Skills act 4 Vet Skills Identification Tool

Final report

1 MARZO 2020

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1. Introduction on Intellectual Output 1

The Skills Act 4 VET Skills identification tool is the result of extensive exploratory research. It aimed at identifying the five most required or perceived as needed transversal skills by SMEs (host companies in the framework of work-based learning experience abroad), students and teachers.

The research allowed us to:

- select and identify the five target transversal skills;
- describe accurately the content of each transversal skill – framed within the learning needs of the target students (aged 14-18 enrolled in VET training)

2. The questionnaire

We conducted the exploratory research sending online questionnaire. In this way, we were able to collect feedback from teachers, students and hosting companies. We created three different kind of questionnaire, one for each target group, and each kind of questionnaire was translated into five languages:

1. **English** 2. **Italian** 3. **Spanish** 4. **Greek** 5. **Poland**

The leading information we collected is about:

- Principal **internship activities** carried out during the work-based learning experience (Job description, describing the general tasks, or other related duties, and responsibilities during the internship)
- Examples of **critical issues**, difficulties experienced by all parties involved
- Main **learning results** perceived by all parties when it comes to transversal skills
- The questionnaires were constituted of a set of questions aimed at **identifying the most required and lacking transversal skills** to use as a reference for the project. As a basis for the analysis, we provided a collection of target transversal skills. It included the ones that have been identified during the project preliminary needs analysis carried out by Tribeka with its partners 80 schools: Teamwork, Self-confidence, ability to perform context analysis, time management, adaptability, emotional intelligence/ability to manage emotions.

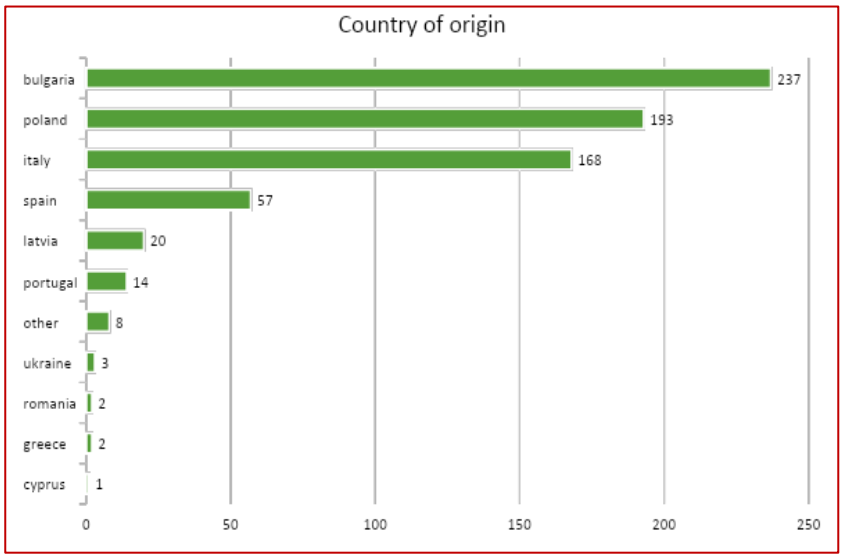
After a few weeks, we received many questionnaires, from each target, and each country represents in the project. In the table below, we report some interesting numbers about this research.

VET teachers	students	SMEs	Countries	Languages
226	705	100	11	5

BIA coordinated the design and administration of the questionnaires to SMEs, counting on the active inputs of all the partners. Elidea led the data analysis and reporting, While BIA coordinated the administration of the research tools and data gathering. We counted on the strong collaboration of all the partners and Tribeka, the coordinator for the definition of the content of the research tools and their administration.

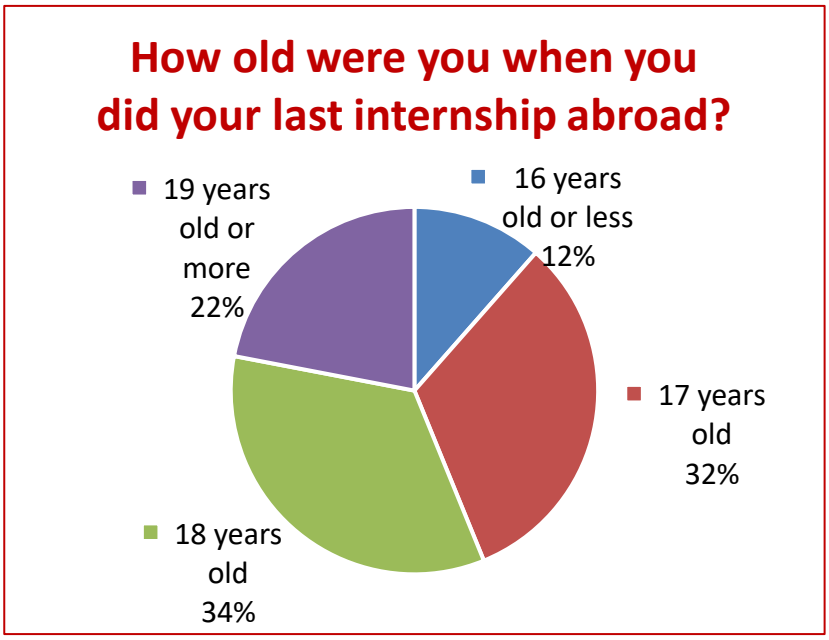
3. The Students

3.1. Countries



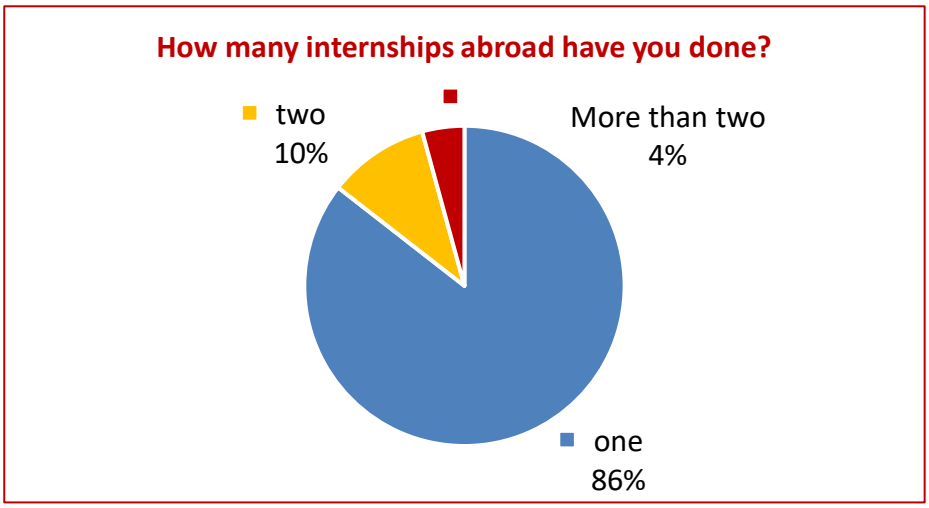
As you can see from the graphs, the 705 students come from different countries. The most representative is Bulgaria, Poland, Italy and Spain.

3.2. Ages

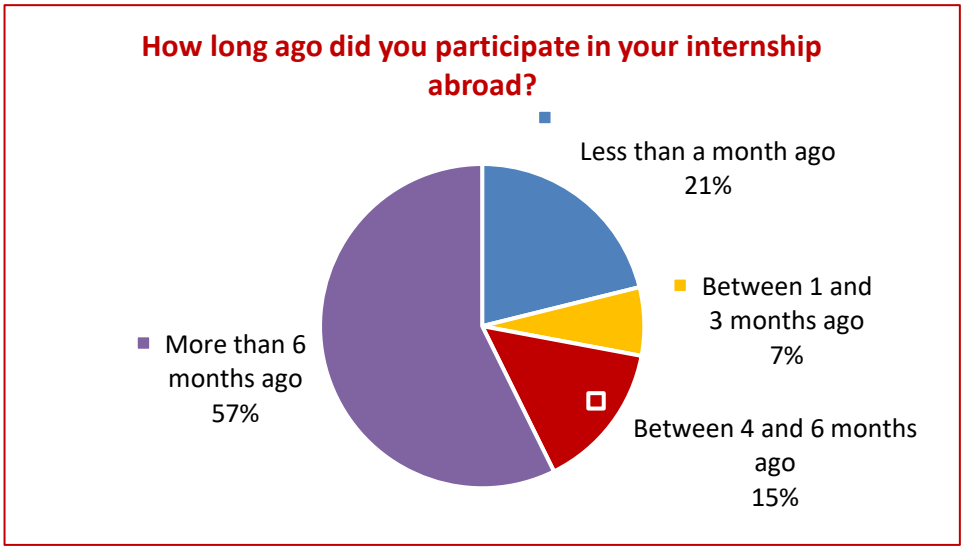


Our students were very young; the majority had done the internship between 17 and 18 years old.

3.3. The internship



The majority of the sample reported having done one internship abroad (86%).

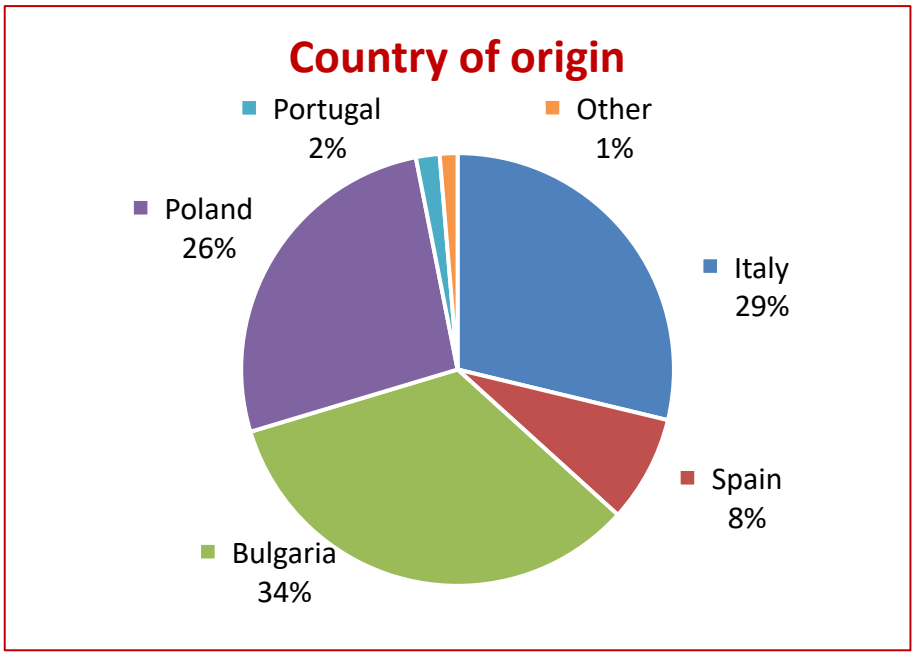


The majority of them reported having participated in the internship abroad more than six months ago (57%).

4. Teachers

4.1. Countries

We had 226 questionnaires from teachers; they come from 6 countries. The most representative is Bulgaria, Italy and Poland.



4.2. How they prepared the students for the mobility

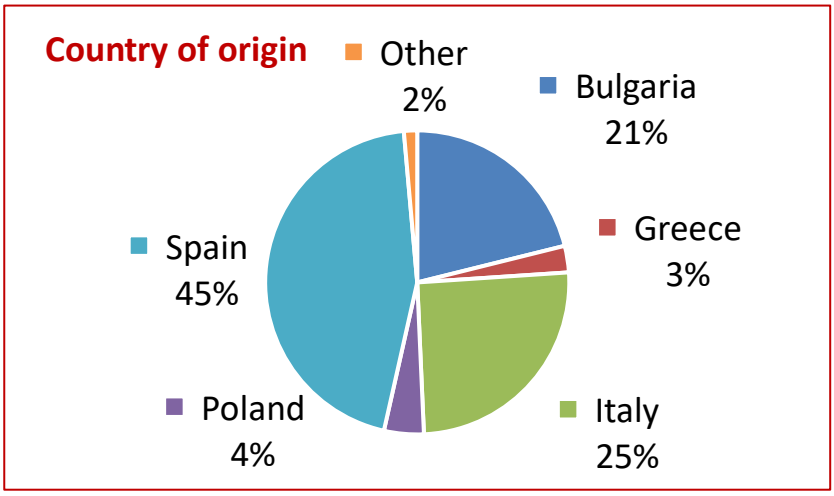
This question was open-ended. We gathered all the answers, and then we create some "category". Each teacher was able to describe more than one activity for his/her students.

kind of activity	How many teachers do that activity
Language course	113
Cross-cultural training programme	92
Professional preparation	22
Training	21
Specific educational and psychological training	16
Exercises	12
Instructions for creating a CV and a motivation letter	11
Getting to know the host country	10
School's testimonials of previous courses students	3

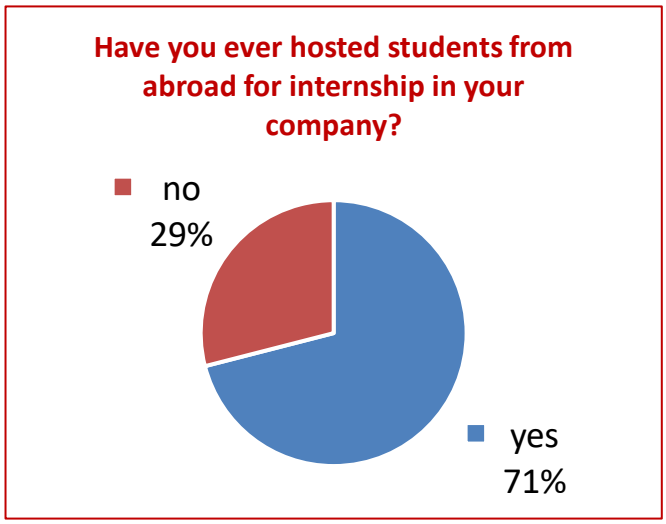
5. Companies

5.1. Countries

We received 100 questionnaires, almost half of these were from Spain.



5.2. Have you ever hosted students from abroad for an internship in your company?



Probably this was the most interesting question. We asked if the companies have already hosted students for an internship.

Of the 100 questionnaires we received, only 71 were from companies that were going to host internships.

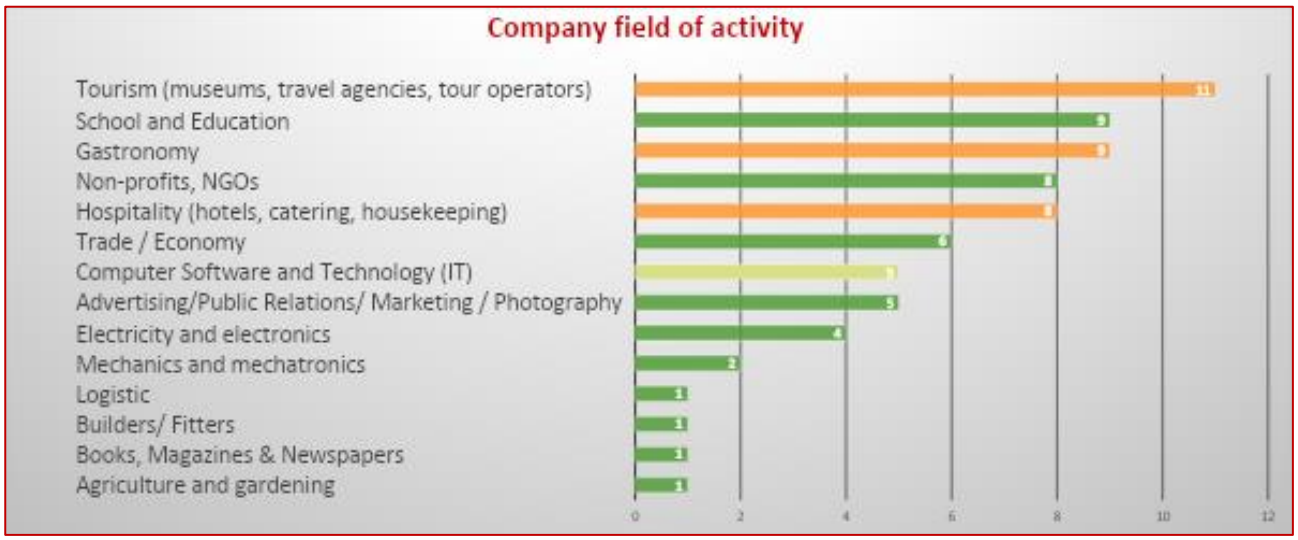
This result suggests that there is a lack of communication; companies don't know about the possibility to host students from abroad for an internship.

We collected data also from the 29 companies that did not participate in the project. It was asked them the reason why they did not join in an international VET programme.

Why hasn't your company taken part in an international VET programme?	
It does not have information for such a programme	19
It does not have the capacity to administrate such programme	3
It does not have the capacity to provide mentorship to such programme	2
It has no suitable positions to offer	2
Something else	2
The opportunity has never been presented	1

5.3. Company field of activity

According to the companies, the majority of these were in the field of tourism, which included museums, travel agencies, and tour operators. The areas of Gastronomy (9) and Hospitality, including hotels, catering and housekeeping (8) Computer, software and technology (5) also showed high frequencies.



