

PRO BONO PILOTS IN BULGARIA IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE BEESE PROJECT



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1. Introduction

With this report, Time Heroes Foundation (TH) and the University of National and World Economy (UNWE) present the three pilots they have developed, in the framework of the Beese Pro Bono Project, throughout the years 2019-2020.

Post-communist Bulgaria had a really bad track record - according to a 2007 survey by Eurobarometer, less than 10% of the country's population has ever participated in a volunteering activity, while 22% being the EU average, with some countries such as the UK scoring as high as 35%.

For the ten years of its existence, Time Heroes was able to shift the volunteering culture in the country. According to a 2017 survey by the Pew Research center, 33% of Bulgarians have done volunteer work during the preceding year.

According to an internal Time Heroes survey, conducted by Alpha Research in 2019, 24% of the Bulgarian population are active volunteers, and people regularly volunteer multiple times.

To date, the TimeHeroes.org platform has facilitated over 2200 volunteering initiatives (called missions) that have taken place in more than 250 locations (cities and rural areas) across the country, and have thus supported over 950 organizers. The platform has a network of more than 80 000 registered volunteers.

Apart from developing the online platform, TimeHeroes has built a network of independent volunteering clubs in schools and universities across the country, increased the capacity of the nonprofit sector for effective work with volunteers, and successfully promoted the concept of volunteering as a whole.

Skill-based volunteering (also known as Pro Bono) is a rising global trend, offering professionals the chance to put their specific knowledge in practice to support a chosen cause, and thus get a stronger feeling of value, satisfaction and impact. The impact is indeed higher, as studies demonstrated that for nonprofits and communities, the value of skilled support for general operations, technology and professional services can be 500% greater than the value of traditional volunteering.

There is still much to be done regarding Pro Bono, as the concept of skill-based volunteering is relatively new in the country. This project helped us share and exchange knowledge with international partners, and also to test and quantify a really successful model of work, so we could see how we can apply it in a sustainable way.

Since the project's kick-off, our work focused on building three different programmes – each with different durations and engaging a wide range of parties. This helped us achieve meaningful conclusions, as to the student's backgrounds and motivation, their previous experiences with volunteering, as well as their feedback on the project.

Similarly to our international partners, the three Pro Bono pilot programmes were carried out by the intermediary (Time Heroes), together with the University (UNWE). All three pilots have involved the participation of students (volunteers), teaching staff and business professionals (corporate volunteers) as mentors/tutors, as well as four different nonprofits, these the main or at least direct beneficiaries of the activities. The intermediary served as coordinator, mediator and a connection with nonprofits and business professionals, while the University took care of contacting and organizing the students.

The programmes differentiate themselves by the time (total number of hours) spent by both students and their mentors in its preparation and execution.



The implementation of the pilot programmes demanded a relationship of close articulation and cooperation between the Intermediary, the University, the students, the corporate volunteers, and the nonprofit.

Each programme counted with the participation of different actors – students from different Faculties and even different universities, nonprofits working in various social fields and corporate volunteers, which were carefully selected, according to the nonprofits' needs (diagnosed during a meeting with TimeHeroes and the nonprofit).

The corporate volunteers helped the students achieve all project goals, while also providing them with some important advice and guidance on topics like marketing, communications, strategic thinking, SWOT analysis, and fundraising. With the help of the mentors, students from different ages were able to put their knowledge into practice, while also helping increase the capacity of several nonprofit organisations.

We believe that the three pilots were really successful and also gave opportunity to all parties involved to learn, work and collaborate together on an especially important topic, such as pro bono.

2. Short-Term Pro Bono Pilot

This pilot had to engage a small team of students (up to 5) and 1 corporate mentor to work in one session of 3-5 hours to solve a specific nonprofit's problem. In Sofia, the meeting happened on April 20th, 2019. Along with the preparation and evaluation parts, the whole short-term pilot started at the beginning of March and ended with some late evaluations in June 2019. This was the first pilot for the Bulgarian team.



Participants in the short-term pro bono

a. Selection of the nonprofit beneficiary

Our starting point for setting the topic was the insight that the nonprofits in Bulgaria have the need to further develop their marketing and communication skills. As a result of this insight, TimeHeroes created BOOST – a programme that helps nonprofits improve their communications and marketing skills. Since its inception, BOOST generated great traction among nonprofits, but its format allowed only a handful of organizations to take part. Knowing this, we knew that a topic around marketing and communications would certainly answer the nonprofits' needs.

