

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Third-Country National Secondary School Students in Spain.

**Prospective study in
Madrid and Barcelona**



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PRESENTATION

This research is part of the “Promoting Meaningful Integration of Third-Country Nationals Children to Education - IntegratED” (project number 776143) project financed by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) of the European Union and implemented by a consortium of European organisations that includes the InteRed Foundation (IR) in Spain, the Centro Studi e iniziative Europeo (CESIE) in Italy, Canary Wharf Consulting LTD (CWC) in the UK, the Regional Directorate for Primary and Secondary Education of Central Macedonia (KMAKEDPDE) in Thessaloniki, the Social and Innovation Centre (KMOP) in Greece and the European Parents Association (EPA) in Belgium. Project implementation began in 2018 with the aim of enhancing and strengthening educational participation among third-country national children, as well as tackling discrimination towards this population in Greece, Italy and Spain through a holistic working approach.

InteRed was in the middle of implementing the project when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out. As a development NGO, we conducted an analysis in which it became clear that understanding the impact of the current crisis caused by the pandemic inevitably involved looking back and understanding the situation we were in, with a world in deep eco-social and economic crisis as a result of a system that puts the needs of the market over those of the people, a consequence of a system of consumption and production that is accelerating climate change, destroying our planet’s biodiversity and the people who inhabit it. The current effects on growing inequalities and their impact on at-risk groups are also marked by the consequences of the 2008 crisis and the austerity policies implemented at a national and international level.

To this analysis, which as a development NGO we conducted from a need to change our model, we added our analysis of the consequences the pandemic has on the right to education and on women’s rights that we conducted as an NGO specialised in education and gender. We are particularly concerned about the closure of schools, the total or partial closure of which affects almost

10 million students worldwide today, according to UNESCO¹. In this context, at-risk groups are particularly impacted, and here in Spain, migrant students who are third-country nationals are among the most vulnerable. The media reports on the progress of the COVID-19 vaccine daily, but the question we ask ourselves is: what is or will be the vaccine to cure the impact of the pandemic on education? At InteRed we know that this vaccine requires an ongoing commitment to educational inclusion and the right to education, turning the motto of the United Nations Agenda 2030, “leave no one behind”, into a reality

It is through this lens that, together with the consortium of organisations involved in IntegratEd, we believed it was important to have research that could provide us with a snapshot of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education of young third-country nationals in Spain, revealing what had taken place during the lockdown, but also what the start of the 2020-2021 school year was like. This document is the report on this research conducted by Silvia Carrasco and Marina Pibernat, with the participation of schools in Madrid and Barcelona.

InteRed would like to acknowledge the efforts and commitment of the teaching staff in the education and care of students, key aspects identified in the research.

The conclusions and questions in this report will guide InteRed’s future actions. These actions will certainly continue to promote educational inclusion and reaffirm our commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. International organisations like ECLAC warn that “the world that existed when Agenda 2030 was approved in 2015 now seems far away”, however, at InteRed we refuse to allow the pandemic to distract us from these objectives. They are now more challenging, but it is in everyone’s power to achieve SDG 4: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

Ana Arancibia Tapia
Director of InteRed

1. Global monitoring of school closures caused by COVID-19 (Partially open: 728,839,484; Total: 952,907,822 as of 27/11/2020) For more information, please see: <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the academic and social life of children and adolescents is raising concerns about the serious consequences it may imply for a generation of young people, especially those who were previously in more vulnerable situations, particularly students who are third-country nationals. However, it is surprising to see how, since the beginning of the lockdown and when schools later reopened in exceptional partial in-person instruction, the specific needs of this group of students and the effects of academic and social isolation as possible aggravating factors have been ignored in the public debate and, even more worryingly, in the response from the educational administration beyond simply being included in the more general issue of the impoverishment of families and the digital divide.

This prospective study was conducted through interviews with management teams and teaching staff specialised in the direct care of students who are third-country nationals in eight schools in Madrid and Barcelona. It addressed the impact of the pandemic on these students from a more complex and specific approach, in the context of the transformations, readjustments and consequences experienced by all students from mainly disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. To reconstruct the social debate and collect the still scarce data on the effects of the pandemic on education, a brief analysis of resources and a review of the emergency studies was conducted.

The results reveal a reality that is at once more serious and more complex. Among other findings, the disparity in terms of how well schools are prepared to respond to the needs of their students, particularly in the case of students who are behind in their studies and are still learning the languages used, through ICT, has been noted. Secondly, and commonly affecting some students, regardless of their origin, curricular setbacks and the loss of work habits have been aggravated by the recreational use of the same technologies, with clear differences between boys and girls, which may lead to less predictable, but more persistent, processes of school disengagement. Finally, it is necessary to remember that neither the digital tools nor the educational innovation that they

may entail, however much effort is made to train and educate teachers, cannot offer solutions to structural social issues, such as socioeconomic inequality, which pre-date the advent of ICTs. The higher incidence of early school leaving among third-country students in Spain prior to the crisis requires clear and committed educational and social intervention in an attempt to reverse its potential exacerbation. One of the greatest challenges will undoubtedly be to redouble efforts to get these students, a group of students which has already disengaged from the education system in recent months, back into school.

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INTRODUCTION

As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and UNESCO has noted, the lockdown and school closures have had a serious impact not only on the education of many children who have entered Spanish schools in recent years, but also on their integration process, and it does not appear that the conditions of the 2020-21 school year will be able to reverse this trend. This report presents the results of a prospective study designed to document how this process has been experienced in Spain and, more specifically, to conduct a preliminary analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education of young third-country nationals, as part of the IntegratEd project². The ultimate aim of this research is undoubtedly to contribute to an understanding of how the educational response should be reconstructed after the socio-health crisis in which we are still mired, in the specific case of this particular group of students.

Other organisations and agencies are prioritising this approach as a way to avoid irreparable setbacks in educational rights and in the improvement of living conditions of the most disadvantaged children. The United Nations Special Delegation for the Right to Education has published a report entitled “Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the right to education; concerns, challenges and opportunities”, which notes that, despite the many innovative measures that have been adopted to address the challenges of compulsory non-formal education by governments, non-governmental agencies and schools to ensure continuity of learning, the crisis has revealed a general lack of preparedness to tackle the issue.

These concerns are shared by all countries and many research groups set out to conduct emergency surveys in the first weeks of the lockdown. Particularly, those of us who develop research in the field of educational inequalities, in

2. EU Project - Promoting Meaningful Integration of Third-Country National Children to Education - IntegratEd (project number: 776143) financed by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (FAMI) and implemented in Spain by InteRed.

general, and in the specific experiences and journeys of foreign students since the late 1990s, when Spain became the second country in the world to receive the most international migration inflow, and more recently, those of students belonging to refugee families. However, as will be discussed later in this report, this group of students does not seem to have been the focus of political and media attention, despite being over-represented in most indicators of educational inequality. Despite the recommendations of the above-mentioned reports, this unsurprising finding is in line with what has occurred in neighbouring countries.

Moreover, it also seems common, judging by the considerations published over the past few months, the initial state of shock in which teachers found themselves when they discovered their lack of preparation in digital skills and the need to acquire them quickly, as Gabriela Taddeo (2020) points out, in the case of Italy, exacerbating the differences between school results and student learning. In the United Kingdom, Manzoni and D'Angelo (2020) underscore the higher educational, linguistic and social impact of lockdown for students from migrant and refugee families by compiling emergency reports. The prestigious association NALDIC³, which brings together professionals and researchers on multilingualism and education, organised expert panels together with the Bell Foundation in April and May 2020 to provide practical guidance on how to continue to support students with “English as an additional language”, as it has been called for some time now, both during and after the lockdown. They also made provide a website with free resources to families and teachers in several different languages (e.g., Polish, Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali and Lithuanian in addition to English) so that they could help students. Other actions have involved supporting communication and coordination between families and schools.

In Spain, several researchers have also noted the risk of worsening educational inequalities but have also reported the pitiful and deficient perspective on families from which the specific problems the pandemic poses for education have often been reported. Since the start of the pandemic, Martin Criado used his blog *Entramados Sociales* and the press to criticise the classism that blamed families with fewer resources for worse stress management, stating that, although the help received by students would depend on their parents' education level, the limitations had nothing to do with any differences in the parents' level of concern, interest or effort to get their children into school. For her part, Silvia Carrasco (co-author of this report), in an article in the *Diario de la Educación*, described positive aspects of the strengthening of connections and opportunities in the inevitably personalised, albeit virtual, relationships between tutors and their students, following a survey of schools in an ongoing study on the risk of early school leaving during the first weeks of the lockdown. González and Bonal, as will be explained later given the media impact of the survey they launched immediately after the start of the confinement, pointed out the opportunity that the situation provided when it came to gauging the impact of the cultural and social capital of families and the added value of the differential role of schools, emphasising the impact of the digital divide. Cabrera Infante, in a special COVID-19 issue of the *Revista de Sociología de la Educación* (Journal of Sociology of Education)⁴ published urgently during the months of lockdown, also reviewed the impact of online teaching on the increase in inequality of educational opportunities in Spain given the differences in its implementation, calculating that it negatively affected around one million students.

