-face classes under strict sanitary conditions. With regard to the start of the new school year in September, there are two scenarios: a normal return to face-to-face teaching with the wearing of masks, or a return to face-to-face teaching with a new possible lockdown of the country and therefore clear pedagogical strategies to be put in place.

In conclusion, apart from technological discoveries (digital teaching tools...), Catholic schools have shown innovation and research into pedagogical adaptation. Collaborative work (between teachers of the same subject or school) has been developed.

Similarly, at the national level, the Secretariat of Catholic Education in France (SGEC) has been able to pool resources, whether they are linked to students or to the various national structures. On the other hand, the SGEC is showing its support to partner countries, particularly Lebanon, which has been badly affected by the crisis. The International Catholic Education Office has also joined this action. Such situations show that several countries such as France are privileged. We must then know how to look at what other countries are going through and not remain withdrawn into our own difficulties.

7. ES – SPAIN

Escuelas Católicas carried out a large survey among Catholic schools in Spain, about half of which completed the questionnaire. The answers received are similar to the results of this survey: in general, the educational teams of the Catholic schools have been very creative in staying close to the families, whether through digital tools or otherwise, to enable the pupils to be accompanied effectively throughout the lockdown.

On the other hand, the work provided by the parents during this troubled period is to be underlined. Therefore, taking into account everyone's efforts, Escuelas Católicas has decided to respect the holiday period initially planned, despite the pressure from some who wanted to continue or catch up on classes during the summer.

The resumption of face-to-face classes for all students (all levels and types of education combined) is planned for September 2020, except in the event of a resurgence of the epidemic. It should also be noted that the Ministry of Education was working on decrees with consequences for Spanish Catholic schools. However, in view of the circumstances, parliamentary negotiations on this new law for education were postponed to the beginning of the school year.

8. IT – ITALY

For the Italian Catholic schools, the current moment is very critical. The school year has just ended, after more than 3 months of lockdown, with lessons taught remotely via digital platforms. The final exam of the first cycle was transformed into an online interview, while the final exam of the second cycle was reduced to an oral interview in presence.

The government is discussing a plan for the next school year, with new rules on safety, spaces and lesson times. For this reason, the Italian Catholic schools have sent a document to the ministry of education, with their own proposals. The suggested criteria are those of autonomy, flexibility, and agreements with local communities.

The sudden closure of the schools, at the beginning of March, required activating distance learning. Many schools were not prepared, but the overall response was very good. Except for kindergartens, over 70% of Catholic schools had very good results in the didactic use of digital technologies. This experience has become a standard recognized by national quality bodies and has been published for all schools.

The greatest difficulty in recent months has been economic. Many families were unable to pay school fees for their children. In other cases, the schools have succeeded in reducing these costs for families. Aid of 150 million euros will come from the government, too little for the 12 000 thousand concerned schools. The Italian Episcopal Conference has allocated 40 million euros for scholarships, challenging some national laws. Over 8 000 Catholic schools in Italy, 50 have already announced that they will have to close permanently in September (especially small kindergartens).

A positive aspect is that various associations of Catholic schools (managers, families, religious institutes, parishes, foundations) gave signs of unity and collaboration, which served to many people, in Italian society and among politicians, to become aware of the importance and difficulties of Catholic schools in Italy.

9. IE – IRELAND

Schools have been closed since 12 March for primary and secondary education, with the use of distance education. The question of the university entrance examination (Leaving Certificate) was discussed at length. This assessment was finally cancelled, and the teachers have, for the very first time, given an estimate of the results. The marks awarded to students in their final year of secondary school will therefore determine their entry to university for the coming year.

Furthermore, taking online courses has been difficult to set up for families from disadvantaged backgrounds. For the sake of equity, the ideal scenario would then be to resume classroom teaching in September. It is desirable that research be carried out on the schools that have reopened and that the rate of spread of the virus to children be known: to what extent is the virus transmitted from pupil to pupil and pupil to teacher?

10. HU – HUNGARY

Schools were closed from March 16 to June 16. There were problems with the equipment (computer, wifi access, poor internet connection...), with a very marked difference between families living in rural areas and those (better equipped) in the capital. The teachers gave their lessons very autonomously, either online or by handing in paper exercises. Lectures were also broadcast on national television and on websites. National support was therefore very strong, as was that of the secretariat of Catholic schools, which passed on useful information to its schools and collected good practices in distance education. In this regard, the representatives were satisfied with distance education, but stressed that it does not replace face-to-face teaching.

