



How to work with persons with disabilities?



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Jordanka Trenevskva
Minister of social work and social policy

I am pleased to have been asked to introduce the United in Inclusion for Employability project's result "Mini-Guide for employers of people with disabilities". Supporting people with special education needs and disabilities and helping them into employment, is something which is very important and one of the highest priorities in an inclusive societies.

People with special educational needs and disabilities are presently under-represented in the labor market in North Macedonia and it is clear that as a result many employers are losing out on the skills and knowledge of a significant proportion of the population. Each person looks at various situations and problems differently, and the more diverse a work force is the stronger it will be.

UNITY project coordinated by the Faculty of Philosophy, University Ss Cyril and Methodius in Skopje, recognizes that employers can really benefit from employing individuals with disabilities. Whilst this guide cannot address all the individual differences that this category of employees will have, it does give helpful examples and positive practices where people with disabilities show how they can contribute towards all sorts of teams in business.

Many people with disabilities have particular talents and employment skills which will be of benefit to a wide variety of companies.

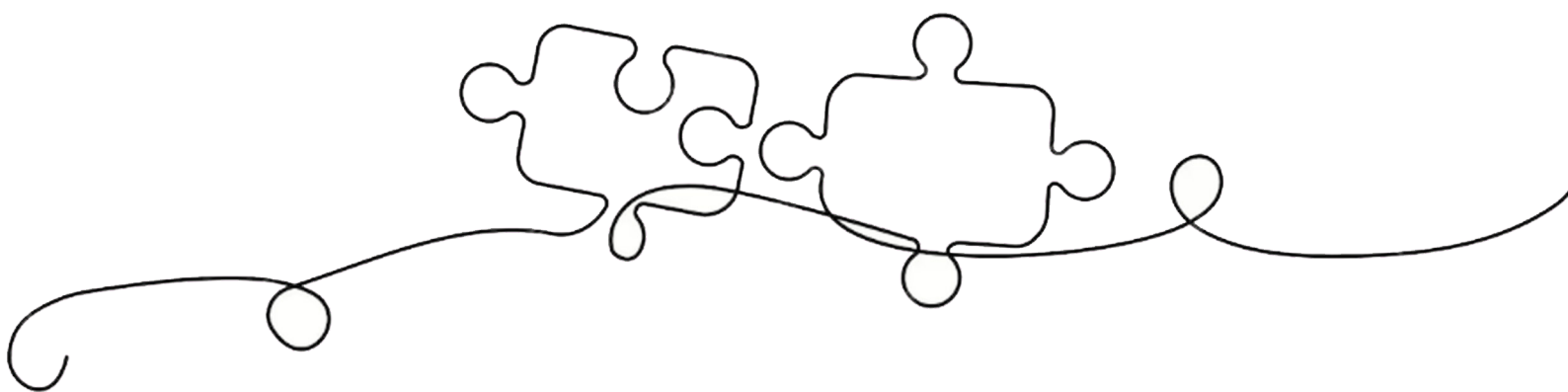
As the Minister of Social work and social policy of Republic of North Macedonia I am happy to encourage and support the UNITY project and hope that people with special educational needs and disabilities will become equals in the labor market of our societies and partners for success of the companies.

Jordanka Trenevskva, MA
Minister of social work and social policy of Republic of North Macedonia



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Introduction to the Mini-Guide

Mini-guide “How to work with persons with disabilities?” is one of the project results from the Erasmus+ project United in Inclusion for Employability (UNITY) which is strategic partnership between University Ss Cyril and Methodius Skopje, Faculty of Philosophy Skopje – North Macedonia, University of Nicosia - Cyprus and Professional school Amar Terra Verde – Portugal. Main aim of the project is to contribute by creating dynamic and inclusive sensitive tools for use across Europe to support unemployed adults with disabilities to be fairly included in the labour market and to ease the transition process of education and training to employment.


This Mini guide is practical tool intended for raising awareness about the barriers that persons with disabilities face in mainstream society and the implementation of the process of inclusion in the labor market. They are frequently not considered potential members of the workforce. Myths abound, including that persons with disabilities are unable to work and that accommodating a person with a disability in the workplace is expensive. This tool is one step towards decreasing negative statistics of unemployment of persons with disabilities and a small contribution for social inclusion.

