



## INVESTIGATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF CIVIL SERVANTS DURING THE PERIOD OF THE HEALTH CRISIS COVID 19 - THE CASE STUDY OF THE SINGLE PAYMENT AUTHORITY TO IMPROVE ITS FUNCTIONING

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### Abstract:

The Single Payment Authority (SPA) is a Public Organization that complies with the most modern management systems, seeking the maximum utilization of human resources and a high degree of effectiveness and efficiency in Greece and Europe. The present study attempts to investigate the training needs, attitudes, and views of the staff of the SPA in the context of reform actions and modernization of the Public Administration. The necessity of the study is considered important so that the personnel managed by SPA are able to face the challenges and respond to crisis conditions. The aim of the study is to highlight the benefits civil servants gain by attending training programs, identify the barriers hindering their participation in the training programs offered and define new subjects for training programs that will cover the modern needs of SPA employees. The sources of investigation for the systematic collection of information and data analysis were based on the method of triangulation with literature review, interviews and questionnaires ensuring validity and activating the meritocratic judgment. From the research results, it becomes clear that the training in the public sector needs to improve in terms of subject areas, methodology, as well as adult educational methods and techniques in order to satisfy the constantly changing needs of the services. Needs analysis must be included as a vital step of any educational program design in order to meet the needs of SPA employees today, thus upgrading the services and facilitating its development.

**Keywords:** public administration, training in Covid-19 period, investigation of educational needs, Continuing Professional Training (CPT), lifelong learning

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## 1. Introduction

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought about significant changes in Public Sector Services and connecting all the bodies' systems electronically has now become a foremost concern. Globalization, together with demographic, climate, and technological changes, as well as developments in health-related matters and in matters concerning the economy and the prompt serving of citizens' needs, means reform is essential if public administration is to adapt to these changes.

Public Administration reflects the institutional framework of the way countries are governed, as it responds to the needs of society. Reforms aim at contemporary policy-making, more effective coordination and the creation of a meritocratic Public Administration that can attract and retain highly trained staff (Spanou, 2018). One of the main issues in the reaping of the expected results and benefits, as well as an important starting point, is the way in which the reforms are planned and applied, including the political procedure involved (Spanou, 2018). In order to support the effective application of measures for development and employment, Greece invests in improved Public Administration, thus reducing bureaucracy and facilitating investment opportunities (EU, 2021). Since 2000, skills administration has also been applied systematically in the Public Sector, and this is a strategic tool for Human Resource Management (HRM) in that it highlights those skills that are necessary for the improvement of employee performance. What this seeks to achieve, in essence, is the familiarization, training, dedication, and commitment of the employees to the achieving of the goals of each organization as well as each manager (Tsolakidou, 2000). In addition, the economic and health crises of 2008 and 2020 respectively, obliged governments to redesign the employment and training policies of previous decades using new and flexible models (Roidis, 2021). Electronic governance is a digital form of support for Public Administration as it follows the new policy of resource management and the adoption of new forms of management and organization which make use of modern information and communication technologies. The Ministry of Digital Governance thus promoted important steps in the digital transformation of services that facilitate tele-working, distance learning and the distance operation of the Public Sector and the provision of distance services to citizens (Tarnari, 2021).

In this paper, we present a research on the educational needs of civil servants employed in the Single Payment Authority (SPA) in Greece, during the period of the Covid-19 health crisis. We focus on the necessity for the adaptation of the SPA to the new conditions, in compliance with the Government's modernization programme for Public Administration. In this context, the main research questions focus on a) the training needs of SPA employees, b) the attitudes – and views of SPA employees towards training and lifelong learning and c) the degree to which the educational needs of the SPA employees are met by the existing educational programmes.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 The necessity of investigating educational needs

The investigation of educational needs is a necessary element in the design of educational programmes and in ensuring their effectiveness. Identifying the needs of adult learners and defining the goals of educational programmes to meet these needs, makes a significant contribution to ensuring learner participation and activation in the educational process (Caffarella 1988, 2002; Moseley, & Heaney, 1994; Karalis, 2005; Leftheriotou, 2014; Pavlis Korres & Leftheriotou, 2020; Rogers, 2007).

The design of educational programmes, according to Karalis (2005), their analytical content, the choice of teachers and the use of suitable educational techniques, should meet the needs of the target population. In addition, it is also judged important since it **reinforces the active participation of adult learners, contributing to the effectiveness of a programme**. A programme is effective when its goals are achieved. When its goals don't correspond to the needs and goals of the learners, then it is difficult to satisfy them. According to Karalis (2005), the learning process is influenced by a large number of factors, closely connected to circumstances that the learners are called on to deal with.

### 2.2 Modernization and training of the workforce in public administration in Greece

Sustained economic growth and new conditions in the labour market are the factors that necessitate training (Haniotou, 2019).

According to Mavrogiorgos (1999, p. 101), "training" is "*the framework within which a set of actions and procedures which are directly related to the creation and application of particular educational programmes are executed, aimed at the qualitative improvement and development of academic, theoretical or practical professional and other interests, knowledge, abilities and skills*". In addition, according to Vergidis (2005), continuing education as well as the updating of the individual's knowledge are essential if he is to be able to meet the demands of constantly developing work conditions.

In her introduction in the minutes of the International Conference of the National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government (E.K.D.D.A) which took place in Athens on 21-22/1/2008, on the issue "*Training and Education in Contemporary Public Administration*", Professor Valeria Termini (2008), Director of Italy's School of Public Administration (SSPA) highlighted the importance of the role of training in Public Administration. In her view, the main aims of training in Public Administration are:

- The development of a public elite, capable of changing Public Administration.
- Offering further training to civil servants so that they are able to adapt to the continuous changes in the Public Sector and to the developments in work practices.
- The establishment of a regulative system for the training programmes.

The ultimate goal of the training of civil servants is to gain the trust of citizens and businesses in the Public Sector (National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government (EKDDA), 2008).

In fact, due to the demands brought about by the changes in the workplace, Continuing Professional Training (CPT) is lifelong. So, in order for the employees to meet the increasing professional demands of the modern era, they should, alongside their work, constantly refresh their interest in deepening and extending their knowledge (Kanaki-Protopapa, 2001).

Nowadays, few people work based on their initial education. Increased mobility, the desire for a new professional position, the acquisition of more professional qualifications, the reactivation of skills, becoming familiar with new professional conditions, the rehabilitation after serious illnesses or injuries as well as professional reintegration as a consequence of unemployment, are all part of the objectives of CPT (Tippelt, 1999).

According to Ainatzis (2010), contemporary Public Administration should be flexible and able to effectively use quantitative administrative measures, target-setting techniques, time-management and control, as well as evaluation of results. The main goal of the qualitative reorganization of Public Administration should be the meeting of the needs of the citizen-customer in full. The citizen should be the ultimate judge of the services provided to him and not the passive receiver of goods and services (Benos, 1997). According to the results of the Branch research of the Competition Committee into finance technology (Fintech)<sup>ii</sup>, in 2019 Greece was third the end in the European Committee's list of digital competitiveness of the 28 EU member states, having improved on the position held in 2018 in the lowest weighted index DESI<sup>iii</sup> in relation to all the EU member-states, in other words behind Romania and Bulgaria.

A report by Makrydimitris & Michalopoulos (1998) highlights the fact that public services have come in for repeated strong criticism regarding the quality of the services provided. As they mention, the low quality of Public Administration in Greece is influenced chiefly by the public employee mentality that cultivates mediocrity, fear of responsibility, ritualism and often lack of interest. The result of this is that the able and creative employees are absorbed by the system. A cause of the low quality in the Public Sector, they note, is the permanence of positions, the stripping of responsibility, salary not being linked to performance, the lack of planning of work/duties/responsibilities and goals by Agency and employee position, the stress on formal and not meaningful qualifications, and promotion based on years of service and not ability and effectiveness (Makrydimitris & Michalopoulos, 1998).

In her study, Velli (1996) notes that the problems in Greek Public Administration today are to a large extent due to the lack of appropriate training and specialization in its managers. As she claims, the systematic and ongoing education of civil servants is one of

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<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.epant.gr/enimerosi/kladiki-erevna-stis-xrimatooikonomikes-texnologies-fintech.html>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/desi>

the chief levers for the modernization of Public Administration while the necessity for training emerges from the need of those who participate in training to be able to face the challenges of **globalization of the business world, rapid technological changes, greater flexibility in the business organization, and public regulations.**

In addition, according to Chytiris (2001), ineffective utilization of the productive resources, which is due to the inadequacy of the employees, is one of the chief reasons why educating them is essential. Rummler and Brache (1995), stress the huge impact of the system on the individual when they note that if you place a good and productive worker in a bad system, you will notice that the system always wins. In one of their publications, Alexiadis and Peristera (2000) mention that one of the problems related to the low level of development of human resources in Public Administration, is the lack of education, training, updating or guidance of the workforce, in modern techniques, developments, conduct and attitudes. Consequently, according to the literature, the effective and efficient operation of public services is the aftereffect as much of suitably training employees at regular time intervals, as an adequate operational system for these services.

