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Home learning during COVID-19

METAdrasi - Action for Migration and Development, Greece

Introduction

Established in 2009, METAdrasi supports the reception and integration of refugees and migrants in Greece by providing interpretation services, essential protection activities for unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable groups, and education programmes. During the public health crisis, METAdrasi's interpretation team ensured that refugees had access to vital information about the pandemic and health care options to guarantee their equal access to essential services.

The people who access METAdrasi's services come from over 10 different countries and a large majority are refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Since 2011, METAdrasi has offered classes to adult migrants and refugees, and since 2017 it has been running a comprehensive non-formal education programme for children aged 6 to 18, providing classes in Greek, English, German and maths at its head office in Athens, as well as in schools in Athens, Thessaloniki and the frontier islands of Lesbos and Chios. Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent public health measures, 418 children attended classes in Athens and Thessaloniki during January and February 2020. These live classes were suspended in line with the government decision to close all schools on 10 March 2020.

Twelve days later, as restrictions on movement were imposed, METAdrasi decided to implement a distance learning programme. There were many things to consider:

- Should synchronous or asynchronous distance learning be used?
- Which online platform is best to use?
- Do we continue with the same subjects?
- Are we going to accept new registrations for the classes?

These were just some questions that the team had to answer before starting this new way of operating.

“I am also glad that you are with us and thinking about us during these difficult days. Thank you very much.”

“Thank you for helping us learn Greek.”

Students





The programme

METAdrasi launched 23 digital lessons of online learning on the subjects of Greek, English and German, using a variety of digital media and tools. It chose Google Classroom as its main platform because it allows both synchronous and asynchronous interaction between educators and students. In addition, its structure is simple and clear and most students already have a Gmail account which makes it easy for them to access Google Classroom.

Implementation

Realising they didn't have email addresses for all students, which was necessary to start the distance learning, METAdrasi telephoned each student individually to gather email addresses. It then collected the emails per class and per educator, and each educator sent an email to their students with translated guidelines and an invitation to access Google Classroom.

At the same time, the educators were creating educational material adapted to the needs of each class and the specific needs of the distance learning programme. They created various interactive exercises using different free online tools, including Wordwall, Google Forms, Kahoot! and Akelius, and uploaded them to their digital classrooms.

Learning takes place in two formats:

Synchronous

Lessons are live streamed through Google Hangouts, Webex, Zoom, Google Duo camera or Skype. During live lessons, educators teach new material using METAdrasi's syllabus or they offer remediation classes to students who attend formal education. There are around 12 to 15 students per class.

Asynchronous

Educators upload materials to Google Classroom which students access in their own time, answering questions and solving exercises. They press submit to send their work back to the teacher and the student can also check their own score.

Impact

- The e-learning programme has enabled METAdrasi's lessons to continue normally and given refugees who live all over Greece the opportunity to gain access to classes.
- Of the approximately 250 children who normally access monthly face-to-face lessons, about 174 have participated in the online classes.
- METAdrasi staff and volunteers have learned how to use new interactive educational tools, created new materials and acquired invaluable knowledge for the future.
- Students living in refugee camps have reported how they have appreciated having the online lessons, as it has given them a chance to interact with others and do something different, breaking the monotony of confinement in the camps.

Top tips

Collecting students' email addresses as a standard part of their registration.

The combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning enables varied learning styles and keeps students engaged outside of live lessons.

Allowing extra time for live lessons to give students the chance to chat informally between themselves and with teachers before and after class helps them to stay connected and be a source of support for each other.

Challenges faced

- One of the principle and common challenges with this type of work is the lack of widespread access to an internet connection. Many students also don't have access to equipment, such as a computer or smartphone, so online education is not an option for everyone. However, METAdrasi has been able to provide internet access for some of its regular students by buying data cards.
- Many students face difficulties in understanding how distance learning works.
- Using various platforms for the live online lessons, dependent on each group's preference and access, was not ideal for the METAdrasi team, particularly in terms of preparing tailored guidelines for the different software.
- Communication was a huge challenge at the outset. It was particularly difficult to engage with those children and adults who had no level of Greek.
- Preparing the classes and carrying out the individual communication with all students were time-intensive processes for teachers (in addition to the 250 6 to 18-year-olds attending lessons, there are 400 participants in METAdrasi's adult learning programme).

Next steps

METAdrasi has decided to continue offering e-learning as a standard option in its education programme in the future, alongside face-to-face learning. It has found that this enables more children to attend, regardless of their location in Greece or their ability to access the in-person lessons due to work commitments or caring responsibilities. On 1 July some of METAdrasi's in-person classes started again at half capacity (now between 9 and 12 students per class) to ensure social distancing measures are followed.

Resources required

- Additional financial costs in the form of internet access cards for students without an internet connection.
- METAdrasi has made good use of various free online software and learning platforms.
- Smartphone or other device required by student.

CONTACT DETAILS

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Family
for every child