Increasing the number of persons with disabilities in the labour market requires a comprehensive approach making use of a wide range of measures. Key among them are collaborating with companies/employers to create more inclusive workplaces as well as promoting a conducive policy and legal environment for the wage employment of persons with disabilities. This Mini guide titled “How to work with persons with disabilities?” is intended to support business sector and employers for working and engaging with persons with disabilities at the workplace. It offers real-life case studies that provide clear guidance and expectations of employers to make efficient and inclusive workplace environments for persons with disabilities. It emphasizes the added value that people with disabilities bring to the workplace and provides a realistic view of reasonable adjustments which might be needed.

What are your expectations?

 As an employer, you are looking to match the right skilled person with the right job position in order to get the company to a place that you find it successful.

You are probably looking for people who can grow and develop, at the same time growing and developing your company.

 You are willing to explore the idea of corporate responsibility, as well as exploiting the potential of the available workforce.

 You want to be legislation compliant.

 You will be employing someone different.

This **Mini-Guide** introduces the main points of employing people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Advantages for employers: getting the right person for the right job

People who have disabilities have many skills and talents that make them ideal employees.

Often only simple adjustments (which can have little or no cost to employers) may be needed.

With the right support, you will not have to worry about absenteeism, stress and anxiety.

Cooperation, tolerance and interpersonal relations in your company will become stronger.

Possible challenges:

The first challenge is to think about the specific requirements of the job vacancy you have.

Use the table below to state which skills you consider to be essential / desirable for the vacancy.

Try to be open-minded when matching an individual to the specific skills required for the job.



Essential skills	Desirable skills

Frequently Asked Questions

You may never have thought of employing someone with a disability before and may have lots of questions you would like answered. Support is out there for you! Listed below are some of the Frequently Asked Questions from employers:

Q1: What is disability?

Disability refers to a physical, sensory, cognitive, or mental condition that can impact a person's abilities and functioning in various aspects of life. Difficulties that people with disabilities face often stem from a combination of individual factors and environmental barriers. While an individual's impairments or conditions play a role, societal attitudes, inaccessible environments, lack of accommodations, and discriminatory practices can significantly contribute to the challenges faced by people with disabilities.

Q2: What is diversity?

Diversity encompasses the range of individual differences and unique characteristics, including but not limited to dis/ability, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and religion.

Q3: What is inclusion?

Inclusion involves creating an environment where all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds or differences, are respected, valued, and given equal opportunities to participate and contribute.

Q4: Do people with disabilities have the capacity to apply and get a job in the labour market?

Yes, people with disabilities have the capacity to apply for and succeed in jobs within the labour market with appropriate accommodations and support (i.e. assistive technology, guidance, special training etc.) in inclusive thriving environments. Stereotypes exist that wrongly assume people with disabilities are unable to apply for and excel in jobs within the labor market, but these assumptions are inaccurate and unjust.



Q5: Is it beneficial for a company to employ people with disabilities?

- Yes, employing people with disabilities can be beneficial for a company. It promotes diversity, brings varied perspectives, fosters inclusivity, and can lead to increased innovation and a positive public image.



Q6: What funding streams are available?

- Additional subventions and finance is available to anyone with a recognised disability, of working age and who is able to work a minimum of several hours each week (depends of the country policy).



Q7: How many hours can a person with disabilities work?

- However many hours you agree with them, but a minimum of specific number of hours each week for help with funding.



Q8: What kind of adjustments do I need to make?

- These can be really simple, depending on the person's disability and individual needs.



Q9: What would be the role of a mentor/ work coach/ named supporter for the person with disability?

- People with disabilities can use support to help find and keep a job.



How to use this guide

In 2021 we launched the project UNITY – United in Inclusion for Employability. We used three approaches in order to explain, understand and popularize the issue with employment of persons with disabilities and help their transition from school to the labor market having in mind changing the **culture** of the workplace, **policies** (national and international) and **practices** of the companies.