3. <https://naldic.org.uk/>

4. <https://ojs.uv.es/index.php/RASE/article/view/17125>



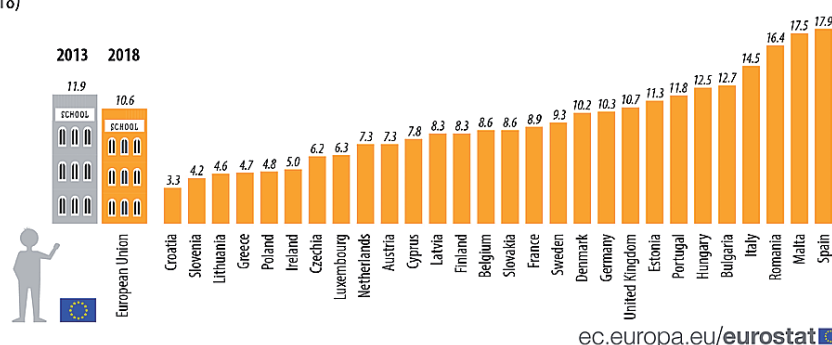
However, despite the emergency surveys on schooling and confinement and the reflections generated during these months from the data of other research in progress, the impact that COVID-19 has on third-country national students, especially among those students most affected by curricular gaps and poor command of the languages of instruction, still lacks a systematic approach. This is despite a pre-pandemic situation marked by major educational inequalities, as shown, for example, by one of the indicators on which the team that conducted this survey was working, early school and training leaving (ESTL), which can be considered key evidence of the education system's capacity to compensate for disadvantages and differences, since it describes the percentage of young people between 18 and 24 years of age who do not have any post-compulsory educational qualifications and are not studying to obtain them, regardless of whether or not they have completed compulsory secondary education.

In 2019 the ESTL rate in Spain, the highest in the European Union, had already been stagnating for two years after falling from 28% in 2012 to 17.9% in 2017. This is partly the result of a degree of economic recovery and the job attraction factor that continues to affect Spanish youth more than that of other neighbouring countries, but also, as we know from the research conducted (Carrasco, Narciso, Bertran, 2015; Tarabini and Rambla, 2015, among others), is due to characteristics of the education system itself and the low retention capacity of the schools in practice.

Early school and training leaving (ESTL) by country (2018)

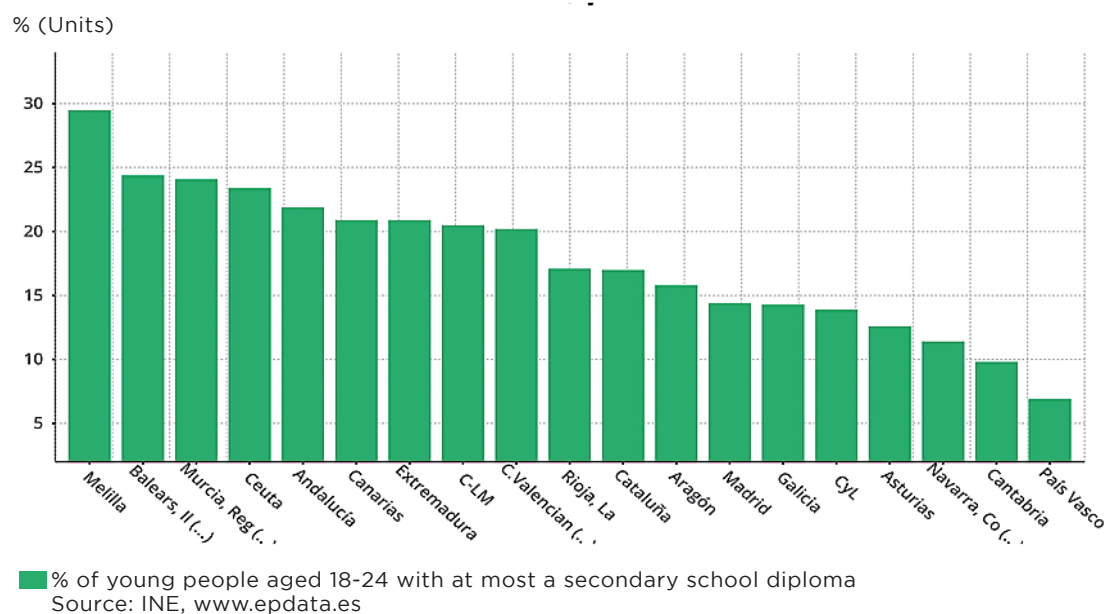
One out of ten young people in the EU have completed at most a lower secondary education and are not in further education and training

Early leavers from education and training (% of population aged 18–24)
(2018)



Moreover, there are significant differences between Spain's autonomous communities, so that while the Basque Country has an ESTL rate below the 10% maximum, the target set by EU countries except for Spain, for which a reduction target of 15% was set given the high starting percentage, these percentages are quadrupled in various autonomous communities. In this case, Madrid is below the Spanish average, and Catalonia is close to the average.

ESTL by Autonomous Community (2018): Madrid and Catalonia.



But even more worrying is the fact that Spain also sadly leads the EU in terms of the highest polarisation in ESTL rates by national origin, sex and class. Boys, foreign students and those from low-income families have a much higher ESTL rate than girls, national students and those from medium- and high-income families. But it is important to remember some less expected data. As Carrasco, Pàmies and Narciso (2018) found in the framework of the RESL.eu project (FP7 EU. 2013-2018), although both male and female foreign students (by birth or nationality) have a much higher rate of ESTL than Spanish students (Table 1), it seems that obtaining a secondary education degree acts as a greater protective factor against the risk of ESTL among foreign students. Of the young Spanish students who left school in 2018, 58.6% had completed compulsory secondary education (ESO), but of the young foreign students who left school that same year, 50.5% had completed compulsory secondary education. More Spanish students that had completed compulsory secondary education left school than students of a foreign origin, for whom this achievement is, however, more difficult.

Table 1. Early school and training leaving (ESTL) by sex, place of birth and nationality (2018)

	WOMEN	MEN	TOTAL
Born in Spain	11,9%	20,1%	16,1%
Foreign-born	29,5%	36,4%	32,9%
Spanish national	12,3%	20,3%	16,4%
Foreign national	33,8%	41,5%	37,6%

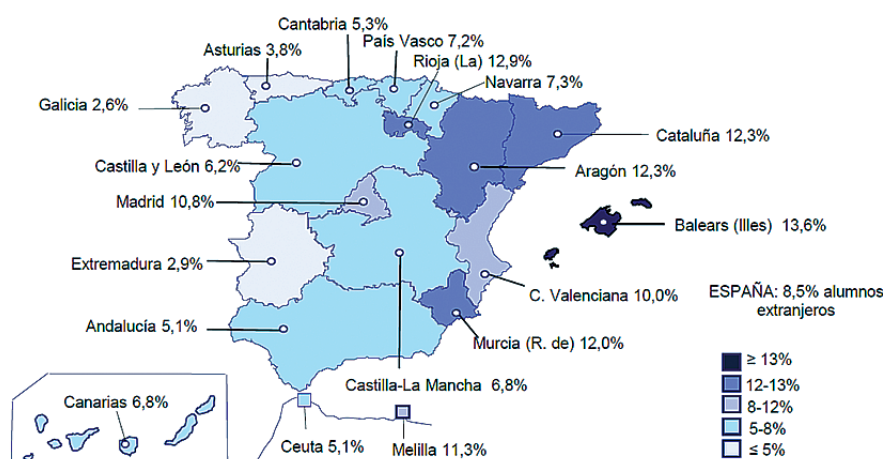
Source: Prepared by the authors with data from Eurostat (2017) and the MECD (2018).

Furthermore, the processes followed by students in general, but particularly by foreign students, are not linear and lifelong learning beyond the age of 24 can transform the static image that we get when observing the ETEF rate (Narcissus and Carrasco, 2020, forthcoming). This makes it even more imperative to investigate in greater depth than was possible in this prospective study how objective and unexpected risk factors such as the lockdown and school closures affect students from diverse social groups and backgrounds.

The cases of Madrid and Barcelona (considering their metropolitan region and not the region of Catalonia as a whole) are particularly interesting and not simply because they are urban areas with powerful economies and major destinations for international immigration of various origins. They also present paradoxical educational indicators: Catalonia has a higher ESTL rate than the Community of Madrid, but the latter has worse results in terms of secondary school accreditation. Madrid ranks second best in Spain in terms of the leaving rate of post-compulsory secondary education, after the Basque Country, and Catalonia ranks fifth worst. Schools in both autonomous communities have also suffered severe cuts in public investment.

Students of a foreign origin by autonomous community 2017-2018

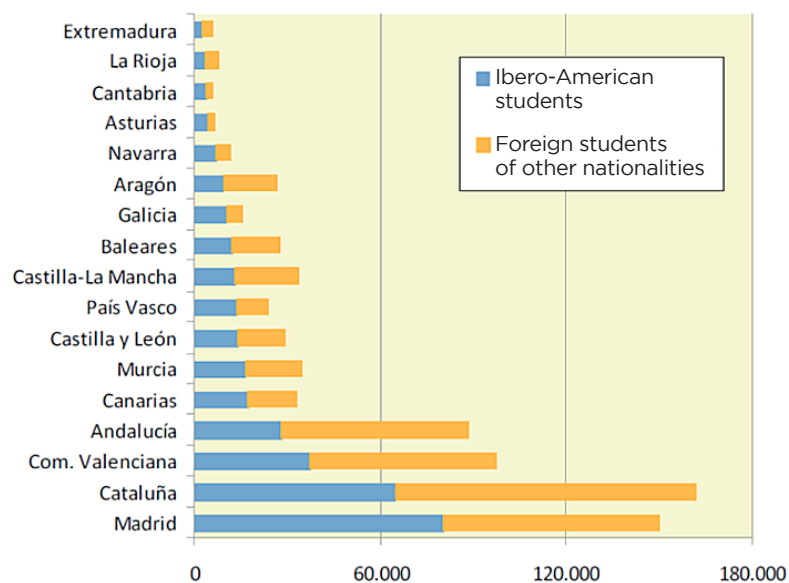
ES. Graph 3. Percentage of foreign students enrolled in non-university general education by autonomous community. 2016-17 academic year.