5.4. Who answered from the companies

We collected information about the role of the person in charge of answering the questionnaire. How we could see from the table, most of the time, it was the director him/herself who answered the survey.

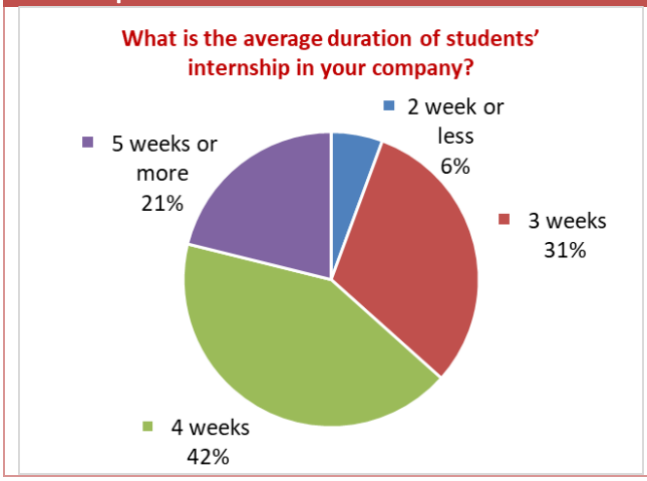
Role	responder
Director	17
Entrepreneurs	9
CEO	6
Coordinator	7
partner	3
Chef	3
manager, project manager	3
Secretary	2
Front office	2
Teacher	2
tecnico di progetto, talent partner	2
Information Systems Engineer, senior developer	2
other	4

6. Internship

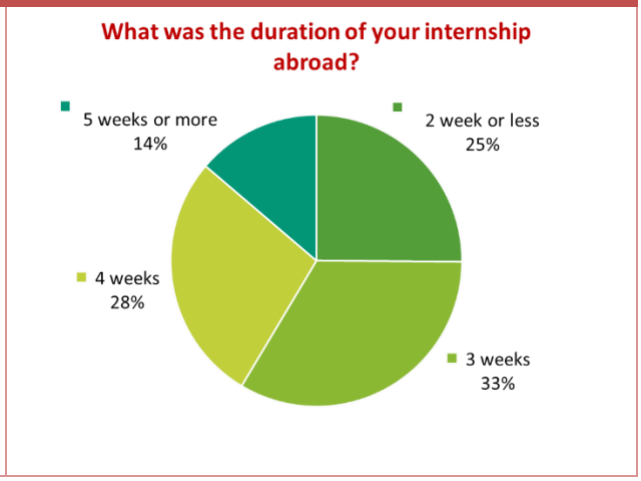
6.1. Duration of the internship

We asked the students and the companies about the internship. As you can see on the graphs, on average an internship lasts between 3 and 4 weeks

For Companies

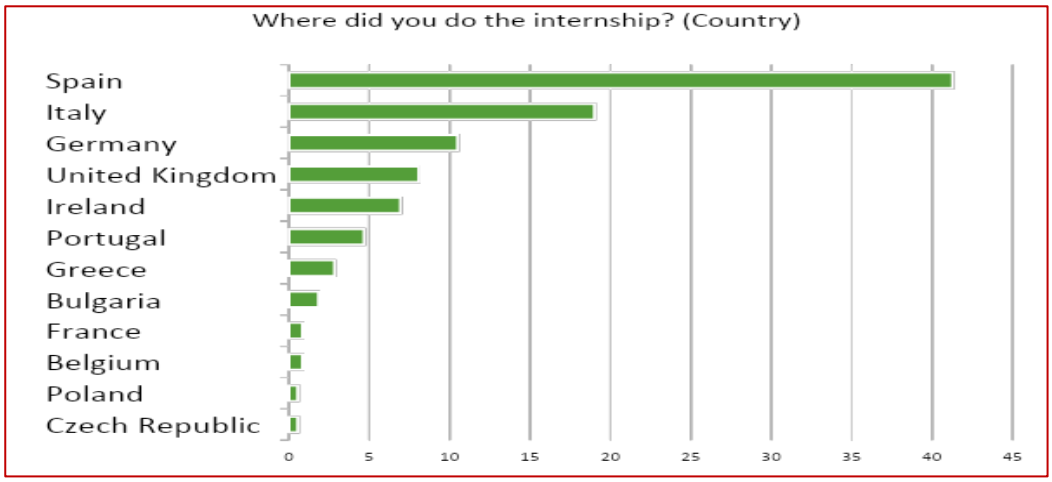


For Students



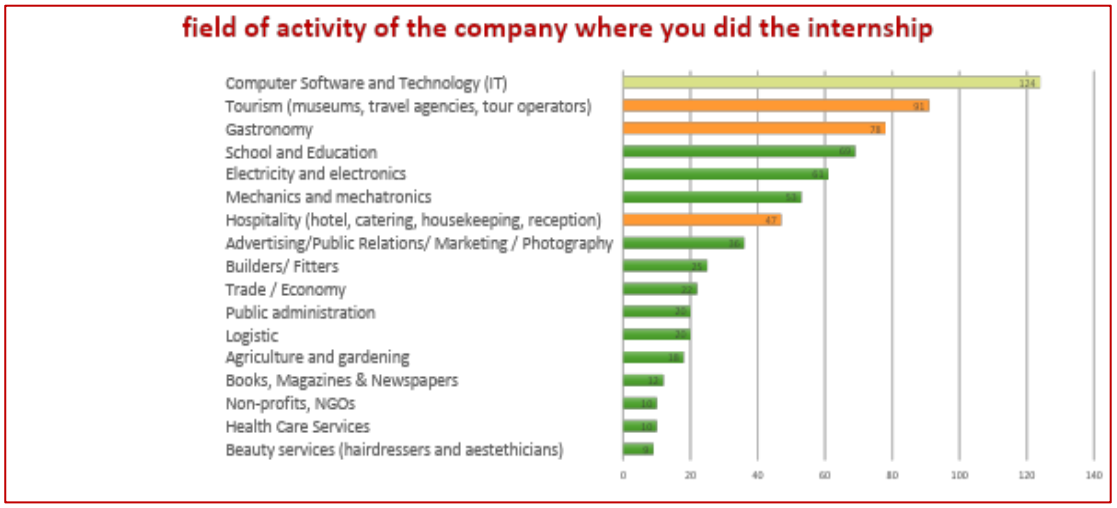
6.2. Hosting country

Spain was the country that hosted the majority of the students, with more of the 40% of the students. Italy was the second one with almost 20%.



6.3. Internship's field

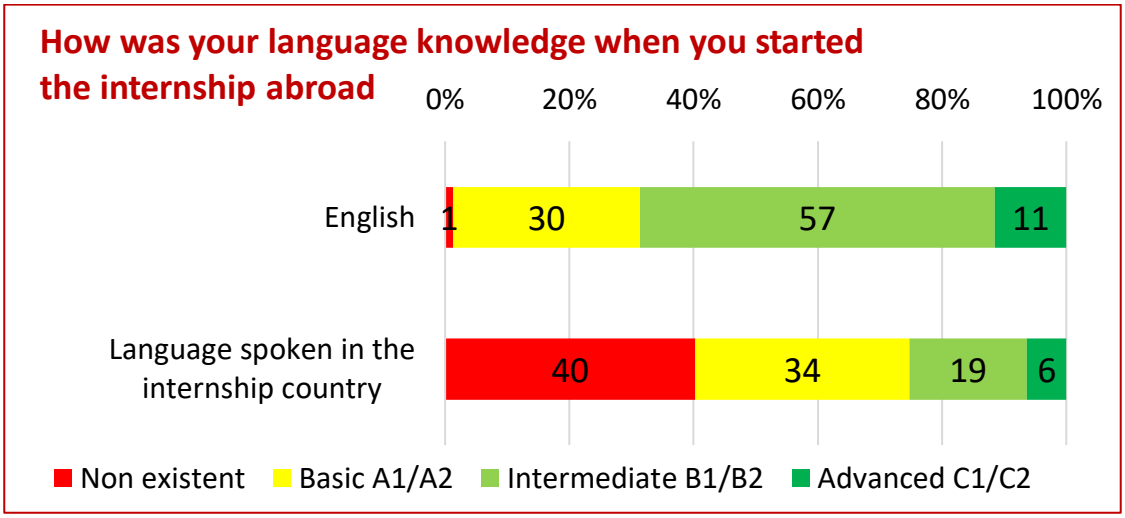
124 students reported the internship being in the area of Computer, software and technology. Below the IT activities; there are the activities of tourism (91), gastronomy (78), hospitality (47).



6.4. About languages

We asked the students their language skills before starting the internship abroad. Four levels have been established: "Non-existent"; "Basic A1/A2"; "Intermediate B1/B2"; "Advanced C1/C2".

Regarding the English skills, 68% has a very good level intermediate and 11% advanced. Instead, regarding the language spoken in the internship's country, the majority answered: "non-existent" (40%).

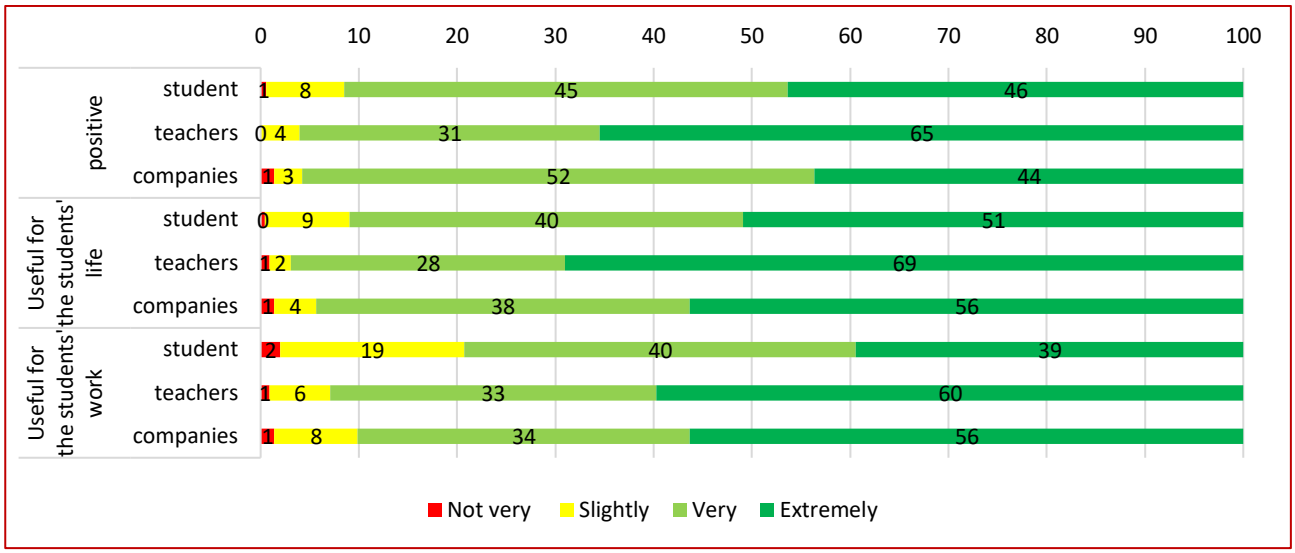


6.5. Impression about a mobility experience

In the table below, you can see how the three target groups consider the experience abroad. We gave them three different points of view:

- positive,
- useful for students' life
- useful for students' work.

In general, the answers of the three groups are very positive.



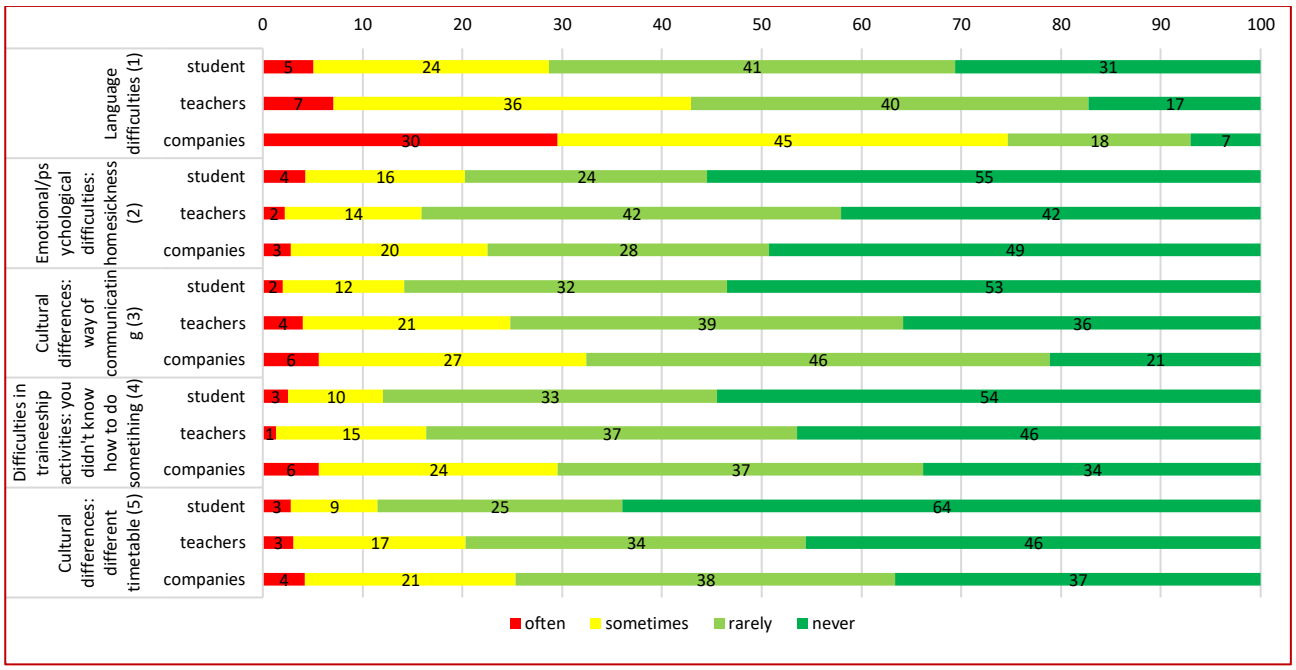
6.6. Difficulties during a mobility experience

In the survey, we asked students, teachers and companies about the difficulties they encountered along with the project. All three groups put the linguistic difficulties first. Another significant hardship, mainly found for students, turns out to be homesickness, included in the cluster of emotional/psychological difficulties.

In the table, you can see in red the most rated kind of problems according to the three groups.

List of difficulties	students	teachers	companies
Language difficulties	**1**	**1**	**1**
Emotional/psychological difficulties: homesickness	2	7	6
Cultural differences: the way of communicating	**3**	**2**	**2**
Difficulties in traineeship activities: you didn't know how to do something	4	8	3
Cultural differences: different timetable	5	4	5
With other students who shared this experience with them	6	5	10
Cultural differences: the way of working	7	3	4
Cultural differences: personal space	8	9	7
With student's colleagues, supervisor and people who worked with the student at the company	9	5	9
With teachers who accompanied the student	10	15	12
With the company Tutor	11	10	11
Difficulties in moving through the city	12	14	8
With local people	13	11	14
Difficulties in traineeship activities: the tasks were too difficult	14	12	13
Emotional/psychological difficulties: panic attacks	15	13	15

We also asked how often the students face these kinds of difficulties. In the table, you see the frequency of the answers.



Another question in the survey was about personal difficulties during the internship; this one was an open-ended question. Here the most frequent answers. We collected the responses in macro-categories

Language difficulties	freq
I experienced difficulties due to the language barrier	55
During the assignments, when we had to present in English	4
Understanding the accent and pronunciation of certain words	4
Trying to learn the local language	2

Emotional/psychological difficulties: homesickness	freq
Missing home	29
When I had some health problems	9
Loneliness	6
the comfort zone that you have to break, At the beginning I had difficulties adapting, The first few days due to the adaptation period to the new culture, values and habits of the foreign country	28
When I say goodbye	3

Other	freq
I didn't really know what to do	14
Some difficulties in adapting to food	15

6.7. Lessons learned

We asked about The most important lesson from the internship. The table below shows the main answer categories for each target.

Some answers are in common with two targets, let's see the principal:

- *Teamwork*: it is an important lesson learned for every target
- *Increasing foreign language*: it is crucial for both students and teachers
- *Better self-confidence*: it is vital for both students and teachers
- *Real working experience*: it is essential for students and companies

STUDENTS	TEACHERS	COMPANIES
• Increasing foreign language skills (83)	• Better self-confidence (40)	• **Teamwork (14)**
• How to cope alone, Learning how to deal with difficulties by myself (72)	• They are more open and receptive to new experiences and cultures (23)	• Customers' orientation (12)
• **How to become a part of the team (71)**	• Increased self-initiative and proactive attitude (20)	• real working experience (9
• real working experience (29)	• They improved language (17)	
• going outside your comfort zone makes you grow (27)	• A more comprehensive vision of the working world (15)	
• Widening of my knowledge of the cultural aspects (17)	• **Teamwork (11)**	
• Communicating with new people (17)	• More comprehensive with other people (11)	
• how to live according to the rules, norms and tradition (17)		

7. The app

We also asked what the three targets think about creating an app that measures this kind of skills.