We published a Research about inclusion of persons with disabilities on the labor market, addressing main points and giving specific examples of three countries (North Macedonia, Cyprus and Portugal). This publication is available on the OER on 4 languages (English, Macedonian, Greek and Portuguese) <https://unitedinincstg.wpengine.com/resources/>



We created special tool for employment of persons with disabilities “European passport for employment” that is accessible and adapted to persons with different types of disability available on 4 languages (English, Macedonian, Greek and Portuguese) <https://unitedinincstg.wpengine.com/cv-form/>



We created OER (Open Educational Resource) intended for all stakeholders interested, working or living with this challenge. This OER is also available in 4 languages (English, Macedonian, Greek and Portuguese) and contains all of the information about the project and useful links and tools for persons with disabilities, researchers, employers, policy makers, etc. <https://unitedinincstg.wpengine.com/>

Culture of the workplace

All businesses create their own culture where beliefs and attitudes underpin and affect the behavior of all employees and trainees.

Policies

National, local and in-house policies of a business or workplace provide concrete guidance and direction for the development of an inclusive environment.

Practices

These are how the people in the business or company behave in practice. Using this way of looking at your business can ensure that people with diverse disabilities are fully included in your workforce.

This mini guide provides positive practices to explore how to implement these inclusive dimensions of cultures, policies and practices and employability skills to identify and harness the strengths and talents of people with disabilities to develop valuable employees.



Your employee with disability



Culture of the company/institution

- Employees with disabilities are not being excluded or discriminated in the workplace.
- Your company is encouraging collaboration and communication between employees.
- Your company nourishes atmosphere of trust and respect.
- You encourage success of any scale.



Practices of the company/institution

- Your company is very responsive to staff diversity.
- Your organisation encourages understanding of differences.
- In your your company, expertise of all employees is valued and utilized.
- Your work institution helps new employees to adapt to the workplace.



Policies of the company/institution

- Each employee's strengths valued.
- Every employee valued equally.
- Recruitment open to all applicants.

How does this work in practice?

In the following section there are real examples of positive practices of employees with a range of disabilities.

In this **Mini-Guide** we recognize that:

- Not everyone with disability can be categorized or labeled into some medical or social category.
- Every individual human being has their own pattern of strengths and weaknesses - not just people with disabilities.
- In this guide we are showing you a small sample of people with disabilities we have met in this project who are successfully employed.

For more information about different disabilities, please consult our website:

<https://unitedinincstg.wpengine.com/>



Positive practices

No two persons with disabilities are the same, but they all have many strengths and talents they can offer to the workplace. We have included stories of people with a wide range of challenges. Further information about what disabilities are and how they can affect an individual, can be found by looking at the links on our website.

Simple adaptations

Very small, and often free, adaptations can make your workplace accessible to a person with disability. For more information about any adjustments you might need to make to allow a young person with these different kinds of special needs and disabilities to succeed and support your organisation, please refer to the links and sources on our website

Supporting inclusion process and giving people a chance

Many employers have found it very rewarding, from both a social and a financial viewpoint, to give persons with disabilities a chance to be professionally successful: what might seem to be taking a small risk can provide you with a better workforce! Check out our stories. These are all real young people from across Europe.

The Mini-Guide focuses on specific persons and through the case studies information has been included about the challenges they faced, how these challenges were overcome and how the person with disabilities can still demonstrate employability skills.

Now meet:

• **Beira from North Macedonia**



• **Maria from Cyprus**



• **Abilio from Portugal**



Example from North Macedonia

Beira Salifoska



Job Position

Physiotherapeutic technician (masseur) at the University Clinic for Physical, Medicine and Rehabilitation

Types of Disability

- Blindness

Qualifications

- University degree

Memberships

- Member of the union for the blind in the city of Skopje

Social Competences

Communication

- Beira has excellent social skills.
- She is an active listener and always uses verbal communication with the speaker.
- Beira is very empathic person, understands and validates the feelings and experiences of others. Shows compassion and offers support when needed.
- She is polite and respectful in interactions with others. Uses proper greetings and expressions of gratitude.
- She also uses technology like speech-to-text apps, she is using Braille.
- She maintains a positive outlook and approaches in social interactions with confidence.

Working with others

- Given the fact that she works in a hospital with patients and many colleagues, a team approach is inevitable. Beira excels in teamwork.
- She is open to cooperation with colleagues and superiors, always openly talks about her disability. She is aware that only with good and open communication, all challenges can be solved effectively.
- Working for a long time with patients who come with various problems has made her much more empathetic, she always tries to understand them and help them in any way.