Source: Facts and Figures, Ministry of Education, 2019.

In absolute values for the 2016-17 academic year (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport - MECD), the autonomous communities with the highest number of foreign students enrolled are Catalonia, with 170,871, followed by Madrid (132,949), Valencia (91,270) and Andalusia (84,879). In both metropolitan areas there are also statistically unreported flows of students who are third-country nationals, particularly those who are linked to more recent phenomena, such as the arrival of refugees from Venezuela, in the case of Madrid, or migration caused by violence, such as that in the Northern Triangle of Central America, in Catalonia. The decline and cessation in the number of arrivals from 2010 to 2016 results in similar figures when comparing the current situation with that described in the 2009-10 academic year.

Foreign students in Spain (Latin American and other nationalities).
Distribution by autonomous community (2009-10 academic year)



Number of students in the 2009-2010 academic year

Source: Compiled by Colectivo Ioé from the Ministry of Education's statistics on students

Although focusing on Madrid and Barcelona as contexts for this survey is not intended to represent all the situations experienced by third-country national students in Spain, the results can provide important indications of more general experiences and trends by considering the schools in environments where the school is expected to play a crucial role in academic and social terms as observation units. Thus, the questions that have guided this prospective phase of research have been the following:

1. How have schools dealt with the situation created by COVID-19 and with third-country national students in particular?
2. What impact has the pandemic had on the learning and schooling of these students in relation to the rest of their schoolmates?
3. What are the plans for dealing with the impact that has already been observed?

To identify, analyse and understand the relevant aspects of the impact of the COVID-19 on the schooling of third-country students, it is necessary to adopt a comparative perspective based on several factors:

- Foreign/national students
- Third-country national students with/without language and/or curriculum gap
- Third-country national students from different flows
- School types and situations
- Madrid / Barcelona - context-specific aspects / school system
- Educational stages, if the schools provide more than one
- Cross-cutting gender perspective

Based on the background of the RESL.eu project, we will take a cross-cutting approach to the incidents and processes that have impacted school engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris, 2004) in completely different learning circumstances and without direct, everyday contacts and social relationships.

In subsequent phases of research, taking a comprehensive approach would allow both regions to carry out in-depth research into indicators of resources (teachers, other staff, infrastructure, grants and subsidies, administration and management plans), processes (school organisation, teaching methodologies, type of support) and results (secondary school graduation, early secondary and vocational school leaving, school enrolment rate at 17 years of age, ESTL rate).



DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This methodological design is framed within the study's overall objective to identify the main issues of this school-age population segment during the current health and social crisis, in comparison with the majority of students of Spanish nationality. Below, we present the schools included in the sample, the variables considered, and a description of the research techniques used.

Sample

The InteRed team selected the schools in Madrid based on the project's research and intervention phases. It consisted of three state-subsidised private schools in low-income neighbourhoods to which one public school with the same type of socio-economic environment was added at the suggestion of the team responsible for this phase of the project. The selection of the schools in Barcelona's metropolitan region was made from the sample with which this team has been working over the last year, before, during and after school lockdowns in a project on the risk of early school leaving with special attention to foreign students and those from disadvantaged social environments. Specifically, three public schools and one state-subsidised private school with a school population and in socioeconomic environments similar to the schools in Madrid were selected.

Table 1. Characteristics of the eight sample schools

LOCATION	SCHOOL	OWNERSHIP/ ENVIRONMENT	DIGITAL EDUCATION
Madrid	M1	State-subsidised private school/ working class, presence of immigrant population	Pre-pandemic implementation and teacher training; replicate schedule online
Madrid	M2	State-subsidised private school/ working class, presence of immigrant population	Implementation and joint student/teacher training prior to the pandemic; students work independently
Madrid	M3	State-subsidised private school/ working class, presence of immigrant population	Pre-pandemic implementation and teacher training; 60% of students without adequate devices
Madrid	M4	Public school/working class, presence of immigrant and Roma population	Low implementation until the pandemic; accelerated teacher training in the first weeks; few cases of teachers without digital literacy
Barcelona	B1	Public school/working class, presence of immigrant and Roma population	Partial implementation prior to the pandemic; divergences in faculty reaction; daily tutoring, students work independently (partial)
Barcelona	B2	Public school/middle class and working class, presence of immigrant population	Implementation and resources for 90% students in the entire school pre-pandemic; daily tutoring, students work independently
Barcelona	B3	Public/disadvantaged neighbourhood, predominately immigrant and Roma population	Pre-pandemic partial implementation; accelerated and comprehensive adaptation
Barcelona	B4	State-subsidised private school / working class, presence of immigrant population	Accelerated teacher preparation and training in the first weeks of the pandemic; the entire schedule is replicated online

Consideration of relevant variables

To conduct this prospective study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic among third-country national students ages 12 to 18 in Spain, multiple variables that affect this segment of the school population have been considered. Therefore, attention was always paid to the internal diversity of this group in relation to the following variables:

- Student age
- Time elapsed since arrival
- Sex; gender perspective
- Socioeconomic level
- Geographical origin and differences in migratory flows between Madrid and Barcelona
- Linguistic differences between home and school
- Continuity or discontinuity with respect to previous schooling
- If the students come from families who arrived in Spain as refugees
- If the students are unaccompanied foreign minors (MENA)
- Type of school (public or state-subsidised private)

Media analysis

Analysis of the press releases of the sections on Madrid and Barcelona/Catalonia in mainstream newspapers at a national level, from the beginning of the lockdown to the present day, on education and socially vulnerable students, particularly immigrant students, during the pandemic. The objective of this analysis is twofold. On the one hand, it identifies the interest and debate generated at a media and social level in relation to the situation of third-country national students in Spain. On the other hand, it compensates for the existence of emergency research only, which have been reported in the press, given the extraordinary socio-health and educational situation that has arisen.

Interviews

The primary source of data for this prospective study was individual and collective semi-structured interviews based on the script provided in the Annex, which was developed based on the principal debates identified in the media analysis and in the existing emergency research conducted in recent months, in addition to previous knowledge about educational inequalities of third-country students in Spain. The interviews were conducted with the school's administration, who are responsible for meeting with families, managing the placement of students in the courses, levels and support systems, and liaising with the competent administration, and with teachers with specific responsibilities in the direct support of third-country students who have arrived in Spain in the last five years, such as specialist teachers in support classes (Madrid) and introductory classes (Barcelona). The interviews were conducted through the Zoom digital platform and were recorded to facilitate their analysis. The interviews were designed to collect professional experiences in relation to students in general, and specifically to foreign students and their families, as well as to document the practices the different

schools and their professionals implemented to integrate these students into school life and to facilitate their school engagement and continuity.

Comparative perspective at a national and international level

The possibility of comparing the results of this prospective research with those of other existing preliminary research on the issue in Spain, although inevitably quite tentative, may shed light or identify and confirm trends on certain points. In this case, these are reports from both non-governmental bodies and public agencies focused on studying and monitoring the situation of young people. Knowledge of some similar initiatives at a European level also allows us to situate our preliminary data and observations on an international scale.

RESULTS

RESOURCES, SCHOOL AND PANDEMIC

One of the most relevant consequences of the pandemic for all countries was the need to close schools during the lockdown phase. Thus, because of the health crisis, one of the most defining functions of the welfare state was suspended due to the inability of students and teachers to attend their schools. This issue became one of the major problems for countries and, therefore, a subject of social debate in the public arena and the media, often resorting to analysis by education research professionals and reports by recognised bodies and organisations on the subject. The central concerns reflected in the Spanish media in the face of the new and sudden suspension of in-person classes were mainly centred on the digital divide, the socio-economic level of families, cuts in education and the students most affected by the effects the pandemic had on education, issues which we will address below. As we have seen, the particularities of students who are third-country nationals have been absorbed into these central issues, and particularly into the group of students most affected by the COVID-19 crisis⁵.

The digital divide

When in-person classes were suspended and replaced by virtual communication via the internet, access to the network, connectivity possibilities and available devices became a major issue for education, given that not all students have the same means and resources. The press followed the changes in government guidelines and has fuelled the debate about the digital divide among students.

5. *El Diario de la Educación* (15 de mayo de 2020). Brechas digitales y educación inclusiva durante el Covid19. (The digital divide and inclusive education during COVID-19). *El Diario de la Educación* [Debate]. <https://eldiariodelaeducacion.com/2020/05/15/debate-brechas-digitales-y-educacion-inclusiva-durante-el-covid19/>

In an article in *El Periódico de Catalunya* published on 6 April 2020⁶, sociologists Bonal and González noted, in relation to the inequalities brought to light by the pandemic, that “never before have we had the opportunity to see the cultural capital and social capital of families become so clearly activated”, and that these inequalities are partly due to the digital divide. To address the disparities in families’ access to the internet and the availability of devices, the Ministry of Education and the autonomous communities committed to purchasing 500,000 tablets and computers for disadvantaged students (Aunión y Romero, *El País*, 2020)⁷. However, five months later, these half a million devices have not reached the students, and the press reported that they were “lost in a bureaucratic maze” (Lucas, *El País*, 2020)⁸. In any event, the media have also emphasised the fact that the disparities in the digital divide are a consequence of the inequalities in the training and resources, both economic and cultural, available to families.