As a platform connecting more than 80 000 volunteers with close to a 1000 nonprofits, we already had a Facebook group dedicated to cause organizers and nonprofits. This group was the first channel that we'd planned to use in our open call for organizations inviting them to take part in the pilot.

Alongside the open call on social media, we also sent a newsletter both to nonprofits that have subscribed to our BOOST newsletters and to cause organizers.

In order to apply, nonprofits had to fill out a short form asking them to present themselves and their online communication problems, as well as explain why they believe we should choose them for the pilot.

In order to be selected, nonprofits had to have:

- Clear understanding of their online presence and communications prior to their application
- Had to be convincing, clear and concise.
- Had to clearly lay out their marketing goals and communication challenges and/or issues
- Had to convince the team that their organization would really benefit from the pro bono format. Of course, judging their motivation is the most subjective, but important part of the selection process as it is very important for measuring the pilot's impact
- Had to have websites, social media presence and appeal that needed obvious improvements

The nonprofits involved in the first pilot in Bulgaria were the following three:

Ideas Factory

Through both an innovative approach and tested methods, Ideas Factory awakens the potential for social change in almost anyone. One of their most popular activities is Baba Residence. Baba Residence connects urban youth with the elderly living in various villages across Bulgaria by relying on an innovative model that combines design thinking, ethnographic fieldwork skills. Its mission is to nourish bright ideas on how to preserve and develop the uniqueness of these wonderful villages and thus revive local economies and find solutions for existing social challenges.

Website: <https://ideasfactorybg.org/en/baba-residence/>

Alzheimer Bulgaria

As a member of Alzheimer Europe and Eurocarers, they share the best European practices for supporting families with Alzheimer's and dementia. Their objective is to make society aware of the importance of Alzheimer's and other dementia problems.

Their belief is that caring for patients with Alzheimer's or other dementia diseases and their families is an important step towards a society based on the principles of equality, tolerance and mutual assistance.

Website: <https://alzheimer-bg.org/en/>

The Generations Together Foundation

The Generations Together Foundation has identified a problem concerning the social isolation of the elderly people living in retirement homes. Their mission is to reinstate the bridge between generations by encouraging young volunteers to visit retirement homes and spend time together with the elderly.

In order to achieve that goal, the foundation organizes weekly visits in various retirement homes in the city of Plovdiv and the region. Recently, they've started an initiative to broaden their organization's reach by covering most retirement homes in Bulgaria through the help of a wide network of coordinators-volunteers.

b. Recruitment process and number of participants

The recruitment phase was multi staged because a pro bono experience of this kind was to happen for the first time in the country. Also (as discussed in the Introduction), the culture of youth volunteering is still re-emerging in the country after the years of the socialist regime and the concept of pro bono is relatively unknown for the Bulgarian students. That meant that at first we needed to organize an informational campaign on youth volunteering, pro bono and the BEESE project. This way, we could be sure to attract potential student participants and be able to make a better selection.

The communication with the **general audience** happened in two stages:

- The *overall process of informing* the student audience about the BEESE project started in October 2018. The information was given in the form of short oral presentations and was focused on the general possibilities for the

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students. The news published on the UNWE website and social media were more general regarding content;

- The *open call for the Short-term Pilot* was conducted simultaneously by the UNWE team and the Time Heroes team, and the main tool we used was a Facebook page for the upcoming event. It was shared by several departments in the University – Public Administration, Media and Public Communications, Information Technologies and Communication.

The **targeted communication** with the potential student volunteers was done via two channels:

- *Circular emails to all students.* The first set of emails was sent to approximately 450 people, on March, 30th (20 days before the scheduled pilot). The message consisted of a short description of the main goals of the BEESE project, an outline of the upcoming short-term pilot and an infographic with the selection requirements.
- A meeting with the *volunteering Eco Club UNWE* was conducted by D. Gorchilova and V. Zlatkova in UNWE on March 20th. They are active young student volunteers who were considered to be the most plausible audience to consider for the first pilot.

The actual **application process** started with an open call on March 30th 2019. The candidates were expected to send a short CV and an email with 5 reasons why they would like to participate in the pilot.

The **set of criteria** under which the candidates would be selected included those 5 reasons, previous volunteering experience, social media skills, good command of English, and year of study.

