



**Entrepreneurial Skills
for Social Sciences**



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Social Work and Entrepreneurship: Mission Possible?

At the meeting of the partners of the project "Entrepreneurial skills for social sciences" at the Hellenic Mediterranean University, it was decided: we will invite social workers to training in February.

Not only project challenges were discussed at the partners' meeting. We had the opportunity to get acquainted with the activities of the Health and Road Safety Laboratory (LaHeRS) of the Greek Mediterranean University. It is truly an entrepreneurial laboratory in every sense. Thanks to Maria Papadakaki, associate professor, for the story we share in this newsletter. We will all learn from Maria and her colleagues.



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In the context of the economic crisis and the austerity measures of the past decade, Social Work in Greece was confronted with high unemployment rates, budget cuts in the public sector and a weakened welfare state. This inevitably resulted in a simultaneous crisis of institutions and values, extreme inequalities and conflicting social interests. Re-orientation of undergraduate Social Work programs was necessary for the profession to secure its emancipating character in the modern environment. The rapid social and economic changes in Greece necessitated new knowledge and skills for social workers and the redefinition of the character and mission of Social Work to reflect the new social circumstances including poverty, migration, inequality, corruption, and violence. The practice of Social Work required social workers, who can understand the political and social context of their time and pursue social justice. At the same time, the new circumstances required social work education to be open to the wider society holding firm ties with the field.



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During these challenging years of the past two decades, an academic laboratory affiliated to one of the four Social Work Departments in Greece, demonstrated an increased academicization and stood out with its innovative and pioneering work. It managed to reduce the gap between undergraduate education and professional practice. This academic laboratory during the crisis supplemented the damaged mental health and welfare system and provided behavioural health and crisis intervention services to the community, both at prevention and therapeutical level, with a full package of preventive and therapeutic services for various vulnerable groups.

Laboratory of Health and Road Safety (LaHeRS, <https://lahers.hmu.gr/>) is affiliated to the Department of Social Work of the Hellenic Mediterranean University (HMU). LaHeRS aims at promoting health and safety through education, policy making and research. Injury prevention is one of the key priorities of LaHeRS and particularly prevention of intentional and unintentional injuries. It is a unique academic laboratory combining health and social sciences for the promotion of health among economically deprived individuals residing in rural and remote areas with limited access to health and social care services. LaHeRS works directly with people to inform, educate, and empower them about health, mental health and social issues, particularly the underserved and those at risk. LaHeRS tests innovative solutions to treat individuals, couples, families and communities experiencing adverse bio-psychosocial circumstances and evaluates the effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of health, mental health and social welfare services. LaHeRS supports the development of scientific tools and material for use by academic, research and civil organizations; development of training material and lifelong training programs for front line professionals, and more.

Several services are currently offered at the premises of LaHeRS and are worthy noting because they are unique in Greece. Undergraduate and postgraduate students of Social Work are trained in service provision, next to expert and dedicated social workers and mental health professionals, while supervised by academic staff. This early exposure of our students to supervised field work offers a unique experience and assists them in gaining professional competence, skills, confidence, and a sound professional identity.



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The services are the following:

Counseling/Therapy for domestic violence offenders/perpetrators

Among the most pioneering and unique services in Greece is the counseling programme for domestic violence offenders (perpetrators), which is delivered by LaHeRS since 2021, under an official protocol of collaboration between the university and the Public Prosecutors Office of Heraklion. Through this programme, LaHeRS offers counselling and therapy to persons that have been violent towards members of their family and have consented to follow the Special Counselling-Therapy Programme. The Programme aims primarily at victims' protection and offenders' behavior change through focusing on changing the offenders' perceptions regarding violence, anger management, development of social/communication skills and prevention of future violent acts. The sessions take place with trained psychologists and social workers and the number of sessions depends on the case and the intermediate evaluations, with a minimum of 14 sessions (complementary individual and group sessions). The sessions may be weekly or less often (according to availability). The program offers the opportunity to extend the therapeutic process on other individual or family difficulties/issues, besides violence. The sessions take place at the facilities of the Laboratory of Health and Road Safety (LaHeRS). If the Programme is not attended at offenders' responsibility, the competent Public Prosecutor takes charge for the continuation of the legal procedure.

The Special Counselling-Therapeutic Programme of LaHeRS Lab is applied in the framework of Penal Mediation as stated by L. 3500/2006 (GG 232Á /2006), chapter. D'. «Prerequisite for the process of penal mediation is the unreserved statement by the person who is accused of the crime, that he/she is cumulatively willing to: a) Promise that he/she will not commit in the future any domestic violence act (word of honour) and that, in the case of co-habitation, accepts to live elsewhere for a reasonable period, if suggested by the victim. For this promise a report is written based on article 148 and the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure. B) Attend a special counselling -therapy programme for combatting domestic violence in a public actor, in any location and time frame deemed necessary by the competent therapists. The manager of the programme certifies its completion. The relevant certificate is attached to the court case file. It contains in detail, the scope, methods and the number of sessions that the person attended as part of the Counselling – Therapy Programme. C) To lift or to restore, if possible, all the damaged caused by the act and pay reasonable compensation to the victim (Article 11).

