

## **COVID AND SCHOOL TODAY IN ITALY**

The current pandemic has affected and is still affecting many sectors, which are partially or very important for us, especially for teenagers and above all, the Education sector.

Education, perhaps, is one of the most important things in everyone's life because it helps us improve our skills, such as social skills and acquire knowledge to achieve our goals in the work market or the future as well. Indeed, we start our learning process already when we are still toddlers who can only say a few words and continue throughout our adolescence for at least twelve years when we develop our behaviour and complex mental structures.

However, education allows people to become freer and more capable of thinking without manipulation in many different situations, in particular when we have to elect our delegates and deputies. Noteworthy, either the population's literacy rate or the number of people with a secondary school diploma/degree is the mirror of our education system.

Bearing in mind the previous statement, COVID has been disrupting our system because of many factors, which have led to much inconvenience among the Italian regions, such as distance learning and related issues and now more than ever, school organization. Nevertheless, some schools were able to overcome the major limits (also regarding the Minister's incompetence) but it has been insufficient!

The previous lockdown period was intended to be a testing period to gain competence and skills for the future re-opening, but it has not been useful enough. Still, at the beginning of September the majority of students, whether they were attending high schools or elementary schools, did not know if they could return or not. Therefore, the main question was: will distance learning happen or not?

Actually, distance learning has both advantages and disadvantages. Firstly, students can stay at home with all comforts. This means that a huge number of people do not need to use public transport or private means, safeguarding the environment from traffic pollution and maintaining social distance among people. Secondly, apart from younger pupils, teenagers have more free time between two lessons and time to expand their studies with research as well.

On the other hand, youngsters attending middle schools or elementary schools could get easily distracted, thus obliging parents to support their children while studying and helping them with technological devices. However, sometimes parents could not follow their children from 8 AM to the end of the afternoon because of work. In this way, many children could encounter more difficulties than in a normal environment when studying. In addition, distance learning in these early stages of life implies cutting off any relations among pupils, which is something awful we need to prevent.

For this reason, the Ministry did not include distance learning in elementary and middle schools, of course guaranteeing safety distance and providing free PPE for all. Instead, the Ministry did not provide any clarification for high school students, especially those finishing in 2021. Actually, there was a national debate on whether to activate distance learning or not and all related procedures, but a final resolution was not reached. In the meantime, the situation worsened, owing to positive cases of COVID and lack of organization and prevention in public transport. In fact, there have been many cases of overcrowded school buses or subways leading to an overall increase in cases.

Due to ignorance, lack of coordination and negligence, students are now living difficult times. One day something is true, the day after what was certain becomes the opposite. The case of total

confusion was that firstly Apulian students were told not to go to school but do distance learning. Then, a couple of days later, the PM requested 25% of in-school learning!

This has led to an overall bad organization, wherein many cases people, who were organised for a distance learning approach, with fewer tests due to devices, must now prepare multiple tests to be held on one day.

On the contrary, when students try to talk with teachers to find a solution, they tend to answer in a very simple manner, telling us we are graduating so it is something “obvious”. Secondly, they usually tell us they lived difficult situations as well, even though I do not really care about this, due to their general indifference regarding students’ lives.

Personally, I find this last period confusing and annoying too. Students who are now in their last year are feeling frustrated because of recent decisions (for example the waste of money on “innovative” desks with wheels). Some people suggest distance learning would be great, only if infrastructures are improved so that secondary school could remain closed, whilst others think it is better opting for in-school learning. My opinion is to agree on the effectiveness of an in-school approach, but because of a second wave, which is affecting the country, I would rather opt for a distance-learning period, in the hope of a decrease in COVID cases.