There were **11 applicants** among which we chose **9**. The increased number of participants was due to the fact that 3 nonprofit beneficiaries were selected and our plan was to form 3 teams, each consisting of 3 students and 1 corporate mentor.

The selected students received a **short briefing** on April 16th 2019 at the UNWE. They were instructed on the pilot, the three selected nonprofit beneficiaries, the three corporate mentors, as well as the expected deliverables.

The portfolios of the nonprofits (the diagnosis) and other additional materials were sent to the students right after the briefing.

As to the other participants, we had the valuable collaboration of three mentors.

The experience TimeHeroes has with BOOST and communications in general was of great help during the call for corporate volunteers. With a wide network of professionals, working in the marketing and communication businesses, finding suitable corporate volunteers proved to be an effortless task.

Short on time, we started the recruitment process by creating a shortlist of professionals with an excellent track record. Our next step was to approach these professionals via email. We provided them with sufficient information on the BEESE project, its goals and the pilot at hand. Then we conducted a series of interviews via Skype or over the phone.

Based on these interviews, we selected the three corporate volunteers that were about to take part in the upcoming pilot.

c. Pro Bono Meeting(s)

The execution of the short-term pilot happened on the 20th of April 2019. There were 9 student volunteers, divided into three teams; 3 corporate mentors (1 per team); 3 representatives from the selected nonprofit beneficiaries and 4 members of the Bulgarian BEESE project. Altogether, there were 19 people present.

There were no team leaders, since that function was performed by the corporate mentors. The students selected one person to present the deliverable at the end of the meeting.

During the workshop, the tasks of the students were, among others:

- to explain the nonprofit's problem in their own words and briefly suggest ideas for solution;
- to present the main findings they've had after the preliminary research on the nonprofit's online presence;
- to describe the most valuable thing they've learned through the TimeHeroes guide for working with nonprofits and volunteers;
- to brainstorm and generate ideas together;
- to search for additional information online;
- to put together all the findings and suggestions in a final presentation.

The tasks were divided equally, but also depended on the skill set and the expertise that the students had.

The event was organized in a nice and modern co-working space, which provided each team with an individual and cozy office for work.

As a final result, each team prepared a package of documents and suggestions for the nonprofit beneficiaries. They can be found here:

1. [Final deliverable/Presentation for Alzheimer Bulgaria.](#)
2. [Final deliverable/Presentation for Ideas Factory/Baba Residence](#)
3. [Final deliverable/Presentation for Generations Together](#)

The solutions were presented at the end of the meeting and there was a certification ceremony.

d. Evaluation

The evaluation was addressed both to students and mentors. It was conducted through a standard post-pilot questionnaire used by all the partners in the BEESE project consortium.

The opinions of the **students** regarding the overall organization, execution and results were highly positive. There was not even one answer on the negative part of the opinions scale (somewhat disagree, disagree, not used, etc.).

As to the **most enriching**, the students outlined many aspects of the mission:

- The contact with active, ambitious, creative people;
- The ability to be *"more observing of my surroundings, to express my opinion openly and discuss different ideas"*;
- The teamwork;
- The discussions with the team mentor.

Some of the **difficulties** concerned:

- The limited working time – this is the most frequently stated obstacle;
- Limited time to create a presentation;
- The lack of information on the implementation of the proposed decisions;
- The need to search for additional information during the workshop (meaning also that the facilities used to conduct the pilot should have the necessary infrastructure).

The overall impressions of the students were highly positive – they liked the experience as a whole, learned something new and developed their personal skills. All 9 of the participants plan to include the experience in their LinkedIn profile.

The feedback with the **noprofits** was done mostly during face to face conversations. They shared that the whole experience was positive for them, although some of them had unrealistic expectations of the final result. One representative expressed some disappointment, since the findings of the workshop

could not be applied due to financial restraints. It's good to consider this as a point to address during the initial conversations - to be able to manage the expectations of the nonprofit beneficiaries and conduct something feasible and that is going to actually be implemented.

After the pro bono workshop, there are great improvements in the communication strategy and the online communication and presence of one of the beneficiaries.

The follow-up with the **corporate mentors** was done face to face and via online questionnaire. All of them were extremely happy to have taken part in such a workshop. They pinpointed the time limitation as a main obstacle. All of them listed a sense of purpose and personal development as main motivation to take part in such a project. All of them had previous experience with pro bono and would be happy to participate again.

e. Testimonies and Learnings

There were many learnings from this first pilot in Bulgaria. The most important can be organized around several topics.