Socio-economic and cultural level of the families

Relating less connectivity to the family’s socio-economic level, *El Diari de l’Educació*⁹ magazine published the results of a survey conducted in Catalonia through 600 telephone calls between 27 April and 5 May 2020. The article, published on 17 November 2020, states that 18% of disadvantaged students do not connect to their school to follow virtual classes, compared to 2.8% of students overall. Similarly, only 3% of students only had access to the internet via a mobile phone at home, a figure that rises to 8.7% for disadvantaged students, and another 4.6% have no internet connection whatsoever. Thus, the digital divide is portrayed as the expression of the socio-economic inequalities of families in terms of communication and digitalisation. In this regard, the press reported the perspective of psychologist Elena Martín, who stated that the emphasis on internet access and the distribution of devices tended to forget basic issues “that are more difficult to resolve because they involve the cultural capital of certain families, which makes it difficult for them to support their children” (Aunión y Romero, *El País*, 2020). In this same vein, Bonal and González (2020) already warned in April that while the middle classes were rapidly adapting to home schooling, the more disadvantaged social classes working outside the home did not have the means, resources or capabilities to do so. They pointed out that the pandemic has served to underscore the fact that the main issue lies in the circumstances of families and their unequal ability to cope with the education of their children in a situation like the current crisis.

6. Bonal, X. y González, S. (6/4/2020). Confinamiento y efecto escuela (Lockdown and its effect on schools). *El Periódico De Cataluña*. Obtained from: <https://www.elperiodico.com/es/opinion/20200406/efecto-coronavirus-desigualdad-escuelas-xavier-bonal-sheila-gonzalez-7919442>

7. Aunión, J. A. y Romero, J. M. (6/9/2020). Educación: cómo reparar el destrizo (Education: how to repair the destruction). *El País*. Obtained from: <https://elpais.com/ideas/2020-09-05/educacion-como-reparar-los-destrizos.html>

8. Lucas, B. (19/11/2020). ¿El fin del espejismo educativo de la era covid? (The end of the educational mirage of the COVID era?) *El País*. Obtained from: https://elpais.com/sociedad/2020/11/16/actualidad/1605520352_256434.html

9. Saura, V. (17/11/2020). Un de cada cinc alumnes vulnerables va “desconnectar” durant el confinament (One in five disadvantaged students “disconnected” during lockdown). *El Diari de l’Educació*. Obtained from: https://diarieducacio.cat/un-de-cada-cinc-alumnes-vulnerables-va-desconnectar-durant-el-confinament/?utm_source=Butllet%C3%AD+web&utm_campaign=4b151a99f3EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2016_11_24_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1792201920-4b151a99f3-145896877

Furthermore, the pandemic has also revealed schools' unequal responses to the suspension of in-person classes, with schools being "the only salvation from social exclusion and the perpetuation of poverty". Thus, the current situation of the education system, particularly in relation to its capacity to respond to the inequality between students, has also formed part of the public and media debate on the pandemic's impact on education.

Cuts to education

It has been impossible for the media to ignore the state of the education system after a decade of budget cuts following the economic crisis of 2008. In Catalonia's case, the *Crónica Global*¹⁰ newspaper reported in an article on 11 November that the Catalan government invests only 2.8% of GDP in education, whereas the Catalan Education Act stipulates that it should be 6%. This autonomous community ranks fourth in Spain in terms of how the level of family income most conditions students' academic performance, and the poorest students in Catalonia repeat grades at three times the rate of students with more resources. All these issues illustrate the lack of equity in the Catalan education system. As Esther Niubó, Member of the Catalan Parliament, explained in the *Crónica Global* article, "Catalonia is a pioneer in early school leaving and segregation, but we are trailing behind in educational investment", with the Catalan government having cut 700 million euros in education over the past 10 years. This has resulted in only 300 of the 2,987 schools in Catalonia currently having adequate fibre optic bandwidth, while 1,230 public schools out of 2,800 do not have wireless LAN. As far as Spain overall is concerned, and as indicated by *El País* (Aunión y Romero, *El País*, 2020), the Spanish education system has suffered significant budget cuts of close to 10 billion euros in recent years. In light of the situation, a congressional commission has discussed reforming strategic public sectors such as education, which have been hit by the cuts and mortally damaged by the pandemic. Experts who have made statements in the media have noted the grave consequences of the decline in educational spending, and the fact that schools have had to face the exceptional health crisis, finding themselves in a very precarious situation in terms of resources to be able to serve their students, particularly the most disadvantaged students affected by the pandemic.

The most affected students

Echoing UNESCO's Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and Education, a press release from RTVE on 23 June 2020 warned of the increased incidence of the effects of the pandemic globally among female students, children with disabilities, those with fewer economic resources and those from ethnic minorities. With regard to immigrant students, the article noted that "immigrant students in the richest countries are concentrated in the same schools, which reduces their chances of success". This same issue

10. Cañizares, M. J. (13/11/2020). La escuela catalana deja de ser ascensor social (Catalan schools are no longer a social ladder). *Crónica Global*. Obtained from: https://cronicaglobal.elespanol.com/vida/escuela-catalana-deja-ser-ascensor-social_406449_102.html



regarding Spain was addressed in the El País newspaper (Aunión y Romero, El País, 2020) by Lucas Gortázar, an education specialist with the World Bank, who argued that the massive influx of immigrant students in a very short time, combined with the economic crisis and cutbacks, is making it difficult to reform and modernise the education system, leading to exhaustion among teachers, students and society in general.

In conclusion, and as we have seen, despite the fact that the press has devoted much attention to education during the pandemic, it has rarely referred to immigrant students or their circumstances, and when it has done so it has been included within the lack of resources of families, the general state of the most affected sectors of the student population, or the challenge they pose to the country's education system, without considering their specificities and particular needs. During the pandemic, the press' treatment of immigration has focused on their working conditions, the legalisation of undocumented persons, changes in the number of arrivals or in sending money back to their countries of origin. This interest, however, has impacted the children and school-age children of these immigrants much less, and they have received far less media attention.

RESULTS: SCHOOLS, TEACHERS, FAMILIES AND ADMINISTRATION

Although this report has prioritised the detailed analysis of the results corresponding to the impact of technology on education during lockdown, it is necessary to point out the trends identified in all the schools in the sample with regard to other impacts that have transformed the educational context and, in particular, that affect teachers and the tools and resources they use to adequately serve third-country students and their families.

1. Schools and teachers

1.1. Greater impact of size and transitions

The differences between schools according to their size in terms of the complexity of their management have been clearly revealed, and the risks of school leaving during the transition from one stage of education to another have become more acute. Faced with the challenges posed by the pandemic and lockdown, as well as the return to partial in-person instruction in the 2020-21 school year, the state-subsidised private school that educates students from low- and middle-income social sectors is in a better position to initiate and maintain continuous contact with students and families. In addition to this differential advantage due to its size (number of lines and number of students), there is the not inconsiderable possibility of smoothing the transition between educational stages, at least between primary and ESO and, often, also between ESO and post-compulsory studies. These and other reasons are cited by the Catalan government's Department of Education in order to convert former high-complexity secondary schools (with high percentages of foreign students, new incorporations throughout the year and a significant presence of Romany students) into so-called "school institutes". Many of the community management actions identified in the three state-subsidised schools in Madrid are replicated in two public schools in Barcelona, precisely in school B3 in Barcelona. The capacity of these schools to react, partly avoiding student disengagement, has been facilitated by these common features: size and transitions within the same school.

1.2. Between profession, vocation and social commitment

The existence of a school policy and ethos has also been crucial, with the technological limitations that we will discuss, in facing the risk of school leaving that lockdown and partial in-person instruction has entailed and continues to entail. The testimonies from the schools in Madrid confirm what the team observed in the earlier research underway in Barcelona: a significant proportion of the teaching staff has discovered the relationship between the dimensions of school engagement (cognitive, emotional and behavioural) in practice as they have had to reorganise their work through individual and personalised contact. This has also had an impact, in many unexpected cases, on an increase in the perception of teacher support, which research points to as the key factor in combating school leaving. In both Madrid and Barcelona, the schools report how families have turned to teachers as the only local point of support for questions beyond educational issues related to their children. In many cases,

the school has been the most important point of contact for foreign families with a limited social network.

2. Families; Educational Administration

2.1. Educational aspirations versus downward mobility

The schools also report that school closures and the return to partial in-person instruction exacerbate the frustration of the family migration plan because of the impossibility of gaining full access to school, the central institution for the integration of their children. The extreme precariousness experienced by many families as a result of the pandemic¹¹, both those of national and foreign origin, has been offset for the first time by an institution which, despite having suffered significant cuts in staff, infrastructure and programmes, has always been the one to continue on the difficult path of settling down and incorporating families on a legal, labour and economic level. For these reasons, beyond attempting to reverse the severe impact on formal education during this stage, the social function of schools must be reconsidered as a central part of post-crisis recovery.

2.2. No specific plan for third-country students

As we already mentioned in the Introduction to this report and in the results in the previous section, the most striking aspect during the months of lockdown, school holidays and the start of a new school year with significant restrictions, is the invisibility of the specific circumstances of the students who are logically most affected: no knowledge of the language of instruction and a pre-COVID curricular gap. Through the testimonies of the schools in both autonomous communities, in addition to the drastic reduction in resources and specific attention to the needs of third-country students during the years prior to the beginning of the economic recovery, a total lack of political response at a methodological and technical level since the start of the pandemic has been observed, as well as a lack of resources allocated to them by the autonomous and state educational authorities.