According to White (2000, p.162-177), the reforms in the Public Sector and the continually changing internal and external environment, are leading public organizations to reconsider their work practices (Karatzoglou, 2011). From the perspective of the changes, as we mentioned before, training in the space of Greek Public Administration is an additional factor in its adaptation to the continually changing environment of rapid technological developments, so as to meet its obligations as a member of the EU (Passas & Tsekos, 2004). Training promises the improvement in individual and collective performance in order to achieve an increase in productivity, improvement in the quality of the work produced, a reduction in waste of funds and delays, contributing to the correct and full use of the equipment, to increase the enthusiasm and raise the morale of the employees (Papadopoulou, 2018). Through this, the workers will acquire new knowledge and skills so as to shape a new work culture, as well as more effective and efficient attitudes and behaviours (Passas & Tsekos, 2004).

### **2.3 Public employees and new technologies**

In the presentation by the National Documentation Centre (2020), in the framework of the 10th annual conference “e-Government Forum” on the digital reform of the public sector, which focused on the crucial developments in the technologies and the changes in terms of the digital reform of Public Administration, in the third paragraph it was noted that “the digital re-shaping” of existing administrative structures into a more effective and efficient “*state in circumstances of economic constraint, COVID-19 pandemic and constant cutting of public funding is feasible only through the new possibilities provided by the utilization of Digital Technologies and their meaningful incorporation into state administrative structures. Digital technologies change the society as much as the economy, having established the Digital*

*and Administrative Reform of Public Services as one of the chief terms of development for European states” (EKT, 2020).*

Within a framework of intense technological change, digital skills are one of the most important aspects of the current and future structures of employment, with the danger of the digital skills gap continuing to be one of the most significant challenges (Cedefop, 2016).

The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Public Administration was an element of research by the Observatory (2007), for the Information Society (IS), the results of which were presented at the conference ICT Forum. According to this, 92% of the managers in the Central Public Administration have access to a computer, but it is doubtful whether it is used since civil servants have a low opinion of their own eSkills. Their training, as they themselves judge, is ‘mediocre’ and their satisfaction with seminars that their agency organizes is ‘low’. Equally important is the finding that the extent of their use is a function either of their skills or their insecurity, given the trend towards the modernization of Public Administration. In addition, it becomes clear that their department doesn’t particularly encourage their use. On the other hand, the majority of IT managers in the public sector have received basic training which is not updated (Kathimerini, 2007; Tsimaras & Salis, 2009).

According to assessments by IT executives in the publication of research by the Greek newspaper “Kathimerini” (2007), for the speedy and more effective management of the problems that come up an improvement in the level of the workers’ knowledge of the use of computers is required, as well as upgrading and flexibility in the supply of equipment and software. In addition, the participation of the IT managers in decisions that concern the Service’s IT issues is ‘low’, data which reveals the centrally determined manner of relevant decision making in the Public Sector (Andreou et al., 2020).

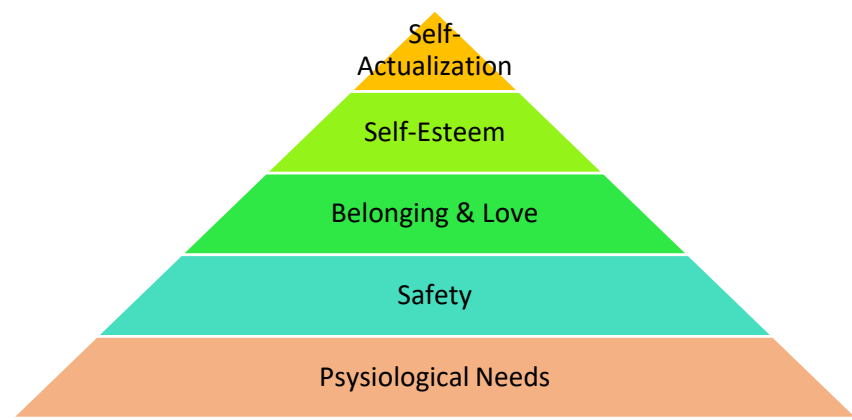
In a number of cases, the vast majority of managing executives have modern computer equipment and a personal email account, which however they rarely use, while cases, where their skills are inferior to those of their subordinates, are not infrequent. The main factor in this is age, as 71% are over 55, as well as the lack of adequate training, familiarity, and experience with ICT. According to the results of the research in question, new employees note the intensely bureaucratic model of public administration while they are more responsive to constant change (Kathimerini, 2007). According to data from research by Roidis (2021), distrust in the use of new technologies in the Public Sector during tele-working is not due to its disadvantages but to a lack of sufficient preparation for them to respond adequately. The situation shaped by the health crisis is an opportunity for the evaluation of the potential of civil servants, so as to locate those that are crucial for in-person presence, as well as those that can work effectively at a distance.

#### **2.4 Motives and barriers in the training of civil servants**

The theoretician Patricia Cross (1981) was occupied at length with the **motives and barriers** to learning. Supported by research findings from the USA, relating to the

participation of adults in educational processes of non-formal learning, she concluded that *“the more education people have, the more interested will be in further education ‘or that ‘learning is addictive, the more education people have, the more they want and the more they will get’.* (p.55). Cross (1981) introduced her own classification of obstacles which adults face in their participation in educational programmes: situational, institutional, and dispositional barriers. *“Situational barriers are those arising from one’s situation in life at a given time {...} institutional barriers consist of those practices and procedures that exclude or discourage working adults from participating in educational activities {...} and dispositional barriers are those related to attitudes and self-perceptions about oneself as a learner”* (p. 98). One important barrier to participation in adult education for the less educated, according to Cross (1981), is the lack of interest. From the aforementioned, it is clear that in the attempt to interpret the positive attitude towards adult participation in educational activities, various theories have been put forward. These combine the study of the characteristics of adults, their motives, and the barriers they deal with (Rogers, 2007, Knowles, 1980).

According to Abraham Harold Maslow’s theory (1954), mostly known as Maslow’s pyramid, human needs are ranked in order of priority from physiological needs to Safety, to Belonging and Love, to Self-Esteem, and finally to Self-Actualization (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Maslow’s Needs Pyramid

Maslow’s theory has influenced managers in the application of motivation strategies, contributing so that *“administration may become a positive and meaningful process”* (Chytiris, 2017, p. 198). *“Each person has an innate tendency and right to qualitative growth and development and consequently should be satisfied each time with the appropriate acts of freedom that are not only of a material-exchange nature (Money, payments), but have a qualitative nature and character, such as participation in decision making, recognition of work and so on”* (Makrydimitris, 2013, p. 200). However, according to Maslow, only the needs that haven’t yet been satisfied can be motivating factors. He also claims that people are always searching for something, as well as that each individual’s needs are arranged in order of importance. In similar research results it was shown that if the administration wishes to motivate employees, it is important to recognise the usefulness of the investigation of the

needs of the employees at that moment in time, in order to link the meeting of these needs with the desired result (Pavli, 2019). In Table 1 the pairing of Maslow's needs with the satisfaction factors in the workplace as drafted by Chytiris (2017, p. 198) is presented.

**Table 1:** Factors in the meeting of needs in the workplace, according to Maslow\*

Needs	Satisfaction Factors
<b>Self-realization</b> (to do things separately, superior)	Autonomy, development/rise in the hierarchy, independence, tools of high demands and a high degree of difficulty
<b>Appraisal</b> (how others see us)	Recognition of effort and results, job titles, awards-praise
<b>Social</b> (to interact with others)	Interaction, group integration
<b>Security</b> (to have confidence for the present and the future)	Steady work, safe working conditions, justice, meritocracy
<b>Normal or biological</b> (to enable the balanced functioning of our physical entity)	Working hours, breaks, natural environment (lighting, temperature)

\*Source: Chytiris (2017).