Regarding the **selection of a nonprofit beneficiary**:

- The universities should also participate in this procedure, due to their participation in partnership agreements and/or networks.
- Ten days proved to be not enough for disseminating the upcoming workshop and thus generating enough applications.

Regarding the **students' selection**:

- Despite the long informational campaign and the heavy reliance on social media channels, the response rate was very low. We had only 11 candidates out of over 450 students.
- We need to organize more informational events.
- In terms of finding the "correct" students, the task was completed mainly by personal communication and using the contact established with the volunteering clubs in the UNWE.

Regarding the **corporate mentors**:

- With a wide network of professionals, working in the marketing and communication businesses, finding suitable corporate volunteers proved to be an effortless task for TimeHeroes.

Regarding the **pro bono meeting** organization:

- One month is enough, but two months are optimal to organize a short-term pro bono pilot.
- The date of the pilot should be carefully coordinated with the semester load of the students.
- If you are planning to organize a pilot in April, don't forget to check the Easter holidays and the Easter break dates.
- Universities give 1 credit for 25-30 hours (lectures, seminars and/or extracurricular activities). So the total number of 13 invested hours should be somehow expanded if we wish to recognize the short-term pro bono as 1 ECTS credit. The more realistic scenario is one in which the short-term programmes are recognized as part of the curriculum and/or as part of the final grade of a certain discipline.
- Short-term pilots need to have clear and concise deliverables as their length allows for students and mentors to come up with a variety of solutions, which can sometimes disappoint the nonprofits. The fact that pro bono pilots offer volunteer work, not a professional (v.g. paid) one has to be addressed very clearly with nonprofits.
- UNWE is still not prepared to recognize the pro bono activities as an extracurricular load. It has no procedures to include that type of activity as part of the routine life cycle of the student.
- The participants were glad to receive a certificate but actually did not expect it.
- Students need to be more autonomous while working on the project and shouldn't depend as much on mentors.
- Nice, attractive visual content and templates should be created for the pro bono workshops.

Regarding **feedback**:

- That phase was rather quick and easy to organize and execute (perhaps because we had already established very close working relationships with the volunteers – students and mentors).
- The students were rather slow to respond after the first e-email, but after receiving a reminder email, they filled in the questionnaire rather quickly.
- Feedback with nonprofits was done mostly in face to face conversations.

3. Mid-Term Pro Bono Pilot

This pilot was planned to engage a team of 10 people (students and mentors) for 1 meeting of 8 hours, again with the task to solve the problem of a specific nonprofit beneficiary.

In Bulgaria the execution took place on November 29th, 2019. The whole process of preparing, carrying out and evaluating started at the end of August 2019 and finished in March 2020. It was the second pro bono pilot organized by the Sofia team.



Participants in the mid-term pro bono at the National Polytechnics Museum, Sofia

a. Selection of the nonprofit beneficiary

Similar to the first pilot, we have published an open call for nonprofits to apply for the pro bono workshop and communicated it through channels owned by us, as well as via personal contact and email correspondence. We already had a Facebook group dedicated to cause organizers and nonprofits. This group was one of the

channels that we'd planned to use in our open call for organizations inviting them to take part in the pilot.

In order to apply, the nonprofits had to fill out an online questionnaire asking them to describe their problem in detail, why it is important that this problem be solved and what is their motivation for taking part in the Pro Bono Workshop. There were several categories with general problems that a non-profit organization usually encounters:

1. Project management
2. Reporting and finance/accounting support
3. Legal support
4. Marketing
5. Working with volunteers
6. Other

We have published the questionnaire first on September 30th and the deadline for all applications was October 11th (two weeks) and we have received 7 applications in total.

After receiving all applications, we have decided to choose the participants in the workshop by assessing and shortlisting them. This included reviewing their responses and more particularly:

- What is the nonprofit's described problem;
- How likely it is that this problem is solved for 8 hours;
- How likely it is that solving this problem will actually help the work of the organization;
- How interesting and appealing will be for students to work on a similar problem helping this nonprofit;
- How active is the nonprofit in trying to solve this problem on their own.



After assessing all these factors, we have chosen our nonprofit - the National Polytechnic Museum of Sofia.

The museum keeps evidence of important science inventions in Bulgaria and also encourages and develops cultural and educational programmes for children and students, so we have decided that helping them will be really useful and at the same time interesting for the students.

