



European Holocaust Research Infrastructure
H2020-INFRAIA-2019-1
GA no. 871111

Deliverable 5.4

Evaluation of the ongoing Massive Open Online Course

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Start: September 2020 [M1]
Due: November 2024 [M51]
Actual: December 2024 [M52]



[EHRI is funded by the European Union](#)

Project URL	www.ehri-project.eu
Document URL	https://www.ehri-project.eu/deliverables-ehri-3-2020-2024
Deliverable	D5.4 Evaluation of the ongoing Massive Open Online Course
Work Package	WP5
Lead Beneficiary	5 - IfZ
Relevant Milestones	MS4
Dissemination level	Public
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Abstract (for dissemination)	This DL examines the outcome of the MOOC through quantitative and qualitative analysis.
Management Summary	(required if the deliverable exceeds more than 25 pages) [Max. 500 words]

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1 Introduction

On January 27, 2024, on the 79th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI) launched the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) 'It Must All be Recorded Without a Single Fact Left Out' - The Holocaust through the Perspective of Primary Sources". The MOOC is designed to provide lesson content and to serve as a platform for discussion; in five lessons, it examines the perspective of various primary sources of the Holocaust, and the different functions they can fulfil in historical research and serves as a platform for discussion. Mainly created by Yad Vashem (YV) and coordinated by the Leibniz Institute for Contemporary History (IfZ), the course is online on the Coursera platform¹² and free of charge. While D5.2 focused mainly on the development of the MOOC in terms of content and technology, this DL will examine the impact of the MOOC through quantitative and qualitative analysis, and compare the results with the original objectives of the project, focusing on the enhancement of the EHRI online course launched in EHRI-2 and making it an open and interactive online course reaching a wider global audience.

2 Quantitative analysis

According to quantitative data stemming from Coursera Analytics, by 6 November 2024 the EHRI MOOC has attracted 3,150 unique visitors, with 747 enrolling, 379 beginning, and 47 completing the course. The gap between learners enrolling in and completing the course is striking but not unusual; in general, less than 10% of learners complete MOOCs.¹ After the course was launched in late January 2024, interest peaked at 18 daily learners in March 2024, followed by a decline to around 4 daily learners from April to May. Due to frequent presentations of the MOOC at EHRI outreach events, user engagement has since stabilized, with a slight increase in September and October following a targeted and six weeks campaign on EHRI's social media channels. The development of daily active learners between 27 January and 4 November 2024 is depicted in the info graphics below:

¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2405844023024271>

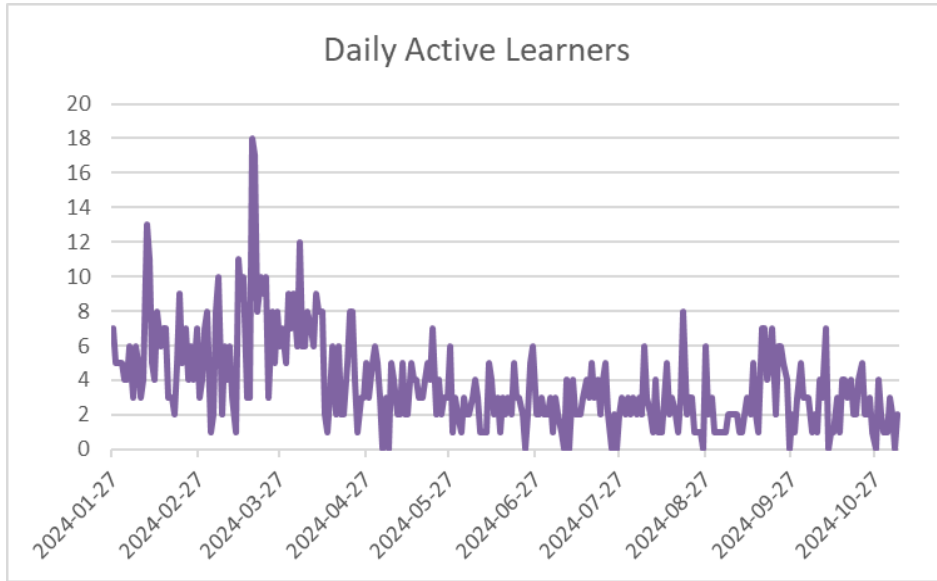


Image 1: Graph showing daily active learners of the MOOC.