Undoubtedly it is difficult for the administration of human resources in each public Agency to locate the particular individual needs at any given moment in time and to meet those needs, and harder still to measure motivation (Kalliga, 2011). However, the necessity of *motivation of civil servants*, the degree of which is low among Public Sector employees emerges out of the need to achieve the goals of *productivity* and *efficiency* of public organizations in Greece. We were unable to find an annual internal study or report regarding the fiscal employees or SPA employees (from the outset of its operation in 2010 until the time of the Covid-19 crisis), on the issue of the motivation or the depiction of the main productivity motives in the framework of their management. As a consequence of this and in order to depict the main motives of the workforce we mention research by Houston (2000) and Buelens and Van den Broeck (2007) from which the civil servants' preference for internal motivation emerges, with the chief motivating factor being satisfaction from work being carried out and with interest in contributing to the common good, especially in times of crisis (Houston, 2000; Buelens & Van den Broeck, 2007). Internal rewards, like the sense of duty, self-fulfilment and a stable, safe and supportive working environment are the things that improve the motivation of civil servants (Kaliga, 2011).

In recent decades see Greek Public Administration in a constant attempt to reduce and overcome a mountain of problems as it continually faces citizens' harsh criticism. Weaknesses in the decentralization of services, the shaping of operations essential for the organizations, and the planning and organising of over-regulation and bureaucracy, inefficiency and effectiveness remain unsolved for a number of decades (IOBE, 2020).

The monitoring and continual improvement of Public Administration take place with the implementation of the System 'Administration through Targets'.



More specifically, with the provisions of paragraph 1 of article 1 of Greek law N.3230/2004 (GG 44/A'/11-2-2004), the system 'Administration through Targets' was established, with which the more effective operation of public services is sought, together with the response of human resources to today's needs and the new models of administration. In paragraph 2 of the same article and Greek law, for the first time *"the measure of the efficiency and effectiveness of Administration is established. Measurement is aimed at the evaluation of the services of the Administration which seek to serve the citizen, so as to increase his trust in it and the degree to which his needs are satisfied by it, and at the strengthening of transparency, the more complete utilization of available resources and in general the exercise of administration for the benefit of the citizen. For the requirements of this law, efficiency is considered to be the maximization of results from the actions of the Administration with given resources, and effectiveness the achieving of specific and pre-defined targets. Indices for measurement are the means used for the assessment of efficiency and effectiveness"*.

The main pillars of the implementation of the previously mentioned provisions are the determination and implementation of annual *target setting* in the sectors of the public service, the development of a system of measurement indices of efficiency and effectiveness and the setting up of an Annual Evaluation Report of the actions of each Sector.

In addition, with the provisions of article 5 of the aforementioned law, the framework for the monitoring of the implementation of the target setting is laid out, through the use of the measurement indices of *efficiency and effectiveness*.

In the framework determining the way in which Public Administration should operate, through the provisions in paragraph 1 of article 19 of Greek Law 4622/2019 (GG 133/A'/7-8-2019) it is stated that *"To fulfil its mission, Central Public Administration operates based on the principles of good governance and use of administration as these are determined in international scientific analysis and practice, and in particular on the principles of legality, transparency, and accountability, effectiveness and efficiency, necessity and subsidiarity and meritocracy and professionalism"*. With paragraph 4 of the same article and law, *"The principle of effectiveness and efficiency means that the operation of Central Public Administration should aim at fulfilling its mission using as few resources as possible"*.

Examining the terms *effectiveness* and *efficiency* in the references in the *international literature* we note that their definitions are rendered with characteristics that are in accordance with what we mentioned previously. In particular, according to Frokjaer, Hertum & Hornbaek (2000), effectiveness is defined as the full achievement of goals within a predetermined time. The measurement indices for effectiveness include the quality of the results as well as the error ratio.

Education aids the intellectual growth of civil servants and promotes the development of crystallized knowledge (Landorf, Doscher & Rocco, 2008). Individuals with greater education are likely to have better foundations, and analytical knowledge, in other words, decrystallized intelligence (Bacal, 2004). Knowledge usually refers to the understanding of information related to work (Collins, Clark & Clark, 2003).

According to research, two kinds of knowledge can be discerned, manifest and procedural knowledge (Landorf, Doscher & Rocco, 2008). Education promotes the fundamental performance of duty, providing the individuals with the manifest and procedural knowledge they require in order to carry out their duties successfully. Linking these findings, we believe that the education of civil servants has a positive link with their performance and the effectiveness of Public Administration.

In studies by Hunter and his colleagues (Landorf, Doscher & Rocco, 2008) it was noted that cognitive ability contributes significantly to the success and performance of almost all work. According to Hunter cognitive ability facilitates the learning of knowledge related to the job and indirectly promotes stronger performance (Bacal, 2004). Results of the study Science and Technology Options Assessment - EPRS /European Parliament Research Service (2018), showed that while technological changes create demand for training, this also leads to growing prejudice over the increase in inequality brought about by the improvement in skills that the technological changes impose, or the replacement of various types of work which are distributed unequally across the workforce. This is because certain groups within the workforce benefit from the specialization that training, mainly in new technologies, provides, while the employment opportunities of other groups who are chiefly workers with a low level of specialization are reduced.

According to the EPRS /European Parliament Research Service, (2018), OECD highlights that even if the digital transformation creates a lot of new opportunities, it will bring about a growing number of workers with redundant skills and a complete restructuring will be necessary, leading to job losses and changes in employment. The COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing health and economic crises extend trends and challenges that have already affected the job market in Europe. These include accelerating digitalization and automation, increased use of artificial intelligence, restrictions linked to the lack of digital skills and problems concerning the circumstances of workers on platforms as well as workers in non-typical forms of employment. During the pandemic, an unprecedented increase in tele-working was observed, as well as the growth of platforms for transport and delivery, as a result of the need for social distancing. It is clear that many of these changes will remain beyond the current crisis and in turn, create new challenges which the EU and member states will have to face in the near future.

According to Chytiris (2001, p. 114), *“In order to monitor the effectiveness and efficiency of participants in training programmes, the desired goals of the training should be listed in order and set out clearly. In this way, it will be possible to determine suitable measurement indices too. The development of evaluation indices for the quality and effectiveness of the educational service provided is fully supported by the EU”* (Chytiris, 2001).

To date in Greece, there aren't any official measurement indices for the quality and effectiveness of employee training. Total Quality Management as a system of administration and management refers to the desire of the training organizations to improve the quality of their services, to adapt to the needs and demands of the learners,

to design new programmes, to improve the education methods and techniques after identifying problems during their implementation and finally to apply criteria to monitor and ensure quality (Apostolou, 2002).

The provisions of articles 32 to 38 of Greek Law 1943/1991 (GG 50/A'/11-4-1991) "*Modernizing the organization and operation of public administration, upgrading the staff and other relevant provisions*" as this is supplemented by article 19 of Greek Law 2738/1999 (GG 180/A'/9-9-1999), regulate the general framework of stages in the education and training of public employees.

According to the provisions of paragraphs 1, 2 of article 1 "*Programme for administrative modernization*" in Chapter A' of Greek Law N. 1943/1991 "*for the methodical and effective promotion of measures to fight bureaucracy, the improvement in methods and procedures, the increase in productivity, the upgrading of staff, the adaptation of the organizational structures, the decentralization of duties aimed at the strengthening of local self-government in particular, and the improvement in the quality of services provided by the agencies of the public sector*", every three years a programme for the modernization of Public Administration is to be drawn up in the framework of the economic and social development of the country, which is approved by the Parliament in accordance with article 79 paragraph 8 of the Constitution. The programme refers to methods, procedures, and systems of correct organization, operation and staffing, and the means required to achieve the above goals are foreseen.

According to the provisions of paragraph 1 of article 47 of Chapter D' of Greek Law 3528/2007 (GG 26/A'/9-2-2007), *in-service training* is the right of every employee and is provided through his participation in programmes of initial education, training, further education and programmes or cycles of postgraduate education. In addition, according to paragraph 2 of the same article, "*initial training is compulsory as much for the Service as for the employee*". It takes place during the first two years after the employee's appointment and is aimed at familiarizing the employee with the subject matter of the Service and his duties as a civil servant in general. The Services are obliged to arrange for the provision of the necessary funds from the budget and to arrange for the training of their employees at all the stages of their career, regardless of category, branch, specialization or rank.

The development of adequate training and skills in technology systems or digital means and familiarity of the workforce in Public Administration and Local Government with the object of their employment is provided through the following educational programmes and actions in the educational units of the National Centre for Public Administration and Self-Governance (EKDDA), the National School for Public Administration and Self Governance (ESDDA) of the Training Institute (INEP), and of the Public Libraries.

In the context of the distance learning programmes civil servants are educated through EKDDA platforms using Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This is a digital space for asynchronous electronic learning in which access is achieved

with the use of personal codes and without the civil servants leaving their work positions (Balapanidou, 2015).