The problems that the museum described in their applications were two:

- Attracting more young people as visitors to the museum;
- Attracting more young people as employees of the museum.

National Polytechnic Museum

The National Museum of Polytechnic preserves over 22 000 exhibits distributed in separate collections: time-measurement, transport, photo and cinema technique, optics, sound-tracking and sound-reproduction, radio and TV, calculation technique, musical mechanisms, geodesic instruments, measurement technique, household technique, sewing machines, type-writers, physical appliances, communication technique. At the museum are preserved precious evidence, related to the life and scientific activity of eminent personalities of Bulgarian science and technique, interesting separate products, etc. The scientific archive includes over 2000 archive units. The museum possesses video-archive, cinema-archive, photo-archive, a reference apparatus of history of science and technics, personal archives, specialized library-reading room with over 12 000 books and periodical issues, a collection of works of art with technical topic, cartographic works.

Their mission:

- To collect the inventions our ancestors have created as they contain traces of knowledge;
- To preserve evidence of science and technology in Bulgaria for the benefit of future generations;
- To present the history of technological progress and the contributions Bulgaria has made;

- To inform visitors and the public about new inventions and discoveries;
- To establish the museum as a preferred cultural center and a place for recreation and entertainment.

Website: <https://www.polytechnicsofia.com/>

b. Recruitment process and number of participants

The process of **student recruitment** included almost the same steps as with the first pilot, but this time we relied more on emails and other sorts of impersonal communication. The project was already known to some of the students and word-of-mouth had spread, so not that much targeted communication was needed. The process included (1) a general email about the opening of a call for participants in a mid-term Pro Bono Workshop “Creative Solutions”, (2) a reminder email and (3) alongside steps 1 and 2 – talking to all the students we met during lectures and seminars.

A Facebook event was created for gathering all kinds of information, deadlines, photos and videos, as well as comments from the participants in the pilot. The event was followed by few people (only the participants) and was used only by the organizers as a communication tool. More and more we see evidence that young people have moved to other social media (Instagram mainly) and Facebook is not the best option for creating buzz around the pro bono events.

The **open call for participation** was done on November 9th 2019 (20 days before the event) via:

- Circular email to over 600 students in the programs of “Public Administration”, “Business Administration”, “Regional Development”, “Media and Journalism”, “Media Economics”.
- The Facebook event.
- On the Facebook page of the Public administration department.
- On the social media of TimeHeroes.



- Personalized email to the students of Eco Clubs who were very active in the first short-term pilot in April 2019.

The application procedure again called the students to send a CV and state 3 reasons why they would like to participate in the workshop. The Sofia team decided to reduce the motivational reasons from 5 (in the first pilot) to 3 and we found out that this was a better option to concentrate and extract the really important motivations.

During the process of selection of a nonprofit beneficiary and the diagnosis phase, it became clear that we would need **3 teams** to work separately on each of the cases. Each team should consist of a mentor and 3-4 students, this meaning a group of 12-15 people.

Within the deadline, we received 13 applications and 1 person decided to join the workshop after accompanying her friend at the training session. We decided to approve all of them, since the structure of the event was different – one whole working day and three relatively complex cases. Additionally, we wanted to reinforce the will of those students to become part of something new and unknown for most of them.

The group of student volunteers consisted of 14 people: 3 boys and 11 girls; 9 students from the UNWE, 1 person from a foundation (Give a Book - www.podaretekniga.org) and 1 person from a private software university (SoftUni - <https://softuni.bg/>).

A short **briefing** for the selected students was held on November 27th at the UNWE. It followed the agenda of the first (short-term) pilot. After that, the students received via email the diagnosis, their team distribution and the specific case for each team.

As to the corporate mentors/tutors for this pilot we had more time to prepare, so we have decided that we will make a presentation and send it out to several



companies that we work with, so that we can attract their employees as mentors of the students.

We approached 10 big companies with good CSR practices, we conducted individual meetings with 3 of them and fortunately one of them decided to support the Pro Bono Workshop and this was VMware Bulgaria.

Since we didn't attract other corporate volunteers, the other two mentors we have invited personally.

The three mentors we have attracted are successful professionals - an operations manager from VMware Bulgaria, the general manager of betahaus Sofia (the biggest coworking space in Sofia) and the project manager behind several successful causes for people with special needs in Bulgaria.

c. Pro Bono Meeting(s)

The workshop was held on 29th of November 2019, at the premises of the National Polytechnics museum at Sofia.