11. The Observatori Català de la Joventut (2020) report on the pandemic and inequality, based on interviews with experts with the participation of this team, recounts the sudden loss of employment and income among large sectors of the population who had managed to stabilise their livelihood, for example, in the case of Filipino families in domestic service and Roma families working as street vendors. In other cases, there has been an increase in irregularity or over-representation of the families of third-country national students in the so-called essential jobs, which have experienced an increase in hours and a persistent lack of job security. This impact has been clearly felt by many families in the sample schools.

RESULTS: TECHNOLOGY, SCHOOL AND LOCKDOWN

When the health crisis caused by the COVID-19 virus reached a global level, Spain decreed a state of alarm and a lockdown for the entire population from 13 March to 20 June 2020. During this period, which lasted more than three months, classes were suspended in all schools across the country. As a result, the internet and digital tools became the only way to continue with the school year through virtual classes or other forms of maintaining academic activity. This new and sudden approach to teaching and the school's educational role affected all students, but with several particularities depending on various variables, such as origin, social class and sex. Therefore, we will explain the situation of third-country students during the lockdown as described by the teachers interviewed in relation to the situation of other students, that is, the Spanish national students.

1. Lockdown and the digital environment

The first question to be examined, which has largely shaped students' (both Spanish nationals and third-country nationals in Spain) digital educational experiences during the lockdown concerns the relationship between their school and family environments and ICTs and the digital sphere.

1.1. The relationship between school and ICT

Regarding schools, considerable diversity has been observed in the pre-pandemic relationship of each school with ICTs, such as knowledge and use of digital tools, use of devices and teacher training. In some cases, the schools already had several years of experience working in the digital environment. This diversity has been observed regardless of the ownership of the school, the area in which it is located, as well as its social composition. In some cases, comprehensive projects combining in-person and online classes had already been implemented. The educational coordinator of school B2 remarked that *"this saved us the first few weeks and allowed us to spend time preparing for the second phase of lockdown in order to progress with the material. Our students are already used to working with tasks in Google Classroom in all subjects on a weekly basis, but this was a decision the school's administration made with the school's independent-study programme two years ago... a coincidence that we chose to provide ICT training!"*. On the other hand, the digital skills of both teachers and students in other schools were rather low, as we observed. This was the complaint of the head of studies at the B1 school, a highly complex school in a marginal neighbourhood of the Barcelona ring road: *"our students don't even know how to write an email, and many of the new teachers who start every year have no training at all or declare themselves to be ICT objectors, so it as a school it was unthinkable, and now..."*. This digital divide between schools has received less attention from the media than the digital divide resulting from the socio-economic inequality of families, despite being the result of the neglect of the competent authorities who even dismantled innovative programmes relating to educational digitalisation. In Catalonia,

the Department of Education has progressively shifted the decision to digitise schools to the administration of each school, which has also impacted the lack of maintenance and safeguarding of infrastructure for all students, resulting in both unequal quality and severe inequality between schools, which always affects the most disadvantaged.

The state-subsidised private M3 school had previously worked with Google Classroom, so the students already had knowledge and skills in this area. This is also the case with the M1 school, whose head declared that the students “[have] their account and work in the Google environment”, and that the teachers are trained in the use of the platform’s tools. The same school had also been familiarising students with the use of Chromebook, a low-end and more affordable type of laptop which works with the Google operating system. The M2 school, another state-subsidised private school in the Carabanchel district, has used Chromebook for the past five years with students in the fifth year of primary school to the second year of Baccalaureate. Here, too, teachers have been receiving digital training for years and know how to use the Google environment. Teacher training began the year before Chromebook was introduced and has continued both internally and externally since then. As one of the school’s teachers said, when new teachers arrive, even those who began teaching at the school as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, *“the first thing we do is give them a brief training course on digital tools, the communication platform with families that the school uses, on the basic features of Google... People who come in new already know how to use Gmail, Drive... For personal accounts, you know. And if not, we provide training, giving them the time they need and providing help. This part isn’t difficult. At first, we trained teachers and students at the same time, now the students often tell the teacher how to do something, it’s completely normal. The teachers who have joined already know, and under no circumstances is it a question of not being hired if they don’t know or obliging them to learn by tomorrow. If they don’t know, they learn little by little”*. This case is a good example of mutual learning and knowledge exchange between teachers and students in digital and communication issues.

However, in other cases the school had to adapt quickly to the new situation in March 2020. This is the case of the M4 public school, where *“a few days before [the lockdown] there was a meeting to teach basic concepts of virtual classrooms”*, as one of the teachers said. The head of the school called the meeting because the use of virtual classrooms had been sporadic until that point. Only the technology teachers used them, and it was they who implemented this first basic training and the creation of virtual classrooms, as the resource and teacher training centres were closed due to the pandemic, and the virtual classrooms could not be opened outside the Community of Madrid’s Ministry of Education. The administration did not recommend any non-institutional platform in secondary education, such as Google Classroom, although there were schools that eventually used it. But the EducaMadrid platform did not work well, and teachers had to use non-institutional email accounts. It wasn’t until after Easter that online training on virtual classrooms began, EducaMadrid was updated and operations improved. Despite all the initial drawbacks, the teachers’ use of these virtual classrooms at the M4 school was widespread during the lockdown. And while some members of the teaching staff used email to send material to students because they did not feel comfortable with or know how use the virtual classrooms, of the

70 people on the school's teaching staff, 65 used virtual classrooms, with varying degrees of skill and agility.

The same teacher at the M4 school said that the principal and most widespread problem they faced in dealing with the lockdown was not so much teachers' digital literacy as student access to digital resources such as electronic devices and network connectivity. For higher-level classes like the fourth year of ESO and the second year of Baccalaureate, the Community of Madrid sent tablets for those who needed them; while students in year 1, 2 and 3 of ESO as well as students in their first year of Baccalaureate also had a need for tablets, but they never arrived. These devices were loaned out and at the end of the course they had to be returned to the school to be re-issued the following year. The school collected information on the use of the devices and the connectivity available to the students during the lockdown. In the case of this teacher, she served some 189 families who did not have connectivity, particularly disadvantaged families. But other families in a better situation also had problems accessing the network.

In other schools, like the M1 and M2 state-subsidised private schools and the B2 and B3 public schools, the schools themselves provided the necessary electronic devices, particularly Chromebooks, to the students. In the M1 school, some 60 students out of 200 did not have devices to be able to continue with the classes, and devices were distributed thanks to the AMPA (Parents' Association). In the M2 school, students whose families were financially unable to purchase a Chromebook were able to access a school social fund through the foundation to which the school belongs. In addition, active and retired teachers worked to request resources and donations to provide scholarships for students with greater financial difficulties. Thus, it was possible to pay for the computers in advance, or borrow computers purchased for the fund, but also to provide other more urgent resources, such as food or clothing. Therefore, the devices the school provided were crucial for providing students with the resources they needed to be able to follow the classes from their homes during the lockdown. The B3 school mobilised the network of neighbourhood organisations and stores to provide 40 tablets to students who had no devices, as well as weekly bags of food for the families.

1.2. Teacher efforts

The case of school M2's social fund is a fitting example of the considerable efforts that teaching staff at all the schools, both subsidised and public, made to deal with the host of issues that surfaced. In this case, the social fund provided money for internet connections, and teaching staff asked other families to donate computers to those more in need, such as certain students in the support classes who had no means of following the lessons from home. As the teachers stated, they even went door to door to bring computers to the families. Teachers at all schools mobilised all the resource material available—the school's and their own—to provide digital devices and internet connections to those without them. School M3 launched a campaign organised by teachers asking family members and friends for help, adopting the crowdfunding philosophy. However, the economic resources available were not just invested in devices and connections, but also in food for students, as was the case with the “Bocadillo Solidario” (Solidarity Sandwich) initiative of the M4 public

school and its families. Teachers also followed up with the families and provided them with guidance. In this sense, for example, school M3 contacted a high percentage of families daily, with the aim of keeping the number of students who would disengage from the school to a minimum, even contacting them through social media platforms like Facebook when they were unable to reach the families by telephone.

Once students were provided, to a lesser or greater extent, with the electronic devices required and with some type of internet connection thanks to the teaching staff's considerable efforts, they could continue performing the essential task of teaching classes in a situation that was new to the entire educational community. As school M3's teaching staff explained, Google Classroom worked thanks to the staff's considerable efforts. In the case of school M1, the administration set the minimum required for teaching online, according to each teacher's training, allowing them to choose whether to perform additional educational activities online. As reported by the head of the school, it *"has received many congratulations from the families. They are happy because we used the same resources we already had, and teachers had already worked digitally before."*

Teachers had to make considerable additional efforts, not only ensuring that their students had the required digital resources, but also accelerating the coordination of online teaching, monitoring the situation of students and their families, preparing and creating materials for online classes and working outside normal hours, while a large volume of unforeseen marking was building up. As was to be expected, all of this took its toll on teachers who, as it should not be forgotten, were also subject to the same work, economic, family and health issues as the rest of the country. These additional efforts were required across all schools.

