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Digital Internship Model for Higher Professional Studies

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RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN

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Abstract

This document describes a methodology for helping the project participants deal with potential problematic situations related to the implementation of the activities or the management of the project.

The purpose of this Risk Management plan is to provide an analysis on the project activities and to present any possible difficulties, which may occur, with the aim of ensuring a smooth and successful implementation of the project, so that it can achieve its objectives and deliver the planned intellectual outputs. Therefore, this document provides an approach to identify and evaluate the risk of the occurrence of adverse situations, which can negatively affect the outcomes of the DIMPS project, and proposes adequate measures to address the issues during the implementation of the project.

A special focus in the document is placed on any potential issues, which might be caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the imposed restrictions in all partner countries. The risk ownership is established through the role and responsibilities within the consortium. The foreseen risks are presented along with their corresponding mitigation measures.

Introduction

This risk management plan intends to maximise the probability of success for Project Digital Internship Model for Higher Professional Studies (DIMPS). This will be accomplished by the accurate identification of any potential difficulties for the project implementation and by careful planning and execution of all measures, which will help prevent the occurrence of these difficulties or will help reduce their negative impact to minimum.

The consortium of the project consists of four partners, namely the Western Serbia Academy of Applied Studies as lead partner and the University of Ruse Angel Kanchev, the Higher Education Technical School of Professional Studies in Novi Sad and the University of West Attica. These four partners are from three different countries, namely Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria. In order to decrease the risks from the complexity of the presented consortium, management structures and related procedures will be defined to cover key aspects of the project operation and coordination.

The implementation of the project will be ensured and monitored by a Project Management Unit (PMU) and a Project Steering Committee (PSC), which will guarantee the timely delivery of the project outputs and will provide the mechanisms and means for communication between the partners, the stakeholders and the interested parties. The quality of the project results and the implementation of all activities and actions will be constantly monitored by a Quality Assurance and Monitoring Committee (QAMC). Quality plans, reporting plans, implementation reports and checklists will be prepared and distributed to all partners and expert groups, so that the QAMC can evaluate the working process and the quality of the produced outputs. In addition, regular virtual meeting between the partners in bilateral fashion and with participation of all partners, as well as three in-person meetings will help detect any deviation from the project plan. Every 3 months the project management structures will meet and evaluate the progress and will analyse the implementation of the project, so that any deviations from the timeline or any issues can be identified, assessed and solved. This facilitates anticipating and fixing problems before the crucial stage of reporting the completion of the planned intellectual outputs.

Risk management is an on-going process to be carried out throughout the project life for identifying, quantifying, managing and monitoring threats. For the purpose of the project, the Risk management plan is divided in five steps – Risk Identification, Risk Assessment, Response planning, Monitoring and control and Reporting and Feedback.

This document is an instrument for the whole consortium. It provides a framework to help tackling potential issues during the project implementation period in a preventive, appropriate and effective manner by outlining how risk management activities will be performed. It reminds the organisation and the principles in place in the consortium and lays out the responsibilities, strategy and procedures regarding the risk management in the DIMPS project. It helps avoiding threats in a timely manner and if necessary - by taking actions, by applying corrective measures and by minimizing the negative impacts on the project and its outputs.

Last, but not least, this document is aimed to raise the awareness of all project partners about any potential risks for the project and to provide them with solutions and tools to mitigate or address these problems.

Risk Management mechanism

This risk management plan intends to maximise the probability of success for Project Digital Internship Model for Higher Professional Studies (DIMPS). This will be accomplished by the accurate identification of any potential difficulties for the project implementation and by careful planning and execution of all measures, which will help prevent the occurrence of these difficulties or will help reduce their negative impact to minimum.

The mechanism that will be used for the establishment of the Risk Management plan is presented in the figure below (Fig. 1) and includes the phases for Risk Identification, Risk Assessment, Response planning, Monitoring and Control of the Risk and Reporting and Feedback.

