

COFACE

Inclusive environments to access
education in equal conditions in the
COVID-19 context and beyond

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Declarada de Utilidad Pública

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Good morning ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

First of all, I would like to thank COFACE Families Europe for inviting FIAPAS (the Spanish Confederation of Families of Deaf People) to take part in this Webinar which will benefit to all students and their families.

Let me briefly introduce the organisation I represent. FIAPAS was created in nineteen seventy-eight to respond to the needs of families of people with a hearing disability and to those of deaf people. Nowadays FIAPAS is a national organisation, composed by forty-seven regional and local associations. FIAPAS is the largest platform for the representation of the families of deaf and hard-of-hearing people in Spain.

Our mission is to represent and stand for the rights and interests of people with hearing disability and their families. We do this by including and promoting the action of our regional federations and local associations.

During the crisis caused by the COVID-19 (*covid nineteen*) pandemic, we have seen highlighted the gaps that already existed within our education system. In relation to students with a hearing disability, along with the gaps themselves, there has also been a lack of planification regarding what kind of responses could be offered.

Today, we can know some good practices from other organisations and the challenges we must face regarding care and education, regarding inclusion of children with disabilities

First, I would like to provide you a picture of the situation of deaf students within the Spanish school system.

Official data shows that in the school year 2018/2019 (two thousand eighteen / two thousand nineteen), we had 8.869 (eight thousand, eighth hundred and sixty-nine) students with a hearing disability. And, 95% (ninety five percent) are in mainstreaming education. Ninety seven percent of all these students communicates in oral language.

During the last years, we (all the different stakeholders) have done a huge effort for providing the necessary resources and methodologies for our students to assure the right to education in equal conditions. We were in the way towards inclusive education, removing the barriers that prevented access to tertiary education and vocational training.

However, COVID-19 has come to remind us that we still have duties to perform in distance learning.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF FIAPAS ACTIONS

In Spain, schools were closed in mid-March and students had distance learning until the end of the school year. From the first moments, FIAPAS increase its advocacy and communication roles demanding:

- The use of accessible materials and platforms. Today we are here using Zoom. Even we, hearing people, must be more concentrated because sound is not so perfect as in a face-to-face meeting. Thanks to the subtitling we have, we can easily understand all the presentations in this Webinar. But, imagine how a deaf student feels when he or she receives distance lesson without subtitling.
- We also request the continuation of the services provided by support teachers. To be at home cannot be a reason for suspending these supports
- And, we also focus on demanding accessibility for education programmes on TV. Our ministry of Education had a good practice for bridging the digital gap with Public TV broadcasting school lessons. For example, at 9 (nine) o'clock, History for those children of 12 years, at 10 (ten) o'clock, Mathematics for those of 10 years, and so on. Unfortunately, in the first weeks, these lessons were not subtitled. After FIAPAS advocacy actions, we are proud to say that these were finally accessible for our children

Now, we are starting the new school year. Face-to-face teaching is the priority for the Government. However, depending the health situation in each Region of the country and even in each school, we have three different scenarios in front of us.

- Face-to-face teaching
- Distance learning
- Combination of both (some days at home, some days at the school) to reduce the number of students per classroom

So, considering these possibilities and with the lessons we learned last school year, FIAPAS has drafted a proposal of roadmap, identifying problems and providing recommendations to prevent new inequality gaps. We sent it to all regional authorities on education and I will share it with you

1. ORGANIZATION AND METHODOLOGY OF ONLINE TEACHING

Problems

- No daily class, so not all the subjects have been given; unfinished agendas
- No possibility of consulting the teacher, no feedback regarding the activities carried out
- No access to support devices commonly used in the school
- Inaccessible evaluation processes and exams
- No accessible and agile channel of contact with schools, with teachers
- No clear and timely information from schools or educational authorities
- Excessive burden on families

In all the different scenarios, some recommendations...

- Assessment of the learning situation of the child, level of skills, available resources...
- Planning education reinforcements and specific support to compensate for the training limitations of the previous year

- Continuation of curricular adaptations
- Provision of hearing support products (assistive devices) that allow access to information and communication
- Creation of an accessible and agile communication channel between teachers, including support staff, and the child and his/her family
- Accessible assessment and evaluation processes (considering curricular adaptations, if any)
- Plan virtual meetings, formal and informal, with classmates
- Clear and continuous information about safety, hygiene, and prevention measures against infection, both to students and families

And, in the scenario of combine education, we propose

- To give priority to face-to-face learning (if the family agrees) in the case of students with disabilities. Comparing to their hearing peers, to be at the school become essential for children with a hearing disability. It will facilitate the use of assistive devices, the access to personal support and will easier their interaction with peers

2. ABSENCE OF PERSONAL SUPPORT IN ONLINE EDUCATION

Problems

- Elimination or reduction of support teachers and hearing and language teachers, as well as non-teaching support, as sign language interpreters

For distance learning and the combination mode, we propose:

- Continuation of pedagogical and speech therapy reinforcement
- Quick replacement of teachers in case of absence
- Intervention of sign language interpreters for those students who use this language
- Creation of a pool of teachers and professionals to deal with substitutions and reinforcements, as well as providing support at home, if necessary

3. LACK OF ACCESSIBILITY IN ONLINE EDUCATION

- No accessible devices, no accessible contents
- No accessible instructions about how to carry out the school tasks, no accessible exams, no accessible education programmes on TV

For distance learning and the combination mode, we propose:

- Teacher training in the use of new accessible technologies, in the design of accessible materials, and in including accessibility in the teaching/learning and evaluation processes, and in educational practice
- Subtitling online lessons
- Written instructions and guidelines for carrying out tasks, activities ...
- Use of subtitling in the case of audio-visual materials
- Close contact with FIAPAS local associations
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4. SOCIOFAMILIAR VULNERABILITY

- Lack of electronic devices and internet connection
- Delay in receiving scholarships and financial aids

We propose:

- Creation of a fund of economic aid to reinforce the support to the most vulnerable families, addressed to:
 - o Intensify school and speech therapy support to compensate for the gap produced last year
 - o Purchase assistive devices needed at home to be able to access distance learning on equal terms
 - o Create a devices loan bank
 - o Training the families in personal strategies and management of technologies

5. OTHER IDENTIFIED PROBLEMS

- Lack of information and guidance to families
- No clear information about the start of this school year
- No information about a reinforcement plan for students who have not achieved the competencies of the last school year

For which, we propose:

- Creation of an accessible communication channel with families and students so that timely information is provided about the school situation