Being adaptable

- Beira has built supportive network of colleagues, mentors, and disability advocacy groups. She offers guidance and support to those who are facing similar challenges in the workplace.
- She has developed strong problem-solving skills. Collaborate with colleagues to find practical solutions.
- She has developed a flexible mindset that allows her to adapt to changing circumstances and tasks.

Practical Skills

Problem solving

Managing Information

- She is very adaptive person. She can come easily with strategies and solutions when faced with changing circumstances or new information. Being open to trying different approaches.
- She uses efficient communication tools and practices to share information within teams. Ensures clarity and relevance in all communication.

Using technology

- She can use adaptive technologies like screen readers, specialized software to access and manage information on computers and digital platforms.
- She effectively uses telephone and computer.
- She uses adaptive methods, online courses, books in audio or electronic form, as well as printed braille books.

Work Competences

Working safely

- She has a strong sense of security in my workplace, and I am well-versed in the health and safety regulations that govern it.

Being responsible

- Beira is reliable and responsible person. Being dependable and trustworthy. Colleagues and supervisors can count on her to consistently meet deadlines, complete tasks, and fulfill her commitments.

Learning continuously

- Beira continuously learning skills or enhancing existing ones. This particularly applies to soft skills.
- Experience with patients teaches her daily that we should give our best in work, because patients need them, their support and help.



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 12 sets of horizontal lines. Each set includes a solid top line, a dashed middle line, and a solid bottom line.



Quotations

Quote from Beira:

- “Considering that I work with people, I must be a responsible person, and the work itself requires a huge responsibility, because after all it is a hospital and people come to be rehabilitated and to have a better and higher quality of life in the future”.
- “I hold a university degree, yet I have not yet secured a position as a special educator and rehabilitator. My vocational education journey began during high school, and I aspire to transit into a career that aligns with my academic qualifications, one in the field of special education and rehabilitation.”

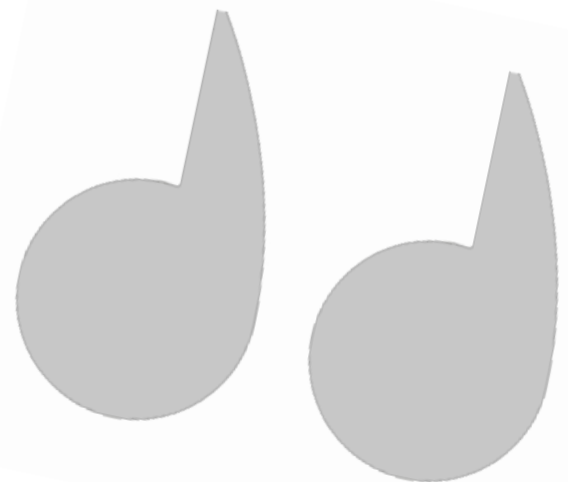
Quote from the patients:

- “I have had the privilege of being treated by Beira during my recovery at University Clinic. From our very first session, I was struck by her’s professionalism and expertise. Her blindness did not hinder the quality of care I received; in fact, it seemed to enhance it. Beira is an excellent communicator, always explaining each exercise and its benefits thoroughly. His empathy and positivity are contagious, making the often-challenging process of rehabilitation more manageable. I would highly recommend Beira to anyone seeking top-notch physiotherapy.”

“My experience being treated by Beira was nothing short of remarkable. Hers’ visual impairment never once compromised the quality of care I received. In fact, it seemed to enhance her ability to connect with his patients on a personal level. She possesses a profound understanding of the human body and rehabilitation techniques, which he expertly applied to my treatment. Hers’ positivity and unwavering support motivated me throughout my recovery journey. Beira is a true testament to the power of determination and dedication in healthcare, and I am grateful to have had her as my physiotherapist.”

Adjustments made:

- Assistive technology aid is provided to facilitate communication.
- Training about work-related duties.
- Health and Safety training.



