



Design and Delivery of a VET Programme for newcomer EU Project Managers and Administrators for Charitable Organisations

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Activity 4

Mapping of Skills for EU project managers and administrators of charitable organisations

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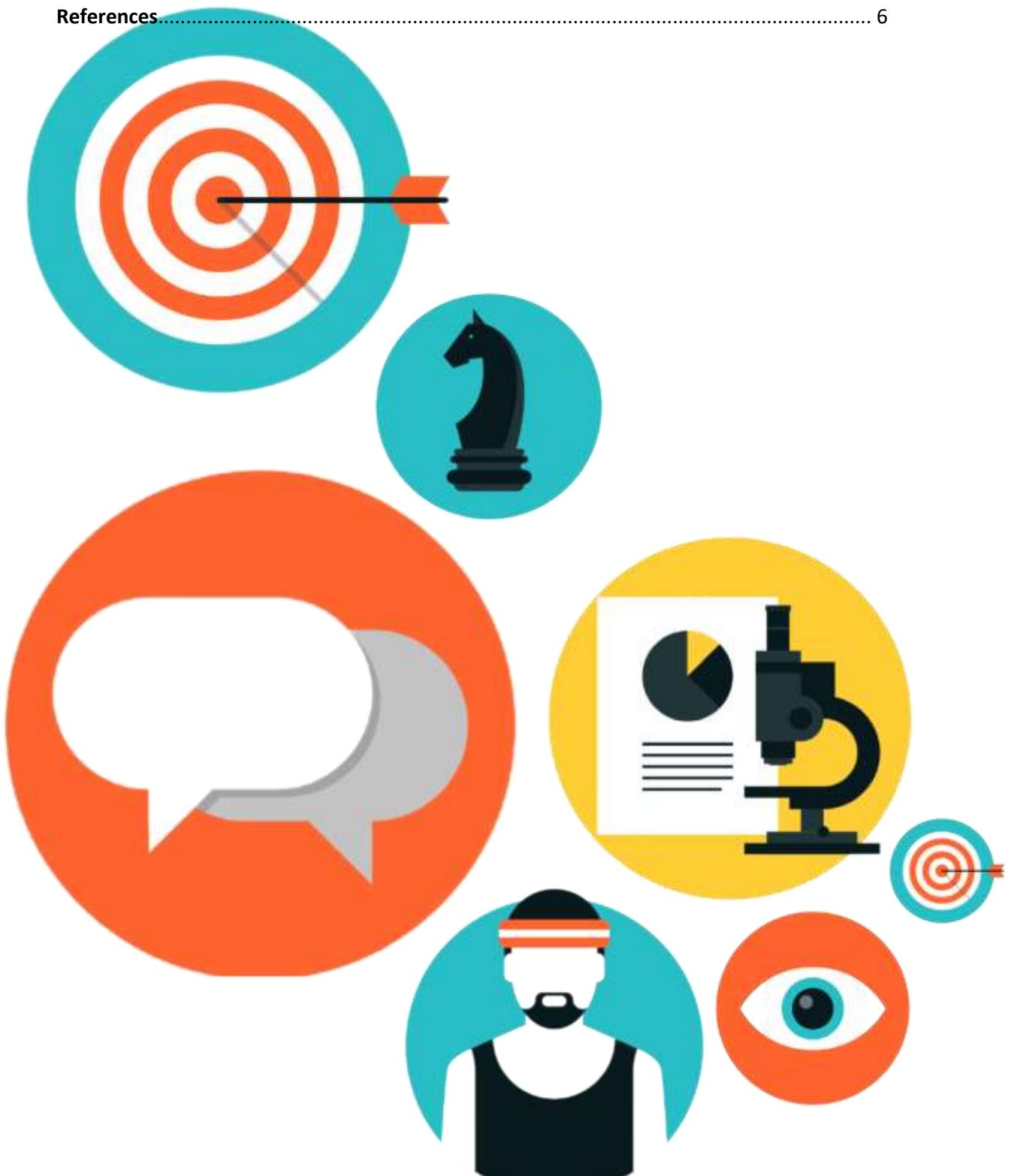
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About the Project

The main aim of the project is to offer to organisations which are registered as charitable in Cyprus or Greece (charitable organisation(s)), the opportunity to participate in EU funding programmes, including but not limited to: Erasmus+, CERV, AMIF, Creative Europe, Interreg and Horizon Europe. With the project's implementation, the aforementioned organisations will have the opportunity to maximise their participation in EU funding programmes and essentially increase their outreach to the society beyond national borders and at the same time offer their expertise and valuable know-how to a project consortium.

