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**Improving the competencies of NGO educators for social inclusion**

**Hellenic Antipoverty Network**

**SUMMARY OF SURVEY AND LOCAL WORKSHOP OF NGO EDUCATORS  
ON CREATING INNOVATIVE COURSES FOR DISADVANTAGED GROUPS**

**Athens, 9-10 of March 2023**

**Social Policy Laboratory - PANTEION UNIVERSITY (Syggrou Av. 134)**

**REPORT OF THE SEMINAR**

The workshop was held at the premises of the Social Policy Laboratory of Panteion University with the presence of 20 representatives of NGOs that implement various types of educational or training programmes for vulnerable groups. Prior to the workshop, a relevant Survey was implemented through a special Questionnaire, which was answered by 20 organisations and workers in relevant fields. The organisations shared their concerns and experiences, evaluated which methods are most effective, made innovative proposals and networked with each other. Through the seminar the need for digital trainings was highlighted and participants were prepared for the next special seminar on training in a digital environment.

On Thursday 9 March, the trainer was Yota Arvaniti, adults educator and member of the Board on EAPN Greece, who introduced the definitions and values of non-formal education and the issues related to innovation.

The participants elaborated on the characteristics of non-formal education, its connection with other forms of education, its objectives, the tools used by trainers and who it addresses. At the end of the workshop, examples of non-formal education with their innovations or models that participants have implemented in an attempt to respond to the specificities of their learners were shared.

Indicatively, the following were highlighted:

- Non-formal education and informal forms of learning are relevant to all but are most appropriate for vulnerable groups because they often do not have access to formal forms of education.

- Non-formal education, because it is not compulsory but a product of choice, experiential, interactive, collaborative, open and often intercultural, participatory and inclusive, active, non-discriminatory and often implemented by non-profit social organisations, is a very attractive tool for social inclusion.

- It is complementary to formal education but open-ended, constantly evolving and much more targeted. It can thus meet real needs and choices of learners and improve their social and professional skills.

- It opens new personal and professional horizons, offers updated and innovative knowledge on each topic, networks and encourages participants to take the next step, offers new technical and technological tools and gives participants the opportunity to become shareholders in the social changes taking place today.

- Regardless of the way it is delivered (workshops, seminars, group work, internships, apprenticeships ...), it is always implemented in an organised context, there are certified training materials, it includes assessments and it provides some kind of certification of the qualifications acquired.

The participating organisations then presented the individual training programmes they implement, the innovations they have introduced and referred to the training needs of the beneficiaries of their services.

On Friday, March 10, the main points of the Survey conducted through Questionnaires, were presented, answered by 20 employees of different organisations and specialties.

Participants made additional observations in working groups based on their experience. They noted the difficulties that the most vulnerable have in applying for unsubsidized training courses when basic and urgent survival needs (food, shelter, bills) are not met. Because the cost of living in Greece is very high and they lack income, they seek various types of benefits as a priority rather than vocational training with uncertain outcomes.

A detailed reference was made here to the benefits granted with great difficulty to vulnerable individuals and families. These benefits (Minimum Guaranteed Income, rent, heating, children, disability, for buying food from Super markets, etc.) are granted under many conditions and with applications on specific digital platforms, which are either complicated or the beneficiaries cannot apply because they lack digital literacy. They therefore seek the help of the staff at the Municipal Community Centres, NGO Social Services or accountants, if any can pay. On the occasion of these issues, the need for digital education was stressed and the introduction for the next related seminar was made.

The Survey's findings on the need for encouragement to apply to training programmes, the value of having a supportive context from friends or family and an organised, friendly and inclusive training context were also confirmed. The need for trainers to be approachable, to 'listen' not only to training needs but also to the difficulties of the most vulnerable, to show empathy and to remember that they are also called to learn from their students was emphasised.

Regarding innovation, it was interesting that - apart from the technological aspect and the necessity of using digital means - artistic, creative, manual, cultural, and entertainment activities were mentioned to encourage participation in training programmes, empower, socialise, and create incentives for the beneficiaries.

Regarding the European dimension of training, it was noted that often it is missing, and trainees frequently become trapped in Greek conditions or do not receive information about the possibilities available in the unified European space.