As you can see from the graph below, the majority believe that the app will be very/extremely useful, innovative and supportive.

8. The most useful skills

8.1. List of most important skills

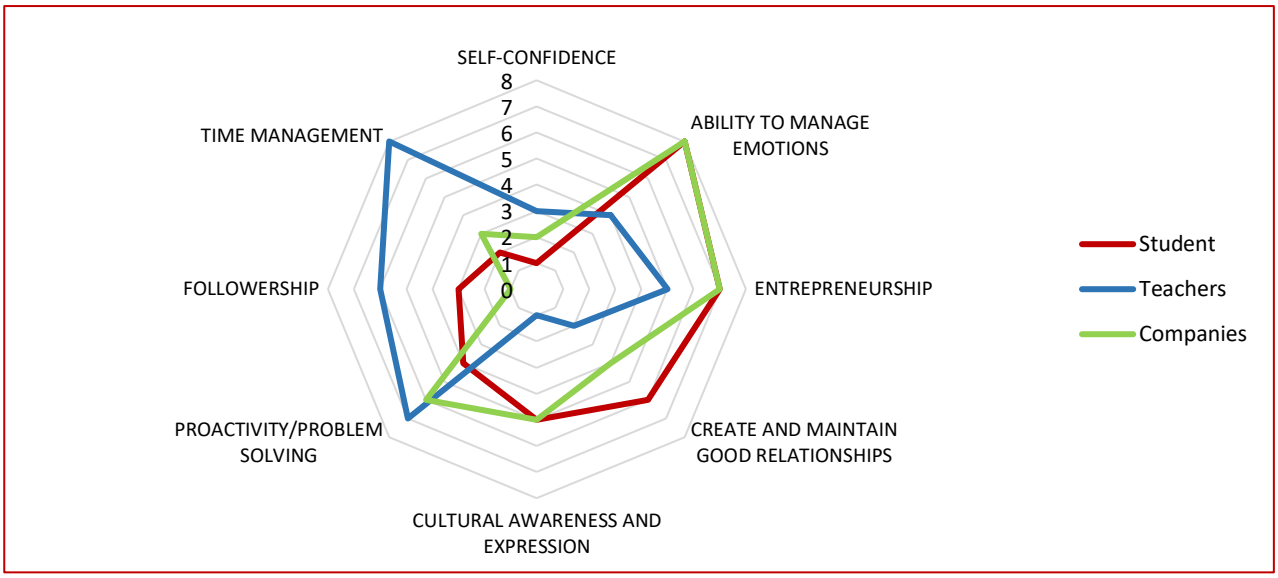
Several questions were about the most useful attitudes or behaviours to have the best learning mobility experience abroad. According to their experience, the responders had to order attitudes/behaviours from the most to the less useful to have the best learning mobility experience abroad.

In the table below, we report the different skills we gave to have this list.

Skill Name	Skill definition
1. SELF-CONFIDENCE	Having confidence in yourself, trusting in your own abilities, recognising your strengths and weaknesses, acting properly to reach goals
2. TIME MANAGEMENT	Organising and planning how to divide your time between specific activities. Work smarter and get more done in less time
3. FOLLOWERSHIP	Supporting your own referent/superior and co-workers at the workplace. Demonstrate collaboration, trust in the group's member and cohesion capabilities
4. PROACTIVITY/PROBLEM SOLVING	Acting in advance of a future situation, rather than just reacting. It means taking control of problems in difficult situations and so finding proper solutions
5. CULTURAL AWARENESS AND EXPRESSION	Respecting and being aware of cultural differences and work effectively with people from a range of social and cultural backgrounds. It is also the ability to be tolerant and respond open-mindedly to different ideas and values
6. CREATE AND MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONSHIPS	Creating and maintaining a positive relationship with others. Expressing oneself and recognising the others' needs, leaving them room to express their thought
7. ENTREPRENEURSHIP	Turning ideas into action, that includes to be creative, innovative and to be able to plan and manage projects to achieve objectives
8. ABILITY TO MANAGE EMOTIONS	Being open to feelings, and to modulate them to promote personal understanding. In difficult or new situations having control of negative emotions

The following radar graph has been extrapolated from the three different priority list. The closer to the centre means the most important, the farther means, the less important.

RED line is students' answers BLUE line is teachers' answers GREEN line is the companies' answers



From the graphs, we can see that the three groups have in common some ideas:

- ***Self-confidence*** is considered crucial; it is in the best position for every target: 1st for students, 2nd for teachers, 3rd for companies
- ***Proactivity*** is in the middle place in each group: 4th for students, 5th for teachers, 6th for companies

The three groups have a different perception of other skills. Students and companies gave more similar answers than teachers.

- ***Time management*** is essential for students and companies (respectively 2nd and 3rd) less critical for teachers (8th)
- ***Entrepreneurship*** is as important as for students and companies (7th) more crucial for teachers (4th)
- ***Cultural awareness and expression*** are important for students and companies (5th) but more important for teachers (1st)
- ***Ability to manage emotions*** is less vital for students and companies (8th) but very important for teachers (4th)

8.2. The five skills of our model

Crossing the difficulties with the useful skills highlighted by the responders, we found five dimensions considered critical soft skills to prepare for the mobility experience.

DIFFICULTIES	SOFT SKILLS	SHORT DESCRIPTION (in the survey)
Language difficulties	**CONTEXT READING and ADAPTABILITY**	It is the ability to act properly in both new and known contexts, adapting to their specific characteristics and recognising the values, beliefs, resources and limits of the environment and people.
Cultural differences: a way of communicating		It is the ability to recognise yours and other role expectations. In multicultural contexts, this capacity implies the linguistic-communicative adaptation to a specific environment.
Emotional/psychological difficulties: homesickness	**SELF CONFIDENCE**	Recognising our strengths and weaknesses,
Difficulties in traineeship activities	**FOLLOWERSHIP**	Supporting your own referent/superior and co-workers at the workplace and to demonstrate collaboration, trust in the group's member and cohesion capabilities
Cultural differences: different timetable	**CULTURAL AWARENESS**	Respecting and being aware of cultural differences and work effectively with people from a range of social and cultural backgrounds
ALL THE ABOVE	**PROACTIVITY**	Acting in advance of a future situation, rather than just reacting

1. In response to "*language difficulties and the cultural differences of the way of communicating*" has been associated with the soft skills of Context Reading and Adaptability.
2. In response to "*emotional/psychological difficulty of homesick*" has been associated with the soft skill of Self Confidence.
3. In response to "*difficulties in traineeship activities*" has been associated with the soft skill of Followership.
4. In response to "*cultural differences of the different timetable*" has been associated with the soft skill of the Cultural Awareness.
5. Instead, the soft skill of Proactivity has been associated in response to all these difficulties.

Name, definitions and behavioural indicators describe each identified transversal skills.

8.2.1.PROACTIVITY

Definition	*behavioural indicators*
Acting in advance of a future situation, rather than just reacting. Ability to seek opportunities, take the lead in improving current circumstances or creating new ones and persevere in bringing significant change. Act of your own inspiration, perform tasks before they are required, invent new ways of doing things and accomplish different tasks or processes	• He/she seeks stimuli, opportunities for improvement; • He/she often spontaneously proposes ideas, observations, interpretations and solutions, also innovative. • Acts by involving himself and others in extra efforts • He/she identifies and utilises social resources, • He/she uses information, advice, practical assistance and emotional support from others. • He/she envisions success, anticipating future problems, planning on how to deal with them • initiation, reflection, planning and prevention are all part of their coping strategies

8.2.2.SELF CONFIDENCE

Definition	*behavioural indicators*
Individual's trust in his/her own abilities, capacities, and judgments, recognising his/her own strengths and weaknesses, belief that he/she can successfully face day to day challenges and demands	• He/she reflects on himself and shows awareness of his own emotions. • He/she possesses a realistic perception of his strengths and weaknesses. • He/she recognises the impact that behaviours can have on themselves and people. • He/she is self-directed even in the presence of uncertainties and pressures. • He/she can cope with different situations and does not give up when difficulties come up • Do not generalise defeats and victories, attributing them to the right causes

8.2.3.CULTURAL AWARENESS

Definition	*behavioural indicators*
Individual's capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings	• Being motivated to learn about other cultures, knowing Cultural etiquette • interpret someone's unfamiliar and ambiguous gestures the way that person's compatriots would. • tease out of a person's or group's behaviour those features that would be true of all people and all groups, • Don't being afraid of making mistakes (gaffes), overcoming obstacles and setbacks. • ability to mirror the customs and gestures of the people around you • Cultural awareness also involves making adjustments and adaptations as necessary in different social and professional situations • Do not overkill with sweeping generalisations.

8.2.4.FOLLOWERSHIP

Definition	*behavioural indicators*
It is the ability to support the boss (or the referent) at the workplace, taking responsibility for the common goal, and actively participating in any task or change needed by the group. It is the ability to demonstrate collaboration, trust in the group's member and cohesion capabilities. Three micro-skills: Support the leader, Critical thinking, Autonomy	• Supporting your manager or boss • Ability to promote a collaborative and respectful working relationships • Being committed to the job • Feeling engaged and involved in a team • Helping colleagues even if there is no profit for him/her-self • Expressing agreement with the group goals • Feeling responsible even in challenging situations • Supporting colleagues who are going through difficulties • Capable of expressing his/her point of view in a positive way avoiding any criticism • Like to receive feedbacks and sharing ideas with bosses • His/her contributions are considered constructive by the bosses

8.2.5.ADAPTABILITY AND CONTEXT READING

Definition	*behavioural indicators*
It is the ability to act properly in both new and known contexts, adapting to their specific characteristics and recognising the values, beliefs, resources and limits of the environment and people. It is the ability to recognise yours and other role expectations. In multicultural contexts, this capacity implies the linguistic-communicative adaptation to a specific environment.	• Feeling at ease even in new or unknown situations • Putting the attention on the relational processes among people • Knowing the culture and the communicative styles of the context • Capable of understanding formal and informal hierarchical relationships between people in the workplace context • Able to recognise the others' expectations • Establishing relationships by considering the context features • Able to upgrade the skills following the development of the organisation

9. First conclusion

Transversal skills are not easy to extrapolate from the context and are not easy to quantify or measure. The skills Act 4 VET Identification tool addressed this issue, offering an innovative solution that could be used as a reference also beyond VET environment.

Transversal skills (and therefore, the Identification tool) can be integrated into any learning activity, as they are powerfully linked and connected with both hard and basic skills. Transversal skills are not associated with any specific technical knowledge or ability, as it is the case for hard skills. The soft skills are true "transversal" to any social or professional activity, being referred to an operative, technical, specialised, managerial or entrepreneurial role. And this is because transversal skills refer to the way we think, feel, act in different situations as they describe the "way" we do things and not "what" we do.

This intrinsic characteristic of the project's primary element of analysis makes it so that The Skills Act 4 VET Identification tool, like the rest of the project results, can be quickly transferred and adapted further in other learning contexts and situations.

10. Work-based tasks

To gathering data useful for the output 2 "*Skills Act 4 VET Work-based tasks map*" we asked students and companies to indicate the main tasks needed during an internship.

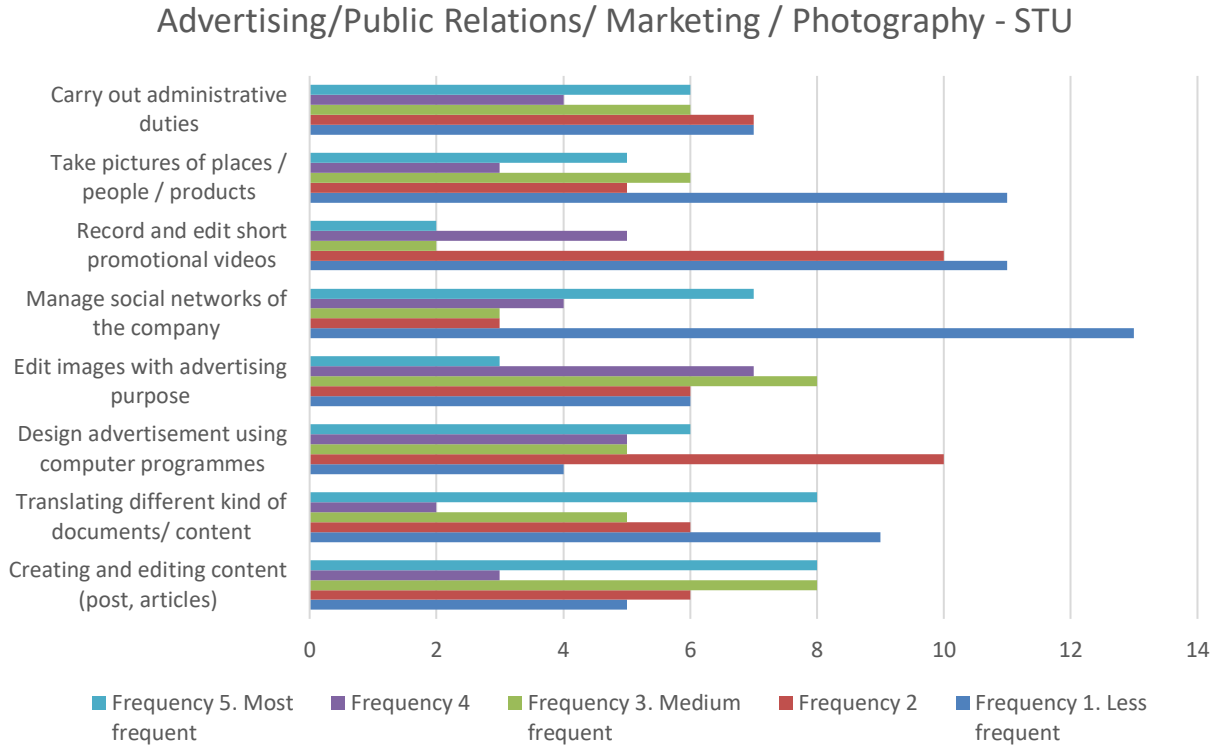
Each responder gave information about a specific area. According to our coordinator experience and the other partners, we gave the students and companies a list of areas:

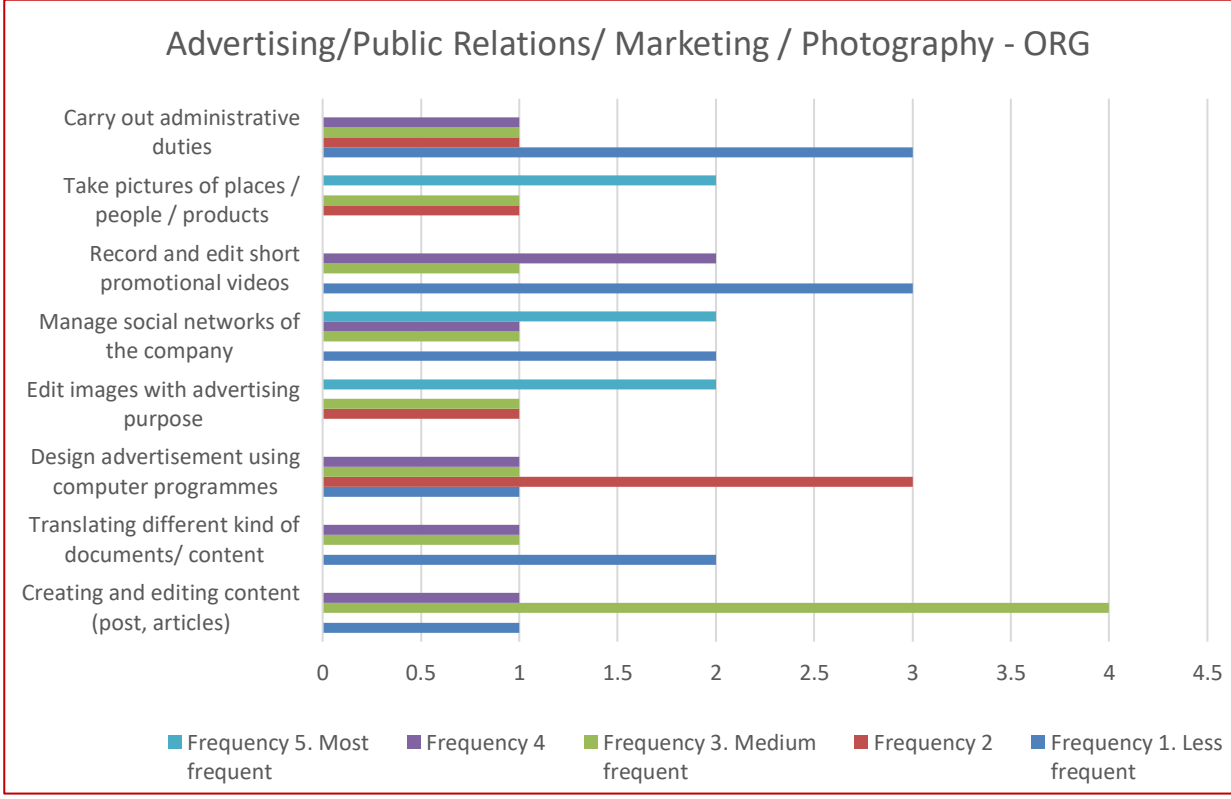
- Advertising/Public Relations/ Marketing / Photography
- Agriculture and gardening
- Beauty services (hairdressers and aestheticians)
- Books, Magazines & Newspapers
- Builders/ Fitters
- Computer Software and Technology (IT)
- Electricity and electronics
- Gastronomy (cook helper, barista)
- Health Care Services
- Logistic
- Mechanics and mechatronics
- Non-profits, NGOs
- Public administration
- School and Education
- Tourism (museums, travel agencies, tour operators)
- Hospitality (hotels, catering, housekeeping, reception)
- Trade / Economy (shop assistant)