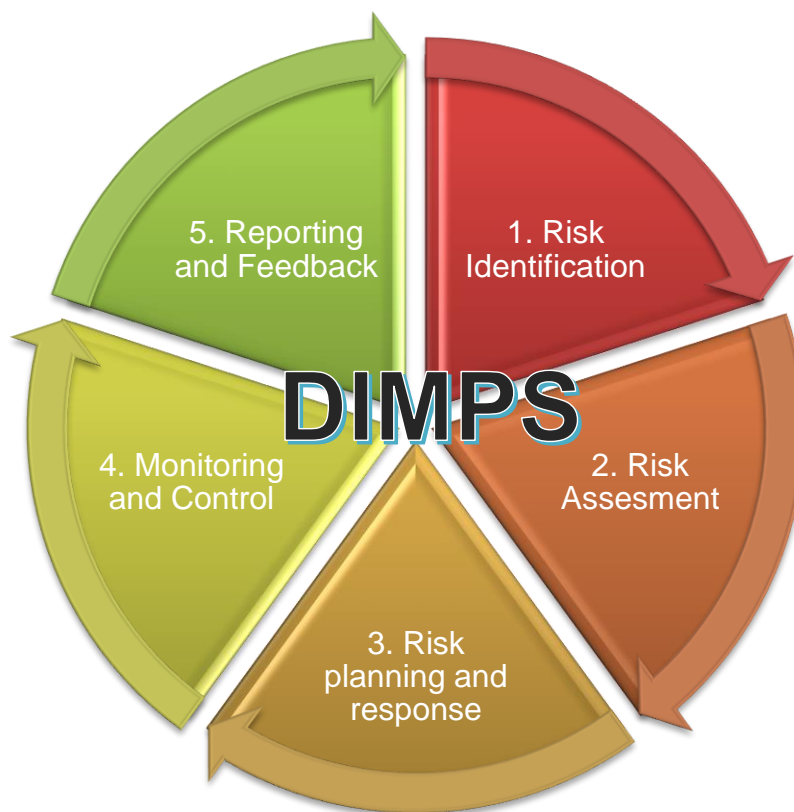


Fig. 1. The phases of the Risk management mechanism that is used for the establishment of the Risk management plan for Project DIMPS

Risk identification

The proper identification of the risk is a difficult process that requires the establishment of set of rules, timelines, guides, plans and mechanisms for its timely discovery and assessment. During the project preparation phase, a number of plans, including this one, will be developed, which will guarantee that the project deliverables are clearly identified, the timeline for their achievement is clear and that the quality of the expected results is known to everyone within the project consortium. Once the results are clearly defined and the methods and mechanisms for their completion are established, any possible threats to the project implementation and their mitigation measures can be identified. Nevertheless, at the preparation phase, the indicators for the project successful outcome have been clearly identified, so a preliminary Risk Management

plan can be adequately established. Once the mechanisms for the completion of the project activities and tasks are defined and put into use, the Risk management plan can be updated, if needed, so that any newly identified risks can be properly addressed. The preliminary Risks for project DIMPS are listed in the Risk Management Register, which is presented in the next Section of this document. These preliminary Risks and the identified and proposed measures for their mitigation or avoidance are available to all partners within the consortium of the DIMPS project and are to be updated by all partners at least every three months and in accordance to the QAMC or PSC decisions and recommendations. The following issues shall be considered as tools and techniques for risk identification:

- Analysis of the status for the intellectual outputs and the progress indicators according to the workplans for the project expert groups
- Analysis of the Activity plan and any potential delays
- Analysis of the Quality plan, the quality indicators and the related activities
- Analysis of the Project Dissemination plan
- Analysis of the Project Management plan and any deviations

Regular communications between the members of the project management bodies, namely the PMU, the PSC and the QAMC, will ensure the anticipation of the risks throughout the project implementation period. Besides, it is the responsibility of each consortium member to inform the management bodies about new potential risks.

Risk assessment

The assessment of the risk is a very crucial part of the Risk management process. The proper assessment requires the use of a methodology that is proven, appropriate and acceptable for projects of this scale, duration and size. In DIMPS, the PSC will estimate the probability for the occurrence of each identified risk and the impact of these risks on the project. This will be accomplished using a risk exposure matrix and evaluation mechanism with five grades – Very Low, Low, Medium, High and Critical. The risk exposure matrix presented in Fig. 2 will be used for the estimation of the risk levels.