Finally, we should note that research results related to the motives and barriers of public servants for participation in training programmes organized by the INEP of EKDDA in Paralimou (2020) showed that the strongest motives for participation were related to professional/personal growth and interest in learning and the greatest obstacles to participation were situational (increased workload) as well as structural (inadequate information, lack of programmes that meet educational needs). The degree of participation in training programmes is related to the position of the workers in the administrative hierarchy, years of service and level of studies. The motives for effectiveness at work are related to sex and age, while the motive of personal interest in learning is related in addition to years of service and the educational level of the workers.

### 3. Material and Methods

The aim of this research is to identify the educational needs of civil servants employed in the Single Payment Authority (SPA) in Greece, during the Covid-19 health crisis. We focus on the necessity for the adaptation of the SPA to the new conditions, in compliance with the Government's modernization programme for Public Administration. In this context, the main research questions focus on a) the training needs of SPA employees, b) the attitudes – and views of SPA employees towards training and lifelong learning and c) the degree to which the educational needs of the SPA employees are met by the existing educational programmes.

Should be noted that this research cannot be supported by previous studies since the SPA is a newly set-up Agency within the Civil Service and has only been in operation since 2010. For this reason, the data will be listed through the existing legislative framework for its operation. Particularly, the sources of investigation for the systematic collection of information and data analysis were based on the method of triangulation with literature review, interviews and questionnaires ensuring validity and activating the meritocratic judgment.

Prior to conducting the quantitative and qualitative research, we secured the consent of all involved with an *approach* via email as well as telephone communication through which clarifications were provided, following the measures for protection against the Covid-19 pandemic. The sample was chosen randomly from the total of SPA fiscal employees working in various geographical locations across Greece, and employees who work for SPA. More specifically, fiscal employees and managers in SPA offices across the whole country, who work together with SPA employees or who use its application, were approached to answer the questionnaires, while only a select sample of employees and management working for SPA was approached in order to carry out the interviews (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000).

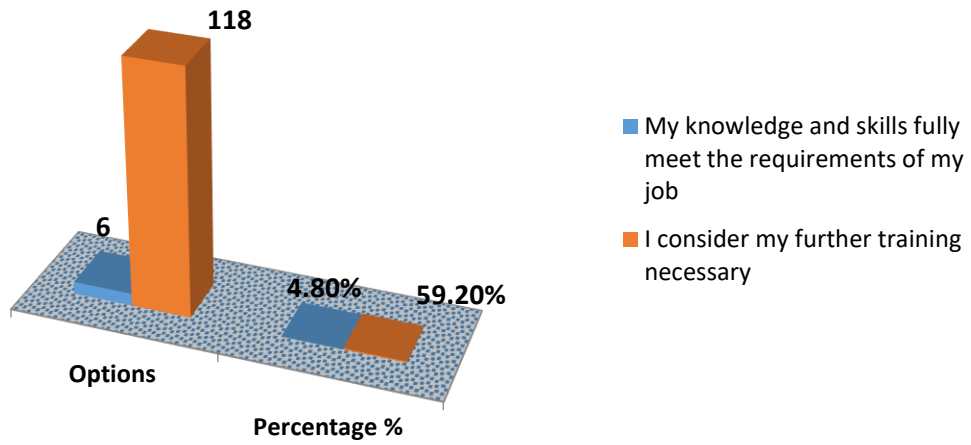
Data collection took place from 1<sup>st</sup> March until 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021, mainly through electronic applications like the google forms application, workplace email, as well as video calls on Viber or Skype, in accordance with the directives and protective measures for the Covid-19 pandemic. More analytically, 150 questionnaires were distributed, from which we received 124 valid responses, due to the inhibitory factors brought about by Covid-19. 10 interviews were successfully carried out (7 with SPA employees and 3 with managers). Content analysis was used to depict the external institutional factors that shaped the context within which the Bodies for the implementation of the Educational Programmes will be organised and will operate, as well as to highlight the problems that arise during their planning (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). The interviews essentially revealed the qualifications or lack thereof, of the target population, which are interwoven with the carrying out of their duties, they also aided the recording of more general weaknesses/problems that constitute an obstacle to achieving their goals and locating elements that constitute motives and aid the smooth implementation of the programmes, as an 'educational contract'. The methodology followed aimed at facilitating a functional connection of the results to the critical evaluation of the literature, highlighting anything new the present research adds to existing knowledge on the issue. In the next section, we present mainly the data that emerged from the quantitative research as the content analysis of the interviews did not reveal any significantly different issues, hence confirming the findings of the questionnaires.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

Concerning the demographic characteristics of the participants, the results revealed that there are more women in human resources at SPA, and that they are somewhat older as most of them are between 40 and 64 years old, with at least 19 years of service in the public sector. Most occupy the position of a simple civil servant, all of them have received basic training during their induction into the public sector and, in addition, their educational level is quite high, as 90.3% of them hold a tertiary education degree, while some of them a postgraduate or doctorate title.

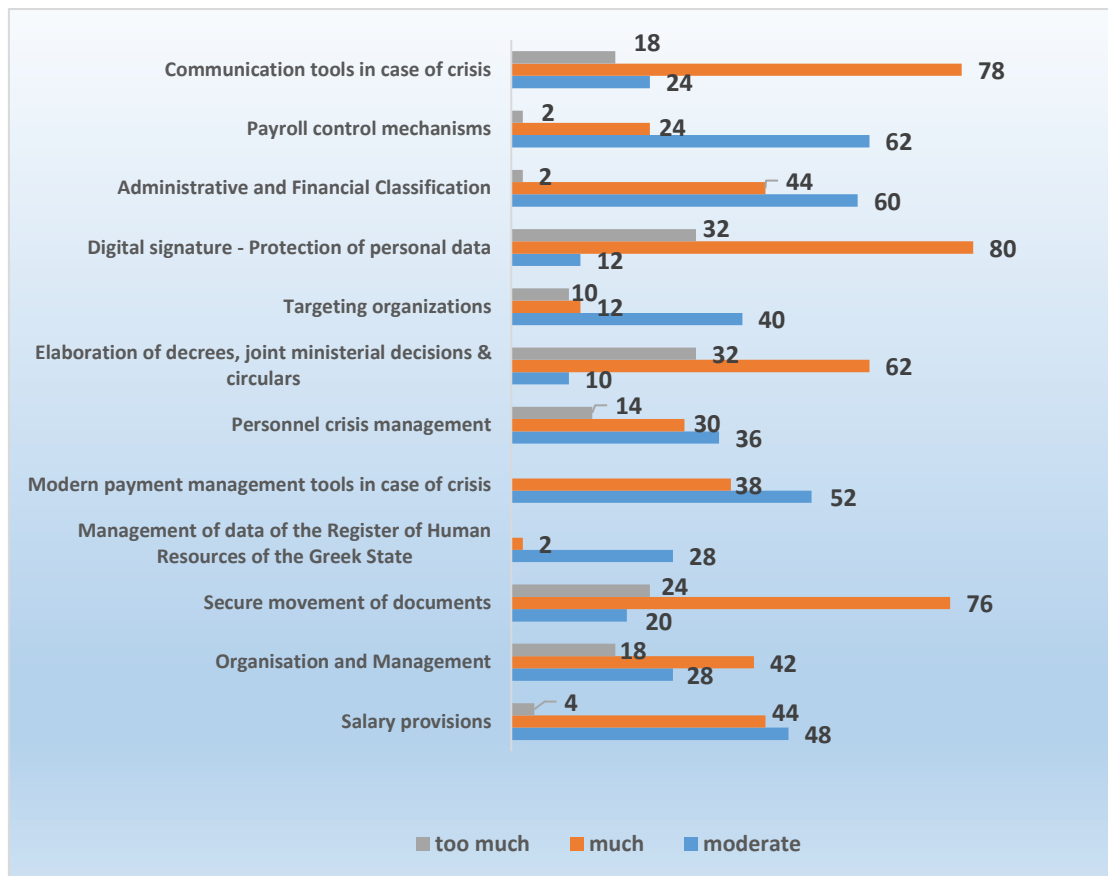
To the research question, "*what are the training needs of SPA employees?*", the results of quantitative and qualitative research revealed the following:

As is shown in Figure 2 below, a percentage of 95.2% consider further training necessary for performance and development in their work, while only 6 employees, a percentage of 4.8%, consider that the knowledge and skills they have, fully cover the requirements of the job they hold.



