



THE LEVEL OF STUDIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING AS FACTORS SHAPING KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ATTITUDES OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES OF SOCIAL SERVICES REGARDING ISSUES OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Alexandros Chaidasⁱ,

Stathis Balias,

Thanassis Karalis

Department of Educational Sciences

and Early Childhood Education,

University of Patras,

Greece

Abstract:

This paper presents part of the results of a study conducted in the context of PhD studies of the first of the authors in order to assess a) the level of knowledge, perceptions, skills, attitudes and mobilization of human resources of social services on issues of protection of Human Rights (HR) of vulnerable social groups (VSG), and b) the impact on this level of both Lifelong Learning (LL) of human resources in the field of Human Rights and their level of studies. For data to be collected, a closed-ended electronic questionnaire was created and completed by four hundred and fifty-three active employees in social services operating in the three Regional Units of Western Greece. The most important results of the survey showed that the knowledge of human resources in the field of Human Rights was moderate. Moreover, it is concluded that the perceptions of human resources regarding the equality which VSG should enjoy in exercising their rights and receiving social benefits from the state range from very high to extremely high levels, respectively. At the same time, the emergence rate of socio-emotional skills during human resources contact with VSG appears to be adequate. On the contrary, the research data showed little mobilization of human resources to defend the rights of VSG within and outside the work environment. In addition, after correlating the categories of LL with the variables under study, the main results showed that the higher the levels of Formal Human Resource Education in the field of Human Rights, the less the various characteristics of VSG (gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, mental-physical disability, age, racial-ethnic origin, religion, socioeconomic status, language, skin color) constitute a barrier of discrimination during their contact with them, the more their socio-emotional skills emerge and their degree of mobilization increases. Finally, as the levels

ⁱ Correspondence: email alchaidas@yahoo.gr

of studies increase, the higher the level of knowledge developed in the field of Human Rights by the participants in the research and the less the various characteristics of VSG affect the provision of quality services to them. On the contrary, the lower the educational level of human resources, the greater their mobilization within and outside the work environment.

Keywords: human resources of social services, vulnerable social groups, lifelong learning, Human Rights, human rights education

1. Introduction

The consequences of intense social, economic, and demographic changes are also evident in the working environments. A very characteristic instance is the case of the social services, private and public, where the profile of the beneficiaries is distinguished by heterogeneous cultural, linguistic, age, racial, socio-economic, psychosomatic, sexual preferences and religious beliefs (disabled, Roma, elderly, immigrants, refugees, single-parent families, unemployed, LGBTQI people, etc.). For these population groups, the relevant international texts of declarations, treaties, conventions, protocols, charters, national laws and action plans over time attribute the characteristics of vulnerability, linking them to a high probability of exposure to social disadvantage, inequalities, material deprivation, prejudice and stigmatization (United Nations, 1948; United Nations, 1965, 1989, 2006; Council of Europe, 1950; European Parliament, Council and Commission, 2012; European Commission, 2010, 2020; Law 4019/2011; Law 4430/2016).

In this context of the operation of social services, the human resources in charge of providing quality services to all beneficiaries, regardless of their characteristics, are called upon to play a leading role. The services it offers are emotional or aesthetic ones (Sturdy & Korczynski, 2005), based on contact and interpersonal relationships and aim to develop relationships of responsibility, trust, freedom and equality (Mulgan, 2012; Stears, 2012). In order to achieve these goals, in addition to the specialized, delineated, technical and measurable skills required by each profession (hard skills), the cultivation and emergence of socio-emotional skills (empathy, emotional intelligence, active listening, critical thinking, management of different cultural assets, etc.) are equally important, as they emerge as key skills (Kokkos, 2005: 35-36), complement cognitive skills and make it easier for human resources to adapt to their complex work needs (OECD, 2017; Golman, 2011). In this effort to provide quality services, a series of codes of ethics and professional ethics come to define and indicate the communication framework of human resources during their contact with the beneficiaries. In particular, private social bodies, organizations, centers and structures draw up internal regulations that include appropriate ways of behavior, treatment and service of vulnerable groups, while in the wider public sector, a series of regulations are observed via Government Gazette, Ministerial decisions and opinions of independent authorities (European Ombudsman, 2015; Ministry of Administrative Reform and Electronic Governance & Ombudsman, 2012; General

Secretariat for Transparency, 2014; Ombudsman, 2015; Ministry of Interior & National Transparency Authority, 2022).

