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Improving the competencies of NGO educators for social inclusion

Local workshop

of NGO educators on advocacy for vulnerable disadvantaged groups in Greece

Date: 01/06/2023

Venue: National Technical University of Athens, Hall M323, 3rd floor School of Architecture

Partner Organisation: Hellenic Antipoverty Network

REPORT OF THE WORKSHOP

The workshop took place on June 1 in a NTUA hall, which met the requirements for the participation of 28 participants from various institutions - apart from the presenter and the staff of the Hellenic Antipoverty Network.

For the publicity of the workshop, we once again did not limit ourselves to informing NGOs and services with whom we have collaborated in the past but also informed other institutions, municipalities and services. Organisations involved in advocacy for the rights of asylum seekers, recognised refugees and those without legal documents due to repeated rejection of their asylum application were also informed. The result was once again a large turnout of professionals and beneficiaries from vulnerable groups.

The trainer was Mariannella Kloka, advocacy officer of PRAKSIS association and president of the board of the Greek Antipoverty Network. In the workshop she was assisted by Mado Baboula - the Network's communication officer and Spyros Psychas, in-charge of the annual Poverty Watch. This report was used as an example of advocacy for the poorest population of the country and was particularly analysed in terms of how it is used by the Hellenic network.

The workshop started with an analysis of what advocacy, vulnerability and poverty are. It was pointed out that less unequal societies have lower poverty rates and that civil society organisations have an obligation to be accountable not only for their independence and finances but also for achieving their statutory objectives.

It is often that there is no strictly agreed internal framework, a Charter of Rights, for members, or goals for the beneficiaries. This makes it difficult to practice advocacy: In order to organise advocacy activities it is necessary to define objectives, a framework, a timeline and describe the difficulties that exist at any given time as well as the risks taken due to external or internal circumstances to advocate for a particular group. To work "smart" and be heard, we need to demonstrate that we have the experience of the target group, and that we, also, understand the reality and how the desired changes can be implemented. After all, it is well known that the system reproduces itself and resists changes.

The first step is therefore to work on the target in detail, get everyone around the table and draft the implementation plan in stages.

As a second step it was suggested to use the Influence Map tool to identify allies: The relevant cross-hatched chart lists the key actors and key persons who have the most or least influence on achieving the goal, those who are most opposed and those who offer the most support.

The third step is to organise our contacts and activities with absolute target-orientation in order to activate all the forces that will contribute to achieving the goal. This is where the "domino effect" was analysed, i.e., the use of alliances to positively influence decision-makers. It is recommended to lobby not alone and in a more collective way in order to achieve short term goals and step by step the long term ones.

The need to not only reach out externally but also internally to all parts of our organisation so that they know what we are doing and to feed the advocacy officer with the new experiences of the organisation from the difficulties or exclusions faced by the group we are advocating for was also discussed. As a problem remains the overload of the staff, lack of internal information as well as time for detailed planning.

Suggestions and tips include:

- The methodology of the work step by step.
- We sometimes need to take steps back, to review the attitude of key persons and actors in order to elicit a positive attitude.
- To be firm in our goal, regardless of whether the issue is in the news.
- To constantly evaluate our work, mistakes and misjudgments.
- To be trained in the art of feasible, in techniques of creative dialogue and how to build bridges with persons who think differently from us.
- To have procedures for discharging the staff in order to deal with frustrations and slow progress.

The workshop made many references to the experiences of participants practicing advocacy for different vulnerable groups on a case-by-case basis, what works best and what doesn't and how to combine theory with practice.