1.3. Teaching practices adapted to lockdown

To be able to teach classes virtually throughout the lockdown, the schools implemented all the strategies within their reach to prevent students from falling behind, adapting teaching to the digital context. For instance, as the head of school M1 stated, there were *"classes through presentations, Google Classroom, forms, etc."*. By March, the school had already organised for students to be connected to the school for all class hours during the lockdown, in a standard timetable. In turn, school M3 used its website as a tool, onto which the support-class teacher uploaded YouTube videos focusing *"on the essential and initial aspects of language divided into various sections: communication, mathematics, reading, etc."*. This system allowed students to access this content at any time, which was important given they usually had internet access through devices that might not have been exclusively theirs, given that they were being used by their brothers and sisters, or even their own parents if they were working from home. The materials, the lesson planning and the compiling of digital content—original teaching material to avoid any copyright issues—was all provided by the teacher. At that school, as with the rest, mobile telephones were also resources for providing lessons and were used to send photographs of homework through instant-messenger programs or even, as was reported by school M3, a lesson ended up being held *"through telephone calls with the child writing while the teacher was explaining to them"*, thus

achieving “*personal and individualised contact so that they didn’t end up so behind as they might have*”. This same practice was also identified in schools B1 and B3. At the latter, the management team signalled a certain unique issue involving a student from the Roma community whose father forbade her from joining her course’s WhatsApp group for sharing and commenting on tasks, meaning that it was her own father who answered in the chat and relayed tasks or queries from his daughter to her classmates. It should also be noted that the return to classrooms is also having a particularly serious effect on truancy among students from Roma families, according to testimonies from all the schools in Madrid and Barcelona, including those that had managed to overcome this situation prior to the pandemic.

Nevertheless, adapting teaching practices to the digital context was not limited to the lockdown months. With the health crisis still critical in the 2020-2021 academic year, schools have continued to re-adapt, maintaining virtual classes and activities and combining these with in-person instruction in certain years, and depending on specific needs. This is the case in schools M1 or M4, where students are attending partially in-person classes during certain hours in the morning on alternate days. Therefore, since classes not having returned to the pre-pandemic normal of March 2020, issues relating to internet access and the availability of electronic devices are still persisting, which is why school M3 has managed to launch a project that will finance the school’s purchase of 30 computers for use by students in the fourth year of ESO who are attending school partially in-person and do not have their own computer. In terms of third-country national students in the support class at school M2, an attempt was made to lessen the impact of the situation by making them attend the school daily since, as their teacher indicated, these are students that require in-person instruction to integrate into the school environment, and to learn the language in those cases in which they are not yet fluent.

1.4. Families' relationship with ICT

Although the relationship each school has with ICT and the digital environment has had major bearing on the impact of lockdown on students as a whole, the relationship that facilities have with digital tools and devices or internet access was equally important. In fact, as we have seen, a good share of the issues the schools had to face when it came to continuing lesson virtually came down to the lack of digital and communication resources of students’ families. The administrators in schools in deprived areas were fully aware of the economic situation of their students’ families, with low incomes, at times coming from the retirement pension of grandparents’, as well as the fact that they had more pressing problems than education and digital issues. However, the schools located in areas in a better economic situation also experienced the anxiety and uncertainty caused by the health crisis and isolation, although those families were less affected by the digital gap that led to so much inequality between students when it came to holding classes digitally.

Although school B3 compared some of the difficulties with non-immigrant sectors of the population displaying a greater ICT usage among foreign students and their families, above all those originating from India and Pakistan due to their frequent exchange of messages, photographs and documents with families in their countries of origin, the economic impact intensified. As

indicated by the head of school M1, many of the students' families, particularly those of immigrant origin, stopped receiving any income, either because they were in a work situation subject to an ERTE (Spanish furlough scheme) pay-out, or they were engaged caring for the elderly or working as cleaners with undeclared incomes, all of which was an added difficulty to the overall situation. This meant that these families' work and socio-economic insecurity led to somewhat worse conditions in terms of internet connectivity, mobile data and devices being less available. Faced with situations in which families had more limited digital resources, the schools distributed devices through local authorities as mentioned, although in certain cases they also had to provide students with basic school materials such as exercise books and pens, while students in areas with greater economic security had the very latest digital technology available. The school B2 pointed out these huge differences among its students.

Among the students at school M3, 60% did not have a computer, and in certain cases the only connection available to them was mobile data, which they had usually consumed by the fifth day of each month, meaning they were once again unable to connect. In many cases, mobile telephones were used as a last resort. As stated by one of the school's teachers: *"in the secondary we wanted everyone to be connected, continuing with classes somewhat... We saw it was impossible. The majority had a mobile and many didn't even have a connection. We then did even some work through WhatsApp. (...) We have a high percentage of students without any device, and the majority just had a mobile. This made working extremely difficult and expensive. Despite this, there were in fact students who are very skilled with mobiles and who manage to get things done."*

Also in school M4, a majority of students lack a computer – some 189 families – and were using their mobiles, despite not having unlimited nor sufficient data. However, this presented multiple limitations, since conducting virtual lessons through these devices was more complicated. This led to many difficulties in conducting virtual lesson properly. Lastly, paper documents were delivered to 30 families in the area, many of them immigrants, while others were Roma families from the Cañada Real who lack digital literacy and do not use emails. This likewise excluded them from virtual parents' meetings, which were held through the Community of Madrid's Robles programme. One of the school's teachers who focuses on social care for those families explained that she herself has to perform many of the bureaucratic procedures with the families in person, since they lacked the knowledge to be able to do so.

Other aspects overlooked by the media when drawing attention to the issues of educational lockdown go beyond teaching, yet with an equally worrying outcome, particularly for those families less familiar not just with ICT, but with how the education system works and managing transitions between stages in education. The teaching staff of school M3 highlighted the difficulties for families with more problematic relations with ICT in performing enrolments online, with an attempt to resolve these through telephone calls. They also criticised the added difficulties of the bureaucratic and administrative framework, even making appointments when the enrolment deadlines had passed. Nevertheless, and on a positive note, the attention and follow-up the schools' staff provided families in more vulnerable situations during the lockdown led to significant improvements in relationships with them. As a

teacher from this same school explained, *“during lockdown, we saw that studying really does matter to families. We decided to contact families once a week. By being at home, we saw that they care and that they want their children to work. They wanted to be there, they looked for a way to help, on their level, with studying. More families now want to be on the school board, are grateful for the guidance, and offer their participation. It's changed the relationship, and they see this positively. It's taken the relationship between family and school to a new level because the school has reached out to them, whether to give them milk or whatever. They've felt listened and attended to”*. This spontaneous effort on the part of teachers in most schools to maintain personalised telephone contact with students—worrying about how they were and how were their families were handling the situation, sharing with them the widespread sense of uncertainty—was a pleasant surprise and provided a sense of hope, and resulted in their considerable gratitude. The teaching staff interviewed in almost all the schools in Madrid and Barcelona highlighted this aspect, identifying its impact on maintaining a connection with the schools: a key factor signalled by research into retaining students in the education system beyond compulsory education.

2. ICT and differences between genders

If the schools and families have certain specific relationships with ICT and the digital world that shaped students' educational experiences during lockdown, it should be noted that the students themselves also have their own relationship with digital tools and devices, and with the internet in general. This means that the use of ICT and consumption of audio-visual products by boys and girls even before the pandemic has had its own, significant repercussions on the effect the lockdown had on education. These effects are closely related to the difference in audio-video socialisation among teenagers and young people according to sex. As investigations in this field have revealed (such as Viñals Blanco, Abad Galzacorta and Aguilar Gutiérrez, 2014), boys play video games to a much greater degree than girls, while social media like Instagram have become, for both boys and girls, one of their main means of digital communication and entertainment.

2.1. Digital entertainment interference

Practically all the schools interviewed in both Madrid and in Barcelona stated that during lockdown they detected significant connectivity differences between boys and girls, due specifically due to the interferences in continuing the year caused by digital entertainment and video games. *“Boys missed a lot because of video games. (...) They spend more time on the computer because of video games. There have been families with male children whose data ran out much sooner because the children were online playing video games”*, explained a teacher from school M4. School M3 outlined the issue in the same terms: *“During lockdown, the issue got worse since they were at home with more video games. They didn't connect to class because they were gaming. The girls connected, however”*. They also added these video games usually involve action, war or violence, such as League of Legends and Fortnite, designed for older adolescents, which even younger students have been observed playing, even those in primary education, although this is much more usual in secondary.



This trend has become widespread among male students, irrespective of nationality, social class or autonomous community. In school M2, this was also detected in third-country national male students, explaining that no differences are seen in this sense between them and male students in general, and that they play the same games, which now reach a global audience. Equally widespread is the use of social media, including among girls, with Instagram and recently TikTok being especially popular. Both forms of digital entertainment and communication, video games and social media not only interfered with the progression of the 2019-2020 year during lockdown, but their impact went beyond this, giving rise to new issues for the 2020-2021 year, as we will see below.

2.2. Girls continuing more

All the schools interviewed also generally observed that girls were more connected to the school during lockdown, attending more classes online. A teacher from school M3 stated that: *“one girl even connected from the Philippines to attend the lesson (...) Girls are more hard working in general, make greater effort, and taking it more seriously. Boys less so; it's harder for them to adapt, they're really hooked on video games, which girls aren't”*. Likewise, a teacher from M4 said: *“in general, what we've seen is that girls have been working harder. The pass level has been equivalent because passing was made easy during lockdown. The problem is now”,* also pointing out the lockdown's outcome for the present academic year in terms of student performance. Neither did they notice any decline in the girls' performance at school M1, even though *“they passed the year without doing much”*. Nevertheless, boys became more disengaged. The head of that same school stated that this trend is also widespread among students, beyond national origin. Among Chinese students, for instance, girls were more applied than boys. With the other nationalities, he said that: *“the girls are almost always better, despite having to look after younger siblings on certain occasions”*.