The participation was not 100 percent. One of the students got sick and excused himself, another one left earlier due to work engagements (even though being present about 70% of the time) and one other was late due to an exam. So, all in all, 13 out of 14 selected students were present.

In total, the workshop had: 13 student volunteers, divided into three teams; 3 corporate mentors; many people from the museum staff – the manager, the PR and library expert, some of the curators and the employees (the workshop generated a lot of buzz at the museum so during the whole day there were employees stopping by to say hello. At the end of the day, all staff members came to see the presentations of the workshop members); 5 members of the Bulgarian BEESE project – 2 from the UNWE and 3 from TH. So, we had **24 people** fully engaged.



The workshop started with a guided tour of the museum. Some of the teams studied the surrounding areas as well – public transport spots, main roads, other interesting objects near the museum and so forth. The other part of the workshop was very similar to the short-term pilot.

The mid-term pilot was very successful in terms of **tangible results**.

The purpose of the workshop was to create more visibility, attract younger people as employees and/or visitors for the museum. Almost a year after the pilot, the museum called us to say they have 2 young people as part of their team, and that they are growing in popularity among students and younger people. They have also included the pro bono workshop as part of their yearbook of milestones in 2019.

During the workshop, both corporate volunteers and students were responsible for taking notes, as well as for creating a deliverable for the nonprofit.

TimeHeroes was responsible for keeping track and making sure that each team submits their deliverable in a timely manner to the nonprofit.

[Final deliverables are uploaded here.](#)

d. Evaluation

The evaluation was conducted by the standard post-pilot questionnaires. It started on the 17th of December and ended at the end of March 2020. The students were rather slow to respond to the first email with the questionnaire, but after receiving a reminder email, they filled it in rather quickly.

As **most enriching**, the students have pointed out the following aspects of the pilot:

- Working with the mentor (4 answers);
- The teamwork (3 answers) with an interesting detail: *Strongly appreciate they are asking us for our opinion and ideas;*
- The mission itself (3 answers), that was called *a challenging topic* and the opportunity to *learn about the museum and its social role;*



- Communication with different people (2 answers) that led to *“enriching experience because I met people with different life inclinations”*.

Three of the participants directly answered that they encountered no difficulties during the mission. Among the **setbacks**, and among others, the following were listed:

- Finding the best among the created solutions (2 answers);
- Talking in front of an audience (1 answer);
- The topic was quite abstract (1 answer).

In the mid-term pilot there was only one student who said that the time for preparation had been short. In the short-term mission the lack of time was among the main obstacles mentioned by the interviewees.

The follow-up by the **nonprofit beneficiary** and the **corporate mentors** was entirely positive, with no recommendations to change anything in the way the pilots were organized and executed.

e. Testimonies and Learnings

Two and a half months are enough to organize a mid-term pro bono pilot. If the period is longer, that will call for more frequent reminding communication and may generate irritation among students, mentors and other participants.

The **beneficiary nonprofit** (the National Polytechnics museum) drew a lot of attention and was mentioned as a motive by many applicants. When the venue of the pilot is the actual office/premises of the beneficiary nonprofit organization, that results in more opportunities for the students to step in their new roles and generate more relevant ideas. The students were very excited by the museum tour, the gamification of some of their experiences and the interesting challenge.

The students who applied submitted **very interesting motives for participation** and executed the job very well. Some of the applicants tailored their professional skills and experience to the workshop specifics: *“I can work in a team and elaborate*



other peoples' ideas", "I am interested in marketing and advertising and I think that they are a key strategy for that museum". One student perceived the workshop as a testing field: "This is a good opportunity to check whether I would like to work in marketing and strategy planning in the future". This motive is a good idea as a way of advertising future pro bono workshops. Another interesting motive was the training in group dynamics: "I feel that it would be useful to study the group's dynamics when making decisions with strangers. Every individual sees the problem through the lens of one's own needs. You can learn a lot by the process itself, no matter the result."

Afterwards they shared their enthusiasm to work in such an environment and their overall satisfaction.

Organizing a **special event beforehand** (a public lecture conducted by TimeHeroes) did not significantly raise the number of applications, but attracted very diverse and highly motivated participants.