The feedback on the content is extremely positive, with 97% likes. As can be seen below, the course's largest age group, over 65, differs from Coursera's and EHRI's typical audience, reflecting many family members of Holocaust survivors and victims interested in learning more about the use primary sources for family research and therefore enrolling to the MOOC:

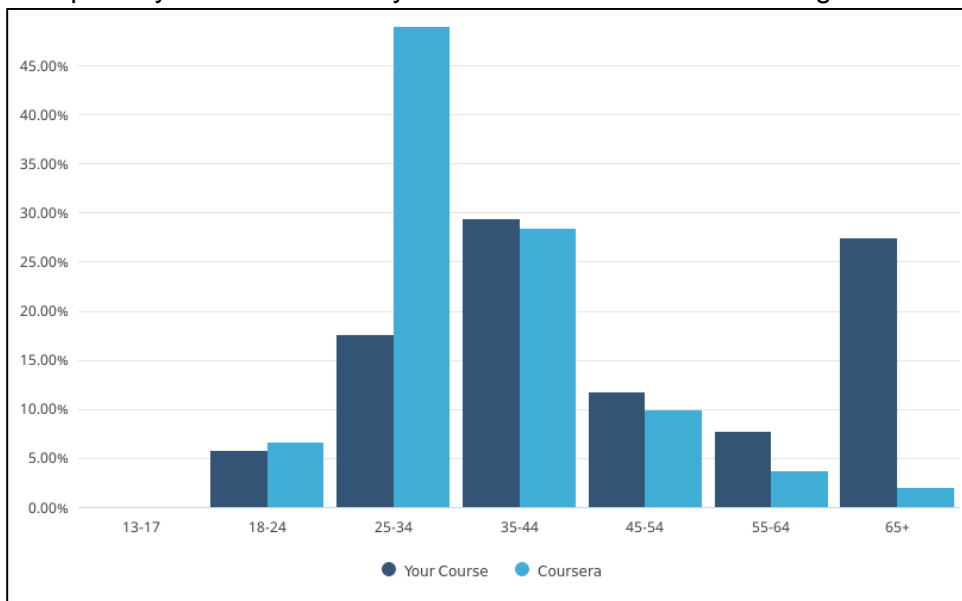


Image 2: Graph showing the age groups of users taking the EHRI MOOC and courses on Coursera in general.

Learners are predominantly female (59%) and primarily located in the United States, with other significant audiences in the UK, Canada, Germany, and Israel. These figures are mostly in line with those taken from other EHRI services. In Brazil and India, interestingly, new audiences have been reached. As the graph below shows, the course has (with exception of Romania) hardly been used in Eastern European countries. Language barriers (the MOOC is only available in English) could be an explanation for these findings.

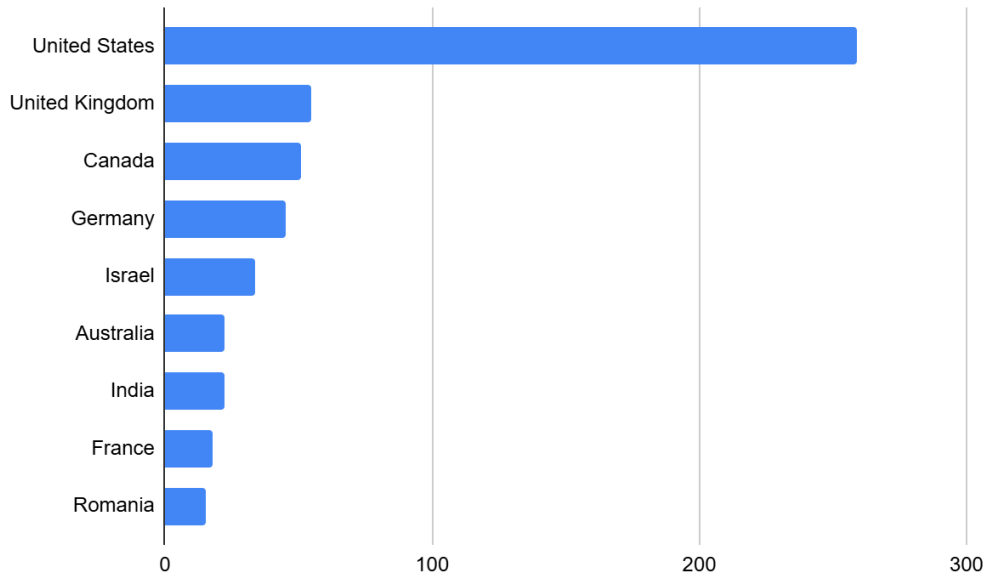


Image 3: Graph showing the geographical distribution of users of the EHRI MOOC.