Specifically, the project's objective is to design and develop a VET course for new-coming or less experienced (max 2 year of experience) project managers and project administrators of charitable organisations. The training will cover all the cycles of a project, i.e. from conceptualising a project idea and writing the concept note, to finding partners, writing the proposal, to project implementation during the project's life cycle and the exploitation of the project's results after the end of the project.

The two main planned outcomes of the project will be:

- the development of a report which maps the required skills and needs of project managers and administrators who are employed or volunteer in charitable organisations (skills report); and
- the design and development of the VET course, which will integrate the results of the skills report. The structure of the course will be flexible enough in order to allow the course to be tailor made based on the needs and gaps that a charitable organisation has.

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Mapping of Skills for EU project managers and administrators of charitable organisations

This activity (Activity 4) essentially entails the undertaking of desk research and analysis of the educational and training needs of project managers and administrators of charitable and civil society organisations in Cyprus and Greece.

The objective of this research is to **identify** and **evaluate** the **educational and training needs** of the **target group** in the **participating countries**, as regards to the **development** of the **VET course** and the **educational methodology**.

The project partners carried out a desk research using official data from their government or other official organisations. The desk research allows the partners to identify and collect not only core skills that are essential for a project manager and administrator of a charitable organisation but also gaps that these people have, for example, the lack of use of digital tools.

The **target group** of this activity was **project managers** and **administrators** of a **charitable organisations**.

Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have stressed their need for support to secure long-term sustainability (HIGGS, 2020). In order, of course, to achieve long-term sustainability, they should possess such internal structures that can be adapted to meet the demands and challenges of the external environment while continuing to deliver on their missions. Recent studies have shown that there appears to be a trend of CSOs actively being involved in training programmes engaged with institutions of public interest to strengthen their capacity (Kotsakas, 2021). In particular, through the years, many initiatives have aimed to assist CSOs by fostering their skills and increasing their organisational development, effectiveness and social impact. According to the Active Citizens Fund (Active Citizens Fund, 2020), some indicative areas of support in the CSOs' capacity building could include improving **the organisation's management, transparency/ accountability/ external communications, staff and volunteer training, networking and financial sustainability**.

Cyprus

In March 2022, the NGO Support Centre¹ in Cyprus, an independent, non-governmental, non-profit organisation, dedicated to the development and strengthening of civil society in Cyprus, published a report (NGO Support Centre Cyprus, March 2022). The purpose of this report was to publish the results of a survey and the key findings of focus group discussions, providing a resource for stakeholders, aiming at supporting and strengthening civil society in Cyprus.

According to this report, the main sources of income for CSOs is their memberships, the state funding, the private sponsorships, events and the funding under the EU programmes. The main fields of action of these organisations are: Human Rights (48,5%), Active Citizenship (33,3%), Health (33,3%), Education (30,3%), Climate crisis, Gender Issues, Capacity Building etc.

Additionally, 97% of the responders believe that small CSOs face increased difficulties in ensuring funding for the development of their actions and 72,7% mentioned that acquired funding to achieve the organisation's objectives is the most important challenge for CSOs, emphasising the **value of networking** and **creating synergies** in enabling small CSOs to access funding. The participants of the focus groups (Board members, staff and volunteers of CSOs operating in Cyprus), have identified the **lack of experience and expertise in proposal writing** as the main challenge small CSOs faced. Furthermore, they agreed that **advocacy** and **communications** are **two main priority areas** where civil society needs to strengthen.

The establishment of **self-governance models** for charitable organisations and civil society organisations was also one of their challenges. The need of the development of **simple guidelines in terms of transparency and good governance** and the **capacity building training and awareness raising around the importance of transparency** were also mentioned, as a necessary step forward to help organisations grow.

The **knowledge of EU law and international human rights and strong awareness of the European Union aims and values** have been acknowledged as important knowledge for charitable organisations and civil society organisations in Cyprus, giving the ability to them to support their priorities and defend democracy and civic space.

Greece

Even though the CSOs in Greece are willing to build a better future for society, they still need better access to knowledge and opportunities for collaboration (Polyzogopoulou, 2016).

