

Conference topic: Europe: Learning Corner

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Organizer: Europe Direct Iași

**Abstract:** The aims and objectives of this report are to identify the problems encountered by the teaching staff at the pre-primary level in Iasi County, Romania. In the last year, the activity has shifted in the digital environment and this unexpected change had to be overcome not only by the teaching staff but also by the children.

The online *Conference Europe: Learning Corner* (Europa - Spațiul Învățării) addressed two fundamental questions. Firstly, the experience of the teaching staff in the last year given the newness of the entire situation and how they could communicate effectively with the children and continue the socialization process even through a screen. Secondly, the teaching staff expressed their concerns regarding the lack of educational materials and other technical issues.

At the beginning of the conference, Europe Direct Iași presented a PowerPoint presentation for the audience. The purpose of this presentation was to show alternative sites and platforms created by the European Commission for the teaching staff which could be used during online classes:

[https://europa.eu/learning-corner/home\\_ro](https://europa.eu/learning-corner/home_ro);

<https://canvass.media>;

<https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/ro/pub/index.htm>;

[https://europa.eu/youth/erasmusvirtual/activity/exchanges\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/erasmusvirtual/activity/exchanges_en);

<https://www.europeana.eu>

All these contain free educational resources, interactive classroom activities or simple questions about the European Union, software designed to create educational video lessons in a few simple steps, reports from recent research, teaching materials created in European projects and training courses, websites that give you access to millions of books, music, artworks and more, online exhibitions, galleries and blogs that aim to inform and inspire.

First and foremost, some participants also mentioned the Erasmus projects in their kindergartens, workshops, international contests with partner countries, previous activities conducted on Europe Day or their partnership with Europe Direct Iași. Essentially, the activities became a great asset to all the kindergartens involved.

One representative of the County School Board exemplified the difficulties the institution had to confront with during this period: uncertainty, changes in the legislation, insufficient resources. The

educational resources were quite limited at the beginning of the pandemic, so the County School Board gathered the existent materials and redistributed them to the kindergartens.

The participants expressed their thoughts on the current lockdown and how it affected their daily activities with the children. The impossibility to socialize is one of the main concerns of the teaching staff, especially for the 3-4-year-old children. The organizer of the Pedagogical Circle shared her view with regard to online teaching. (Their communication continued via WhatsApp and Facebook).

The teaching staff felt that there is a stronger bond between the parents, children and them. The parents re-evaluated their positions and how vital is their collaboration during this critical time. Moreover, there is a growing feeling of isolation, loneliness, and desire to return to life before the pandemic. The teaching staff is needed to re-evaluate certain activities and receive approval for them.

Another participant defined the Covid-19 pandemic period through three words: uncertainty, empathy and creativity. This period deepened the ability to understand emotions, particularly between the teaching staff and parents. Moreover, the parents understood the educational process and how much the teaching staff strives for an experience that is close to normality for children. Face-to-face activities had to be transformed to online platforms and adjusted according to age. Unexpected situations occur in the online medium, so the teaching staff has to find solutions to problems.

The teaching staff provided their stand-point concerning the insufficiencies at the pre-school level. Should there be periodical Covid-19 tests accepted by all parents, the fear of infections would be lessened. Rigorous scientific research should be conducted as to whether or not the virus can be spread by touching contaminated surfaces.

Technical issues may hinder the work of the teaching staff as they do not know how to use certain platforms such as Google Classroom, Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Cisco Webex. In this sense, it is recommended to organize free IT courses. On another note, some kindergartens do not have enough digital devices, so they had to acquire laptops or video projectors. While some members of the teaching staff used their personal devices, others had to come to the kindergarten to use these devices in order to broadcast the meeting.

To conclude, the *Conference Europe: Learning Corner (Europa — Spațiul Învățării)* held by Europe Direct Iași discussed a series of common problems during the Covid-19 pandemic. The participants stressed the desire to experience life before the pandemic and continue to be hopeful and optimistic. Not only that they noticed emotional changes and a higher level of empathy, but the teaching staff considers that new resources, organizational methods must be one of their main priorities. Moreover, a consensus about the vaccine must be reached, so that the children socialize with their peers in the classrooms.