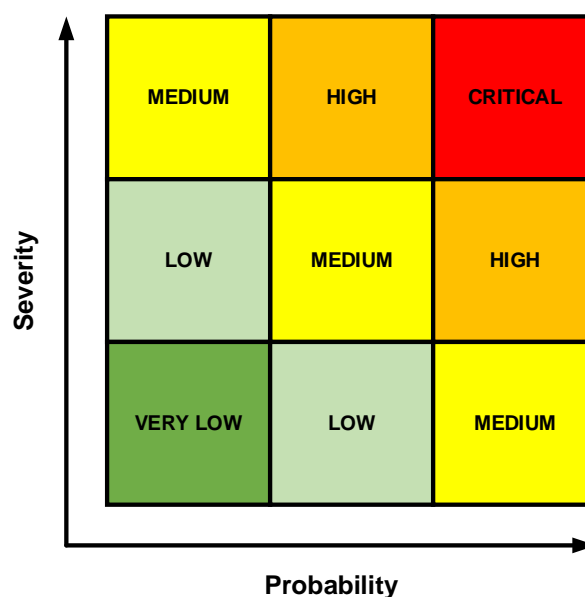


Fig. 2. The Risk exposure matrix, which will be used in the Risk assessment processes for Project DIMPS

Risk planning and response

The Risk response strategy for every Risk Management plan presents the general measures, which are to be activated as response to any identified threats. The strategy also defines the individual parties that own and respond to the identified risks. In other words, the strategy represents a plan that assigns the roles and the responsibilities, provides a response framework for risk owners and measures for risk avoidance and mitigation. The measures for each foreseen preliminary risk are displayed in the following Section.

Risk ownership

The development of the Intellectual outputs and the successful completion of the project requires well-defined responsibilities for management of the risk. The project management bodies, namely the PMU, the PSC and the QAMC, have the general responsibility for the management of the potential risk in the project. Nevertheless, all project partners are also individually responsible for the timely completion of their individually assigned tasks and subtasks and their delivery in the necessary quality and quantity.

Project Management Unit

The Project Management Unit (PMU) will be formed by the Western Serbia Academy of applied studies and will be in charge of the overall project management. The PMU will be responsible for the planning of the project management activities, including the management of the general flow of documents, the organization of all external and internal project communication actions, the management of the partner teams, the management of the administrative and technical staff, the distribution of the project roles, the organization of the events and the preparation of the supplementary documents for all events, etc. In this regard, the PMU will be responsible for any staff related risks, any risks related to the documentation flow, the risk related to the unavailability to organize the planned project events on time and any to any potential issues with the overall management and reporting of the project.

Project Steering Committee

The Project Steering Committee (PSC) will be composed by participants from all four project partners. The PSC will meet in-person three times during the planned project meetings, as well as several additional times online. The PSC will ensure the successful project implementation and the proper use of the project budget. The PSC has the overall responsibility to map the progress of the project activities and to provide overwatch on the data management. The risks related to the PSC can arise if the it is unable to resolve any budget related issues or if the PSC decisions are slow and inadequate, especially considering the short project implementation period. The PSC is also responsible for all risks, which are related to any deviation from the original aim of the project or for the unsuccessful completion of the project activities.

Project Quality Assurance and Monitoring Committee

The Quality Assurance and Monitoring Committee (QAMC) of the project will consist of academic representatives from all project partners. The QAMC has the role to monitor and report on the quality control of the project implementation with regards to the adopted Quality plan. The QAMC will meet 3 times face-to-face and online in compliance with the Activity plan, thus ensuring quality in the implementation and deliverables. The QAMC has a vital role for the project, as the development of all three intellectual outputs is to be closely monitored and the quality of these inputs is to be refined to suit the pilot internships and the sustainability of the project. As the

individual intellectual outputs are dependent on one another, a significant risk is to arise in the early stages of the project, if Intellectual Output 1 is not corresponding to the general aim of the project or is not of the highest possible quality. This will reflect significantly on the development of Intellectual Outputs 2 and 3 and will jeopardise the successful outcome of the project. Thus, it must be clear that the quality control and the monitoring of the development of all three Intellectual Outputs is a risk that is to be closely monitored by the QAMC.

Project Expert Groups

The achievement of the project goal, to introduce the specific virtual internship model and the methodology for these internships with practical workflows and guidelines, is envisioned through the orchestrated work of experts who have experience in organizing internship systems between Professional Higher Education Institutions and companies (Expert Group 1) and a group of experts who have experience in developing web-based platforms (Expert Group 2). These two groups will produce the main project deliverables, namely:

- Model for digital internships in the higher education and methodology for its implementation;
- Online platform for the organization and management of virtual internships;
- Toolkits/guides for the implementation of the virtual internships;
- Usability report with the results of piloting and testing in project partner countries.