Notable is also the extract from the Voluntary European Quality Framework for Social Services of the Social Protection Committee of the European Union, according to which respect for users' rights constitutes the most basic quality principles for relations between providers and users (SPC/2010/10/8 final: 6):

“Service providers should respect the fundamental rights and freedoms as outlined in national, European and international human rights instruments, as well as the dignity of the users. Moreover, they should promote and implement the users’ rights in terms of equal opportunities, equal treatment, freedom of choice, self-determination, control over their lives and respect for their private lives. Appropriate services should be provided without discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Physical, mental and financial abuse of vulnerable users should be prevented and adequately sanctioned”.

However, despite the regulatory framework and the obligation to apply codes of ethics, professional ethics and quality principles, there are still obvious behaviors that show their circumvention. Specifically, in many cases, a portion of employees is found to bear stereotypes and prejudices, to show discrimination, to manifest even racist behaviors. The consequence of these phenomena is that hesitancy, mistrust, lack of trust and doubt are born in the beneficiaries not only for the human resources but also for the bodies that the human resources represent (Houston *et al.*, 2016; National Centre for Social Research, 2012: 282-283; Trutkowski & Hlepas, 2018: 56-61; Moschos & Partners, 2018: 41-45; Moschoti, 2019; National Commission for Human Rights - Racist Violence Recording Network, 2021; Observatory for the Advocacy and Defense of Human Rights of Roma, 2022).

All the above raise serious concerns not only as to the full access of VSG to public goods and services but also as to the consequent protection and enjoyment of their Human Rights. This concern is intensified in the case of the welfare state and its critical choices, social services, where human resources are required to implement social policies and strategies related to Human Rights and to guarantee their protection and enjoyment (Ombudsman, 2021: 47).

2. Literature review

2.1 Lifelong Learning (LL) and Human Rights Education (HRE): concepts and benefits

An answer to the above problems comes from the field of LL, which is an important parameter in the development and evolution of the individual's personality. In particular, the dynamic term Lifelong Education and Learning refers to a philosophical concept according to which education is considered as a long-term process that begins at birth and lasts throughout human life (UNESCO, 1976: 9). It is a lifelong learning activity that

aims to improve knowledge, skills and competences, in the context of a perspective related to the person, society and employment (European Commission, 2001).

In the case of human resources training beyond any organized regular or non-regular process that may take place during her/his professional life, the employee as a social being is involved throughout her/his life in learning activities that run horizontally through his/her social, family and individual life and refer to all types of education, formal, non-formal, informal and at all educational levels (Coombs, 1968: 9; Coombs & Ahmed, 1974: 7-9), allowing *“their constitution into an educational continuum, in constant interaction with socio-economic, political and cultural reality”* (Vergidis, 2001: 138).

The benefits that can arise from LL on a cognitive, psychological, emotional and behavioral level, relate -beyond personal and family life- to the work of the individual, his/her leisure time as well as the community in which he/she is involved and active (Schuller & Desjardins, 2010: 229; OECD, 2007: 35). International organizations, through interrelated programs and complementary strategies, prioritize the value of the LL both for personal life and for the professional development of the individual: his knowledge of the environment and the conditions prevailing in his/her work increases, work problems are understood more quickly and in depth, his/her knowledge, skills and attitudes towards work issues are cultivated, there is a change in the way he/she thinks and acts as an employee, as well as his/her involvement in the processes of solving the problems that arise each time (United Nations General Assembly, 2015; United Nations 2016; UNESCO, 2015, 2016; OECD, 2005, 2010).

Additionally, in the wider environment of the individual and outside work, continuing learning and adult education are associated with higher levels of civic and social participation (Bynner & Hammond, 2004; Field, 2005), with pervasive changes in social and political attitudes (Feinstein *et al.*, 2008), as well as cultivating and reinforcing values, attitudes, beliefs, and motivations to encourage social engagement (OECD, 2007). Moreover, in the context of the LL, a series of Declarations, Resolutions, Agreements, and Programmes come to emphasize the crucial role of education in protecting and respecting Human Rights (Bajaj, 2011: 481). In particular, HRE, as a lifelong process, runs through the design of programs of organizations, public or not, of all ages, categories, professions and professionals. It characterizes all levels and forms of education (formal, non-formal, informal), including, among others, continuing vocational education, public information and awareness-raising activities (United Nations, 1948; United Nations, 1966; United Nations - OHCHR, 1993; United Nations General Assembly, 1994, 2001, 2005, 2010).