The tasks/cases/diagnosis should allow a more flexible approach to the formation of the teams and their workflow. The mid-term pilot saw students coming and going and the organizers should be ready to use all of them – not to reject any student willing to participate (even partially) but also to create focused problem-solving teams.

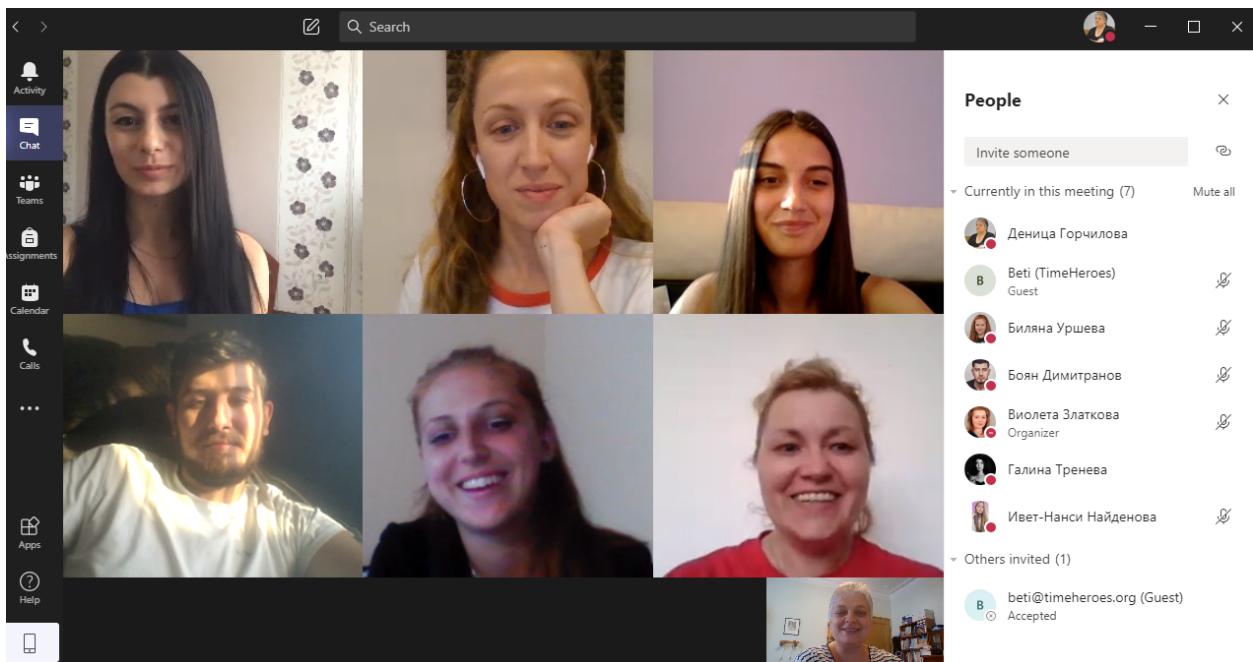
The length of the pro bono workshop (8 uninterrupted working hours) was an important issue for the engagement of **corporate mentors**. That meant a whole day out-of-office, which can be done only by freelancers or by people whose employers are deeply engaged in the pro bono idea.

The **8 hours for the mid-term pilot** actually covered only the physical meeting on the day of the workshop. The students invested much more time – for initial preparation, the briefing, as well as in reading some materials. The time again was not enough and some of the teams worked additional hours after the workshop to finish the details and present their ideas.

The **post pilot interviews** should be done soon after the workshop. If it is done at the end of the day, the students would be too tired to invest enough time and answer in detail. As our experience showed, three weeks later is too much – the students have come back to their daily routines and maybe have forgotten some valuable details. Maybe it's best to do the interview no later than 3-4 days after the workshop.

4. Long-Term Pro Bono Pilot

This pilot was planned to last 20 hours, with a group of 5-8 people (student volunteers, academic and corporate mentors). It took place online due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The project meetings started on the 8th of May 2020 and ended on 15th of July 2020. It was the third pilot carried out in the framework of the project, done by the Sofia team.



Participants in the online long-term pilot

a. Selection of the nonprofit beneficiary

We had a different approach this time - we didn't choose a nonprofit but rather decided to work on a problem that would be helpful to lots of nonprofits instead.