Example from Cyprus

Maria Georgiou



Job Position

Feeding staff in an immigrant structure in Cyprus

Types of Disability

Partial hearing and visual Impairment

Qualifications

University degree

Memberships


Member of the NGO Pancyprian Association of Work Guides Supporting Persons with Disabilities

Social Competences

Communication

- Maria is an active listener. She actively listens by facing the speaker, maintaining eye contact, and nodding or using other non-verbal cues to indicate understanding.
- She requests repetition or clarification when she does not fully grasp what is being said.
- She uses hearing aids when necessary.
- She uses glasses and other visual aids when necessary.
- She also uses technology like speech-to-text apps or captioning services for better comprehension, especially in noisy environments.

Working with others

- 
- Maria is a good team worker and actively contributes to her group in order to complete work-related tasks and goals.
 - Maria openly communicates her condition and specific communication needs to her colleagues and supervisors. This disclosure can help create a supportive work environment.
 - Maria participates actively in team discussions and contributes her insights and skills to the group.
 - She believes that teamwork and collaboration in groups with individuals with varying abilities, often brings creative solutions to the table.

Being adaptable

- Maria has developed strong adaptive communication skills, which enable her to effectively engage with colleagues and adapt to different communication methods, depending on the situation.
- Her experiences with overcoming challenges related to hearing and visual impairment have fostered resilience and determination, making her adaptable to workplace changes and committed to achieving their professional goals.

Practical Skills

Problem solving

- She commands good problem-solving skills which allow her to find innovative solutions to communication barriers and adapt to changing work environments or technologies.
- She attended a few training programs or workshops focused on problem-solving techniques but they were not tailored to their specific needs and challenges related to hearing and visual impairment. Thus, she may need further training to develop more strategies for effective communication, using assistive devices, and adapting to different workplace situations.
- She has learnt from her colleagues and had valuable opportunities for sharing experiences and problem-solving strategies with them.

Managing Information

- She has very good written communication skills at workplace, such as communication through emails, documents, and messaging platforms that help her to organize and retain information more effectively.
- She has good verbal communication skills and asks for repetitions and clarifications if necessary for better information management.

Using technology

- She can use adaptive technologies like screen readers, captioning services, specialized software to access and manage information on computers and digital platforms.
- She uses the telephone and wireless communication devices at her workplace effectively.

Work Competences

Working safely

- Maria received health and safety at workplace and is aware of health and safety regulations.

Being responsible

- She is a responsible person as she is accountable for feeding dozens of people in migrant structures in Cyprus. This is a very demanding position, and she performs her duties very responsibly.

Learning continuously

- Maria is able to employ adaptive learning methods that suit her specific needs, such as online courses with captions, sign language classes, or audiobooks with transcriptions that enable her to engage in continuous learning.
- She expresses the desire for further professional growth, so she can continuously improve her skills and knowledge to overcome workplace challenges and excel in her career.





Quotations

Quote from Maria:

- “In my role as a food service coordinator at a migrant structure in Cyprus, I have had the privilege of providing sustenance and support to dozens of immigrants daily. Each day brings its unique challenges, and as someone with partial hearing and visual impairment, effective communication in a bustling kitchen environment can be demanding. However, I’ve found innovative ways to overcome these hurdles, using visual aids and cultivating a culture of understanding among my colleagues. One of the most rewarding aspects of my work is witnessing the positive impact it has on the immigrants we serve. Their smiles and expressions of gratitude remind me daily of the significance of what we do. Additionally, I take pride in the collaborative spirit within our team, where communication and cooperation are vital to ensure the smooth flow of meal service. This experience has not only enhanced my professional skills but also enriched my understanding of diverse cultures, emphasizing the importance of cultural sensitivity in our work. My journey in this role has been a transformative one, enabling me to continuously grow both personally and professionally”.
- “Despite the fact that I have a university degree, however, it is not easy to find a job in the field I have studied for it. I work in the migrant structure, something that is not directly related to my subject. I have tried many times to apply for a position in the government, as there is a law that 10% of the positions should be given to people with various forms of disability. However, I have specifically tried twice but I have been rejected with the excuse that I did not have the required qualifications”.