At school B4, where the majority of students from third countries are Latin American, the head of ESO studies highlighted conversations with some of the mothers concerning this unequal workload between adolescent boys and girls—to the detriment of the girls—although the mothers normalised this despite finding it regrettable.

Although attendance of virtual classes during lockdown was higher among female students, to a large extent due to their much lower consumption of video games, she also highlighted that *“girls are more hooked on Instagram, even before the pandemic and from year six primary”*, as mentioned by a teacher at school M3. This coincided with other schools and was exacerbated during lockdown, as was observed with the partial return to classrooms during the current academic year. Some teachers commented that it the devices of children in year five primary have usernames for all social media platforms, and that *“they might not know how to draft an email, but they have accounts on everything possible.”* During lockdown, this same school used a tool to monitor students' computers during lessons, and they were able to see that girls aged 12, 13 and 14 in particular were uploading sexually compromising content of themselves on social media, as well as boys to a lesser extent, among whom pornography consumption was also detected.

2.3. Rise in school leaving among Latina girls

A specific trend was observed at school M4 among girls of Latino origin which, despite being a minority, is salient due to the increase in cases during the current academic year. As pointed out by the teacher interviewed, some of these Latina girls in the initial secondary years had difficulties in remaining connected to the school during lockdown. However, beyond that, she explains that *“several referrals to the ASPA project (social outreach education for children at risk) were necessary after we got the sense that certain girls are joining groups of Latina gangs, in isolated cases, although the percentage has doubled. In 25 years working as a teacher, I'd come across two or three cases of female students like that. Suddenly, this year I have six or seven. The ASPA educator relates this to COVID on account of it creating a complicated situation during lockdown and greater economic disadvantage, and it seems that there was an explosion once we returned from lockdown, once they started to gain more freedom in June and July,... [This involved] incredibly significant issues. Girls of 13 or 14 were asking their mothers to give them permission to go and live with people aged 18. It seemed to me a worsening of the situation that, albeit residual, is significant because it has doubled. Just like the addiction to video games”*. Therefore, judging from what this teacher stated, girls of Latino origin might find themselves more vulnerable to a greater rate of school leaving compared to girls of other nationalities, leaving the education system in order to establish relationships in other environments, sometimes related to juvenile delinquents organised into gangs.

3. ICT and third-country national students

The effects the COVID-19 crisis and lockdown have had on third-country national students in Spain differs little from that suffered by other students, and in general they express the same problems, although they usually do so to a greater extent due to their situation of greater social and economic vulnerability. The issue more specific to this group of students relating to their academic engagement or disengagement during lockdown was that concerning language learning.

3.1. More vulnerable families

Immigrant, third-country national families suffered from a greater lack of access to digital resources and tools, with the greater social vulnerability as a direct outcome, which they share with other families of Spanish origin. As a teacher at school M4 explained, immigrant families are overrepresented among families with greater social vulnerability, and therefore with less access to digital resources and tools, finding themselves in a situation in which they were without a computer and had insufficient connectivity, suffering to a greater extent from the overall issues we have mentioned, on account of online academic activities during lockdown.

This same teacher highlighted that families of Latino origin, who make up the majority of immigrant families among third-country national students in Madrid, *“often have less control over their own time on account of work, because having longer working hours often gives them less control of their children’s time. Above all, because they start work beforehand, and their children stay at home. These is seen more in Latino families, and there’s definitely a high percentage, due to the percentage of students at the school. Many of the requests come from children of immigrant origin, mainly Latino. However, this is widespread, and is being seen more in relation to girls”*. This means that not only can the lack of immigrant families’ resources be detrimental to accessing digital tools and devices, but work insecurity also represents an obstacle to families who want to track their children’s academic development, and of girls in particular, which also would have been noticed during lockdown.

3.2. Connection and language learning

However, Latino students do not experience issues relating to learning the language to integrate, nor for a successful academic connection, as occurred in other cases. During lockdown, the educational requirements of students needing to learn Spanish—both for class and for socialising at school—were also affected, and they were at risk of not learning the language or even forgetting what they had already learned. As a teacher at school M3 explained: *“some of them have lost their Spanish completely. If they don’t use it, it fades away”*.

The virtual support class for language learning was prioritised for students in the support class who had recently arrived in Spain, like those at school M2. As explained by their teacher—whose individual initiative at the school was what ensured classes were continued virtually during lockdown—to be able to carry on teaching the language to support class students online, it was first checked

that they had an internet connection and that their families were collaborating, proposing a system that provided sufficient autonomy, and which the teacher could control at the same time. *“What was particularly interesting was the communication aspect. They had two hours of online class every day, they connected with me and we did a normal class, specifically learning Spanish as a foreign language. We eventually managed to minimise the impact of the abnormal situation. They didn’t miss out on practising the language (...) There would be communicative situations in which they had to be continually involved, and they kept this up. Although it’s not the same, everyone was talking and taking part”.* He stated that the solution was quite satisfactory judging from students’ performance, taking into account that this concerns students recently arrived in Spain, and who are conditioned not only by their communication skills, but also by their families’ purchasing power. However, although they connected to the support class and other basic subjects, they failed to do so in the case of many others, meaning they missed out on a good share of the socialising at the school for learning the language better, as well as other knowledge.

This same teacher also pointed out that lockdown was particularly problematic in the case of third-country national students for whom the 2019-2020 academic year was their first in which they were no longer attended support classes, but normal classes, adding further complexity to the situation. *“For students recently coming out of the support class (...) it’s had a profoundly serious impact on them. They want to move on to normal classes. But it’s an impact. They experienced two impactful situations: coming to normal classes, and lockdown”.* Attempts have already been made to lessen the impact of the situation for the 2020-2021 year by having students from the support class attend the school every day, with their presence prioritised, since these are students who need it. In the case of schools in Barcelona, this has been a serious issue for students from third countries, since for the vast majority school is the only social space where they are in contact with the working language in which all curricular learning must be performed, Catalan, which is practically not spoken in the working-class neighbourhoods where they mostly live. Even more surprising is the fact the educational administration lacks a specific plan for meeting the basic linguistic needs all third-country students, without exception. Teaching staff have stated their grave concern, given that according to a teacher at school B3: *“with other colleagues from other introductory classes, although we’ve designed our own resources, the funds are rather meagre, and there’s no doubt these students will seriously lag behind in the curriculum, and in the long term this might lead to these students disengaging from the school, despite being eager to learn and relating to people their own age, which they are.... But the way they’ve abandoned us is unbelievable”.*

4. Internet and impact of lockdown

Third-country national students and their language learning exemplifies one of the most relevant issued observed: namely, that digital tools have mainly been useful for maintaining academic connection more than for transmitting content correctly, with in-person instruction favouring this to a much greater extent. This weakening in the content and knowledge provided to the students as a whole has been one of the greatest impacts of lockdown, together with the consequences for students’ conduct and habits after not having attended

school for six months–three in lockdown plus three months of summer until September–which were mainly spent at home using digital tools as a form of entertainment.

4.1. Internet and impact of lockdown

The teacher at school M4 explained that at the outset of lockdown, they realised that *“the majority [of students] in years 1, 2 and 3 of ESO weren’t coping well with email, they weren’t used to using email. They were putting the message in the ‘Subject’, putting the homework in the ‘Subject’...”*, meaning digital literacy needed to be worked on. Thus, *“digitally, they learned a great deal... Content-wise, they learned less”*, said the head of school M1, adding that 5% of students ‘disconnected’ entirely. In fact, the only training teachers received at the start of the pandemic was on sending assignments but without suggesting any material, meaning a host of different strategies were employed, from digital platforms certain schools already operated on, to using WhatsApp as we have already seen. And despite results improving week after week, a share of students failed to respond to the teacher’s effort. The coordinator of school B1 commented that: *“we’ve had some surprises... Students you wouldn’t have imagined responded well, and others who you expected to respond without a problem have disengaged... And it hasn’t had so much to do, at least not always, with their academic or social profile, or their origins”*.

The reduction in content provided has been confirmed by the other schools interviewed. School M2 highlighted that despite all their efforts to enable students to connect to the school and receive lessons to the extent possible, *“the impact has been tremendous. (...) many students were unable to connect, tutors were chasing after the families, they called social services when there was no way families could be tracked down, they put considerable work into getting students to connect and to work. There were certain students who didn’t join in, our joined in but worked little. There are children whose family can’t help them, or they don’t know”*. They therefore point out that they didn’t teach half of the year, and that on returning, students in whichever year were arriving without having written texts, despite having attended virtual lessons and having had examinations, and with a sudden downturn in spelling resulting from using language on computer or mobiles. They explained that the outcome is that the present academic year is no longer so much about providing content but rather recovering students’ ability to work. In terms of early school leaving, the teacher interviewed from school M4 talked about a ten-year setback as a consequence of the COVID-19 crisis.

The experiences that have been shared with us indicate that although the academic year was a loss, the use of digital tools to continue classes during lockdown served instead as a means of maintaining a certain connection with the school through the internet, thus attempting to soften the impact of not being able to attend school for half a year. It thus appears that online education can hardly be taken as a substitute for in-person instruction in the case of students currently at their compulsory education stage, and particularly among more socially vulnerable and/or third-country national students without fluency in the language, despite the virtual support classes taught daily. Neither does attempting to maintain the level of in-person teaching translated into a virtual environment–reproducing normal school hours online–appear adequate,

because even through keeping up a school routine might prove beneficial in many respects, it requires constant supervision on the part of the family, which is often not possible. This therefore means that online education at home is hardly comparable with in-person education at school. Specifically, the example of school B4 has also proved frustrating, according to the ESO coordinator: *“during the Easter break we set about adapting all the material to be able to teach lessons in a full and normal timetable, but online, as we knew we the prestigious state-subsidised private schools were going to do; but it was exhausting and frustrating both for the teachers and the students, and not only due to our students’ more frequently uncertain conditions in terms of devices and connectivity”*.