¹ <https://ngo-sc.org/>

Regarding the opportunities for collaboration specifically, many CSOs have admitted that they encounter difficulties in **creating collaborative projects and proposals** (HIGGS, Έρευνα Εκπαιδευτικών Αναγκών ΜΚΟ με Έδρα την Κυπριακή Δημοκρατία, 2020). At the same time, institutions of public interest in Greece believe, according to a survey conducted in 2021, that there is a great need to strengthen the expertise of the CSOs in terms of **writing proposals, measuring (social) impact, adapting to new situations (e.g., know-how in work-from-home practices) and leadership soft skills** (HIGGS, HIGGS Έρευνα: Κοινωφελή Ιδρύματα, 2021). These needs have been identified in the course of their collaboration with the CSOs (ibid). Therefore, improving them can enhance the number and the intensity of the relations between the two parties, especially when it comes to new organisations with more gaps to bridge.

Considering also the data collected from HIGGS in 2020, the greatest training needs in CSOs concern **the ability to utilise funding opportunities** (e.g., EU funding sources and grants from public interest organisations). Securing funding is actually described as one of the main factors of uncertainty within organisations. Additionally, **communication and marketing, as well as technological solutions**, have also been marked by many organisations as vital areas for further training (ibid). The COVID-19 crisis specifically has shown to everyone in practice how much organisations can and should be adapted to digital communication and coordination tools (ibid). However, not all organisations have the ability to do it, as they lack the infrastructure for their digital transformation.

In relation to the **available project management tools** for CSOs, Asana and Slack are ranked first, with 22.4% using the former and 22.4% using the latter (HIGGS, Μη Κερδοσκοπικές Οργανώσεις & Τεχνολογία 2019 – Ελλάδα, 2019). Within the concept of adaptability in the COVID-19 era, the co-founder of HIGGS, Sotiris Petropoulos (2020), makes an important statement:

“Zoom and Slack are good, but what are the real capabilities of CSOs? How can Google for Non-profits (finally here!) or project management tools like Asana and Trello help us be more efficient?” (Petropoulos, 2020)

Furthermore, research conducted in 2019 shows that the areas where CSOs in Greece seem to be lagging behind compared to the EU are also related to **the exploitation of new online tools available for subscribing to the organisations' publications and blogging** (HIGGS, Μη Κερδοσκοπικές Οργανώσεις & Τεχνολογία 2019 – Ελλάδα, 2019). At the same time, it is reported from organisations that only (a) 29.8% have a **written social media strategy**, (b)

36,8% use a **calendar for social media campaigns**, and (c) 18,4% have a **system for monitoring and reporting the Return on Investment of social media campaigns** (ibid). New EU project managers and administrators should be familiar with these tools to increase their outreach to society beyond national borders.

Commonly needed Skills for EU project managers and administrators of CSOs in Greece and Cyprus

Based on the desk research conducted in Greece and Cyprus, it is evident that some common areas regarding EU project management and administration need to be improved. These areas are mainly focused on **proposal writing procedures and funding, social impact measurement, communication and networking, leadership and management**, as well as **digital literacy**. Such skills are vital for CSOs, as they can help them navigate effectively in their field and achieve their desired goals. In particular, CSOs with low or medium operational capacity cannot thrive in a constantly changing environment without them. Therefore, the creation of tailored made VET courses designed to cover these commonly needed skills specifically is considered highly important within the Greek and Cypriot framework.

Conclusion

The Human Rights Careers (Human Rights Careers, 2022) has also identified 10 skills that an NGO Development Coordinator needs. These are **project management, fundraising, communication, resilience, crisis management skills, event management skills, advocacy skills, monitoring and evaluation, promote health work environment and teamworking**.

Skills and competences for the digital environment are a priority across the board of all occupations, both for further acquisition of indispensable skills to work in the digital environment and for an increased capacity of the ecosystem to engage more technological intensive development trends.

Leadership, management, funding, proposal writing, fundraising are fundamental for the sustainability and growth of the charitable organisations and civil society organisations. Furthermore, **skills to support and integrate the green transformation** in day-to-day activity and the green transition of organisations themselves, as well as to reinforce the capacity of charitable and civil society organisations to increase their impact and reinforce citizenship, democratic processes and social cohesion are also very important.

Analysing the data collected for this activity, it is perceived that the educational and training needs of project managers and administrators of charitable and civil society organisations in Cyprus and Greece are:

- **proposal writing;**
- **communication, networking and social media;**
- **project management;**
- **fundraising;**
- **social impact measurement;**
- **leadership and management;**
- **internal management procedures (including the use of digital tools);**
- **knowledge on European Union topics (aims, values, priorities etc).**

Good Practices

Peer to peer mentorship within charitable organisations, civil society organisations was also identified as a good practice to support and scale up small organisations, in all areas of their operation.

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