11. MT – MALTA

The Ministry of Education has set up a national committee consisting of representatives of the Ministry, independent schools, the State Church and the Teachers' Union.

Starting in March, the schools were closed until June. Distance learning was introduced, and people were mobilized to provide students with adequate equipment (computers, etc.). The majority of families had at least one computer at home, but the difficulty was mainly when several family members had to use the computer at the same time. Within denominational education, initiatives have been taken to provide computers to students. At present, the modalities for the September resumption still need to be examined, both locally and nationally.

At the beginning of the lockdown, the Teachers' Union insisted that teachers should not be forced to give their course online. This proposal was initially followed and was later relaxed as teachers realized the need to communicate with their students. They therefore gave lessons online or through recordings in order to strengthen the relationship with their students. Unfortunately, not all of them attended distance learning. One will note the difficulty for families to organize themselves with the children at home. In this respect, some teachers, who were themselves parents, asked for some flexibility in the preparation of the courses as they also had to look after their own children.

The evaluations were all cancelled. Some schools, however, gave feedback or evaluations that were not officially graded to the students. University entrance exams are expected to take place in September. Finally, with regard to finance, salaries of education staff continued to be paid by the government, as did public school staff. However, some parents were unable to pay school fees, so schools received government assistance to compensate for these losses.

12. NO – NORWAY

From 12 March, schools were closed, and educational staff used multimedia teaching. On 20 April, kindergarten education resumed in accordance with the measures taken by the government, for example with limited opening hours and teaching in small groups of pupils. On 27 April, the youngest pupils returned to school. They were followed by the oldest pupils from 11 May onwards. In lower secondary education, the pupils attended remedial courses to bring them up to date with the curriculum. Most of the exams were cancelled. The end-of-year marks were based on the work done in class. The students are currently on holiday. The new school year is scheduled to start on August 17. The authorities plan for schools to follow the "yellow" model, i.e. all to be in school full time.

The Norwegian government has funded research on the effectiveness of home schooling. To date, according to a survey of all schools (including Catholic and non-governmental schools) carried out by the authorities, several findings have been made:

- 9 out of 10 teachers say they have acquired digital skills during lockdown.
- The majority say that this period of distance learning has influenced and will influence their way of working in a normal teaching context.
- The majority of teachers report that the use of digital technology has not hindered learning to some extent. Indeed, all students in upper secondary education in Norway have a computer, paid by the government.
- 85% of municipalities and counties believe they have succeeded in following the requirements of the Education Act for a safe and quality school environment.
- The period of lockdown has been characterised as a digital impulse and change.
- The adaptability of students and teachers was highlighted as they experienced some frustration and faced technical constraints.
- Teachers say they collaborate much more than before
- Students were more active in their school work.
- There were difficulties for a minority of "vulnerable" students.

In economic terms, some schools have had additional expenses, mainly related to compliance with safety and hygiene measures (more frequent cleaning of classrooms, etc.). Some schools have lost their rental income. Financial support was provided to them by the dioceses. The government has also helped schools, especially public schools and kindergarten schools.

13. PL – POLAND

As of March 16, all schools in Poland were closed. The Ministry of Education then encouraged schools to organize distance education. This proposal was then imposed from 27 March. The government announced that the schools would reopen in September. External evaluations were postponed from the end of April (early May) to June. The examination of pupils in the final year of secondary education (also important for university entrance) was reduced to the written part, carried out in compliance with health measures.

In May, kindergarten pupils and the first three years of primary education were given the opportunity to be admitted to schools. However, in Catholic schools, only a minority of parents let their child return to school. At the same time, teachers offered individualised sessions to their pupils to help them prepare for their exams.

On the one hand, one of the great challenges in Catholic schools was the introduction of distance education. Several associations as well as the government have tried to help the schools by providing tools and materials. Online courses have sometimes created frustration but have also encouraged the use of new technologies and developed creativity. All these tools and teaching methods will be applied in the future. On the other hand, the great difficulty has been the gap between schools, students and teachers. Some are better equipped and/or better trained. The government has also provided aid for families in need, but this has not been sufficient, especially since it is mainly state schools that have benefited from this aid. The non-public sector suffers from greater financial problems than the public sector. The lack of teachers training in terms of methodology or tools is also regretted.