4.2. Behaviour affected in the 2020-2021 year

The aftermath of months of lockdown at home and virtual lessons did not end on returning to the classroom and extended into the current academic year; and not only in terms of content that could not be taught, but the students’ behaviour and habits. The months of lockdown has meant that students have become more dependent on video games and social media. Teachers from school M2 highlighted that, on returning to the classroom, *“they’re coming without rules, without filters. Never at the start of a year have we had to make so many interventions as with this year. They’re coming hopelessly hooked to social media, with a great deal of aggression on account of these and video games, where they communicate and insult each other... We’re absolutely taken aback. (...) They talk to teachers as if they were their parents, since now they don’t talk to them like previous generations did. Now they talk back to parents and to teachers”*. These interventions have been necessary in the case of fights between boys due to video games, since the insulting vocabulary and verbal aggression they display is converted into physical aggression, which did not happen, or with a lesser intensity, prior to lockdown.

As well as the rise in this dependence on video games and social media, and the aggression that comes from their use, the routine of being at school has evidently been lost, as well as the socialising that this entailed. This loss of routine was also noticed at school M4, relating it in turn related to video games, with a difference between boys and girls therefore also being apparent. The teacher interviewed explained that: *“now, boys are having a much harder time than girls in getting back to certain work routines. They arrive half asleep, not in a fit state; they end up sleeping, their eyes are closing. We see it’s a problem that the parents are telling us about. They now have to follow a timetable, above all those in first and second. They go to bed late because they’re ‘hooked’ [on video games], and they have to get up and come in after maybe three or four hours of sleep”*.

At this same school specifically, and in relation to the loss of routines, the teacher interviewed highlighted that: *“there’s an increase in truancy, which they cover up by using COVID-19, as if they were ill. But often they’re not in a condition to come to class after having slept so little. (...) All the students who were a little weak in this sense have become worse.”*

However, school M3 point out that despite everything: *“they really wanted to come back to school. Now there’s no truancy. They’re happy at school even if*

they don't do anything. There's one kid aged 18 who maybe prefers being here, but neither does he have anything else to do outside". It therefore appears that despite the loss of routines and a general worsening of the situation, certain schools have been able to maintain a greater academic engagement that, at the least, means students continue going to the school. One teacher at school B1 summarises it as: *"the administration isn't aware of the families' conditions and students' needs; I have certain female students who are so keen to come to school that they come with borrowed masks! They pass them between members of the family. The point is being able to attend".* The isolation experienced by many girls and boys was not given adequate attention during the holiday months, and their effects might have been greater in one segment of Spanish students and third-country national students who were involuntarily kept from attending school. This is the greatest emergency.



DISCUSSION

The social, political and media debate on the consequences of lockdown on education have not yet taken into account how students' pre-pandemic digital and audio-visual socialising affected their performance, their behaviour and their habits. This audio-visual and digital socialising displays significant differences depending on sex, as we have seen when it comes to how video games interfere among male students, one of the concerns most highlighted on the part of teachers. Video games make up a very considerable part of young male entertainment, and the lockdown has reinforced this aspect of digital entertainment among boys, with negative consequences for their performance at a time when both their classes and leisure time is spent in front of a screen. In turn, girls are less inclined to this type of digital entertainment involving video games, meaning there have not been the same interferences, which may have helped them to continue the year with greater ease during lockdown. However, participation in social media, widespread among teenagers and young people as a whole, is high in their case and this can also have an impact, if not on their academic performance, then on their behaviour and habits. In any case, the differential relationship in terms of sex has been revealed to be a highly significant factor in understanding the experiences of students of any nationality during lockdown and its subsequent effects, and future research on the issue should take this into account.

This research demonstrates that, while the internet and the digital environment have provided an auxiliary tool for attempting to continue the academic year during lockdown, this alone cannot be viewed as a suitable method of teaching lessons and should rather be deemed as a set of complementary tools for in-person instruction. Ultimately, ICT has on occasion been useful for maintaining virtual contact between students and the school, thus aiming to preserve students' academic engagement, although likewise recreating the various structural socio-economic inequalities also expressed through the so-called digital gap. However, it presents no advantages aside from this, but rather many more disadvantages. For this reason, it is essential that the education system

assesses digital tools in due measure, bearing in mind that they are unable to offer solutions to structural social issues, such as socio-economic inequality, that were there before the advent of ICT. The greater incidence of early school and training leaving among third-country national students in Spain prior to the crisis, which was detailed in the introduction to the report, requires clear and committed educational and social intervention to prevent its potential exacerbation.

CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

1. The months of lockdown and the intermittent return to classrooms has had a negative effect on students at schools with socially vulnerable populations and *particularly on third-country national students, still in a process of linguistic integration and/or when it comes to their curricular imbalance.*
2. *Introducing digital technology and tools into teaching practice at schools prior to the pandemic had meant a considerable differential weight in their capacity to achieve distance learning and monitoring students during lockdown.* However, conveying content has been more problematic, even at the most prepared schools.
3. Rather than the fact of being a third-country national or having joined the Spanish education system in recent years, *the impact on students has been related to vulnerability, in other words, access to devices and connectivity.* Despite this, no specific plan has been outlined for third-country students who have recently started school, nor any preparation to make up for the shortcomings in teaching infrastructure between lockdown and the start of the new academic year on the part of educational administrations.
4. *The differential relationship between boys and girls with digital technology and tools has also had a differential impact when it comes to continuing the year virtually during lockdown among third-country national students, along the same lines as with Spanish students, with less academic disengagement on the part of girls and higher gaming usage among boys, whose greater disengagement has been accentuated.*
5. A higher percentage of both of Spanish and third-country national students who might have ended up *disconnected from education as part of lockdown's effect, in contrast to previous years, in which this trend had started to decline,* has been identified. In the case of third-country national students, in general although *more clearly in the Catalan educational context,* lockdown could very significantly heighten the risk of falling behind educationally in the long term.

Lastly, this prospective study provides indications originating from qualitative and comparative data that leads us to formulate three questions that will be central in a subsequent phase of research:

- How does the educational situation experienced **affect** students' learning overall, and those from **third countries** in particular, when it comes to the **academic disengagement** from **classes affected** by the pandemic situation?
- How can we **make up for** the imbalance or the **curricular gap** and learning the **working language** in subsequent years through schools and through community outreach?
- How do we **intervene** with students who have already left school in **non-formal contexts**, considering the **diversity** of their situations, such as the differences in **gender** and **origin** observed?

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A

APPENDICES

INTERVIEW SCRIPT

InterRed Project

Silvia Carrasco and Marina Pibernat

- 1** Brief presentation and research context: AEP/ATEF vs migratory status in EU and in Spain, by autonomous community; concerns
- 2** Initial open question:
 - A.** In general, what has lockdown and the new academic year meant for the school?
 - Reactions, contact and support: teachers, students, families
 - In the context of social needs – local communities/origin
 - In the context of technological needs – how these were resolved
 - Specialised attention, such as learning/reinforcing working languages
 - B.** Similarities/differences
 - Per type of student, origin, sex, etc.
 - Per type of teacher
 - Other aspects
 - Relationships with administration: changes and continuities
- 3** Options on educational conditions and risks of early school leaving
 - A.** Pre-COVID-19 experience: students in general, students from foreign families, refugee/immigrant students arrived in the last five years
 - B.** What differential impact this will have
 - C.** What can be done/what would be needed
- 4** Specific questions on flows based on variables identified in the methodologies proposed based on previous research.
 - Students' age
 - Time passed since arrival
 - Sex/gender
 - Socio-economic level
 - Geographic origin and differences in migratory flows between Madrid and Barcelona
 - Home/school linguistic differences
 - Continuity or discontinuity with respect to previous schooling
 - Whether this involves families arriving in Spain as refugees
 - Whether this involves unaccompanied foreign minors (MENA)
 - Type of school (public or state-subsidised private)

School information summary sheet. Prospective study in Madrid and Barcelona.

SCHOOL NAME	
Number of students at the school Total; foreign nationality; 3 most numerous foreign nationalities; % arrived in last 5 years	
Courses offered (ESO, CFGM, BAT, other)	
Pupils with study, transport, meal grants.	
Infrastructure and material resources (building condition; digital blackboards, ICT classrooms – computers or tablets per student, 1x1 programme, etc.)	
Population, district and neighbourhood of school	
Schools reinforcement/excellence programmes	
Results according to average ESO certification (differences between Spanish and foreign students, boys and girls)	
Continuing after compulsory stage? How is this done?	
Environment (physical environment inside and outside the school, as well as the structure, the installations, the location and school's accessibility, its restrictions and rules) Socio-economic context of the sector.	
Student profile representation of the school and its surroundings (students, teachers, families, communities, neighbourhoods, towns, etc.)	
Resources and special programmes for immigrant students recently arrived (resources, management, relationships, etc.)	
Student turnover (school with high/low demand, available spots or not, students assigned by administration vs families' choice)	
Teacher turnover (total number of teaching staff, % fixed/permanent, annual teacher turnover)	
Language or languages most commonly used (language of relatives present; used among students; among students and teachers)	
External segregation (concentration of a social and/or national profile in relation to schools nearby) and internal differentiation (flexible attention or not, level groups, special classes, etc.)	
Remarks and Comments:	

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