More precisely, the victim-offender mediation is provided only for misdemeanors. The General Prosecutor is engaged in bringing the victim and the offender of the family violence together, aiming at restoring the harm/damage done to the victim. The Public Prosecutor is responsible for carrying out the mediation process. The last takes place before pressing charges or before trial and is used as part of the criminal process. Depending on mediation's results the case is either fully dropped changing the proceedings (alternative/ diversion procedure) or drawn up following the formal criminal procedure.



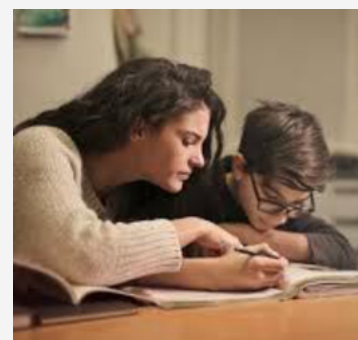
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University Mobile Unit for the assessment of learning disabilities in children and the psychosocial support of their families

<https://learnconsult.hmu.gr/>

Laboratory of Health and Road Safety (LaHeRS), has developed an interdisciplinary Mobile Unit with funding from the Region of Crete, aiming at the early detection and assessment of learning disabilities and other behavioral and emotional difficulties in children, who attend Primary Education and the provision of brief personalized counseling to their family. The program is based on a multidisciplinary approach and aims at the holistic management of learning difficulties based on the needs of both children and other family members. A mobile unit, made up of specialist professionals (special education teachers, social workers, child psychologists, child psychiatrists, logopedics, etc) visits by appointment various remote geographical areas across the region, employs validated diagnostics tools and interview procedures, identifies the nature, depth and extent of the problem and draws up a personalized support plan, with free one-on-one sessions for children and parents, aimed at properly addressing learning difficulties at home and at school.

This mobile service is the first and the only one across Greece. It was developed by LaHeRS in response to the low capacity and the operational deficiencies faced in Greece by the regional authorities in charge of the evaluation and certification of learning disabilities in children. In fact, children with learning disabilities can achieve high educational goals with appropriate pedagogical techniques and methods and with the appropriate guidance of their parents, who are essential partners in the intervention. A delay in the detection of learning disabilities and the insufficient support and guidance to the family is associated with a serious psychological burden on parents and a crisis in intra-family relations with serious consequences. Children, who do not receive timely intervention, do not reach their full potential, are often underestimated and marginalized within classroom. They also tend to develop emotional difficulties, school refusal and truancy as well as behavioral problems both at school, at home and elsewhere.





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LaHeRS developed the mobile unit and managed to reach people with low literacy levels, poor financial circumstances, geographically remote, who were unable to early recognize the problem and seek for help. This unit also discretely reached highly educated people who avoided evaluation due to fear of stigma. The mobile unit reduced the waiting times of children and offered relief to their families from anxiety. It also reduced the burden of teachers, who had several undiagnosed children in class, without sufficient skills to handle parents' lack of cooperation. Through the mobile unit, LaHeRS offered (face-to-face or virtually) brief psychosocial counseling to parents via specialized mental health professionals and educational support to children by special education teachers.



Road safety education for children of all age groups

https://lahers.hmu.gr/driving_simulator/

LaHeRS is a leading research entity in Greece in transport safety from the perspective of social and behavioural sciences. Its work is unique in Greece and focuses on the study of driving performance and the psychological processes that form the basis of safe mobility. LaHeRS uses a wide range of theories and methodologies to study and evaluate how the road user engages with different forms of mobility, seeking to develop tools and countermeasures of road errors, violations and accidents.





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LaHeRS possesses a “Virage VS500M” driving simulator, which was acquired with funding by the Region of Crete and three electric cars, which are used in research and awareness raising on eco-mobility. The simulator consists of an open cabin with the driver seat, the center console, a fully functional instrument and warning light cluster, a wide visual display, as well as motion and vibration systems. Every year the Laboratory is visited by thousands of primary and secondary education students across Crete region for educational purposes. The road safety education programme includes hands-on training on the driving simulator, experiential activities, information on the safe use of streets, road safety games and audiovisual presentations on traffic education.



Juvenile offender rehabilitation

In collaboration with the Heraklion Prosecutor's Office and the Juvenile Probation Service, LaHeRS laboratory conducts three-hour interventions for minor offenders of the Road Traffic Code (KOK), who are referred to the Laboratory, as part of reformatory measures. During these interventions, minors participate in appropriately designed experiential activities coordinated by qualified social workers, psychologists and child psychologists, with the aim of changing behavior and preventing risk in their daily lives. In the context of the interventions, the special equipment of the laboratory (driving simulator) and the special scenarios available in environments with different conditions of driving risk are used. Special interventions have been designed and applied to the parents of juvenile offenders, who are invited and participate in parallel actions. From time to time, selected special guests are invited to the interventions. Since the beginning of the year 2023, four group interventions for juvenile offenders have been hosted at the premises of LaHeRS (Tuesday 21 February, Tuesday 21 March, Tuesday 9 May and Tuesday 27 June 2023).