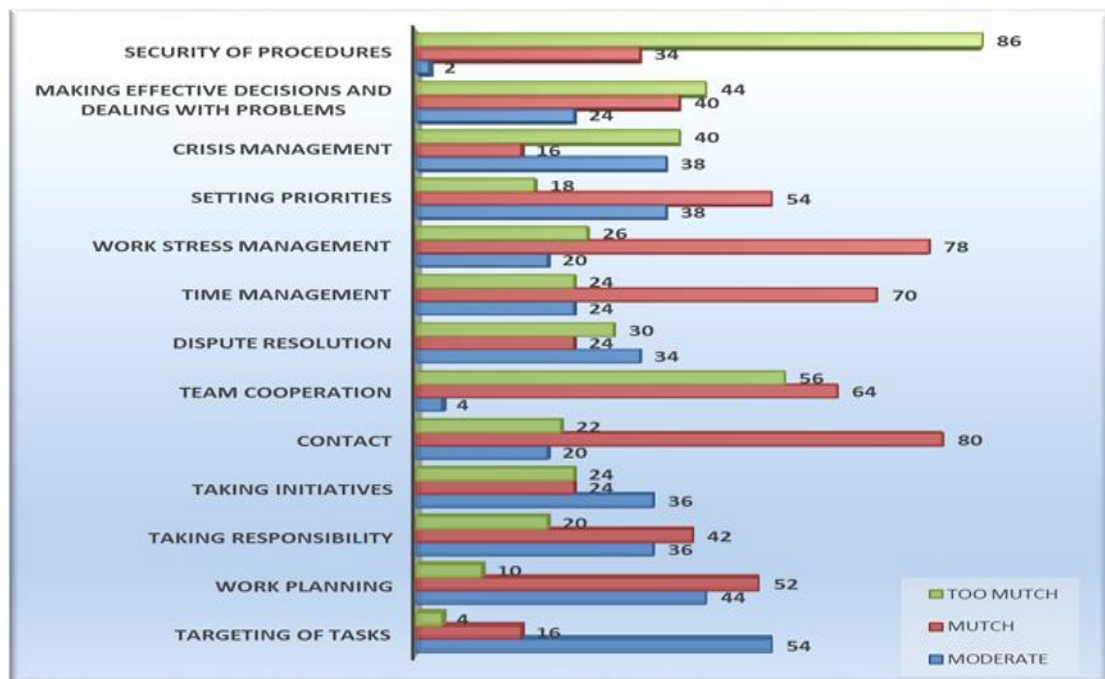
**Figure 2:** Necessity of further training for performance and development at work

In Figure 3 below, we can distinguish the selection gradation of the thematic subjects of training programs that they choose to attend as necessary for their professional development:



**Figure 3:** Programs necessary for the professional development of the participants

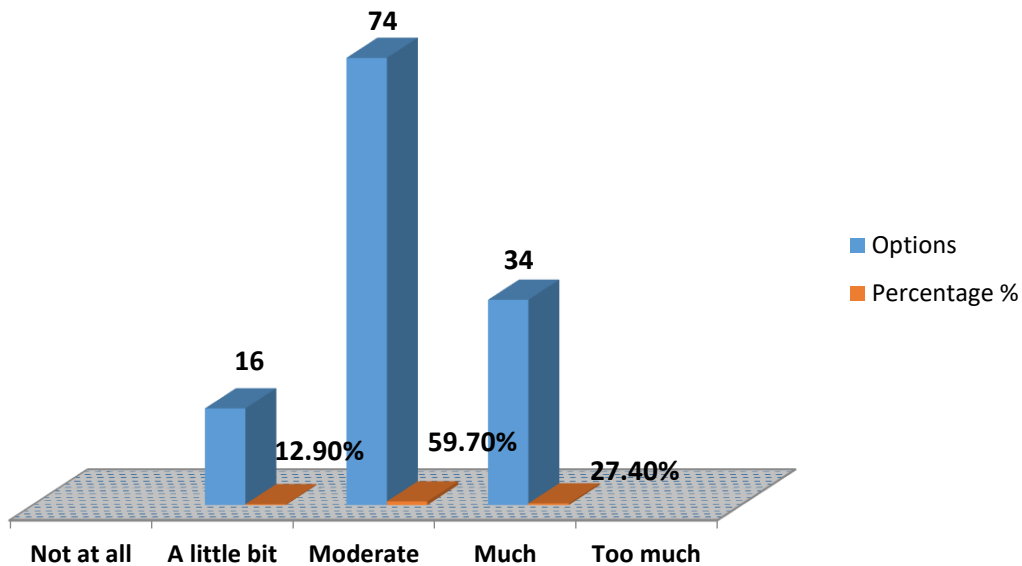
More specifically, out of the 124 valid answers, the most interesting were the programs related to technology and security. This was followed by the communication tools that allowed communication during the Covid\_19 health crisis, the elaboration and interpretation of provisions, as well as the organization and administration. Also, the 4 options selected by the participants in the research as "too much" important for their professional development were: a) the skill of process security with 86 options, b) teamwork with 56, c) obtaining effective decisions with 44 and d) the crisis management with 40. As "much" important for their professional development the 4 options chosen by the participants were: a) communication, with 80 options, b) work stress management, with 78, c) time management, with 70 and d) the resolution of disputes with 64. They were followed by job scheduling with 56, taking initiatives and setting priorities with 54, etc. The skills with the highest degree of choice are presented in Figure 4 below:



**Figure 4:** Skills selected as necessary for the professional development of the participants

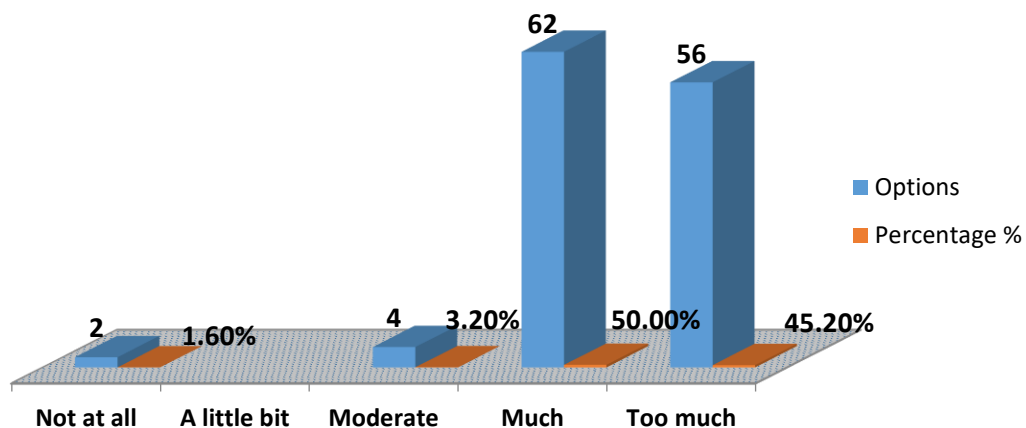
To the research question, *“on what extent are the educational needs of the employees of SPA covered by the existing educational programs?”*, revealed the following:

The degree of coverage based on the 5-point rating scale (not at all, little, moderate, much, too much), as shown in Figure 5, ranges from "little" to "too much", since no employee chooses the two extreme options, "not at all" and "too much". More specifically, 74 employees answered "moderate", recording a percentage of 59.7%, 34 employees, "much", a percentage of 27.4% and 16 employees, "a little", a percentage of 12.90%.



**Figure 5:** Degree of coverage of educational needs by the existing educational programs

On the question “*would regular needs analysis of civil servants prior to the design of training programs lead to their enrichment by topics in response to their actual professional and personal needs in the training programs*” from a total of 124 valid answers, and according to Figure 6, 2 employees answered "not at all", a percentage of 1.6%, 4 employees answered "moderate", a percentage of 3.2%, 62 "much" a percentage of 50% and 56 "too much", a percentage of 45.2%. The high percentage of "much" and "too much" options indicate how urgent it is to adopt this process before designing training programs.