After choosing the area, according to their experience, the responder can order the list of task. In the next pages you can see the graphs that show the answers:

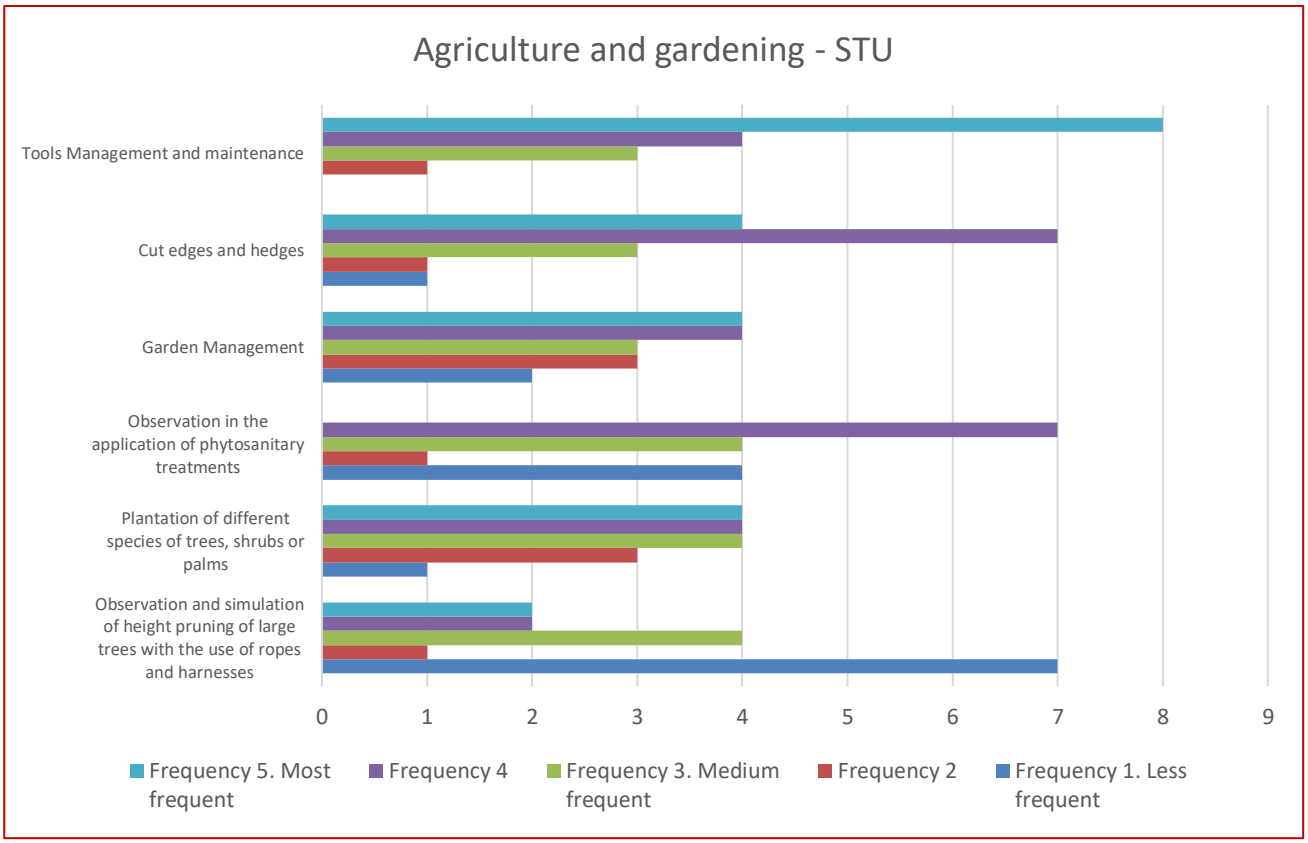
- For each area (the chapter)
- For students and companies (each graphs is named "STU" and "ORG"

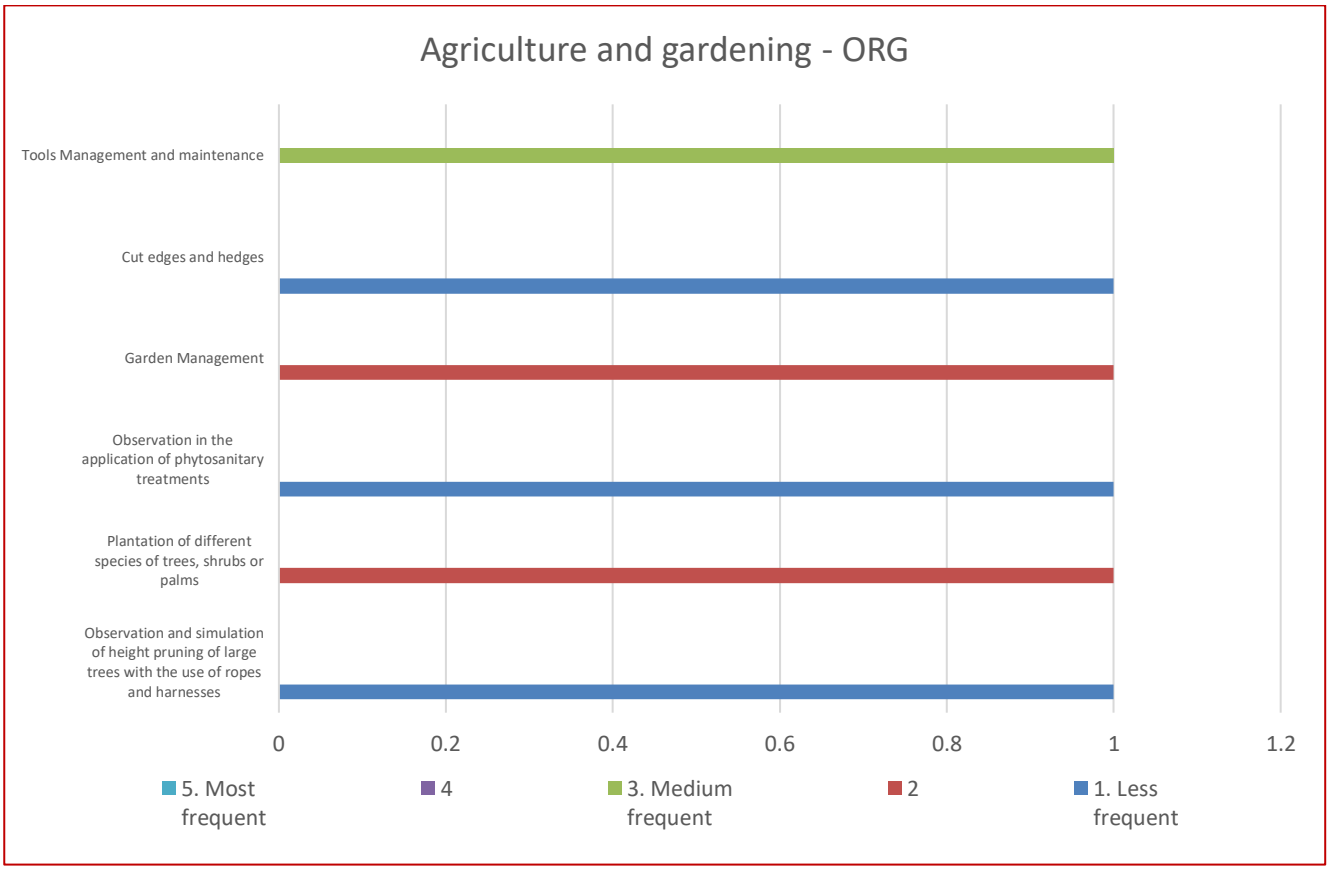
10.1. Advertising, public relations, marketing, photography