Any issues within the Expert Groups or any disagreements, conflicts and disputes between the individual members of these groups will cause delay in the development of the abovementioned deliverables and the possible failure of the project. Due to the nature of the project consortium and of the project itself, deviations from the initial timeline of the project and from the Project Action plan are not recommended. There is significant risk for the project if such delays or deviations are registered and not compensated quickly, but not at the expense of the quality of the deliverables.

Individual Project Partners

The four partners in the project consortium are required to delegate staff members for the needs of the project management bodies and for the assembly of the task-related project teams and Expert Groups. These members will ensure timely delivery of all deliverables and events, the monitoring of the overall project quality and the financial management, the establishment of networks with the potential stakeholders and the dissemination of the project activities and information. Understaffing the project teams and the overloading of individual team members is the most significant risk for the individual project partners.

Risk response strategy

Following the evaluation of the risk exposure and based on the clear definition of the risk owners, the responsible project bodies or the individual partners in the project must seek standalone or joint means to prevent any actions and events that may harm the project or lead to the unavailability to successfully complete the project with the necessary quality. To do this, the corresponding parties can either attempt to avoid the risk factors or if this is impossible, they can implement measures for the mitigation of the risk.

Risk avoidance

For all management, networking, research or transnational events and activities, the risk factors that are creating threat(s) to the successful project implementation are to be tackled and

eliminated by the corresponding the risk owner(s), if this is possible and is according to the national legislation of the individual partner countries.

Means for mitigation of the risk

For threats that cannot be prevented, the risk owner(s) have to establish a response strategy that minimises the damage to the project. The risks already identified are listed in the following Section, which will be periodically updated, if needed. The corresponding mitigation measures are also displayed next to each identified threat. Each partner is responsible for implementing the risk mitigation measures, which relate to the activities they are involved in.

Monitoring and Control

It is the responsibility of all DIMPS project partners to communicate to the project management bodies the significance of each identified risk and the expected effectiveness of the proposed mitigation measure(s), so that the table with identified risks can be properly updated and the relevance of the proposed tools and measures can be evaluated. The risk owner(s) will confirm the correctness of the identified risks and the effectiveness of the proposed responses. The risk owner(s) will keep track of the situation and inform the PMU if any new risks are identified or if the proposed measures are not suitable or will not provide the expected effect. The risk exposure will be continuously re-evaluated and modified accordingly, as defined by the Risk management mechanism described in Fig.1.

Reporting and Feedback

The table with the identified risks for Project DIMPS, presented in the next Section of this document, is to be updated by the Project Management Unit or the responsible project partner and is to be reviewed regularly or at least at every PSC meeting. A separate register of the encountered risks is also to be created and regularly presented to the PSC meetings. This register will contain the list of all encountered risks, the issues caused by them, and the preventive measures or mitigation actions that were carried out to overcome the issues.

Identified risks for the DIMPS project

The following table contains information for all Risks that were identified for the DIMPS project. The table includes risk number, description of the identified risk, the identified risk owner(s) and the proposed mitigation or avoidance measures for all risks that have been foreseen before the start of the project. The table also contains specific risks identified in relation to the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic. All presented risks are then transferred and presented in the Risk Exposure matrix for the project (Fig.3).

Identified Risks for Project DIMPS			
Risk	Description of Risk	Risk Owner	Proposed Risk mitigation measures
R1	Lack of overall coordination <i>Probability - Low;</i> <i>Severity – High;</i>	The Project management bodies, specifically the PMU	Effective project coordination is ensured by the PMU, which is expected to follow the Project Activity plan and the Project Management Plan. In case of unforeseen events, the PMU team members are to implement means for risk mitigation or to address the project consortium, so that a solution can be presented.
R2	Ineffective overall management <i>Probability - Low;</i> <i>Severity – High;</i>	The Project management bodies, specifically the PMU	Effective management is ensured by the appointment of experts as PMU staff and by provisioning of resources for the management tasks. In case of staff changes or understaffing, the PMU staff should be revised and modified accordingly.
R3	Consortium disruption <i>Probability - Low;</i> <i>Severity – High;</i>	All partners, PSC, PMU	All partners have experience with international projects. All partners are motivated to reach the planned project objectives. Any partner(s) not adhering to this common interest, for other reason than force majeure, are to be excluded from the project consortium and if possible, to be substituted.
R4	Partner failure <i>Probability - Low;</i> <i>Severity – High;</i>	All partners, PSC, PMU	Chances of sudden partner failure are considered minimal, but in the case of such event, the consortium will redistribute tasks over the remainder of the partnership or if possible, will substitute the partner.
R5	Conflicts in the Project consortium <i>Probability - Low;</i> <i>Severity – Medium;</i>	All partners, PSC, PMU, QAMC	All partners will sign the Partnership Agreement (PA) and will work under the regulations defined in it. The PMU will monitor for the timely execution of all activities according to this agreement and will report to the PSC if any deviations are detected. The PSC will execute measures for compensation of the deviations or will solve any disagreement between the partners. The PMU will maintain record of all relevant correspondence among partners to aid the PSC in resolving any conflicts. All partners are expected to solve any emergent problems in a collegial spirit. If this is impossible the national legislation regulations will be applied as defined in the PA.

