

DO-IT project – Focus Group

Teacher's replies

In order to fully meet the requirements of the research in the project, we conducted in-depth interviews and discussions with ten teachers who teach immigrant students or students with an immigrant background. Since the school unit is a vocational high school, we turned to teachers of various specialties. It should be noted that some teachers themselves have an immigrant background.

Question 1: *Have the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your activities? If yes, could you detail it further?*

According to the focus group, the teachers executed their duties under difficult and new conditions and the pandemic impacted seriously their activities. Generally, the fact that were forced in a little time to do classes from distance was at the beginning a bit difficult process. They limited their social contacts, their activities, such as physical exercise, (inability to go to gym, swimming pool) even walking with friends, socialization opportunities, the participation in various social events (birthday parties, celebrations, weddings), visiting friends house and relatives as well. The educational process changed from the interpersonal type to distance-learning for a long period of time. Some students (mostly migrants and local students from poor families) had difficulties with the classes, mostly because they could not find an available computer or a mobile device to connect to the class. Some also had to deal with problematic connections to the internet and that was making things more complicated. The vivid educational process was substituted by e-learning which has many restrictions and made the lesson impersonal. Activities were minimized because the mobility factor was reduced. Home confinement and limited ability to meet other people have limited the interaction and opportunity for socialization for all. School life shifted to the type of distance learning and the activities between teachers and students were also limited. The covid 19 crisis stimulated rapid innovation in the digital and distance-learning sector. Pandemic has impacted many activities, some of them more obviously and directly and some unconscious and more underground.

The teachers faced problems in terms of logistics infrastructure and accessibility to distance education. In addition, the most important difficulties were the sending of conflicting instructions, the delays in the organization and the lack of coordination in the implementation of the remote. There were no clear instructions to the teachers on the pedagogical approaches and methodologies that needed to be followed in terms of the curriculum. The role of teachers in distance education was not clarified clearly and the time required for the preparation of teaching was quite large, which significantly affected the whole process. All of the above contributed to the mental and physical exhaustion of both teachers and students and their parents, during the implementation of distance education. In general, the activities in the pandemic era passed to the electronic level as everything was transmitted through a network.

Question 2: *Do you think the Covid-19 pandemic impacted the education and activities of disadvantaged people (young with migrant background) more than citizens in your country? Please explain it.*

The new conditions, highlight that the idea of an education that gives equal opportunities for all has not been achieved, educational inequalities still exist and digital divides reinforce these inequalities. Students from immigrant parents faced some learning difficulties, as their parents may not even had the financial ability but neither the cognitive-educational or even linguistic level to help them. Many times students with migrant background are characterized by insecurity, feelings of inferiority, the difficulty of social integration and adaptation, isolation and marginalization, joining sometimes delinquent groups and the general negative attitude opposite the school.

Language, way of living, different traditions and other situations were already obstacles for those people, so the pandemic was one more problem they had to get over. Social and psychological well-being was affected for everybody. But migrant students affected more because they were in situation where they felt insecure already and the factor of negative emotions they already had, makes it even harder. There was no time for face-to-face information and education with the new tools both to the teaching staff that actually left alone to the students and especially to minority students who had an issue to understand the language. They could not afford to purchase the appropriate equipment as well as an internet connection, therefore hindering the process of learning, communication and other activities. The entrapment in homes or structures increased the stress, the psychological pressure and the insecurity of all people and especially them. The covid-

19 pandemic impacted negatively the education of every citizen in Greece but mainly the education of those who belong to groups of people with disadvantages because the educational system was not prepared to provide them the necessary facilities for distance learning. Also the lack of fluency in the language spoken in the host country can exacerbate difficulties with home schooling. Language barriers are more challenging when instruction is online, and in particular as it reinforces the potential lack of parental support. In the context of online learning, and without daily contacts with peers and few interactions with teachers, it can be more difficult for students with immigrant parents to overcome these language barriers and learn the host country language. Although eight out of ten teachers we interviewed believe that students with an immigrant background certainly had more difficulty in distance learning during the covid period for the reasons mentioned, there are two teachers who believe students could respond equally through the e-learning platforms and that the pandemic did not stop them in this direction.

Question 3: *Do you think the Covid-19 hardened the work of professionals such as teacher, trainers, young workers to delivery service, such as giving education and making activities, to disadvantage people?*

All the professionals had to adapt their teaching to the new conditions of distance-learning so it was more complicated to find tools and methods that could be applied to distance learning but with the same results. In Greece teachers faced difficult experiences, unscheduled lessons, asking and sharing ideas, using Google and searching for appropriate materials and supporting themselves and students especially the young with migrant background. Most of the young students with migrant background needed extra help, to be encouraged, they also needed psychological support. Nothing of these could be provided adequately through distance learning. Apparently the covid-19 pandemic caused additional problems to these groups of people and to those who were dedicated to help and teach them. The ministry of education did not give many tools to the students for an easy transition from the traditional teaching to the teaching with the use of internet platforms. The covid new era has made it difficult for these people to be interpreted in the new society.