Finally, HRE is associated not only with cognitive outcome but also with changes in human behaviors in his/her areas of action, contributing to his/her development as a responsible member of the wider society (Tibbitts, 2017: 6 & 15). Awareness of the principles and values of Human Rights as well as knowledge of the rules and mechanisms for their protection, empowers individuals to claim and assert the rights not only of themselves but also of others (Levin, 2012: 239). Moreover, through this educational dimension, which is a process of empowerment, individuals develop social empathy and a tolerant attitude towards diversity, increase their level of participation in

politics, are active in collectives and social forums, are encouraged in decision-making on social concerns, while, at the same time, in their daily lives they defend and implement Human Rights, as activating and responsible professionals (United Nations-General Assembly, 2010; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2013).

3. Research methodology

3.1 Purpose and research questions

The purpose of the paper was to study the level of knowledge, perceptions, skills, attitudes and mobilization of the human resources of social services operating in the three Regional Units of the Region of Western Greece (RWG) on Human Rights issues, as well as the impact of the educational level and the LL of human resources on this level.

Based on the aforementioned purpose, the present study was guided by the following research questions:

- **1st research question:** What is the level of knowledge, perceptions, skills, attitudes and mobilization of human resources of social services in the field of Human Rights?
- **2nd research question:** Whether and to what extent does Lifelong Learning (Formal, Non-Formal Education, Informal Learning) of human resources in the field of Human Rights affect the formation of this level?
- **3rd research question:** Whether and to what extent does the level of studies of human resources affect the formation of the level of knowledge, perceptions, skills, attitudes and mobilization of human resources of social services in the field of Human Rights?

3.2 Research approach: data collection and analysis

The strategy developed was that of quantitative study. This approach was chosen in order to ensure the largest possible number of participants from specific services of a geographically defined area in a fast, safe and reliable way. Also, the data collection technique was carried out by convenience sampling, as the human resources involved in the study were convenient to the researcher (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2008; Creswell, 2011). Specifically, the human resources staff of twenty social services (bodies, organizations, stations, residential establishments, structures, centers, legal entities) of the Regional Units of Aetoloakarnania, Achaia and Ilia, some of which functionally belong to the local government organization of the RWG, while others are under its supervision, control, provision of expertise, coordination and cooperation.

3.3 Research tool

For the collection of data, a closed-ended electronic questionnaire on Google Docs form was constructed using a five-point Likert scale and sent by email. The questionnaire was structured on the triptych knowledge-skills-stances in combination with the Felisa Tibbitts' revised emerging models of Human Rights Education (2017):

- Values and Awareness/Awareness-Socialization Model,
- Accountability-Responsibility-Professional Development Model,
- Activism-Transformation Model.

This choice was made based on the above purpose and research questions, as well as the fact that HRE is associated not only with the cognitive outcome but also with the development of soft skills and changes in people's attitudes and behaviors in their fields of action (Tibbitts, *ibid.*).

The compilation of the questionnaire was based on a synthesis of indicators, categorizations and scales of international organizations and surveys.

Specifically, the following were used:

- two foreign-language questionnaires of international surveys carried out in 2015
 - in Ireland, by the homonymous Commission of Human Rights and Equality and
 - in Hong Kong (Lo, Leung & Chow, 2015). The relevant permits were requested and obtained for the use of these scales.
- the Human Rights Education Indicator Framework (TCG6/REF/15) developed in 2015 by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Danish Institute for Human Rights,
- the categorization of features included in the Fundamental Rights categorization of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and the Council of Europe (FRA, 2010),
- Daniel Golman's (2011) model of emotional intelligence,
- the European (2015) and Greek Code of Ethics and Conduct for Public Sector Employees (2022),
- focused questions extracted from the study of the literature, from the researcher's communication with the three-member advisory committee, as well as from relevant contacts with key informants.

The terminology that runs through the whole questionnaire was based on the typology of Formal, Non-Formal and Informal Education of the Coombs & Ahmed educational actions (Coombs, 1968: 9; Coombs & Ahmed, 1974:7-9), as well as on the term Lifelong Education and Learning, as defined by the editors of the Adult Education Dictionary (Karalis & Lintzeris, 2022: 51).