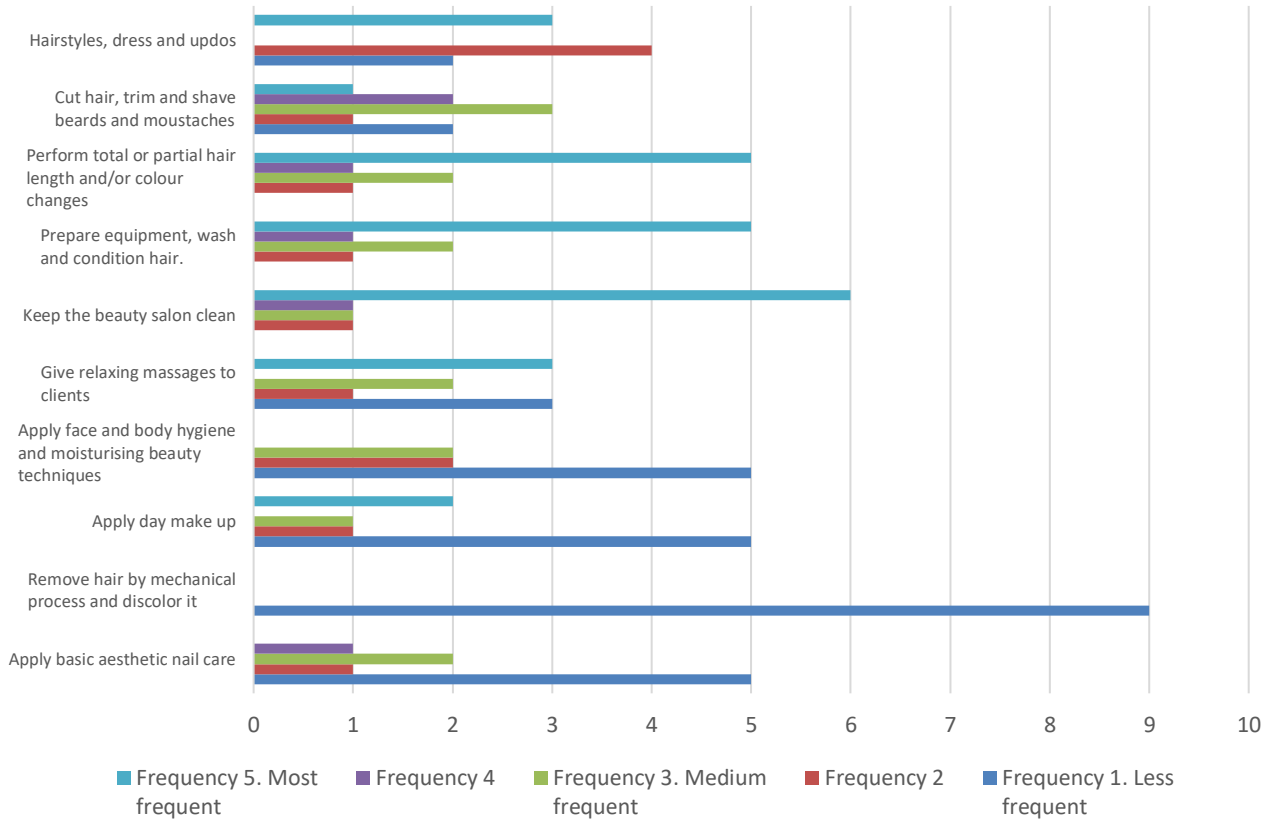


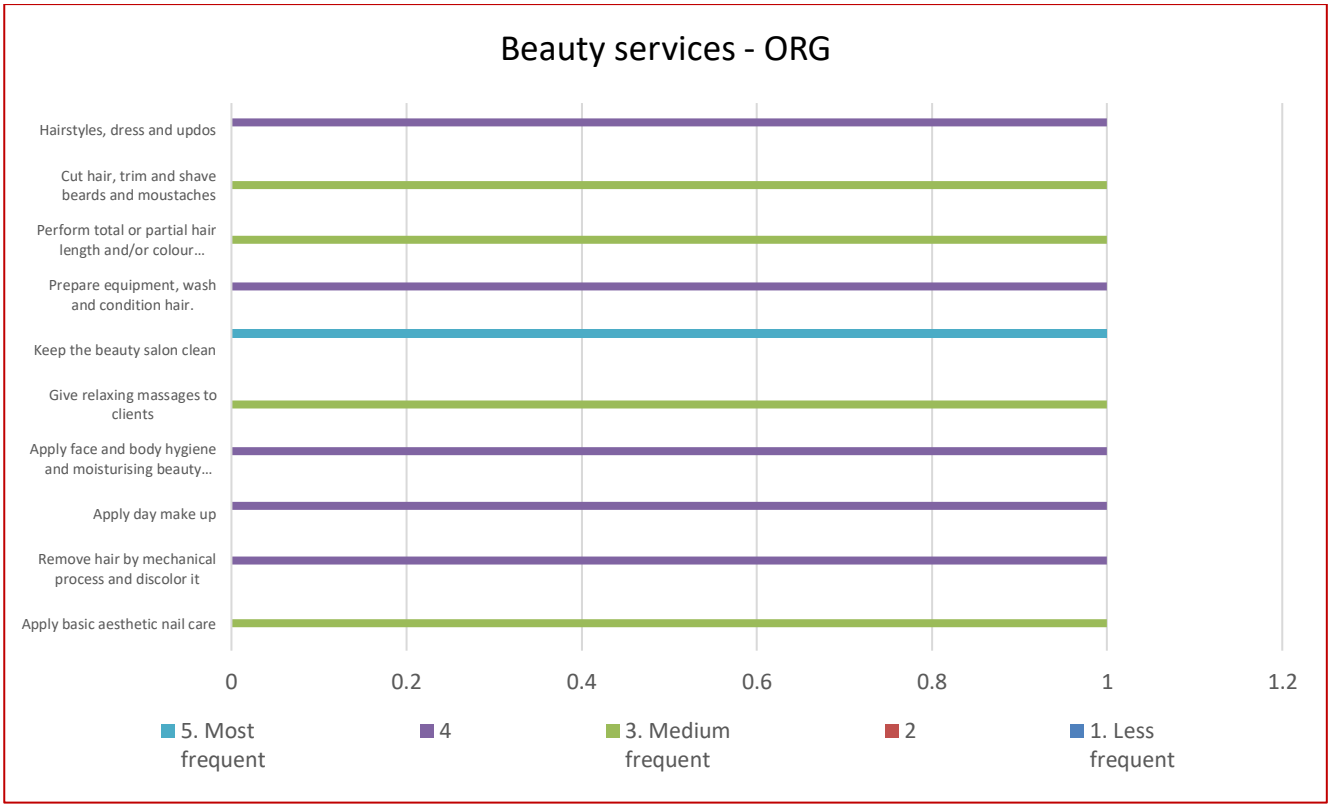
10.2. Agricolture and gardening



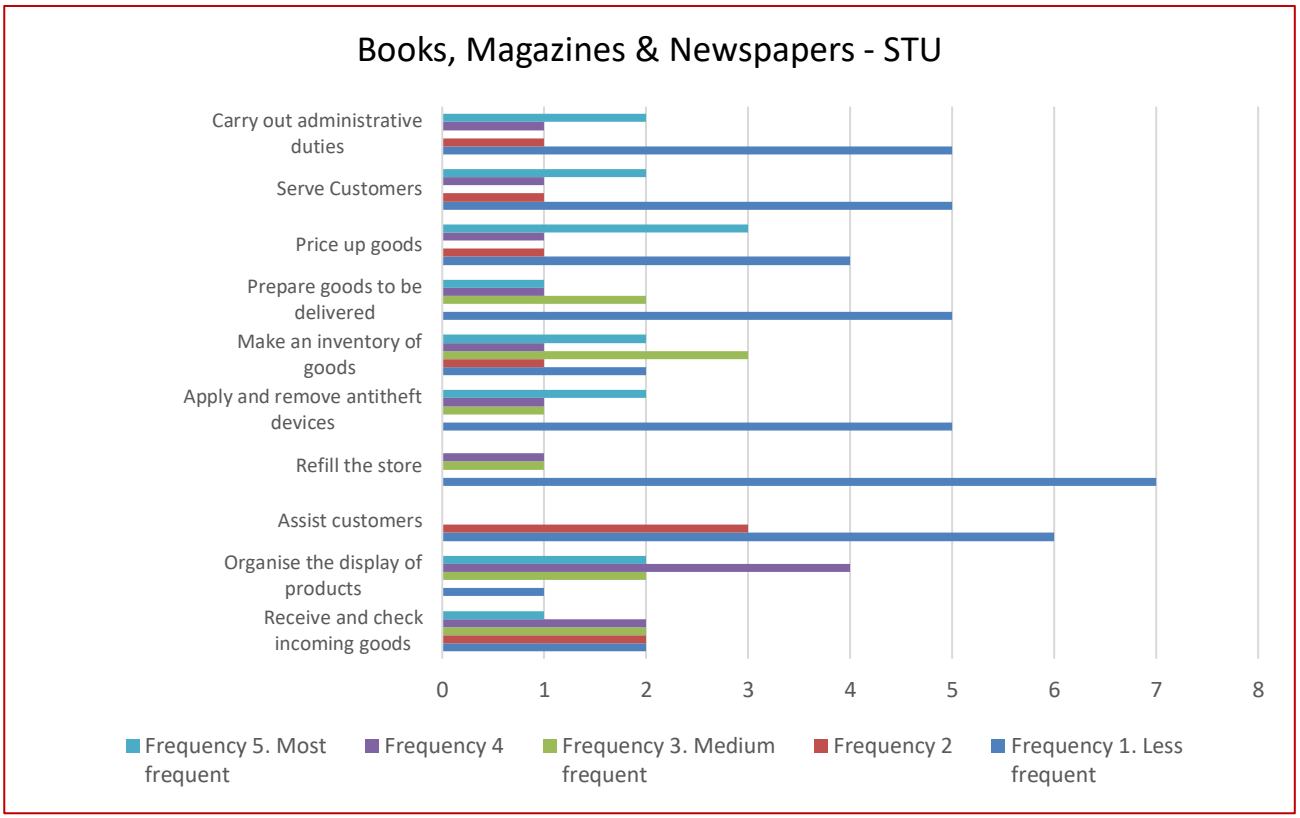


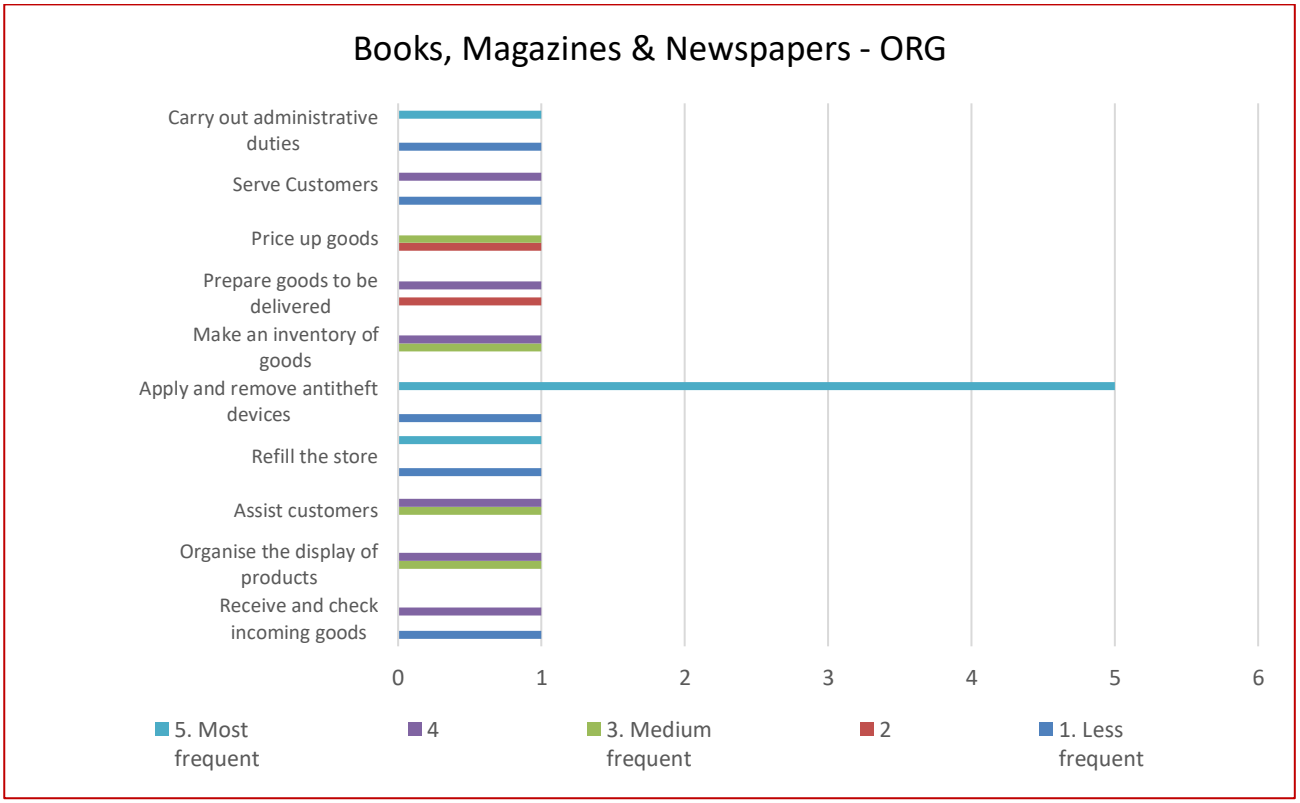
10.3. Beauty services (hairdressers and aestheticians)



