Educational poverty: Unicef, published the report "New horizons for learning" on the use of technology to support disadvantaged children

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Unicef today publishes the report **"New horizons for learning. The use of educational technology to support language learning and social inclusion of disadvantaged children in Italy"** , which presents the results of the first year of the experimentation of Akelius, the digital platform for learning foreign languages.

"Between 2014 and 2020, more than 700,000 asylum seekers and migrants arrived in Italy" and, according to data from the end of November 2022, "around 49,400 refugee minors from Ukraine entered Italy – recalls Unicef - . From 2016 to 2021, an average of approximately 20,000 newly arrived students (NAI) enrolled in schools in Italy each year. Many children still encounter difficulties in acquiring the fundamental skills of the Italian language. This is especially true for foreign students, who represent one in ten students in public schools."

The report is based on the Akelius experimentation in 2021/2022 which involved over 400 students in two comprehensive institutes in Rome and Bologna, here in partnership with the social cooperative "Agire Insieme per l'Intercultura" (Aipi). Since then, Unicef has extended the use of the platform to another 60 Italian schools and Ukrainian associations, in collaboration with the ISMU Foundation, involving over 1,000 newly arrived pupils. Akelius helps students learn the language in a fun way thanks to the innovative blended learning teaching approach, which integrates the use of tablets and interactive content in combination with classroom lesson materials.

From the analysis conducted by the Unicef office for Europe and Central Asia in collaboration with the Unicef Innocenti research office, "the use of the digital platform in classrooms has accelerated the learning of Italian and English of students through personalized paths also suitable for girls and boys with special educational needs. Akelius has also improved student motivation to learn, largely due to gamified content and instant feedback." This approach has been particularly useful "to facilitate the scholastic and social inclusion of pupils newly arrived in Italy and of children with disabilities, giving teachers the possibility of providing personalized support to different students".

The research highlighted some important recommendations for teachers and schools. First, "it is essential to establish clear protocols for the management of digital devices, with well-defined rules and specific responsibilities". Furthermore, "teachers can plan their lessons by considering both how digital learning content can enrich teaching and how digital devices will be used in the classroom." Finally, "teacher training on digital learning should be practical and focus not only on basic digital skills, but also on how to effectively integrate the use of educational technology within the school environment."