Identified Risks for Project DIMPS			
Risk	Description of Risk	Risk Owner	Proposed Risk mitigation measures
R6	<p>Delays in the preparation and submission of the deliverables <i>Probability - Medium; Severity – High;</i></p>	Expert Groups 1 and 2, QAMC, PSC	<p>The PMU and QAMC will provide the tools that are necessary for the effective monitoring of the project progress. These tools include the Activity plan, the Quality plan, the reporting templates, the organization of the events, etc.</p> <p>Any delays in the preparation of the Intellectual Outputs or in the remaining deliverables are to be reported to the PMU, to the QAMC and to the PSC, by the responsible Expert Group, as soon as they are detected. Mitigating actions will be discussed between the PSC and the responsible Expert Groups, so that the project timetable can be respected or if possible adjusted. The PMU and the PSC are responsible for the timely appointment of the Expert Group members and the avoidance of any delays with the deliverables. The COVID-19 situation can significantly delay the development of the deliverables, if national lockdowns and restrictions are put into action for the partner countries. If this is the case, the partners are to continue with the work on the deliverables in a remote fashion, if this is possible. Additional option if this case will be the extension of the project implementation period, without any budget modifications.</p>
R7	<p>Coordination problems between the individual Expert Groups <i>Probability - Medium; Severity – Low;</i></p>	Expert Groups 1 and 2, PSC	<p>The expert groups will involve representatives from all project partners. They will collaborate to achieve the designated tasks in a timely manner and according to the Action plan. The PSC will monitor the progress and will flag problems in a timely manner to enable harmonious mitigation. In case of failure to deliver the foreseen intellectual outputs, all tasks will be redistributed over the partners to ensure delivery in the shortest time possible.</p>
R8	<p>Ineffective collaboration and disagreements between the Expert Groups <i>Probability - Medium; Severity – Medium;</i></p>	Expert Groups 1 and 2, PSC, QAMC	<p>The work of the individual expert groups is closely related, so in case of ineffective collaboration or in case of disagreements between the experts, the delivery of the inputs can be delayed or endangered. The Expert Groups are to report this to the PSC and they should negotiate a compromise or find a solution for the prompt resolution of the issues. The risk factor here is to be solved firstly within the expert group, then between the expert groups and if no suitable solution is found the final decision is to be made by the PSC. The QAMC will also be involved, so that the solution meets the quality standards.</p>

Identified Risks for Project DIMPS			
Risk	Description of Risk	Risk Owner	Proposed Risk mitigation measures
R9	<p>Unavailability to deliver the special quality-related results</p> <p><i>Probability - Low;</i> <i>Severity – High;</i></p>	All partners, PSC, PMU, QAMC	<p>The project needs to deliver specific quality-related results, like number of website visits, number of participants in the project events, etc. While these deliverables are not of essential significance for the overall project results, they are vital for the adequate quality assessment and evaluation of the outputs. The partners need to focus on meeting these results by inviting interested parties, students and companies, as well as in participation in different events. The COVID-19 pandemic might significantly reflect on the delivery of the quality-related results by making the participation and organization of live events impossible. In these cases, the organization and participation in online events is to be implemented by all project partners.</p>
R10	<p>Unavailability to conduct the planned pilot internship activities</p> <p><i>Probability - Low;</i> <i>Severity – High;</i></p>	All partners	<p>Each project partner has the obligation to select 3 students as test subjects for the Virtual Internship platform in their own institutions and to provide two additional students to test the platform in an exchange basis. The unavailability to select students for the virtual internships is a risk for all partners. If this is the case, the partners need to properly advertise the platform to the students and involve them in the pilot implementation of the activities. If possible, other partners can step in and provide additional students at the place of the partners that are unable to select and involve the needed test subjects for the platform. The same thing is valid for the industrial parties, which are to provide the internships.</p>
R11	<p>Irregular update of the project webpage and dissemination media</p> <p><i>Probability - Medium;</i> <i>Severity – Low;</i></p>	All partners, PSC, PMU, QAMC	<p>The visibility of the project is important part of the project lifetime and its sustainability. While the irregular update of the project webpage is not that vital for the project outcomes and outputs, it is important for the publicity of the project and all partners need to invest in the timely update of all dissemination materials and resources. The PMU, the PSC and the QAMC are also required to monitor and if needed to request from the partners to update the dissemination media and the project webpage.</p>