At the psychological level, the period of confinement was stressful for the students since they did not have the social contact usually provided in the school context. Nevertheless, the online courses provided a sense of normality and helped maintain a connection, a contact between students and teachers.

14. PT – PORTUGAL

Classes were suspended from March 16. In mid-May, students in the last two years of secondary education returned to school to work on the subjects covered by the national exams. Children from 3 months to 3 years also returned to the kindergarten. The attendance rate was higher in secondary education: almost 100% of teenagers were present, compared to 10 or 20% of young children. In June, pre-primary education also resumed.

Catholic education had the schools in the network evaluated by parents and pupils. The results received are generally positive. The responsiveness and adaptability of the schools, principals and teachers were highlighted. As for the Portuguese representatives, they praised the adaptability of the families in view of the health and economic difficulties.

At present, registration for the school year 2020-2021 is taking place. The risk of losing pupils is present, but the period of lockdown has nevertheless made it possible to strengthen the school-family link and to develop the Catholic, Christian and humanitarian identity of the network. This special attention to parents and students has helped to retain some families. While some parents do not wish to (re)enrol their child(ren) in a Catholic school, others say they have confidence in the model proposed by the Portuguese Catholic network which is based on the quality of teaching and the relational aspect with children and parents.

15. RO-ROMANIA

Classes were suspended from March 11 until June 12. During this period no face-to-face classes were given, but they were all given online (zoom, google classroom...) or via the national media (especially the 8th and 2nd year-students who had to take national exams). About 60 to 70% of the pupils followed online courses because they were mostly from urban or privileged families with sufficient equipment (computer, wifi connection...). The Ministry of Education had launched a project to support those who were unable to receive distance education.

As far as evaluations are concerned, there were several cases: 1° for students who had taken the courses online, the marks were supplemented with those received during the lockdown; 2° for those who could not take the courses online, an average was made either on the basis of the marks received before 11 March or on the basis of the first semester of courses. On this subject, students following manual and technical training carried out their aptitude test online. And the national tests for the baccalaureate (8th and 2nd) were held in the classroom in accordance with strict rules. Currently, the September start of the school year is considered under several scenarios (face-to-face, partial, etc.). Although the schools show a real desire to resume normal activity, the decision will be taken according to the evolution of the pandemic.

In terms of innovations, the rapid adaptation of educational teams and the rapid transfer of their e-learning content is praised. With regard to the difficulties encountered, the following should be noted: the sometimes complicated contact with pupils and families, the lack of training of teachers and pupils, the lack of equipment for teachers and pupils (especially in large families), the lack of digital resources adapted to the school system, and the lack of time.

Finally, the Church also had to adapt by broadcasting Holy Mass on television, radio and social networks. New initiatives have emerged, such as the Catholic Hour, a program transmitted on the Facebook page of the Signis Romania Association and on the website www.angelus.com.ro.

16. SE – SWEDEN

The situation in Sweden is very special compared to other European countries. Upper secondary schools and universities made use of e-learning. But the compulsory schools (6-16 year olds) have not closed. It should be noted that the 3 Swedish Catholic schools are not in the same region. St Thomas School is located in Lund in southern Sweden. However, this region has not been greatly affected by the virus, especially in comparison to the schools in Stockholm.

The most complicated thing was to prepare for a closure, which has never happened. A few weeks before Easter, the government said that if a person had any symptoms, he or she had to stay home. Many students then did not come to school, with an average attendance rate of 50%. The teachers then found it difficult to give lessons in class to the pupils present while keeping in touch with those at home (via digital means).

The situation at St Thomas was fairly calm, with only one case of contamination. Collaboration between teachers was strengthened as the educational teams worked on resources (which were not used in the end). In this respect, it was advised not to use too many digital tools, especially for young students. This difficult period brought people together, but also created a lot of fatigue among the educational staff.

17. SI – SLOVENIA

The state has taken fairly strict measures to limit contamination. On the one hand, the government has supported teachers financially. At the level of kindergarten education, parents were given the option of not paying school fees for the period of lockdown. On the other hand, the government helped schools to obtain materials, including through donations to schools. However, there was a lack of technical and pedagogical training, which is a great challenge for Slovenia in the future. It should also be noted that the government changed a few days before the lockdown, which drastically reduced the lack of consideration for Catholic schools.