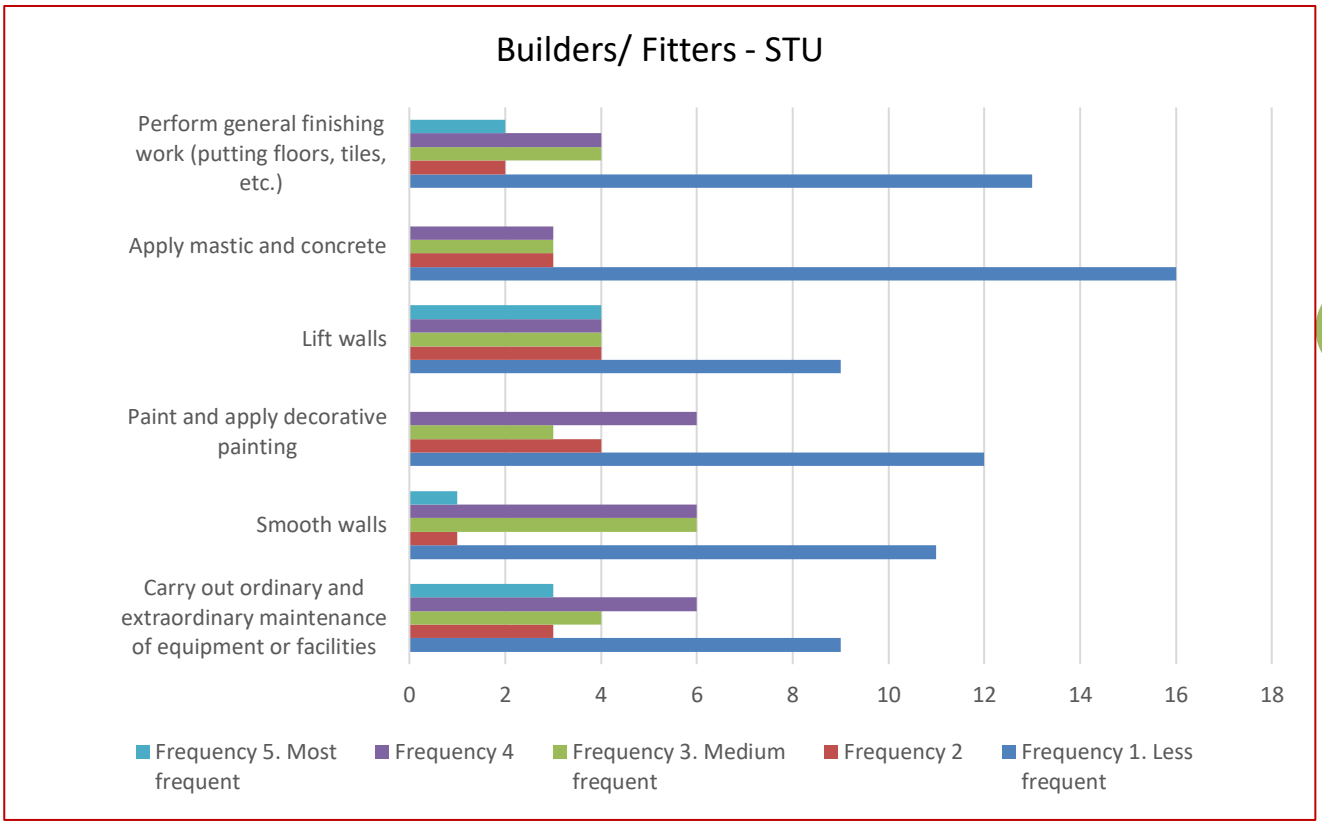


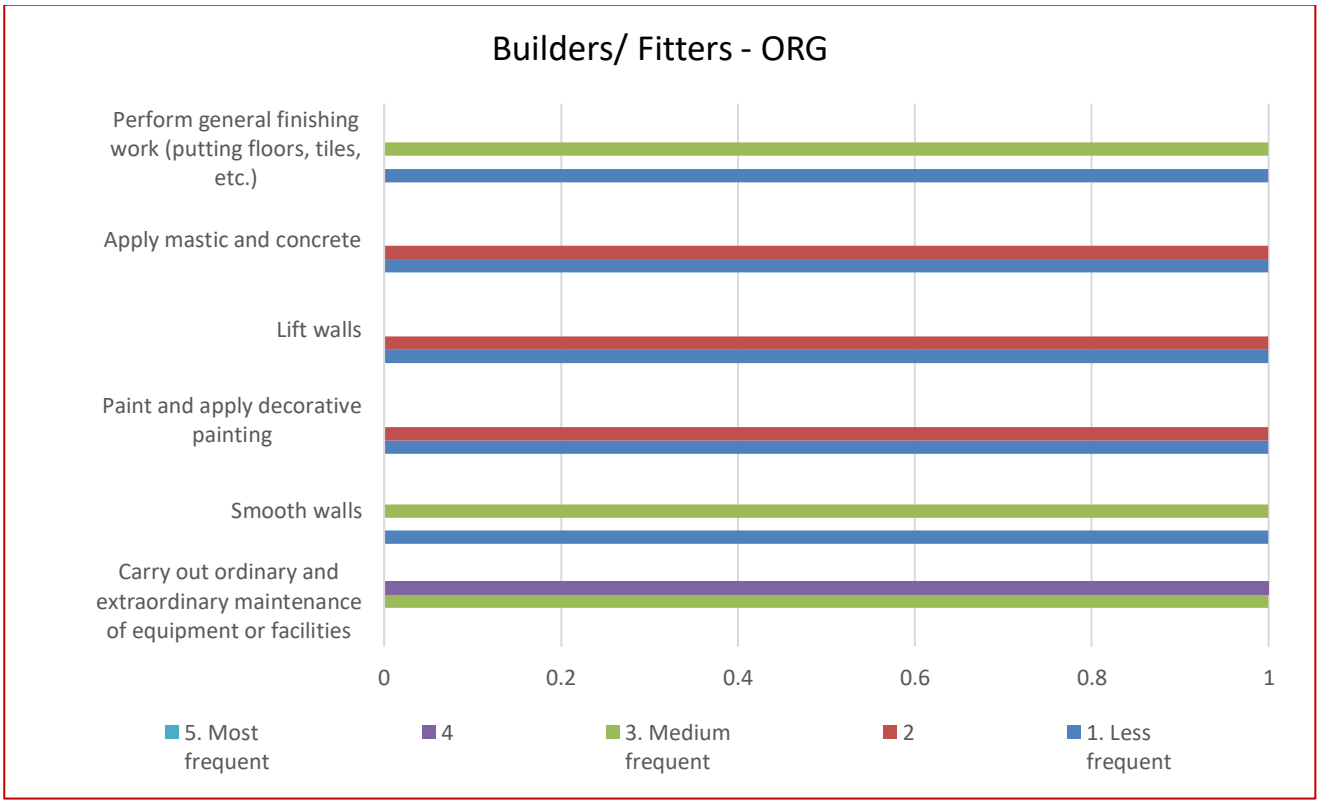
10.4. Books, Magazines & Newspapers



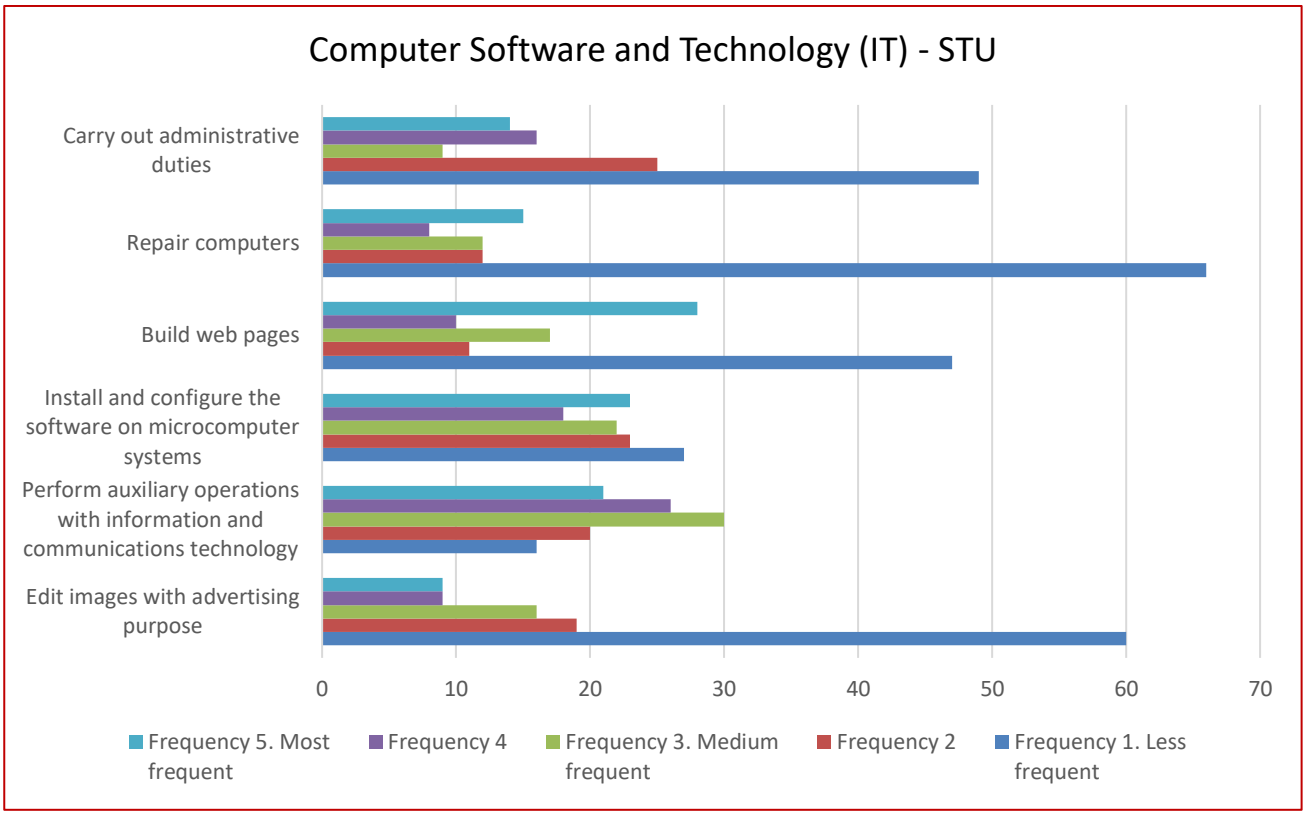


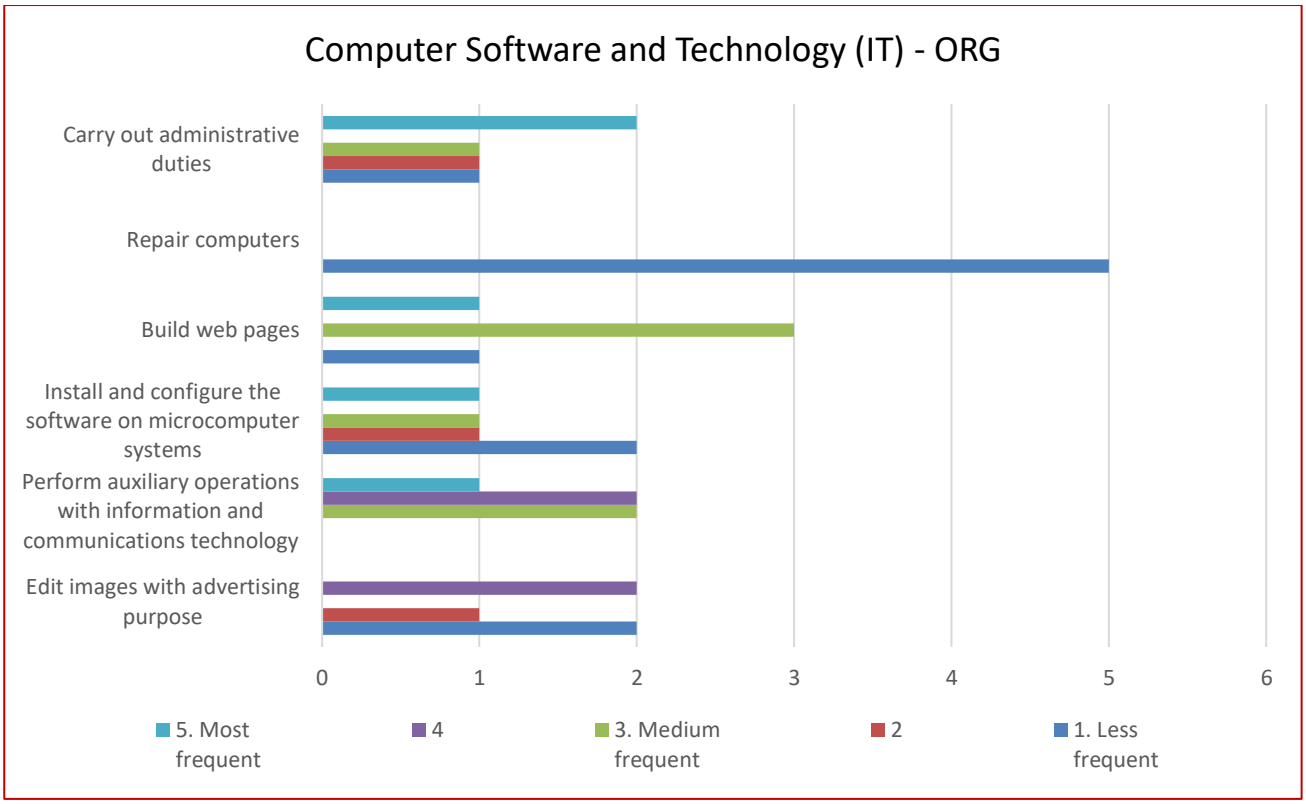
10.5. Builders/Fitters



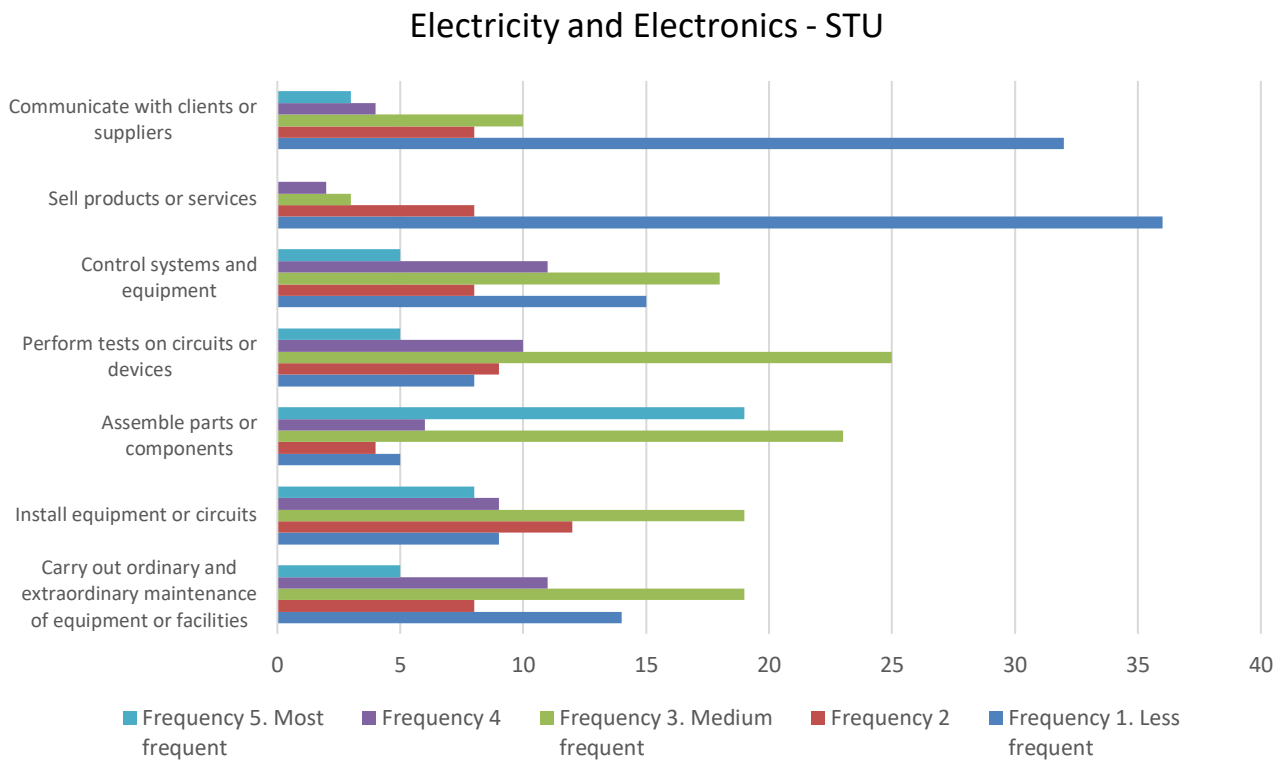


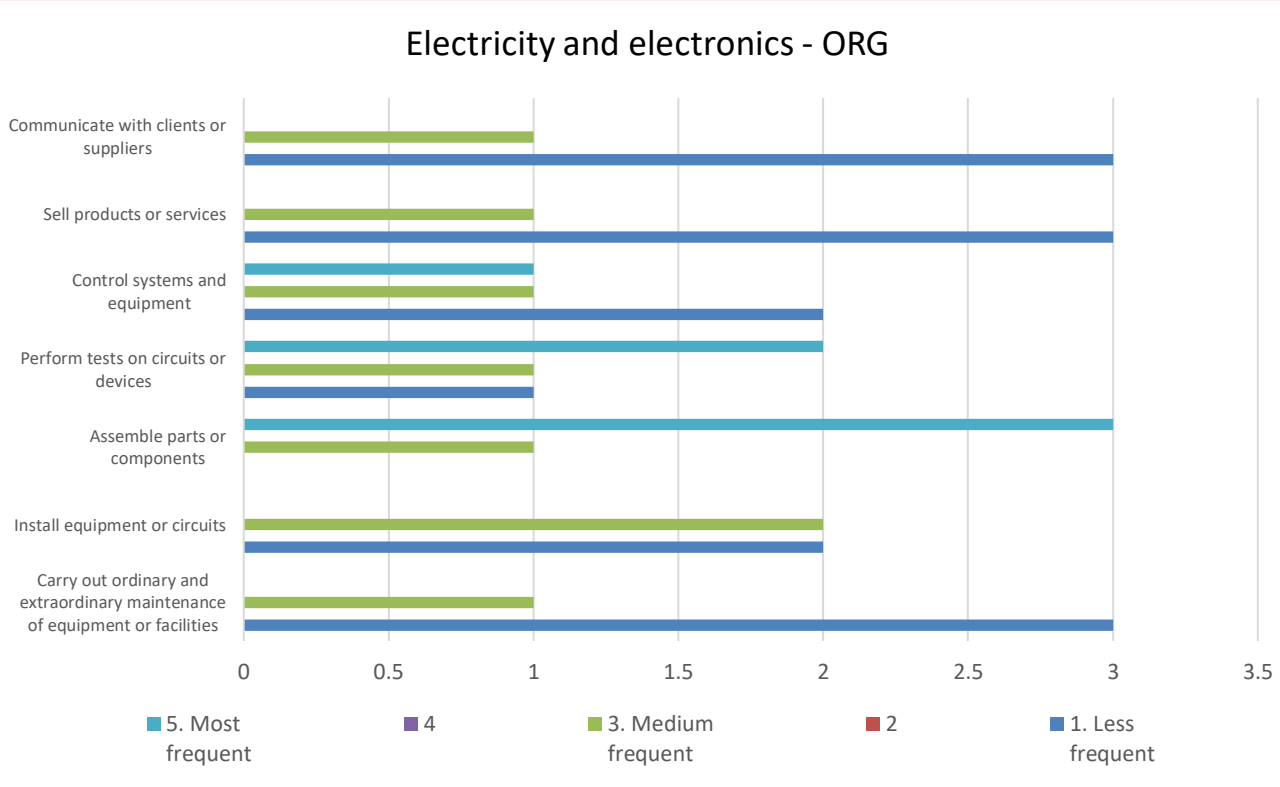
10.6. Computer Software and Technology (IT)