The users' employment status varies, with 36.6% employed full-time and 19.8% retired, echoing the course's striking older demographic and once more distinguishing the EHRI MOOC significantly from other courses offered on Coursera:

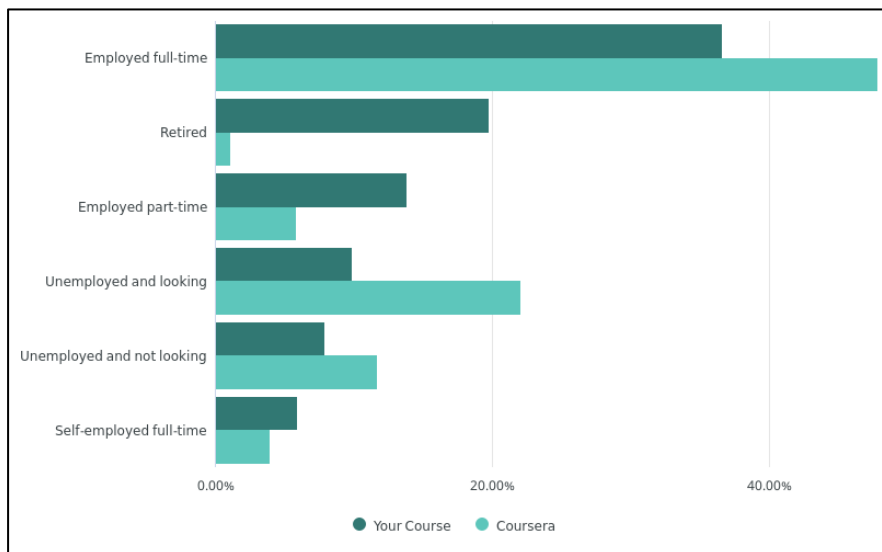


Image 4: Graph comparing the employment status of users taking the EHRI MOOC and other MOOCs offered on Coursera.

In terms of education, 71.15% of users hold a bachelor's degree or higher, demonstrating a strong academic background among the course participants and reflecting EHRI's core user group:

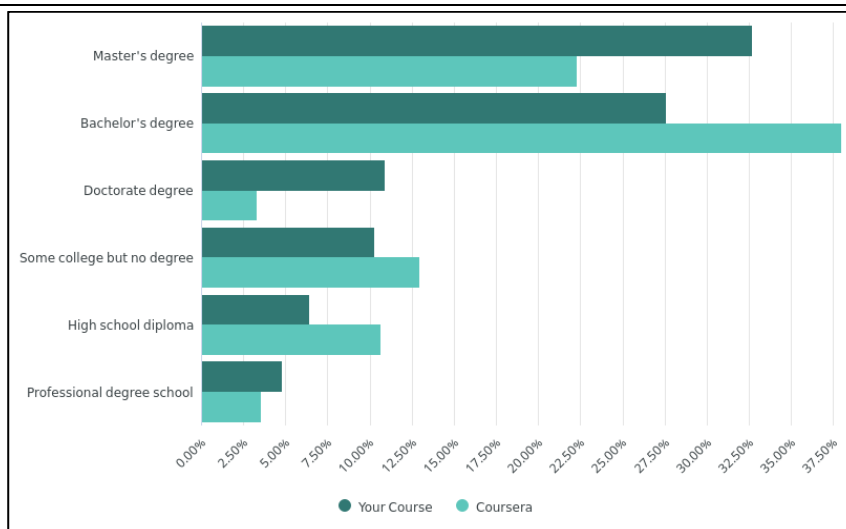


Image 5: Graph comparing the highest level of education of users taking the EHRI MOOC and other MOOCs offered on Coursera.

3 Qualitative analysis and user engagement

Each of the MOOC's lessons contains video material and instructions as well as a discussion forum. In the "Final Discussion" section participants can recap what they have learnt and engage in discussion with other users. In lesson 1 participants were asked to introduce themselves and their motivation for completing the course. The answers varied: many expressed their general interest in the history of the Holocaust, others specifically in primary sources and how to use them in their research. According to the user's comments, the majority had already made experiences studying the Holocaust and some had also completed courses on Coursera. Many of the participants work in education and hoped to get assistance with classroom preparation and to find new material for their students. One participant wrote, for example: "I'm always looking for new ways to engage my students on this topic". Others state to be Holocaust researchers and archivists who are interested in new sources, while other users were dedicated to researching their own family history and primary sources and how to analyse them. According to the comments (and this reflects the figures discussed above) many of the participants are related to Holocaust survivors and therefore interested in family research. Some of the participants stated that their motivation for the MOOC was to use what they had learnt to act against Holocaust deniers or to prepare for a memorial service. A small group of participants emphasized that they were concerned about the rise of antisemitism after 7 October 2023 and therefore wished to receive further education on the topic discussed in the MOOC.