Quote from the employer:

- “We are fortunate to have Maria as a valued member of our team. Her dedication and commitment to her role are evident in her daily contributions. Despite facing the challenge of partial hearing and visual impairment, Maria has consistently demonstrated remarkable adaptability and resilience. Her problem-solving abilities and strong work ethic have not only enabled her to perform her job effectively but have also inspired her colleagues”.
- “While she excels in many aspects of her role, we acknowledge that communication can be a hurdle at times due to her hearing and visual impairment.
- “As her employer, we are committed to supporting Maria in every possible way to ensure her success and comfort at work. We encourage open dialogue and flexibility in communication methods to address her specific needs. We value her unique perspective and the diversity she brings to our team, and we look forward to continuing to work together to overcome challenges and achieve our shared goals”.

Adjustments made:

- Assistive technology aid is provided to facilitate communication.
- Training about work-related duties
- Health and Safety training



Example from Portugal

Abílio Guimarães



Job Position

Coordinator of the reading service on special supports at the Machado Vilela Library (Vila Verde - Portugal)

Types of Disability

Blind person

Qualifications

Secondary level

Followed several other courses

Social Competences

Communication

Abílio used to be a broadcaster in a local radio.

He is a trainer, helping blind people to live with this disability and face all the challenges, in order to be able to show their competences above their disability; he also gives support to people who live with blind people.

Working with others

Abílio works alone, but he has to be part in the municipal meetings, giving an opinion and presenting ideas. Besides that, he exchanges ideas with colleagues.



Being adaptable

Abílio has been working for the municipality for 30 years, 24 of them at the library.

His tasks go through 3 stages: provide necessary and requested documentation in Braille; prepare people with the same disability to be able to work with new sources of information (distance and in-person training); helps in the preparation and counseling of parents, educators, ... that is, those who will live with blind people.

Besides that, Abílio worked as volunteer in other countries, such as Mexico and Brasil, helping blind people to learn to live with the disability and demonstrate their skills despite being blind.

Practical Skills

Problem solving

As Abílio works alone, when some problem comes up, he tries to solve it with his superiors or with some colleagues, using the social media.

We cannot forget that Abílio supports blind people in solving problems, especially in everyday life. So he understands the challenges that blind people have to face and uses this «knowledge» based on his own experience to help others cope with their daily life.

Managing Information

Abílio reads the newspapers, as he often has to transcribe them into Braille; he accesses social networks to exchange impressions and ideas with other colleagues and masters several platforms, as he provides on-line training.

Using technology

One of Abílio's tasks is to transcribe all types of documents requested into braille, audio or computer support. He has no problem in using computer, cellphone or other technology (he helps blind people to use all the platforms that exists to support them in their daily life).

Work Competences

Working safely

Abílio knows perfectly all the interior architecture of the library, being able to move without any help besides his cane. He explained that when he was 6 years old, to go to school, he had to catch 3 means of transport: bus, train and boat as he lived in Lisbon on the other side of the river. This way, he is aware of the dangers that a blind person have to face during his daily life, and recognize that there is still a lot to do, such as warnings on the floor before the crosswalks. As he is part of the municipality meetings, he takes the opportunity to present some suggestions at the municipal level.

Being responsible

Abílio is the only person in his section, which means that all the documents produced are his responsibility. He assumes that very proud.

Learning continuously

Abílio must keep up with all technological changes in order to better support those who seek it.

He started 2 projects before the pandemic, in Brazil, but wasn't able to finish because of Covid-19.



Quotations

Quotes from the interviewed:

“I see my role (helping those with the same disability) as a mission”.

“In society, blind people continue to not be integrated; they are accepted, tolerated”.

“My role is to stimulate the competences of people with disability”.

“One of the best things that happened to me was contacting a young adult, in Brazil, who confessed to me that it was with me that he learned to express himself publicly”.

Adjustments made:

Abílio knows perfectly all the stairs, all the doors, ... of the library. After 24 years, he circulates in the library as if he doesn't have any type of disability.

All the technology needed to perform correctly his tasks is provided.



The Partnership

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**University Ss Cyril and Methodius Skopje,
Faculty of Philosophy Skopje, North Macedonia
University of Nicosia, Cyprus
Professional school Amar Terra Verde, Portugal**

We would like to thank all the institutions and people who helped with the implementation and gave support to the project:

- PI Center for adult education of North Macedonia
- Catering services of the migrant and refugee structures in Cyprus

Disclaimer

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.

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