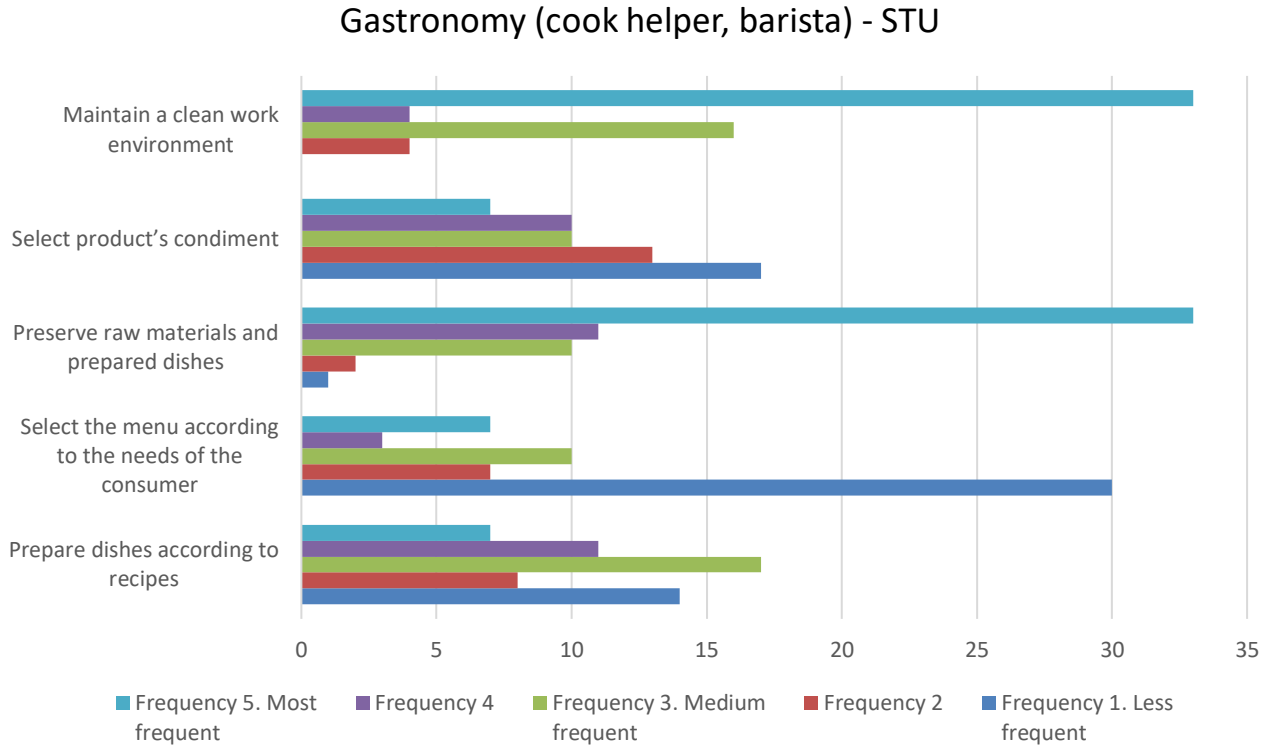


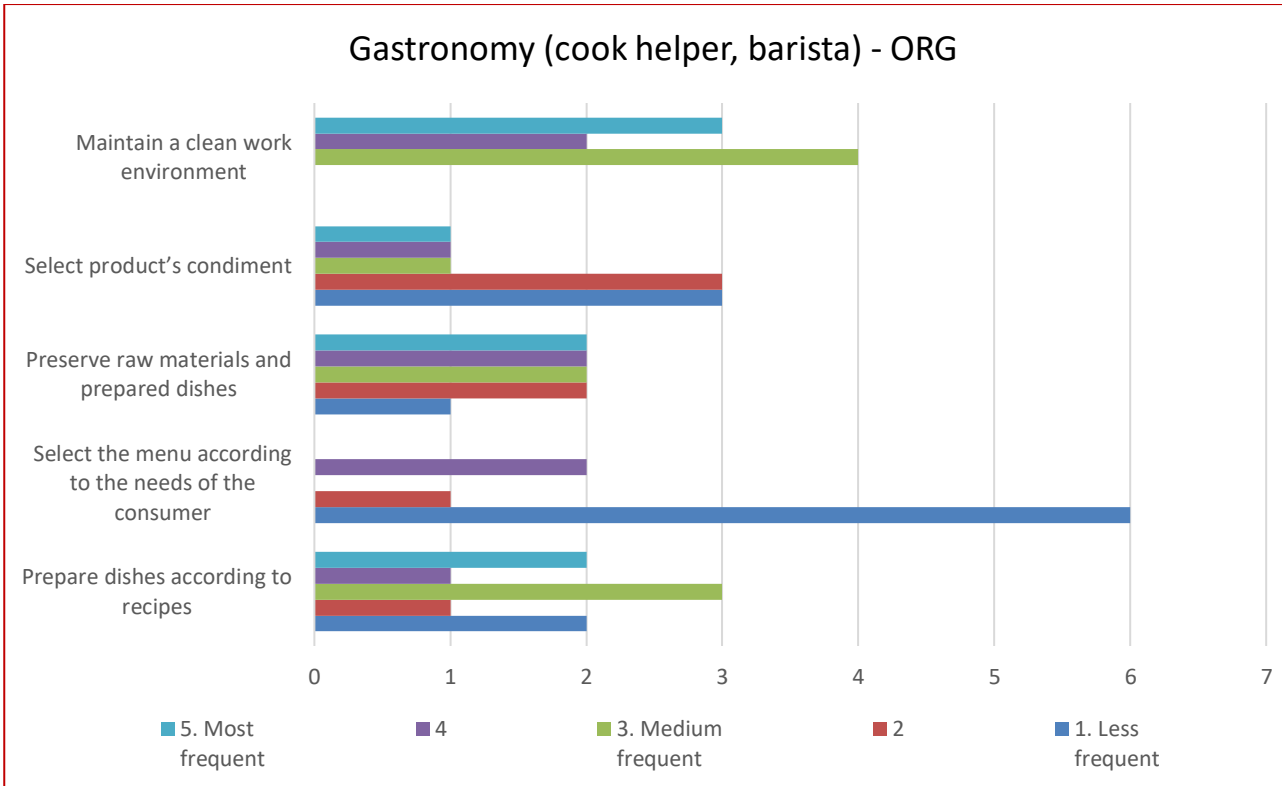
10.7. Electricity and Electronics



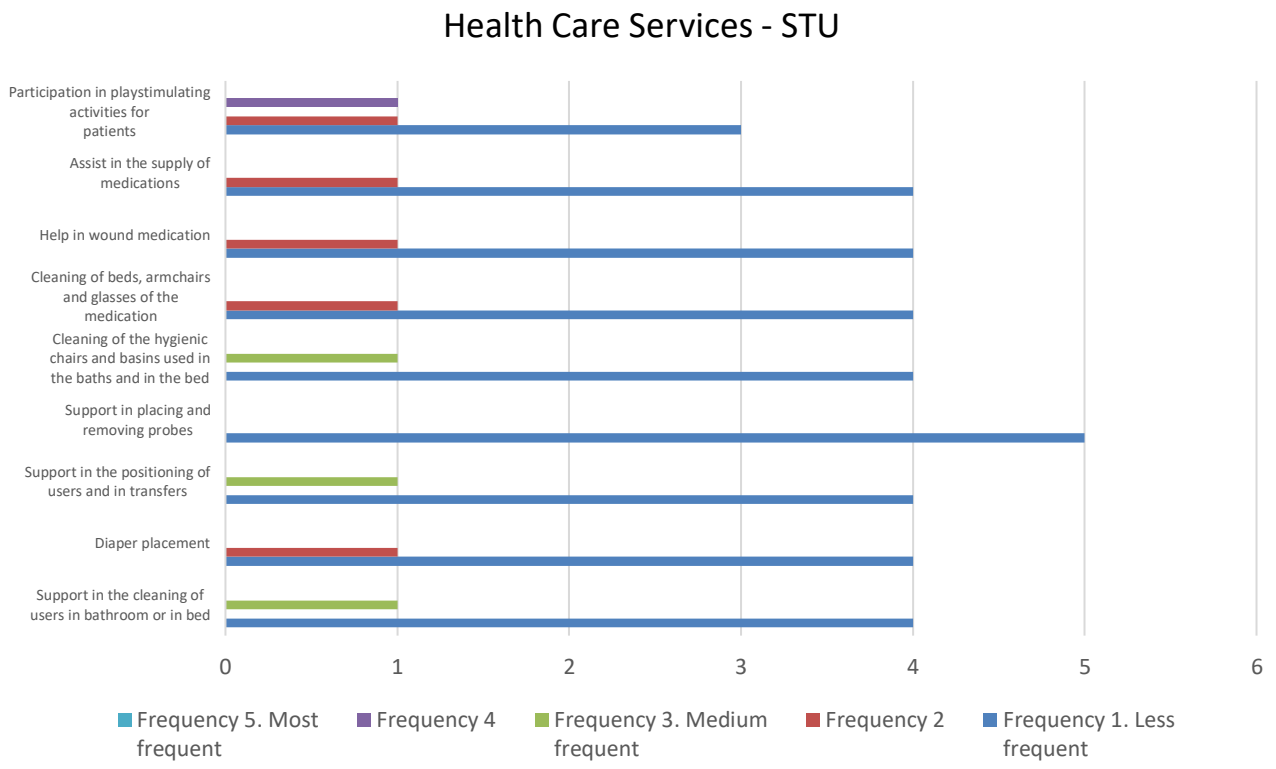


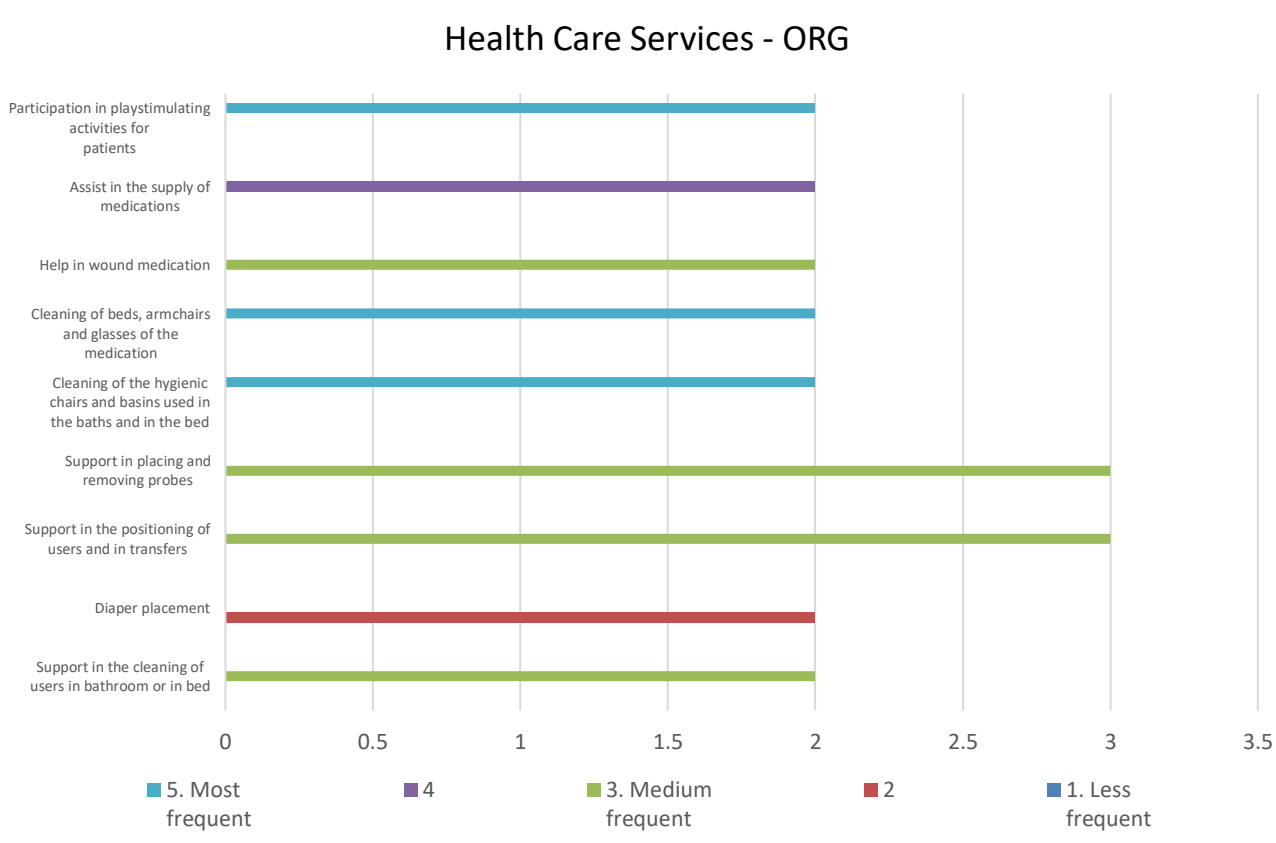
10.8. Gastronomy (cook helper, barista)