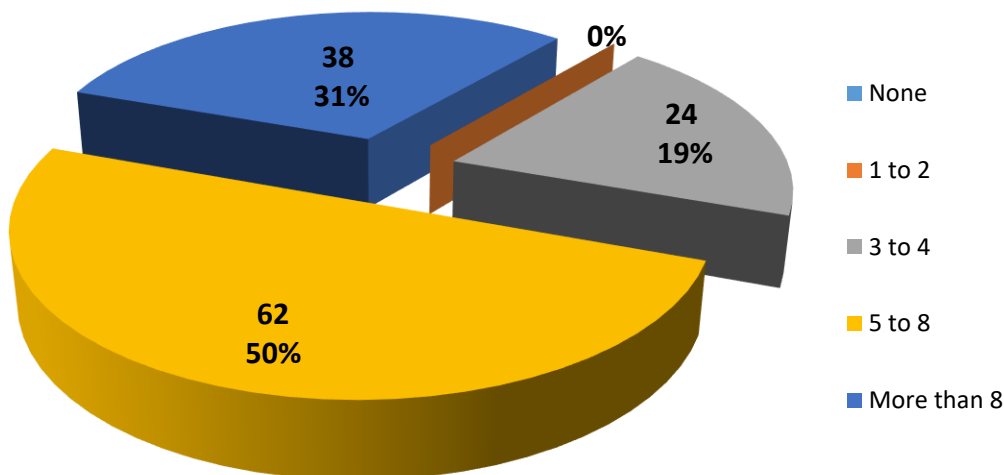
**Figure 6:** The importance of regular needs research before designing training programs

The participants in the research (through questionnaires and interviews) believe that their participation in planning the programs will significantly facilitate their



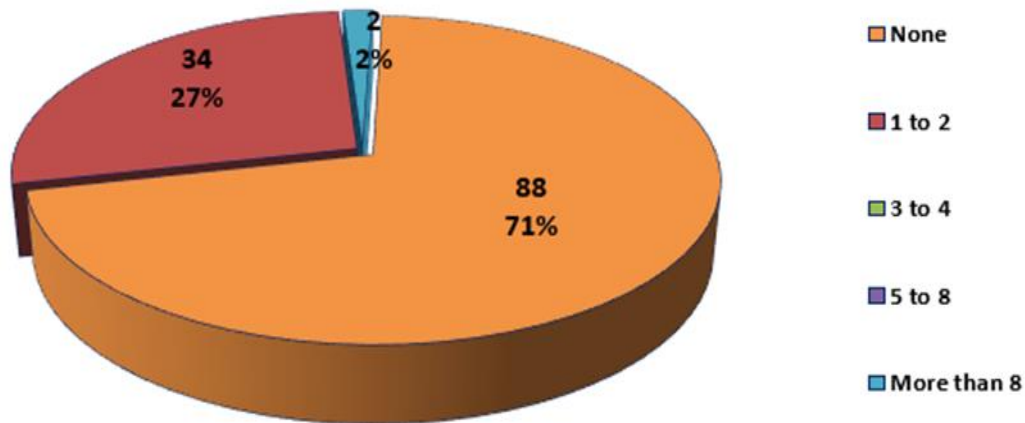
enrichment in subjects that would correspond to their needs. Civil servants' views are in line with the relative educational programs design literature, which emphasizes the necessity and importance of learners' needs analysis, which is a distinct step in educational design (Caffarella 1988, 2002; Moseley, & Heaney, 1994; Karalis, 2005; Leftheriotou, 2014; Pavlis Korres & Leftheriotou, 2020; Rogers, 2007).

The results of quantitative and qualitative research to the research question, "*what are the attitudes – views of employees at SPA to training and lifelong learning?*" revealed: that 24 employees percentage of 19% participated in 3 to 4 live training programs, 62 employees percentage of 50% participated in 5 to 8 live training programs, 38 employees percentage of 31% participated in more than 8 live training programs, while no employee stated participation in "none" or 1 to 2 live training programs (Figure 7). All the participants in the research have attended the basic introductory training of a civil servant implemented by the public institution EKDDA.



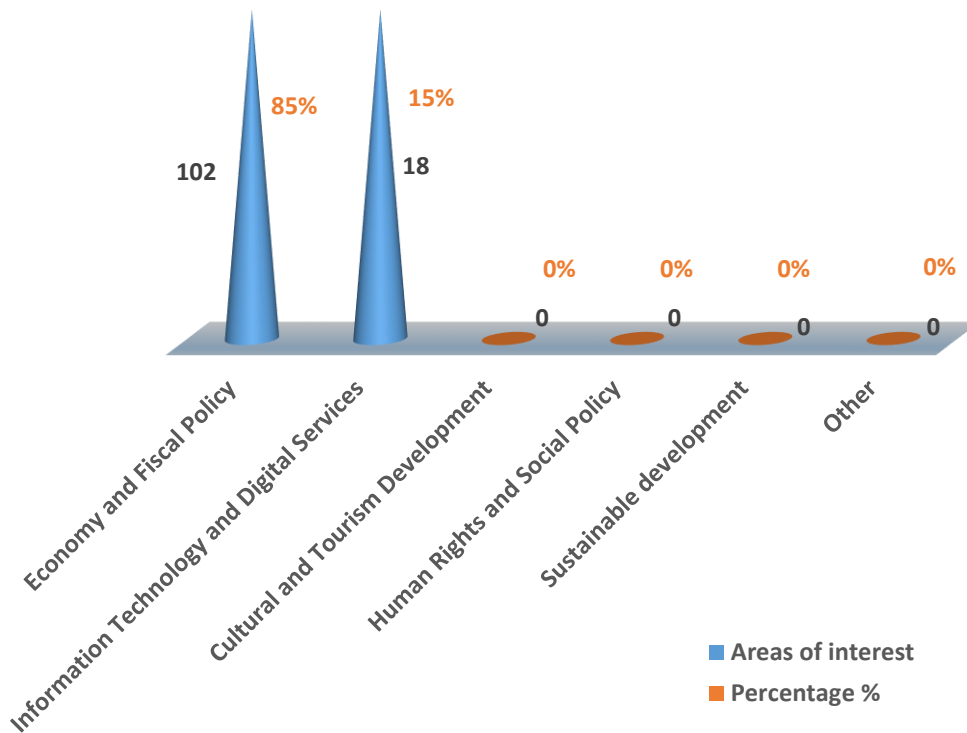
**Figure 7:** Number of participants in live training programs

As shown in Figure 8 below, 88 employees, percentage of 71%, answered that they did not participate in any online training program, 34 employees, percentage of 27%, from 1 to 2 programs, 0 employees, percentage of 0% from 3 to 4 and 5 to 8 programs and 2 employees, percentage of 2%, answered more than 8. The percentage of 71% who answered, "none", raises questions about the interest in attending training programs with the method of distance education. This high percentage is probably related to the fact that they belong to older age groups, who according to Prensky (2001) belong to the digital immigrants, and their low familiarization and capability of using new technologies (CEDEFOP, 2016; Roidis, 2021).



**Figure 8:** Number of participants in distance learning programs

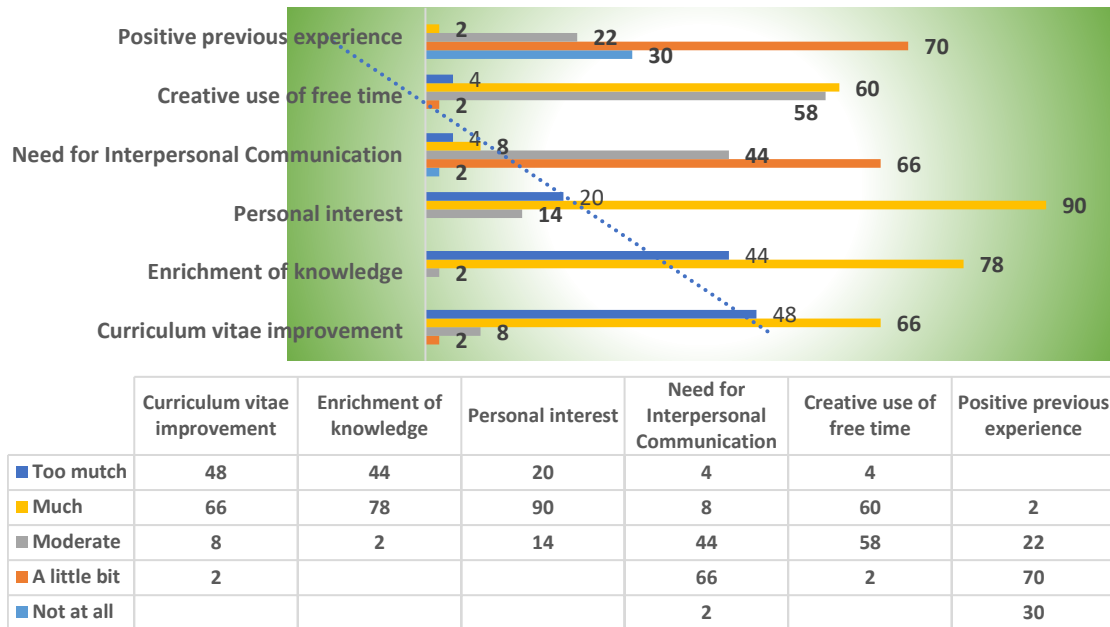
In particular, the interest of 102 employees, a percentage of 85% as it is shown in Figure 9 below, is focused on the field of Economy and Fiscal Policy and 18 employees, a percentage of 15% choose the field of Information Technology and Digital Services. The results demonstrate the strong interest of employees in their involvement with cognitive objects related to their work (Landorf, Doscher & Rocco, 2008; Bacal, 2004).