The identified risks for the DIMPS project are preliminary and highlight the specific issues for the project implementation at its early stages. The presented risks are project specific and are closely related to the envisioned deliverables and intellectual outputs.

Apart from the presented risks, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the project consortium has identified several unforeseen risks, which are presented in the following table.

Unforeseen Risks for Project DIMPS			
Risk	Description of Risk	Risk Owner	Proposed Risk mitigation measures
R12	Unavailability to conduct the planned project events in person <i>Probability - Medium; Severity – Low;</i>	All partners, PSC, PMU, QAMC	The project consortium is planned to meet at three in-person meetings during the project lifetime. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic can force some or all of the partners to remain at their own countries, as the quarantine restrictions can be reintroduced at the borders or the countries might require medical documents for PCR tests or immunisation. If these are the cases for the three events, the PMU can organize the meeting as hybrid events or as entirely online events. Reasonable rescheduling of the events is also possible and should be considered as viable option.
R13	Low quality of the deliverables <i>Probability - Medium; Severity – High;</i>	All partners, PSC, PMU, QAMC	The quality of the deliverables is very important for the project, so any issues in this matter are going to have high severity. Nevertheless, the Quality plan, the Action plan and the dedication of the partners, the PMU, PSC and QAMC members is a guarantee for the timely identification of potential issues and the introduction of the necessary mitigation measures.
R14	Periodical or incidental understaffing <i>Probability - Low; Severity – Low;</i>	All partners, PSC, PMU, QAMC	The COVID-19 pandemic can cause periodical or incidental understaffing in one or more of the project partners. If this is the case, the tasks are to be distributed between the partners or substitutes are to be elected.

Based on the Risk management mechanism adopted for the needs of the DIMPS project and by having in mind the identified risks from the tables above, the following Risk Exposure matrix can be derived for the DIMPS project (Fig.3).

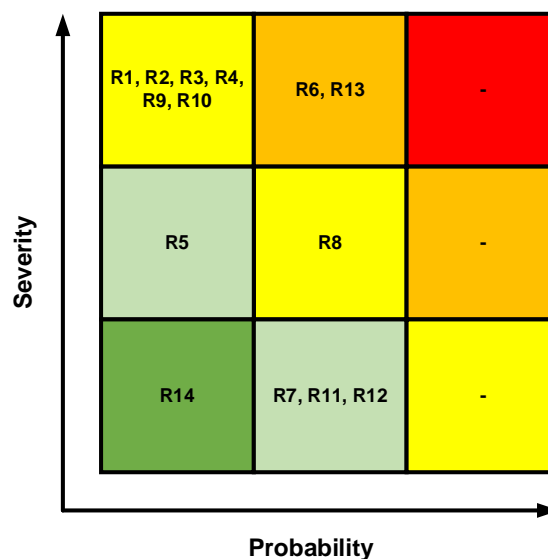
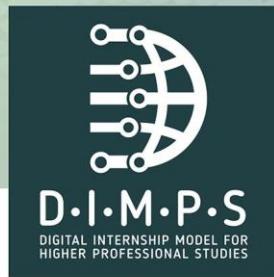


Fig. 3. The Risk exposure matrix of Project DIMPS

Conclusions

The Risk Management plan presented in this document defines the responsibilities towards the risks within the project consortium. In addition, this document presents the anticipated risks that the project could be confronted to and proposes the corresponding avoidance and mitigation measures. The risk exposure level was determined for each identified risk and no critical risks were identified at this point of time.

This document is to be revised and constantly updated by all partners by providing proper information and feedback to the project management bodies.



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