Also in the following five lessons, the participants took actively part in the interactive discussion forums. They responded to each other's contributions and applied what they had learnt in the respective lessons to write their answers as accurately as possible. Each lesson offers at least one discussion forum in which the participants can take part. For example, after completing lesson 2, users are invited to analyse the function of diaries as primary sources. One user wrote: 'Personal diaries, work diaries and diaries with historical contemporary events help us to know the then day to day situations and individual interpretation of victims as well as survivors.' As many comments prove, the course helped participants to get a better

understanding about diaries as a historical source. As a 'valuable reference', as another user accurately commented, diaries 'function both as historical documents and as individual's means of survival'. In general, users show a high level of willingness to engage with each other, for example by liking each other's comments to signal agreement. They also share personal insights into their own family history, especially those descended from Holocaust survivors and victims.

In the last section of the course, many expressed their gratitude towards EHRI and emphasised that they have gained new insights, even if they have been working in the field for a long time. Some educators stressed that they had learnt new approaches to their teaching and that they would not only recommend the course to others but would incorporate it into their teaching. One user wrote: 'Thank you so much for providing these insights. I would love to have a more in-depth crack at the main categories presented: diaries, pictures, German documents, letters and testimonies and a part II of this class, going into even more categories would be appreciated. The class is structured in a really nice way and the experts really are eminent in their fields. The literature provided helps further studies.'

Users of the MOOC have so far have not only actively taken part in the interactive discussion forums but also used the forums to provide feedback and make suggestions for further improvement. In lesson 2, for instance, one user pointed out that he had wished to read more testimonies such as the diary of the Jewish educator Janusz Korczak. Another user criticized that some of the videos were too long.

However, and in alliance with the figures presented above, it must be noted that the EHRI MOOC was perceived as overwhelmingly positive. To give just one example, one user commented: 'Many thanks to Yad Vashem and the EHRI for this important course. Beyond being insightful in its own right and of use to anyone interested in preserving the memory of the Shoah and engaging in genocide prevention efforts, this course has been particularly useful for me from a historiographic perspective. It has offered me a variety of additional analytical layers through which to scaffold my teaching of Holocaust related content to my own students. Using primary sources is invaluable, as it provides students with direct access to artifacts from which we derive a broader Holocaust meta-narrative for the purpose of teaching and memorialization. It is imperative for the sake of combatting Holocaust denial that student[s] know where and how to access primary sources.'

4. Summary and outlook

In its first 10 months of existence the EHRI MOOC has proven as a user-friendly, innovative and interactive learning platform for various user groups. As the figures show, the course is constantly being used by different user groups (such as educators, a group that EHRI is seeking to engage more with) around the world and has even created links with audiences that EHRI has not focused on in the past, such as users mainly interested in family research. As the quantitative analysis in this DL demonstrates, the MOOC serves not only as a learning platform but also as an interactive discussion platform, thus contributing strongly to EHRI's goal of user engagement. These features reflect the strongest advantages of the MOOC, compared to the guide online course created during EHRI-2 on which the new course is based (see D5.2).

Looking ahead, maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of the MOOC will require regular actions. Even though (and as discussed above) the gap between users starting and completing

the course does not seem unusual, it is an issue to be further monitored and improved. In the future, updates will be necessary to keep the content accurate and in line with current research findings, while monitoring of user comments and discussions is necessary to maintain a respectful and interactive learning environment. As an in-kind contribution to EHRI-ERIC, it will be YV's duty to ensure sustainability by monitoring the video content and discussion forums facilitated in the course. EHRI-ERIC, on the other hand, will continue to disseminate the course in collaboration with the emerging National Nodes to promote it as a strong educational resource with a focus on countries that have not yet been adequately reached. Targeted dissemination strategies will help to fill these gaps and thus increase the number of users.

The achievement of the MOOC has also opened new perspectives for the future of EHRI-ERIC, including the possibility of creating specialized MOOCs. An option could be video-based courses tailored particularly to Holocaust education conducted in universities or secondary schools. Based on user feedback taken from the current MOOC, these new courses could be designed with shorter video segments and a more accessible, non-academic language, making them particularly effective tools for educators and younger learners in Europe and beyond.

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