Question 4: *Do you think it is possible to do the activities and education with disadvantaged people via digital platforms? Could you please explain it further.*

Though the digital platforms can supply many additional assets to the educational process they cannot replace the interaction of live teaching and other educational activities. It would be possible

to do activities with young people with migrant background via digital platforms provided that they know how to handle equipment (internet, mobile phone, tablet, laptop) – if they have any - and likewise they have to know writing or reading in the language of the country. It would be more difficult to use all these tools of distance learning in comparison to face to face teaching as in face to face there is the time and the place to explain, to write on the board and to do more interactive activities for all students. In face to face teaching the students can interact, communicate better, exchange ideas, play roles and there is time for the teacher to help them in multiple ways. For some activities like gymnastics for example, thinks were a bit more complicated. Those activities are by nature to take place outdoors or in big rooms and also they are formed in teams. Also they demand physical skills that can not be substituted by any digital platform. In this case (especially for team sports) thinks are not digital platform friendly.

Distance learning through digital platforms is difficult for everyone, especially for young students with migrant background, who do not have the right living conditions, their own homes, live either in structures with other people or temporarily in foreign homes without internet, the appropriate physical technical infrastructure, computers, without proper information about what is happening, to show them the steps of expertise on the platform, explain them in their own language. Sometimes they tried to connect to the platform with a tablet or phone. Many times in a family of 2 to 3 children had a common tablet or mobile phone, so at least one of the students was absent from the lesson. Or through mobile the attendance and participation was difficult in the course, for instance they had bad connection or they couldn't do the exercises. Nevertheless, a remarkable effort was made and these students participated in distance education and attended classes as much as they could. Also it noteworthy that digital platforms offered some advantages concerning the teaching of specific lessons with direct personalized feedback to the student.

Question 5: *Do you think there are solutions in order to cope the impact of Covid-19 on disadvantages people's education and activities?*

In these difficult circumstances such as the Covid-19, the State or other non- governmental organizations must prepare accordingly, so that these people have the support and the supplies they need for their education as well as for better living conditions so that they don't suffer and will be able to enjoy the benefits that the rest of the citizens do. There should be extra effort in order to fill in the educational gaps that the covid-19 pandemic has caused to those people. Formal, non-formal and informal educational activities and tasks should be organized for these people.

Furthermore, online counseling courses could be done to help the students. The teachers have to support them psychologically somehow. The state could provide them free internet connection, computers and other equipment during the classes. Disadvantaged students need the person to person interaction to learn. Eye contact, facial expressions, body language and tone of voice, work together to ensure comprehension. Further, students who have disorders associated with attention deficit require the physical presence of the teacher in order to stay focused or return to such a state. Learning activities achieved through distance education and the use of internet learning such as games puzzles entertaining interactive teaching etc. may be useful but for a short period of time. The education system needs to be reshaped, better organized and properly prepared to deal with similar situations in less time. The immediate organization of virtual meetings between students and teachers, the immediate sending of teaching materials for study, educational television supplements and other modern tools will be able to normalize the situation. As long as all actions are organized, coordinated and valuable time is not wasted.

Question 6: *In the period of pandemic all teachers and trainers were forced to work with distance learning. Please further analyze this situation and address the difficulties you faced.*

There were inequalities between the students, inefficient and unsuitable content and educational material, and generally lack of support in education. Teachers had to familiarise with new means of communication with students which were awkward and could not replace the vivid live learning. It was really difficult for teachers to work from a distance and make sure that the learning outcomes would be the same. They had to use digital platforms, technical equipment, software or other ICTs to work in distance learning. Some difficulties were that a number of students didn't have all the necessary equipment or internet connection in order to be able to attend lessons properly. Also the majority of teachers were not properly trained in order to use these digital platforms and digital tools so as to teach in an appropriate manner. There were difficulties for all students and teachers in general. The main reason is because of the little time available for preparation. Many teachers had to overcome their tech skills that they didn't have at a very short time. They had not only to overcome this problem, but also (for all teachers) they had to adjust their classes to a new web oriented environment. The time for preparation was the main issue and there was some delay as to that.

Question 7: *Please write in details the software you used to help you teaching in the period of the pandemic. Have you been trained to use this software? Have you been supplied with the appropriate equipment?*

During the COVID-19 pandemic teachers had to use mainly the CISCO WEBEX platform (it was recommended by the Ministry of education) for synchronous education and ECLASS an asynchronous platform based on Moodle as well. The teachers were not trained on this platforms and they had to create their digital lessons from the scratch. Teachers had to choose from a variety of methods or tools to make the learning process more attractive for the students and also had to use ICTs and especially those that could bring better results. For example, they used Zoom, Power Point, Videos from Youtube, Viber, C-map tools, Wikis, questionnaires (google forms). They were not previously trained to use them and they forced to get familiarised with them as soon as possible to teach their students.

Many teachers with no tech and communication experience/skills faced some difficulties during the first days. But in a short period of time almost all of them managed to overcome any issues they had. Many of them had help from other colleagues from their school. They had also to supply themselves with the appropriate equipment, since no equipment was supplied by the State, at least at the early times.

Question 8: *Do you think that migrant students faced more difficulties than other students during the pandemic in their life in general and as a result affected their progress in education?*

Migrant students faced more difficulties than other students during the pandemic and naturally affected progress in their education and in their lives in general. Staying in structures or at houses with other people, without understanding the language, sometimes not having internet access, specific material and technical infrastructure, affected their lives and their progress. In a few cases the problem was that they could not find a computer or a tablet to connect to a class. Most of them were using a smart phone, which as device was not exactly suitable. Others had connection issues like connection in low speeds which was an obstacle for them following the classes. Obviously not only the educational progress of these students was negatively affected but also their life in general because their socializing that was taking place at school was abruptly interrupted. They were not able to make new friends and they were left restricted to their homes.