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This juvenile offender program was developed by LaHeRS in response to the lack of scientifically sound approaches and intervention programs for behaviour change in young violators of traffic law. This is the only program offered across Greece by a university laboratory and specifically by Social Sciences Department. Other programs are usually offered by selected police Departments across the country with a strict focus on traffic rule education. Almost 80% of juvenile delinquency cases in Greece, concern violations of the Traffic Code. According to the Greek Penal Code, Juveniles never bear full criminal responsibility as adults do, because their mental, social and emotional disposition towards social values and legal standards are not fully developed. Likewise, parents of a juvenile offender cannot incur any criminal liability with respect to offences committed by their child, unless they act with intent to promote or allow the delinquent conduct, or with negligence. Under these circumstances neither the juveniles nor their parents are considered liable for the offence. Furthermore, juvenile offenders may be sanctioned with educational measures such as with a reprimand, supervision order carried out by parents or by probation officers, which replace a more severe penalty and are very common in violations of the traffic law.



Psychosocial interventions for those experiencing severe poverty

Multilevel interventions were introduced within the framework of the FAED program, to alleviate the psychosocial burden shouldered by people experiencing severe poverty. At individual level, a model of a “blended” therapeutic plan is employed, with distance and face-to-face consultations to treat persons who require multidisciplinary family-focused care due to complex psychosocial needs. Therapy is offered by a professional team (psychologist, social worker, psychiatrist) operating at a central unit under LaHeRS lab at the Hellenic Mediterranean University in Greece. The local community social services serve as a point for service inquiry.



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At group level, counseling is offered on weekly basis by psychologists/ psychotherapists to small groups of people experiencing common stressful situations (e.g., carers of patients with chronic diseases) at various community settings.

At community level, interactive workshops are organized at various geographical areas across Crete, aiming to promote mental health and well-being of people living in extreme poverty. Overall, the workshops aim at knowledge gain and skill building on various topics including domestic violence, substance abuse, learning disabilities, healthy parenting, and so on, and targeted various population groups including single parents, unemployed, elderly, disabled. Most importantly, the workshops share an experiential design and employed various interactive activities (e.g., role-plays, videos, skill building) in order to engage people of mixed educational levels and cultural backgrounds into a dialogue.





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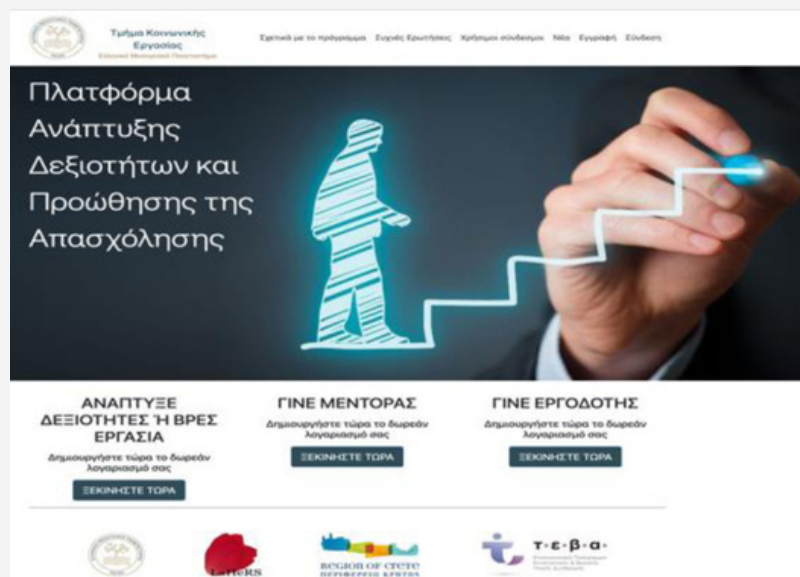


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A platform for job inquiry and career guidance for vulnerable groups

<https://mentoring.sw.hmu.gr/>

An innovative platform for job inquiry and career guidance was developed by LaHeRS Lab for Crete region, within the framework of the FAED program and initially presented at the end of 2022. It is easy-to-use tool for job inquiry and career guidance, which is aimed at companies looking for staff but also people who are either looking for job or want to change professional orientation, improve their working conditions, develop skills, have group counseling sessions, and career guidance. The platform is free of charge. Currently, there is no such digital service based on artificial intelligence, which is offered at the level of the central government by the Unemployment Office for those in search of a job. Among the benefits deriving from the platform, the most important is the fast and targeted finding of employees through automated systems, saving time from time-consuming efforts of job inquiry and personnel-enquiry respectively. Especially useful for low literacy individuals who find it difficult to navigate among job options and make safe decisions on the most appropriate ones. Through artificial intelligence and special software, the platform offers the opportunity of matching the UNEMPLOYED with the EMPLOYER and the MENTOR upon considering several conditions including personality traits and qualifications.



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