We had more time to focus on research, so we wanted to produce a document that will have a bigger impact on society.

b. Recruitment process and number of participants

The **student volunteers'** recruitment was very different for this pilot. Due to the pandemic, the whole university life was moved to online, in the beginning of March 2020 (just several weeks after the beginning of the summer semester). That is why we didn't opt for the wider audience, although we created a Facebook announcement and sent a circular email to all the students in the 3rd and 4th year of study.

This time we decided to **personally invite** the student participants. We relied on students from the Public Administration bachelors' programme with whom we had worked in the previous semesters and whose strengths and weaknesses we knew. We had several one-on-one and small group online meetings and phone conversations with the potential participants.

Despite that "personal invitation" approach, we still expected the students to submit their CVs and to send an email with 3 reasons why they would participate in a pro bono project.

All 4 of the invited students submitted their documents and were enthusiastic to try this new experience.

The first working session was also a **training session** on the task - the financial problems of the Bulgarian nonprofit organizations and the lack of systematic information on the potential sources that are open and available for fundraising.

The other participants in the long-term pro bono were the two academic mentors from UNWE, Beti from TH and the **professional mentor**. TimeHeroes invited the mentor personally - CSR Director in one of the biggest outsourcing companies in Bulgaria, who often provides grants to nonprofits and was able to explain more about the whole process and what is important for them when they read project proposals from nonprofit organizations.

c. Pro Bono Meeting(s)

As already mentioned, the entire long-term pro bono was delivered **online**, using the MS Teams platform. We could use it to its full potential because the UNWE has an institutional partnership with Microsoft and has applied MS Teams as a teaching/learning platform since the beginning of the lockdowns in Bulgaria.

In total, there were **7 online meetings** of the entire team and numerous in-between online contacts between the student-volunteers.

In the process of gathering information, several specific topics turned out to be quite challenging for the students. That is why at the third and the fifth meetings the mentors provided **more training** - on the available financial sources for nonprofits in Bulgaria and on the ways to work with information, to structure a text, to back-check and document internet sources.

The students took terms and all of them performed the role of a **leader of the team**. That helped them distribute the burden and to create new skills on organizing, distributing tasks, pushing people to keep deadlines, balancing the workload, etc.

Due to the online format and the complexity of the task, every participant (students and mentors alike) invested more than the planned 20 hours. The estimates were that **the real workload** was around 45-50 hours per person.

The **final deliverable** of the long term pro bono was a handbook, called "*Financing Organizations with a Cause*" ([padmin_a52cb Финансиране на организации с кауза.pdf \(unwe.bg\)](#)). It consists of 60 pages in Bulgarian and presents opportunities for financing nonprofits from 1) foundations and trusts, 2) corporate entities, 3) municipalities, 4) governments, 5) EU funds, and 6) crowdfunding options. The handbook delivers hyperlinks to every presented possible financial source and gives advice on how to approach the different institutions.

d. Evaluation

The evaluation was done during the last MS Teams meeting - on 15th of July 2020. It happened in an **open discussion** that was followed by filling in the **evaluation form**. The small number of student participants made that task very easy to perform.

As **most enriching**, the students have pointed out that the pro bono experience has contributed to their personal development, and has made them “feel useful”. They pointed out as benefits:

- The search for useful information;
- Ability to self-organize, to organize people, to work with a team, to understand which part of the information is important and relevant;
- To gather new knowledge and skills.

Among the **setbacks** the following were listed:

- The difficulty of working online;
- To organize the teamwork;
- To find the right information.

The overall impression of the **professional volunteer** was also very positive. Feedback with her was done face to face. She was happy to have taken part in such a workshop and listed a sense of purpose and personal development as main motivation to participate.

e. Testimonies and Learnings

Due to the pandemic situation, the long-term pro bono presented the challenge to be fully organized and executed **online**. The whole process started quickly, but then other obligations of the students (especially the summer exam session) made us postpone the finalization of the deliverable.

The **task** turned out to be too complex for the students and they invested more time than preliminary planned. Splitting the work in more meetings was a good option to help the students at little steps and when needed.

All of the students worked extra hours and this should also be especially considered when the experience will get the students ECTS credits.

With regards to the “**entirely online**” situation, we can summarize that the online pro bono experience is very suitable to be part of a holistic online teaching and studying process. In situations of restrictive measures (as lockdowns) it can be a very refreshing form of engaging students.

5. Conclusions

We believe that the three pilots were really successful and also gave opportunity to all parties involved to learn, work and collaborate together on an especially important topic, such as pro bono.