

Milano

General Background

Lockdown in primary schools

Primary schools in Italy closed on the 4th March 2020. Lombardy has been the first region to close them, one week before than the rest of the country, because of the high number of Covid19 cases. Closure was at the beginning declared for a couple of weeks, then every 15 days the measures were renovated and they eventually last until the end of the school year.

After two/three weeks, remote teaching has been introduced with different modalities according to the schools: differences depended on the availability of devices, the capability of teachers of using devices and on-line teaching platforms, the quality of connection (that differs greatly between urban and rural areas, between Northern and Southern regions and cities). There have been no exceptions for special workers' children or disabled children.

A stream of funding at national level has been dedicated for providing students with the devices in case they did not have them. Devices were bought and distributed directly by schools to in-need families

Reopening

Primary schools have re-opened on the 14th of September. At the end of August guidelines were issued at national level in order ("Practical indication to manage the Covid cases and outbreaks"). The document provided general rules and guidelines about how conducting teaching activities in the safest way and consider several scenario and indicate how to react to them:

- Masks were mandatory for students from six years old
- separated entrances and exits were established
- classes were treated as "bubbles" to guarantee the tracking of the contagious
- the use of common places (gardens, canteen) was organized time shifts in order that different bubbles do not meet each other
- pre-school and post-school services have been abolished in some cases, when the bubbles' isolation cannot be guaranteed
- each school needs to have a person in charge of communicating with the health authorities responsible of the tracking and the containment of the virus (this person should provide the list of students that have been in contact with the positive case in the last 48 hours). In case the class have been in contact with the person/child tested positive for Covid19, the class would be closed for ten days and only those who tested negative at the end of the quarantine period can be readmitted at school. With the introduction of the vaccination for children older than, rules have been changed with reference to quarantine and isolation timing. The same has happened for children attending the primary school when vaccination has been made available also to them: for instance, primary schools' classes close only with more than four cases tested

positive for Covid19 and the quarantine period lasts 7 days for vaccinated children instead of 10.

- Shifts are organized to maintain distance between classes during the lunch time

Schools of all grades have been closed again the month of March 2021 for an increasing of the number of hospitalized people because of Covid.

Governance of the crisis (National/local authorities, schools, others)

A technical and scientific committee has been established in order to set the necessary measures to contain the virus. As the schools are concerned, measures have been established with the consulting of the Ministry of Education. Regions had to follow the national rules, but it was possible a certain degree of autonomy, also considering the different trends in terms of number of positive cases. Some regions have kept school closed longer than in others regions, increasing the North-South divide.

Rules for the distance learning were also regulated at national level (i.e. the cases in which it is mandatory, training for teachers, platform...), but then the huge diversity of conditions in schools and territories have led to a certain degree of school autonomy.

Implications for Education

During the pandemic years, learning performance in Italian and math have decreased significantly, especially for upper secondary students. Primary school's students have been affected less dramatically. This is probably due to the fact that primary school has been the grade (as the mandatory education is concerned) where more attendance days have been guaranteed because of the age pupils (see the table below).

i.e. school days in Milan in the different cycles for the a.y. 2020/2021

School days expected	Childcare	Primary	Lower secondary	Upper secondary
145	135	124	116	70

INVALSI (National Institute for the Evaluation of Education and Training System) data show that for lower secondary school, the lost in learning matches with 2 months of lost in Italian and 4 months in math. For the upper secondary school the learning lost matches with 5 months for both the subjects.

A survey conducted from "Save the Children" in April 2020, on a sample of 1003 minors aged between 8 and 17 years old: almost 1/10 of children attending the primary school has never had a remote teaching class or less than once a week.

Learning lost has been generalized for all the students, apparently despite their socio-economic backgrounds. Children with disabilities have been suffered from a significant exclusion: the 36% of them did not attend remote teaching classes, at national level (according to a Fondazione Agnelli research).

Remote teaching has been hard also for the digital divide and the lack of digital skills of the teaching body. In Italy, 84% of schools had to provide digital devices to families. The ageing school staff (46 is the average age) did not help in acquiring the digital competencies. Also housing conditions did not help: 42% of students lives in overcrowded conditions and 12,3% of students between 6 and 17 years old lived in houses not equipped with digital devices. Of those who have devices, the 57% has to share them with other family's members. Finally, only the 30% has high digital competencies.

Quality of life/family relations

The pandemic has had a relevant impact on family's life and relations. Issue of conciliation and, in general, of the role of the family during the school closure have become even more relevant once the economic and commercial activities have started to open again (mid April - May 2020) while schools keep staying closed. A survey conducted by Polytechnic of Milan (Cordini, De Angelis 2021) from May to June 2020, that has collected 3.600 questionnaires from parents of children enrolled in school of all grades in Milan, showed that 29% of respondents registered a loss in their income, the 16,3% of respondents have entirely lost their income. It has to be noticed that the 80% of respondents were the mothers.

Those with a low educational background have been the most affected by a reduction of work (60%), while parents with higher levels of education and higher professional status have experienced an increase in the number of hours dedicated to work: 18% of highly educated respondents have worked more hours during the lockdown compared to the 9% of those having a medium-low and low educational level. These data show a polarized distribution of the sampling between two groups. On one hand, we have parents who lost their job and had the time to help children with school duties, but lacking resources (both emotional since they have been stressed by the sudden unemployment or reduction of income and, financial, especially considering that this condition has been more likely to occur to the already disadvantage ones). On the other hand, we find high skilled and educated parents who have seen an increase in their workload and who struggled in balancing their work duties with the family ones, usually to the detriment of mothers. Here are some evidence from researches conducted on the impact of pandemic on families:

- school closures have highlighted and exacerbated the gender gap that is already quite significant in Italy
- a survey conducted in April 2020 (followed one conducted in spring 2019), has proved how during the pandemic the increase of family's duties have concerned mostly women: almost the 70% of them have had dedicated more time to domestic work despite the presence of the partner
- more than half of the lost jobs regards women
- the 60% of parents of children aged less than 14 years old has seen increased dedicated to helping their children with school duties (homework, remote teaching...)

Extraordinary parental leaves and voucher for buying baby-sitting services have been introduced: 300.000 families over 8 millions have benefited from extraordinary parental leaves (mothers in 8 cases over 10) and 800.000 from vouchers