**Figure 9:** Training interests for professional development

The data from the questionnaires and the interviews showed that the fiscal employees are in favour of participation in training programmes, as much for their personal as for their professional development. They believe that beyond the formal procedure and the satisfaction of personal needs, training is an opportunity for advancement in the service which brings with it an upgrading of services and the weight of additional obligations.

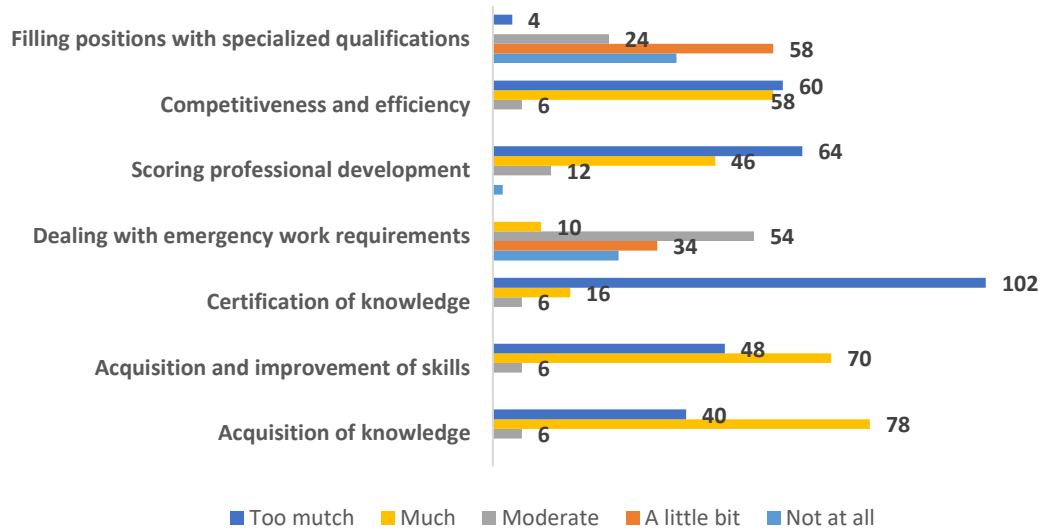
The factors that motivate "much" and "too much" to participate in training programs for the personal development of employees are shown in Figure 10. Following the trend line based on the option "too much", we find that the CV improvement, the enrichment of knowledge and personal interest, outweighs the interest in interpersonal communication, creative use of time or positive past experience.



**Figure 10:** Incentives to participate in personal development training

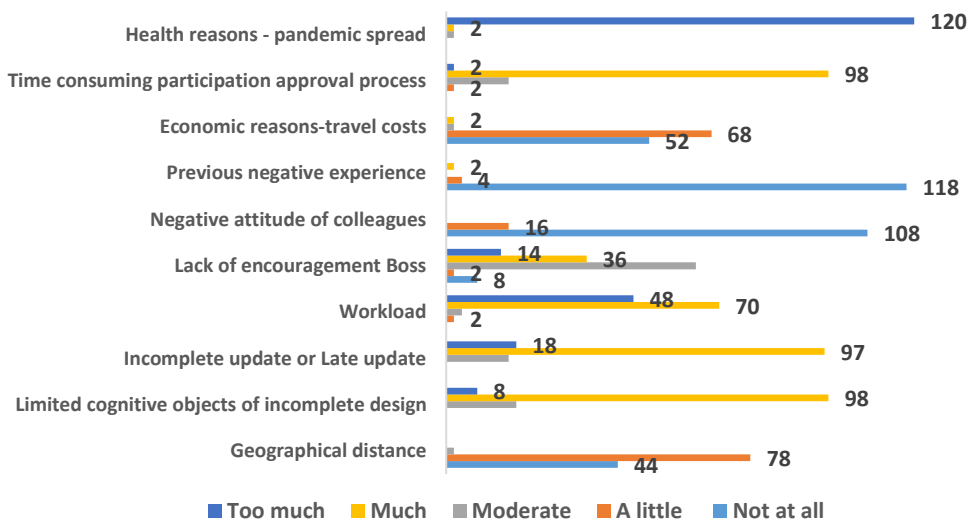
The factors that by "much" and "too much" are the motivation for their participation in training programs for their professional development are presented in Figure 11 below. We note that the motivations they choose are not so much related to dealing with emergency work needs or filling positions with specialized qualifications, since priority is given to incentives related to the acquisition of knowledge that will clearly lead to his professional development. So that, the certification of knowledge, the acquisition of knowledge, the improvement of skills, the Scoring for professional development, the competitiveness and the efficiency, are the "much" and "too much" important motivations for their participation in the training and consequently in professional development. The choices of the participants confirm that the knowledge

and skills adults acquired in educational programs are directly applied and useful in their lives as referred in the adult education literature (Knowles, 1980; Rogers, 2007).



**Figure 11:** Incentives to participate in training for professional development

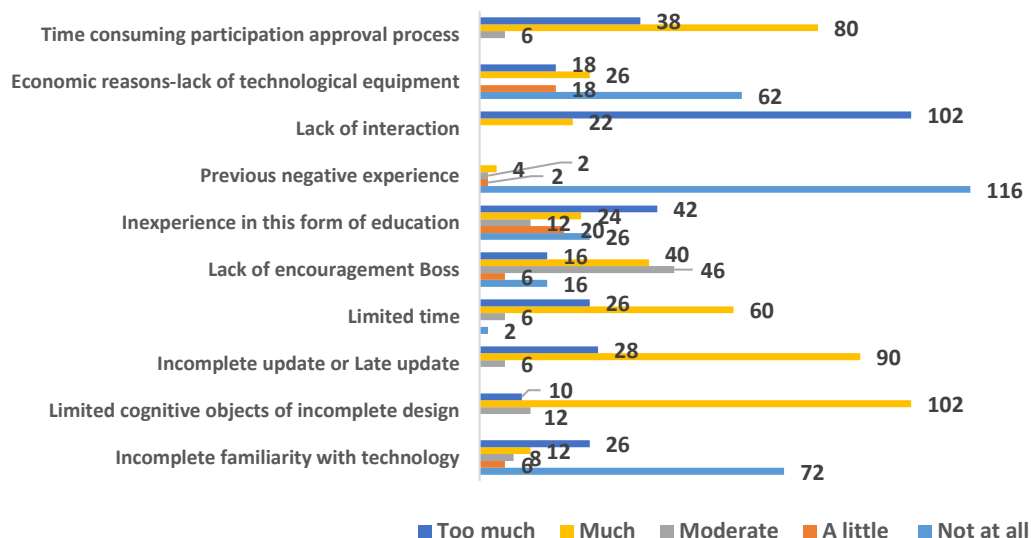
The factors that constitute "much" and "too much" a barrier to their participation in lifelong learning programs, as shown in Figure 12, are in order of choice: The health reasons due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the time-consuming approval process and the limited knowledge- shortcomings in program planning, lack of information, encouragement from Administrative Manager and workload. In fact, in order to form an illustrative view of the results, we note the trend line intermittently, taking into account the options with the largest number of answers.



**Figure 12:** Barriers to lifelong learning

The factors that "greatly" limit their participation in distance learning programs, as shown in Figure 13 below, are: a) limited knowledge, b) time-consuming approval

process, c) incomplete information or delayed information d) the limited time and "too much", the lack of interaction, while it does not affect them "at all", any previous negative experience.



**Figure 13:** Barriers to distance learning

Regarding distance education, they recognise its usefulness in a time of health crisis. Despite this though, mainly through the interviews, we noticed reservations over its choice, which according to the research, emerge from the lack of experience or even technological equipment.

The main barriers revealed by the research consist mainly of institutional barriers (limited cognitive objects of incomplete design, lack of interaction, incomplete update or late update, time-consuming participation approval process) (Cross, 1981). These barriers are directly related to design flaws of the educational programs in combination with the educational technique’s outcome (lack of interaction) in both face-to-face and online educational environments (Caffarella 1988, 2002; Karalis, 2005; Pavlis Korres & Leftheriotou, 2020; Rogers, 2002; Pavlis Korres & Leftheriotou, 2016).