3.4 Survey participants

The target population consists of active employees who staff social services operating in the three Regional Units of Western Greece (Aitolokarnania, Achaia, Ilia). The questionnaire was completed by 453 people, of whom 372 were female (82.1%) and 81 (17.9%) were male. The bulk of participants (339 people) are tertiary education graduates (74.8%: 26.5% Technological Educational Institute Graduates, 18.1% University Graduates and 28.9% PgD holders and 1.3% Phd holders). 69.8% do not hold a master's degree and/or a doctorate, while, among the Pgd and PhD holders (30.2% in total), only 7.3% hold a master's degree and/or a PhD related to Human Rights.

The specialties of the sample members vary. The majority specialize in disciplines related to Psychosocial, Legal Support and Mediation (31.8%: social workers, psychologists, sociologists, intercultural mediators, lawyers), Education (24.1%: kindergarten teachers, pedagogues/special educators, etc.) and Health Sciences (20.3%: nurses, nurses' assistants, occupational therapists, speech therapists, pharmacists, doctors, health supervisors, etc.). This is followed by professionals in Management (16.8%) (Secretaries with High School Education, Administrative-Financial with Technological Institute and University Education, IT, etc.) and Auxiliary staff (7.1%: family assistants, caregivers).

Regarding their employment status, 38.9% work as private law staff of indefinite duration, 32.9% as fixed-term private law, 23% are permanent employees, while the remaining 5.3% are external partners and employees with a work contract. As for the body, 51.3% work in social structures, centers, agencies, public sector organizations and the remaining 48.7% in corresponding services of the private sector. Furthermore, 26.5% of the sample members staff "one-stop shop-information-referral-providing benefits", while 73.5% staff "Direct, regular and/or continuous contact with beneficiaries" (category of body per service provided). Regarding the type of service provided, the largest percentage of participants comes from "Education, care and provision of goods to adults" (44.2%), followed by "Education and care services to children and adolescents" (25.4%), followed by local government administrative, social services (22.8%), while the remaining 7.5% staff counselling centers-psychosocial health centers.

Finally, as far as quantitative demographic characteristics are concerned, the average age of respondents is 43.48 years, their average total work experience is 15.35 years, and the average work experience in the current position is 9.30 years.

3.5 Survey reliability and validity

The participants in the survey constitute about 40% of the human resources that staff the social services that operate in the three Regional Units of Western Greece. In order to check the apparent and conceptual validity of the questionnaire, the time of its completion, the specific interests of the participants and its electronic form, a pilot survey was conducted (Chaidas & Balias, 2023), in which forty-two employees participated, staffing eight of the twenty social services of the final survey, communication with Heads of Social Services and Departments, but also contact with informants of various specialties who had extensive work experience (key informants).

The quantitative data of the research were analyzed through the statistical software package IBM SPSS V. 28. The non-parametric statistical Kruskal-Wallis test was used to identify possible statistically significant differences in the averages of 2 or 3+ demographic subgroups. The possible correlations between arithmetic and ordinal variables were investigated with Spearman's Rho correlation coefficient, and the reliability of the various ordinal question subscales was tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. In all static tests, $\alpha=0.05$ was used. The reliability of the sub-scale questions of the variables under study is very satisfactory since Cronbach's Alpha received values

above 0.7. Finally, since three of the five parts of the questionnaire were the translated version of sections of two international scales, but also in order to determine whether all subsections function as one variable and/or more, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was carried out (Cohen, Manion & Morrisson, 2008; Sarris, 2021).

4. Research findings

1st research question: What is the level of knowledge, perceptions, skills, attitudes and mobilization of human resources of social services in the field of Human Rights?

On a scale of 1=None to 5=To a high extent, the survey participants were asked to state the level of their "Knowledge in the field of Human Rights" (official texts, protection mechanisms, codes of ethics and labor ethics, principles and values of Human Rights), the level of emergence of "Socio-emotional skills during their contact with VSG", as well as the extent to which various "Characteristics of VSG inhibit the provision of services to them". In addition, on a scale from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree, survey participants were asked to express their degree of agreement with various proposals regarding their "Perceptions of discrimination on Human Rights and social policy issues", as well as proposals regarding their "Attitudes both on issues of adherence to labor codes of ethics and on issues of mobilization for the defence of the Human Rights of VSG within and outside the work environment".

