

STORIES FROM MAX PEOPLE

Resilient and inclusive education in times of COVID-19

The rapid development of language skills is always the first obstacle to tackle to achieve real social inclusion. The restrictions associated with the health crisis make this even more challenging. On the occasion of the International Day for Education, two MAX partners explained how they readjusted their education programmes amid the pandemic.

On January 26th the [MAX project](#) kicked-off a new round of [Stories from MAX People Facebook live](#) chats. And it did around a theme that is critical to building fully inclusive cities: **access to education**.

Last Sunday 24th the United Nations celebrated the International Day of Education, in commemoration of the function that education has in building peace and development around the world.

This year, the celebration happens in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. An unprecedented situation that not only is making it very difficult to maintain the general education system keep going around the world but that also has exacerbated even more the social disparities. The health crisis has revealed that the digital gap or the work-life imbalance has a greater negative effect in the most vulnerable of our societies, a group where we very often find refugees and people with a migrant background.

Moderated by **Patricia Martinez** from [AEIDL](#), two of the 20 MAX partners shared their experiences in that field and how they have been keeping forward since the pandemic outbreak.

Kristina Avdonina, project coordinator at the [Johannes Mihkelsoni Center](#) (JMK) in Estonia explained the *'job-readiness'* training they provide for different target groups, including long-term unemployed refugees and newly arrived migrants in Estonia. Such courses vary depending on the skills and market area the group may be better off. But generally, they are a 3-month course structured in 6 different parts. They are provided in Estonian and Russian mainly, sometimes in English and in the past, they could fund some specific courses in Arabic to make sure they could really benefit the participants by overcoming the initial language barrier.

Important to mention is that the training does not only address the specific job market needed skills but also



other psychological aspects they need to pay attention to, such as self-awareness, empowerment, cultural readiness for applying to a job and conducting interviews, understanding different cultural practices, the Estonian labour market or the legislation.

During the last year, a lot of extra effort to readjust the whole methodology was needed.

At first, there was a general frustration among all the participants. The health crisis was adding a new barrier to a large number of existing difficulties to enter the labour market this group is already facing, due to the destruction of job opportunities occasioned by the COVID19 pandemic. The exclusive online interaction was neither the best format to address certain psychological issues. Nonetheless, the JMK team managed to readjust the whole training into an online format, with a 5-month duration rather than 3, so that the daily courses lasted only 3 hours and not a full day. The group of refugees and newly arrived migrants managed to adapt themselves as well, showing resilience and commitment and eventually, generating a self-support group that made them grow together and keep moving forward.

From the North of Europe, we moved to hear the experience of a receiving country on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea.

Pietro Boriotti, MAX partner at [Legacoop sociali](#) in Italy, and one of the biggest organisation dealing with education and inclusion of migrants in different Italian regions, presented us the tasks that their working group on migration does.

Emanuela Graziani, from the **Cooperativa Sociale Agorà**, is one the 100 active members of Legacoop delivering those education programmes on the ground. They are composed by three different centres for the accommodation of migrants providing comprehensive support for newly arrived of all ages and origins, sometimes to full families.

The outbreak of the pandemic meant the closing of the public language schools where migrants acquire the mandatory B1 level of Italian needed to benefit from other training courses. To solve this immediate need, Cooperativa Sociale Agorà made their facilities available, setting up computers, screens and other digital tools to make it possible for migrants to keep receiving this education while still keeping the requested health measures the critic situation was demanding. It did not come without challenges given the fact that social ties were cut, something very important to boost the language learning process of the newcomers, as well as developing a sense of belonging, of a new project in a new place.

Cooperativa Sociale Agorà also works with migrant children, organising all kinds of intercultural activities and education courses. Emanuela mentioned how inclusion from an early age is not only key but also highly faster. Children do not look at differences. They are not afraid of trying to speak a new language. Their learning process is thus highly more effective. Therefore, intervention addressing kids and young adults are essential and rewarding, for both them and their families, which may feel more encouraged to follow their path by accompanying them.

To watch the video of the session click [here](#).