The participants have all been through basic training and over their years of service have participated in more than eight in-person programmes, on an Economic and fiscal subject matter, mainly through EKDDA. In addition, the need for civil servants to be offered training programmes by other training bodies too, other than EKDDA and INEP, was apparent. The Training Institutions they choose for their training are listed in Table 2 below:

**Table 2:** Selected Training Bodies

Training provider	Choices	Rate %
EKDDA	124	100%
INEP	80	64,5%
Hellenic Open University (HOU)	40	32,3%
Higher Education Institutes	8	8,1%

The thematic training subjects that attracted the greatest interest of the staff concern: a) introductory education, b) economics and fiscal policy and c) computer training. The selection number and percentages are shown in Table 3 below:

**Table 3:** Objects of training of the participants in the research

Training items	Choices	Rate %
Introductory education	114	91,9%
Economy and fiscal policy	114	91,9%
Computer training	106	85,5%

Employees were asked to choose one or more of the 5 areas in which attending training programs affected their work. The options that attracted the most interest were: a) the upgrade of services for 118 employees, a percentage of 95.2% and b) the opportunity for career development, for 82 employees, a percentage of 66.1%. The results of the selections are shown in Table 4 below:

**Table 4:** Areas affected by the training

Sectors	Choices	Rate %
Charge with additional obligations	28	22,6%
Upgrading services	118	95,2%
Opportunity for career development	82	66,1%
Standard monitoring procedure	8	6,5%
Satisfaction of personal needs	4	3,2%

In addition, the employees' choices in terms of thematic subject areas for training according to the nature of their work, are related to the choices of the impact sectors of training.

In particular, the relevant answers reveal the employees' interest in participation in training programmes on thematic subject areas related to the object of their work in order to improve their skills and knowledge in them, while aiming at the upgrading of services and their career progression.

The thematic subject areas of the training programmes that are missing and which they believe will contribute to their effectiveness in carrying out their duties revealed the civil servants' interest in programmes related to the Economy, Administration, Fiscal Policy, Information Science, Legislation and all the forms of digital services.

It is worth noting that apart from the clearly fiscal subject areas, the fiscal employees displayed great interest in participation in programmes on group behaviour and behaviour towards the employees in other Sectors, or Sectors that are to be integrated, programmes related to communication, understanding the subject areas of other Services (Census-ELSTAT) some of which they communicate with inter-operably, crisis management programmes, the safety and use of new technologies in order to facilitate their job, and distance work and training.

From the research results, it becomes clear that the training sector in the Civil service needs to improve in terms of subject areas, methodology, as well as adult educational tools in order to satisfy the constantly changing needs of the Services.

Training programmes offered to civil service employees by other bodies besides EKDDA and INEP, like the Hellenic Open University (HOU) and other Higher Education Institutes would be extremely important. Ensuring the effective training of the fiscal employees and the SPA in particular, in subject areas that are missing, but judged necessary for their advancement in the Service, is the main link in the chain of the planning, application, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes.

## **5. Recommendations**

From the main findings of the research, we propose an immediate improvement, to the following: the design of educational programmes by the official training Body of the Civil Service (EKDDA), in parallel with the main principles for designing programmes and adult education, should take into serious consideration the educational needs of the SPA employees as there are no similar published research in the Greek literature (Lorrena & Dieguez, 2018). We propose that the official training Body (EKDDA), should focus on searching for new thematic subject areas, methods, and educational tools in order to attract the interest of the learners since at the moment it is occupied only with a continual search for and absorption of funds. Credits should not be the only motivation for participation in training programmes, without them being connected to employee efficiency after training, seeing that in Greece relevant indices for evaluation have not been defined (Karalis, 2013). The thematic subject areas for distance learning should be enriched, providing motivation so as to overcome the lack of corresponding skills and abilities in the public employees (Armakolas, 2018). In particular, the Training Centres, exploiting the special circumstances created by the Covid-19 health crisis, during which an increased need to satisfy training requirements and make use of employees' free time was noted, should adapt their methods of approach by designing attractive programmes and flexible educational methods so that interest in participating in distance learning becomes a choice for making use of free time in the future beyond the circumstances that a health crisis may create.

Economic motives should be provided for the purchase of equipment (computers, cameras, headphones) or even participation in Bodies outside the EKDDA, in thematic subject areas of general content, for all civil service employees, providing skills for various service needs, without their absolute specialization (Karahalios et al., 2012). The structure of educational programmes should be more attractive. The practical part of the training should be widened to the theoretical (Dimitriadis, 2015). The goals and expected outcomes of the educational programmes should be precisely defined in order to ensure effectiveness (Messaris et al., 2011). Information about the programmes on offer should be sent directly to personal workplace email addresses which the employees provide

during registration with the training Body (EKDDA) as the information process today (central Service email), brings with it a plethora of delays and obstacles. In addition, the procedure for the approval of participation should be simplified, as the current procedure is extremely lengthy. Lack of encouragement from Supervisors should cease to be an obstacle to training, with the promotion of legislative regulation which provides for compulsory training for all civil servants each year, giving equal opportunities for participation to all (Kyriakidis, Iakovidis & Panda, (2017).

With motivation the factor of being satisfaction from work being carried out and with interest in contributing to the common good, especially in times of crisis, internal rewards, like the sense of duty, self-fulfilment and a stable, safe and supportive working environment are the things that improve the motivation of civil servants.

In a society and administration undergoing rapid transformation and continually changing shape, the SPA should ensure the necessary education for its human resource in order for it to acquire knowledge and skills that will contribute to the improvement of its operation.

For researchers in the future, an interesting topic would be the evaluation of the impact of training on public institutions by using Kirkpatrick's evaluation model.

## **6. Conclusion**

The main aim of this research was to investigate the educational needs of the civil servants in Single Payment Authority (SPA) in Greece, during the Covid-19 health crisis. All the employees judge further training to be necessary for their performance and progress, in subject matters related to the safety of procedures, group work, effective decision making and crisis management, as the knowledge and skills they possess don't fully meet the requirements of their position. Based on the duties of their positions, the needs of most employees focus on carrying out cases, making checks, processing decrees, digital services, modern tools for monitoring and payments, communication, security, and financial and administrative classification. In particular, staff in supervisory positions noted that they needed training on issues to do with Organization and Administration, staff crisis management at times of crisis or goal setting, while for those working in secretarial positions, the needs focus on matters of Secretarial Support such as the digital signature, the protection of personal data and the secure movement of documents.

The fiscal employees are in favour of participation in training programmes, as much for their personal as for their professional development. Motives for participation in training programmes for their personal growth include improving the CV, enriching knowledge and personal interest, outweighing interest in interpersonal communication, creative use of time or positive previous experience. For those who participate in their career progression, priority is given to subject areas related to their professional fields



such as the certification of knowledge, the acquisition of knowledge, improvement of skills, Credits for career advancement, competitiveness, and efficiency.

The factors that in order of priority are barriers restricting their participation in face-to-face training programmes were hygiene reasons due to COVID 19 pandemic spread, the lengthy and complicated procedure for approval of the application for participation, the limited cognitive subjects, lack of planning, scanty and delayed information, lack of encouragement from their supervisors and their workload. It was stressed that corresponding barriers to their participation in distance training programmes were the limited cognitive subject areas, lack of information or delayed information, the time-consuming approval procedure for applications, limited time, lack of encouragement from Supervisors, financial reasons linked to technological equipment, inexperience as well as the lack of interaction.

The research results indicate clearly that the training in the public sector needs to improve in terms of subject areas, methodology, as well as adult educational methods and techniques in order to satisfy the constantly changing needs of the Services. Also, the civil servants' preference motivation emerges, the factor being satisfaction from work being carried out and interest in contributing to the common good, especially in times of crisis.

Needs analysis must be included as a vital step of any educational program design in order to meet the needs of SPA employees today, thus upgrading the services and facilitating its development.

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**Maria Pavlis-Korres** obtained a university degree in Political Science in Athens. From 1983 until 2018 she worked in Adult Education at the Greek Ministry of Education. Since 2005 her research interests are focused on e-learning and she became a PhD student at the University of Alcalá, Spain. In 2008 she obtained her Advance Studies Degree from the Computer Science Department of the University of Alcalá and in 2010 she obtained her PhD with honors. Since 2012 she is a member of the scientific staff of Hellenic Open University and teaches in "Adult Education" and "Education Science" postgraduate programs. In June 2017 she has been elected Associate Professor in the Pedagogical Sector of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki to teach "Lifelong Learning and non-Formal Education". She has published several articles, chapters and books on Roma, adult education, and e-learning. Her current interests are focused on the design, development, and evaluation of educational projects for adults, face to face and e-learning, as well as the group dynamics in an online environment and the appropriate use of communication tools in order to promote interaction in an online environment.

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