The reliability of all sub-scale questions of the variables under study is very satisfactory since Cronbach's Alpha takes values above 0.7. For each participant, the average of the answers related to each subscale is calculated, and an individual average score can be obtained from 1 to 5.

From the averages of the variables under study, we observe (Table 1) that there is a very high degree of agreement for the provision of Social Policy on Human Rights issues (AR=4.79), a very high degree of Compliance with Labor Ethics (AR=4.59), a high degree of discrimination on Human Rights issues (AR=4.41, more for the entire population with AR=4.67 and less for vulnerable groups with AR=4.15), a sufficient degree of emergence of Socio-motional Skills when contacting human resources with VSG (AR=4.32), Mobilization above average (AR=3.76, more potential mobilization with AR=4.04 and less action with AR=3.64), moderate Knowledge on official texts, Human Rights protection mechanisms, codes of ethics, principles and values of Human Rights (AR=3.35) and a low degree of influence of the various characteristics on the provision of services by human resources to VSG (AR=1.69).

Table 1: Variables under study

	N	Min	Max	Average	S.D.	Cronbach's Alpha
Knowledge (official texts, protection mechanisms, codes of labor ethics, HR principles and values)	453	1.20	5.00	3.35	0.85	0.911
Perceptions on Discrimination Issues – Human Rights	453	2.50	5.00	4.41	0.52	0.817
In the total population	453	2.25	5.00	4.67	0.46	0.701
In vulnerable social groups	453	2.25	5.00	4.15	0.73	0.801
Perceptions on Discrimination Issues – Social Policy	453	2.00	5.00	4.79	0.39	0.915
Socio-emotional skills of human resources during contact with VSG	453	2.17	5.00	4.32	0.50	0.897
Attitudes: Characteristics that inhibit the contact of human resources with VSG in the workplace	453	1.00	5.00	1.69	1.05	0.978
Attitudes: adherence to work ethics	453	1,00	5.00	4.59	0.48	0.870
Mobilization	453	1.55	5.00	3,76	0,63	0.872
Action	453	1,40	5.00	3.64	0.77	0.881
Potential action	453	1,00	5.00	4.04	0.73	0.879

2nd research question: Whether and to what extent does Lifelong Learning (Formal, Non-Formal Education, Informal Learning) of human resources in the field of Human Rights affect the formation of the individual's level of knowledge, perceptions, skills, attitudes and mobilization?

Using Spearman's Rho correlation coefficient, the relationships between the ordinal variables under study and the categorization of Lifelong Learning were investigated (Table 2). The results showed that higher levels of formal education go hand in hand with greater "Knowledge of official texts on Human Rights and Equality" ($R=0.428$), with more "Socio-emotional Skills" ($R=0.252$), with a lesser "Degree that various characteristics of VSG inhibit the provision of services to them" ($R=-0.133$), with greater "Compliance with ethical principles when contacting human resources with VSG" ($R=0.156$) and with a greater degree of "Mobilization" ($R=0.179$). Non-formal education is positively related to all variables under study, except for the "Degree that various characteristics of VSG have an inhibitory effect on the provision of services to them", with which it has a negative correlation ($R=-0.139$). Similarly, Informal Learning is positively related to all variables under study, except for the "Perceptions regarding discrimination issues-Human Rights" (not statistically significant correlation) and the "Degree that various characteristics of VSG inhibit the provision of services to them", with which it has a negative correlation ($R=-0.231$).

Table 2: Correlation of LL with the ordinal variables under study

	Formal Education	Non-Formal Education	Informal Learning
	r ¹	r ¹	r ¹
Knowledge (official texts, protection mechanisms, codes of labor ethics, HR principles and values)	0.428**	0.420**	0.455**
Perceptions of Discrimination Issues – Human Rights	0.031	0.148**	0.064
In the total population	0.110	0.182**	0.185**
In vulnerable social groups	-0.021	0.086	-0.016
Perceptions of discrimination issues – Social policy	0.025	0.127**	0.147**
Socio-emotional skills of human resources during contact with VSG	0.252**	0.242	0.359**
Attitudes: Characteristics that inhibit the contact of human resources with VSG in the workplace	-0.133**	-0.139**	-0.231**
Attitudes: adherence to ethical principles in the contact of human resources with VSG	0.156**	0.184**	0.205**
Mobilization	0.179**	0.142**	0.146**
Action	0.175**	0.183**	0.161**
Potential action	0.169**	0.099*	0.157**

¹Spearman's Rho correlation coefficient

* Correlation is significant at a 0.05 level

** Correlation is significant at 0.01

3rd research question: Whether and to what extent does the level of human resources studies affect the formation of the individual's level of knowledge, perceptions, skills, attitudes, and mobilization in the field of human rights?