With regard to evaluation, the Maturity Examination has been maintained. The school year is scheduled to begin in September 2020. Depending on the state of progression of the disease, several scenarios are considered for the resumption of classes (face-to-face, partly in school, combination of digital and classroom teaching, etc.).

18. UA – UKRAINE

First of all, Ukraine has very few Catholic schools compared to other European countries. All schools were temporarily closed in mid-March. In view of the growing rate of contagion, the closure of schools was extended, and teachers resorted to e-learning (complemented by televised teaching on national TV channels). E-classes were easier to implement in larger schools than in smaller or rural schools where students and teachers were generally less equipped (no computers or smartphones, unstable internet connection, etc.).

The government conducted a survey within schools. It was estimated that 30% of students did not receive learning during the period of lockdown because of lack of equipment (from schools or families). In Catholic schools, lessons continued, parents continued to pay school fees. Very few parents reported that they could not afford the fees. The government therefore continued to support public and private schools (Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic) during the period of lockdown.

Currently, all schools are closed during the summer holidays. Most exams have been cancelled, except for the External Independent Test for university entrance. The start of the September school year is under discussion. But many families are wondering about the modalities as they fear a resurgence of the disease since the number of contaminated people has increased after leaving the lockdown.

19. PARTNER ASSOCIATIONS

UNAEC - EUROPE

On the one hand, all meetings of the European Union of Former Pupils of Catholic Education had to be cancelled. The UNAEC representatives also regret the loss of many members of the union due to illness. On the other hand, UNAEC has issued a statement in view of the risk of abuse in some countries of Catholic education. This declaration initiated by the Council of Europe wants to defend the respect of democratic principles and fundamental rights in times of pandemic. Furthermore, UNAEC Italy is lobbying the Italian government for financial aid for Catholic schools. Indeed, due to lack of subsidy, 30% of Italian Catholic schools risk having to close at the beginning of the next school year.

Finally, UNAEC is currently working with OIEC and SGEN on the situation of Catholic schools in Lebanon. There are currently 329 Catholic schools with an average of 200,000 students.

However, the current economic and financial situation is very bad, especially with the coronavirus crisis, and because the government is in default. The population is very much affected, and the country is in a state of general bankruptcy. Catholic schools have lost 10% of their students in the last 2 months. It is to be expected that many schools will close by September. UNAEC is therefore in contact with these schools (most of which are French-speaking) in order to find a solution. A campaign will soon be launched to raise funds. However, it is obvious that in view of the situation, Lebanese Catholic education will be badly hit and the money raised will not be sufficient.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Several meetings have been held around the coronavirus pandemic. In particular, a two-day webinar was held to initiate a process of reflection. The discussions will serve as a basis for the elaboration and publication of a text.

OIDEL

In collaboration with ECNAIS-EMIE, OIDEL joined in the drafting of a declaration entitled "Europe must not forget independent education and educational pluralism". Some political parties took advantage of the coronavirus crisis to present a discourse that recentralized education in national and international debates. For example, some spoke of "coming out of the crisis together" but behind this discourse proposed measures that aimed to give more power to the state in terms of education, for example in Italy where independent schools lack financial resources, or in Spain where a bill contrary to Catholic schools is being discussed. The aim of this declaration is to show that independent schools have something to say in these debates, and that it is better to come out of this crisis with a pluralist approach. The manifesto has been sent to the members of the CEEC to invite them to co-sign it. The declaration will be launched by EMIE-ECNAIS, but it is addressed to all players of independent schools.

CONCLUSION

Following the results of the survey and the exchanges, we note a great diversity of initiatives undertaken as well as a great dynamism in the Catholic school communities. Significant needs for support, as well as materials for children and families, but also for teacher training and equipment for schools were identified. In this regard, public authorities have sometimes helped, but not everywhere. Unfortunately, a financial risk for Catholic schools in some countries has not been ruled out, due to non-payment of school fees or a possible drop in pupil enrolments at the start of the next school year. The question of state intervention and aid is paradoxical: we hope for support for a number of initiatives, but we fear too much takeover. We must avoid a situation where, during a crisis such as the one we are experiencing, states decide to recentralize and re-appropriate a certain number of things that were left to the autonomy of the stakeholders and allowed the pedagogical freedom of schools. We must continue to support each other, exchange and call on our resources.

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