Compulsory, secondary and post-secondary education graduates seem to have a statistically significantly lower level of "Knowledge" (AR=2.95) compared to Tertiary Education graduates (AR=3.42) and PgD-Phd holders (AR=3.58), with $p < 0.05$. Also, for compulsory, secondary and post-secondary education graduates, "Socio-emotional Skills" appear to emerge to a lesser extent (AR=4.22) when contacting VSG compared to higher education graduates (AR=4.34) and holders of PgD/Phd (AR=4.36), with $p < 0.05$. Moreover, compulsory, secondary and post-secondary education graduates seem to have a statistically significantly higher "Degree that various characteristics of VSG inhibit the provision of services to them" (AR=2.49 vs. AR=1.42 of tertiary education graduates and AR=1.44 of PgD/Phd holders), with $p < 0.05$. Finally, compulsory, secondary and post-secondary education graduates seem to have statistically significantly greater "Mobilization" (AR=3.92 vs. AR=3.74 of Tertiary Education graduates and AR=3.66 of PgD/Phd holders), with $p < 0.05$.

Table 3: Influence of the educational level on the variables under study

Education Level							
	Graduates' compulsory, secondary & post-secondary education		Graduates Tertiary Education		Holders PgD-PhD		Importance Difference ¹
	(N=114)		(N=202)		(N=137)		
	AR	SD	AR	SD	AR	SD	P
Knowledge (official texts, protection mechanisms, codes of labor ethics, HR principles and values)	2.95	0.83	3.42	0.81	3.58	0.80	0.000*
Perceptions on Discrimination Issues - Human Rights	4.41	0.55	4.38	0.52	4.45	0.50	0.478
In the total population	4.63	0.44	4.65	0.49	4.71	0.41	0.493
In vulnerable social groups	4.19	0.79	4.11	0.69	4.18	0.72	0.296
Perceptions on Discrimination Issues – Social Policy	4.75	0.48	4.81	0.32	4.81	0.42	0.207
Socio-emotional skills of human resources during contact with VSG	4.22	0.49	4.36	0.53	4.34	0.46	0.05*
Attitudes: Characteristics that inhibit the contact of human resources with VSG in the workplace	2.49	1.36	1.42	0.73	1.44	0.78	0.000*
Attitudes: adherence to ethical principles in the contact of human resources with VSG	4.55	0.49	4.62	0.41	4.58	0.57	0.828
Mobilization	3.92	0.64	3.74	0.63	3.66	0.61	0.000*
Action	3.88	0.73	3.63	0.75	3.47	0.79	0.000*
Potential action	4.10	0.76	4.05	0.73	3.99	0.71	0.165

¹ Kruskal-Wallis Test for independent samples

5. Discussion and conclusions

In this paper, part of the findings of the research conducted in the context of the PHD studies of the first of the authors was presented. The purpose of the research was both to investigate the level of knowledge, perceptions, skills, attitudes and mobilization of human resources employed in social services of the Region of Western Greece on Human Rights issues, as well as to determine the degree of impact of the LL and the level of studies at the said level.

In relation to the first research question concerning the investigation of the level of knowledge, perceptions, skills, attitudes and mobilization of human resources on Human Rights issues, the main findings reveal:

- Moderate knowledge of official texts, mechanisms for the protection of Human Rights, codes of ethics, principles and values of Human Rights.

- High and very high degree of agreement of the survey participants regarding the equality that VSG need to enjoy in the protection of Human Rights and social benefits (social policy), respectively.
- Sufficient degree of emergence of socio-emotional skills when human resources come into contact with VSG.
- Low degree of influence of the characteristics of VSG (gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, mental-physical disability, age, racial-ethnic origin, religion, socio-economic status, language, skin color) when providing services to them.
- Very high observance of ethical and professional ethics rules (equality, neutrality, impartiality, objectivity, sense of justice, absence of inappropriate behavior, respect) of human resources in their contact with VSG.
- Moderate mobilization of the human resources of social services when the rights of VSG are threatened, within and outside the work environment.

Regarding the second research question on the extent to which LL in the field of Human Rights (Formal, Non-Formal Education, Informal Learning) affects the level of knowledge, perceptions, attitudes and mobilization of the human resources of social services, from the correlation of the variables under study with the categories of LL, we point out, the higher the levels of Formal Education of human resources in the field of Human Rights, the less the characteristics of VSG constitute an obstacle to the provision of quality services when human resources come into contact with them, the more socio-emotional skills emerge and the more the degree of mobilization of human resources for the defense of the Human Rights of VSG within and outside the work environment, increases even more.

In reference to the third research question, which studies the extent to which the category of education of those who participated in the research affects the level of knowledge, perceptions, attitudes and mobilization on Human Rights issues, the research data showed that the higher the levels of study, the higher the level of knowledge that human resources have developed in the field of Human Rights and the less the various characteristics of vulnerable groups affect the provision of quality services to them. In contrast, the lower the levels of education of human resources, the greater their mobilization within and outside the working environment on issues of protection of Human Rights of vulnerable social groups.

The above conclusions are consistent with the study of Stellmacher, Sommer & Brahler (2009), which shows that the more people are informed about Human Rights, the more they are willing to engage in actions to protect them when they are violated. They also converge, to some extent, with Pitsou's study (2015) in which it is found that even if individuals are informed and discuss about Human Rights, when they or a person close to them underwent an unpleasant experience that led to a violation of their rights, they remained largely uninvolved in their practical claim and protection. The impact of the cognitive background that human resources have gained via/through LL on Human Rights issues can only be positively interpreted. This is so as it can lead to a substantial

and practical orientation of the sensitized personnel in relation to issues concerning the protection of Human Rights (Cohrs *et al.*, 2007) of VSG.

However, only positively can be interpreted the impact of the knowledge base that human resources have gained through the LL on Human Rights issues; and this, as well, can lead to a substantial and practical orientation of the sensitized human resources on Human Rights issues (Cohrs *et al.*, 2007) of vulnerable social groups.

In addition, the data of this research come to verify the rhetoric of international organizations and the results of surveys, according to which the changes that the LL bring to the individual, as well as the knowledge that individuals develop in the field of Human Rights, may subsequently affect their professional and social interactions, developing a more tolerant attitude and behavior towards the diversity (Manninen *et al.*, 2014: 49-61; Schuller & Desjardins, 2010: 229; Feinstein, Budge, Vorhaus, & Duckworth, 2008: 18-19, 21-22; Peston & Feinstein, 2004). However, in the case of taking initiatives, in cases of Human Rights violations both within and outside the work environment, this research has shown that it can occur to an obviously small extent.

Finally, in the field of skills, the very high level of emergence of socio-emotional skills that is recorded during the contact of human resources with VSG, agrees with the findings of research and studies that identify soft skills as keys central to the provision of high-quality services to the beneficiaries (Korn Ferry Institute, 2018; Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2015; CEDEFOP, 2015)

6. Limitations and implications of the survey

The collection of research data may meet the criteria for a sample size capable of generalization (about 40% of the total number of employees). However, to avoid sampling error (Creswell, 2011), a future comprehensive evaluation of the findings could involve an even larger size of research participants, mainly from social centers and stations where our sample was smaller compared to the sample drawn from social services, institutions and organizations.

At the same time, as self-referential questions carry the risk of drawing less safe conclusions, future researchers need to add other methods both to confirm the quantitative conclusions and to achieve a deeper understanding of the issue: triangulation of data collection by conducting interviews with Key informants and/or through focus group meetings per social structure.

Finally, the failure to find and list previous studies and research tools focused on samples from bodies with similar characteristics makes our research original in any case and the research tool, built for this reason, a guide for similar research that will confirm or reject, either in whole or in part, our conclusions.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Authors

Chaidas Alexandros is a civil servant in the Social Welfare Address of Region of Western Greece, PhD Student at the University of Patras, Department of Educational Sciences and Early Childhood Education, Greece.

Email: alchaidas@yahoo.gr

Stathis Balias (PhD) is Professor at the University of Patras, Department of Educational Sciences and Early Childhood Education, Greece.

Email: balias@upatras.gr

Thanassis Karalis (PhD) is Professor at the University of Patras, Department of Educational Sciences and Early Childhood Education, Greece.

Email: karalis@upatras.gr

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