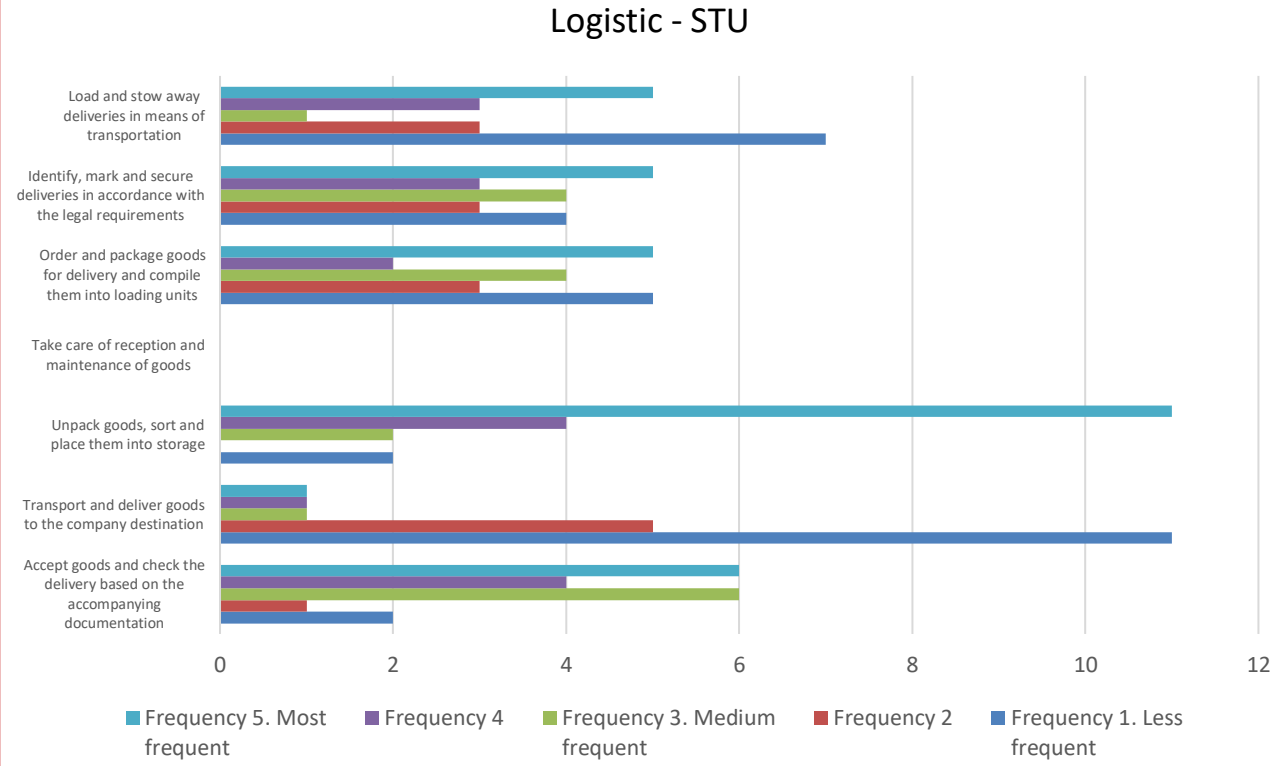


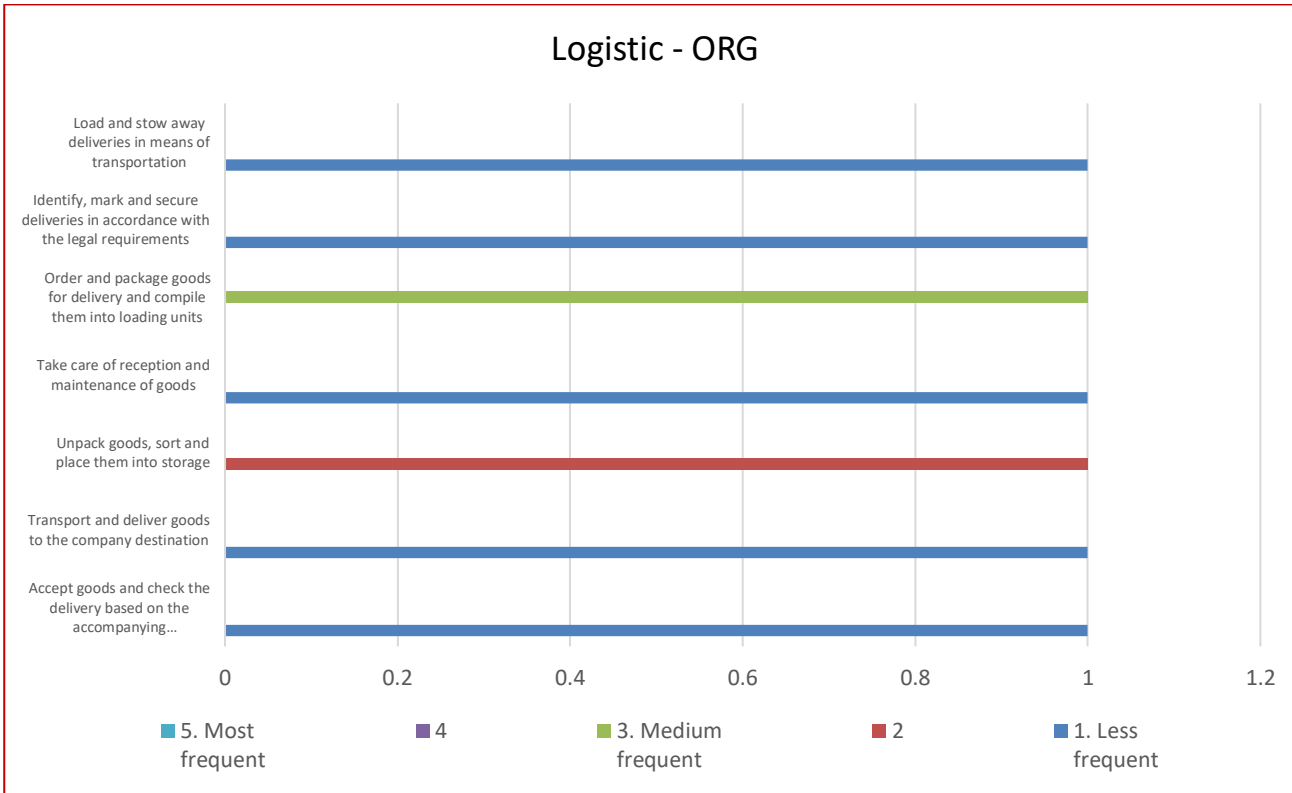
10.9. Health Care Services



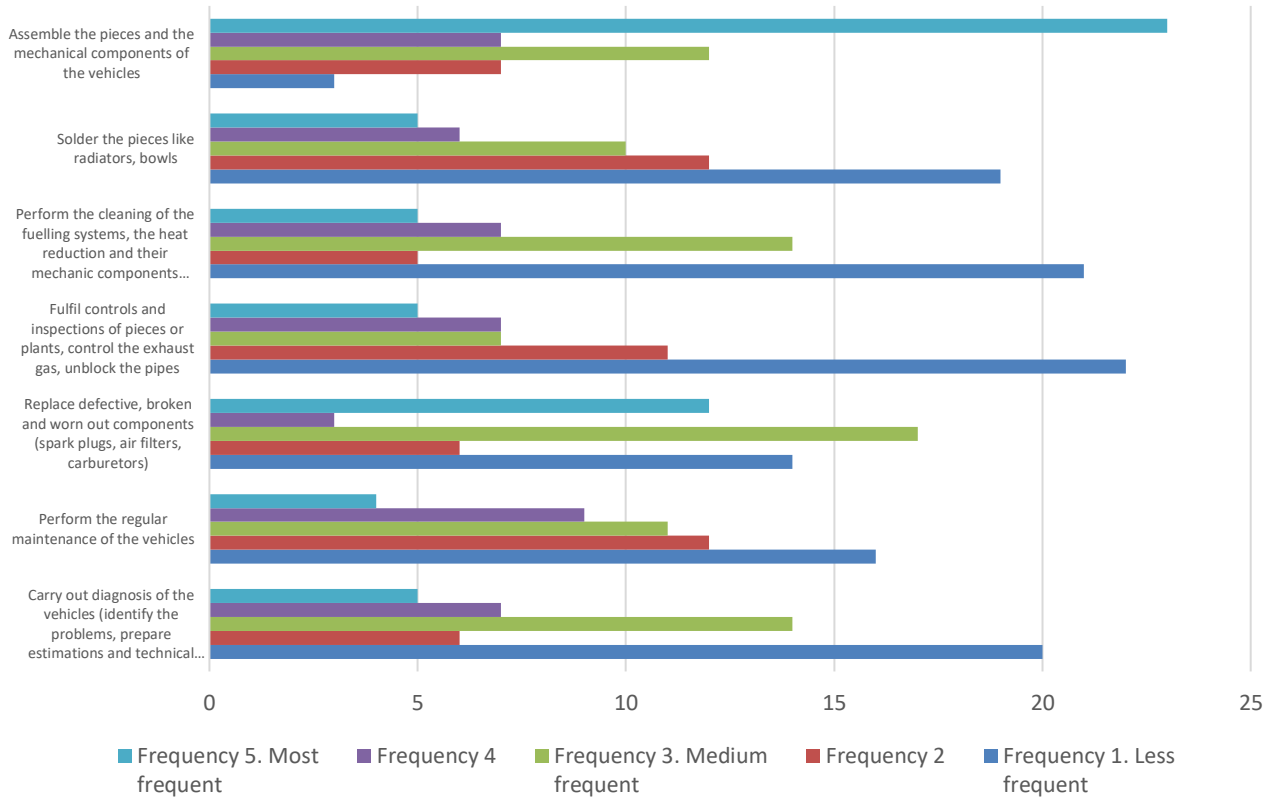


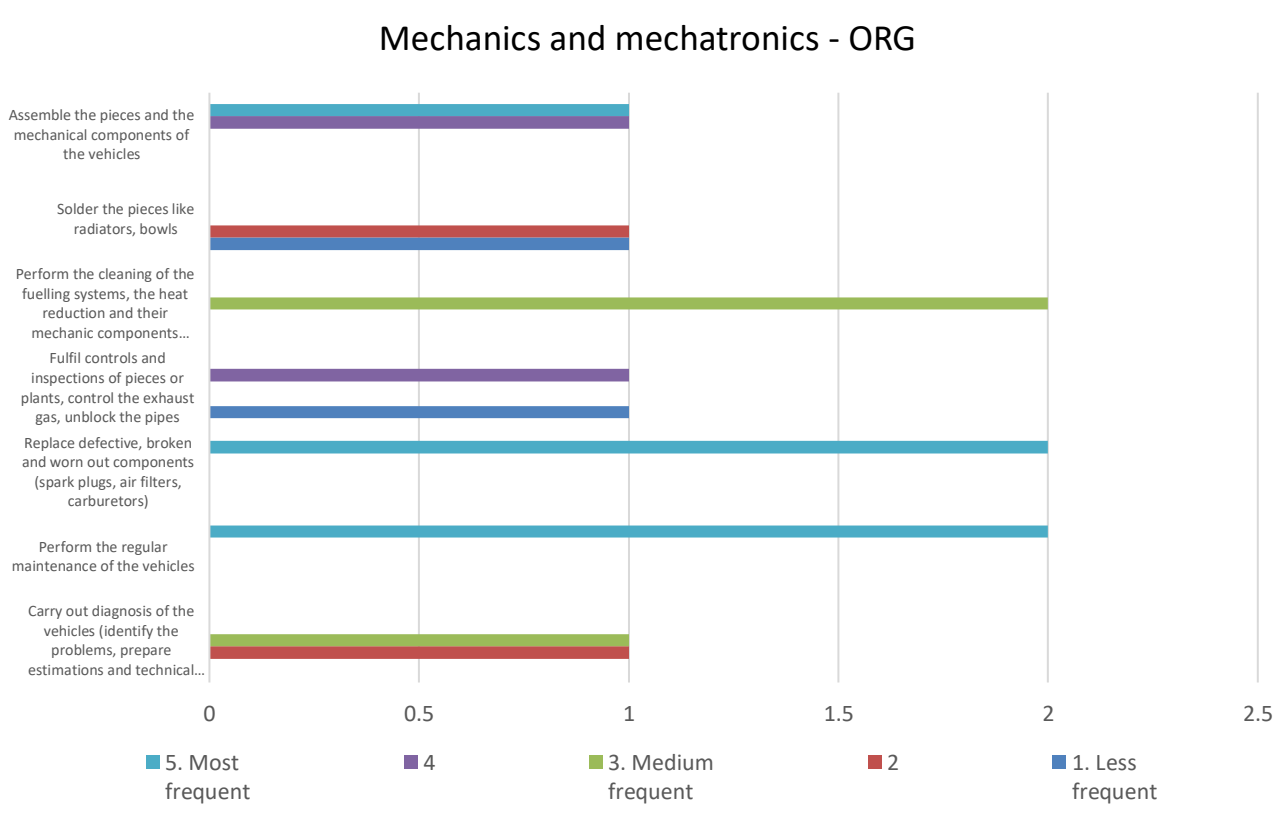
10.10. Logistic



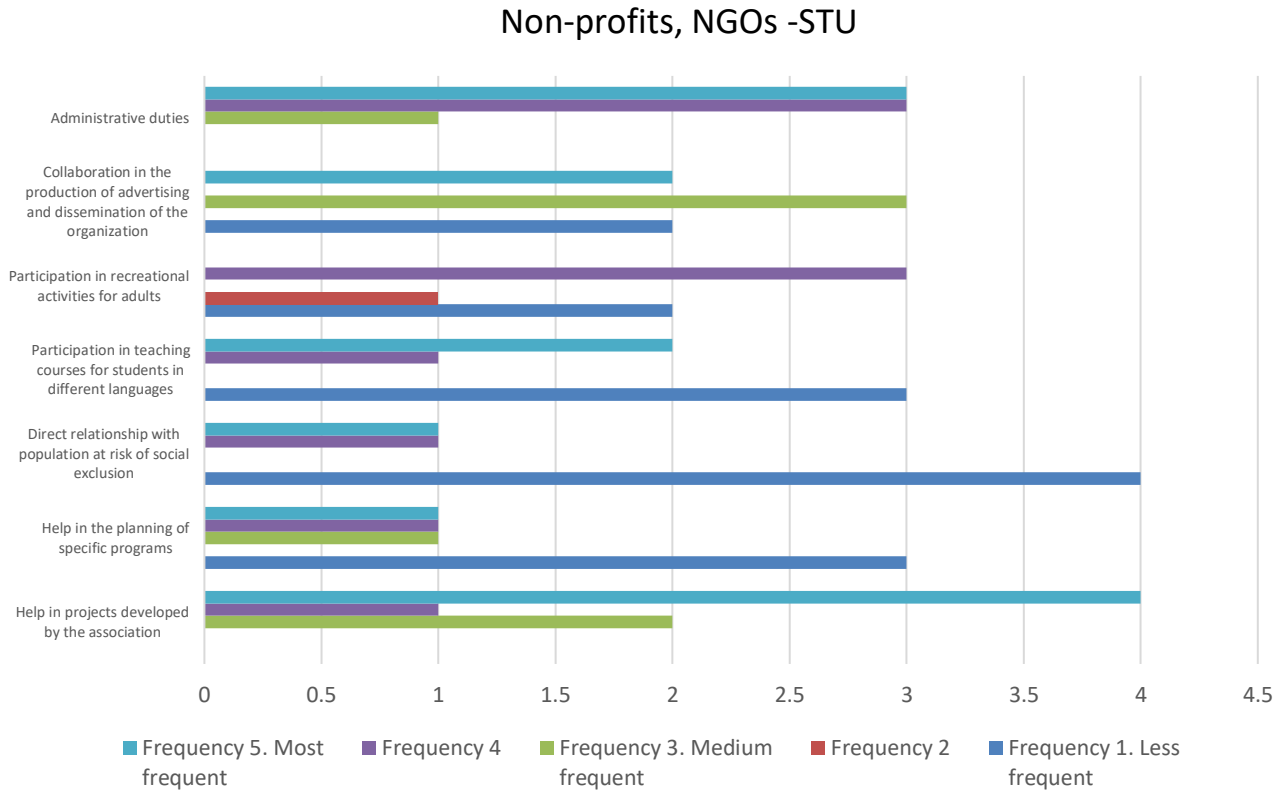


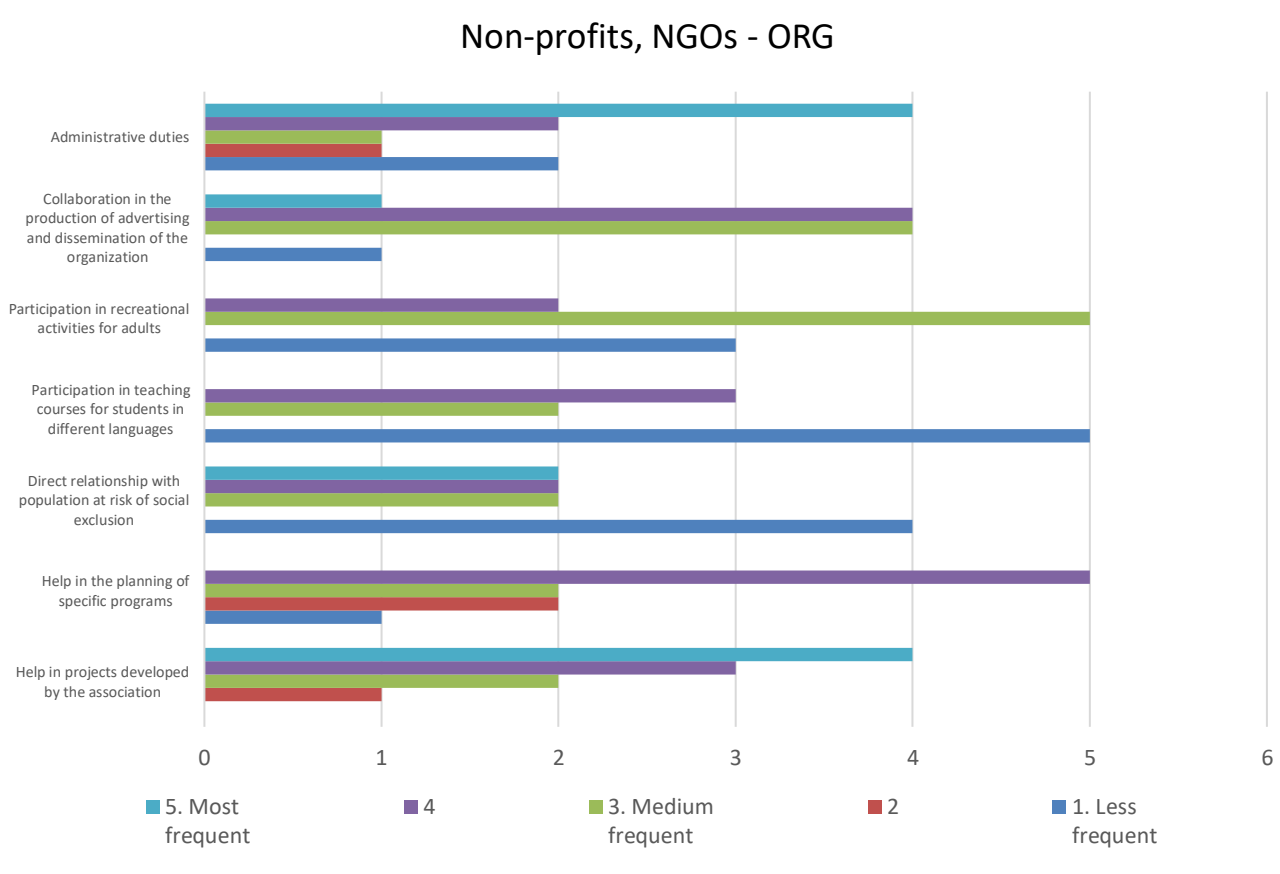
10.11. Mechanics and Mechatronics



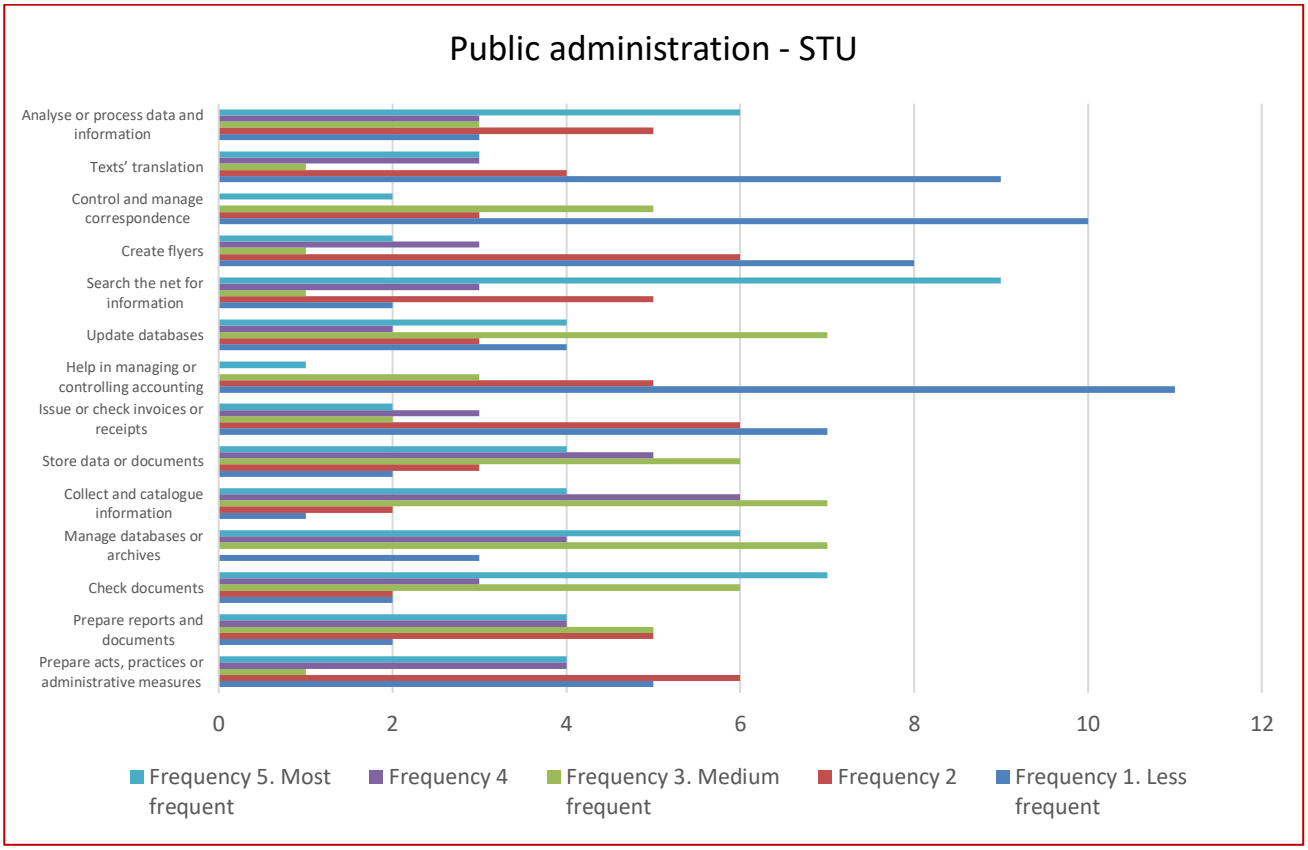


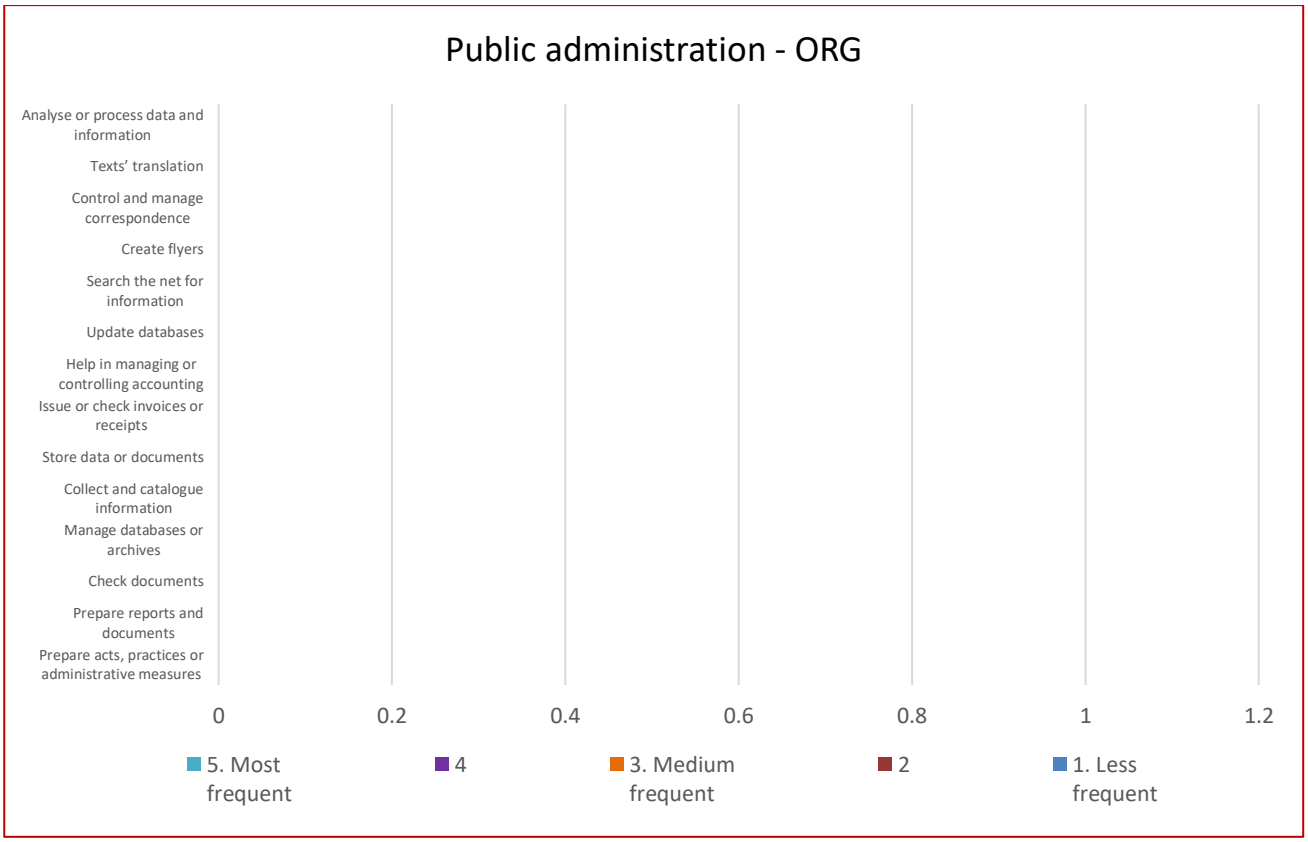
10.12. Non – profits, NGOs



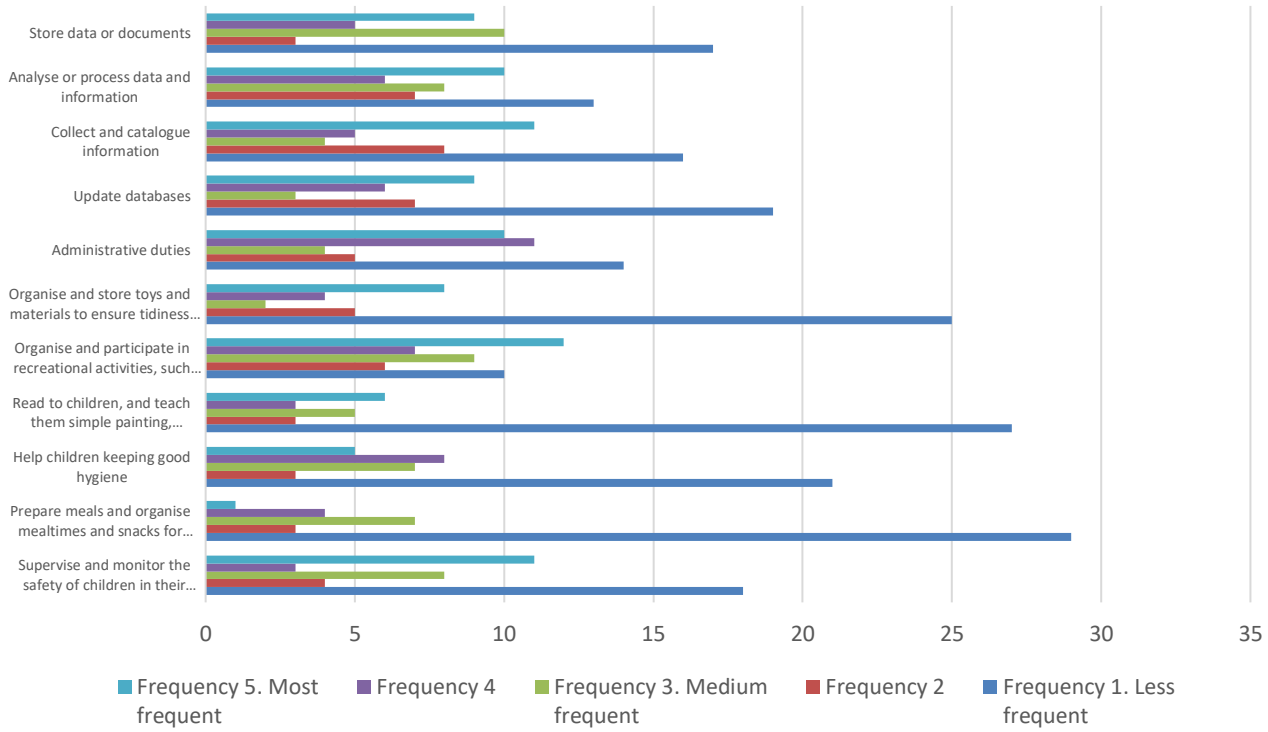


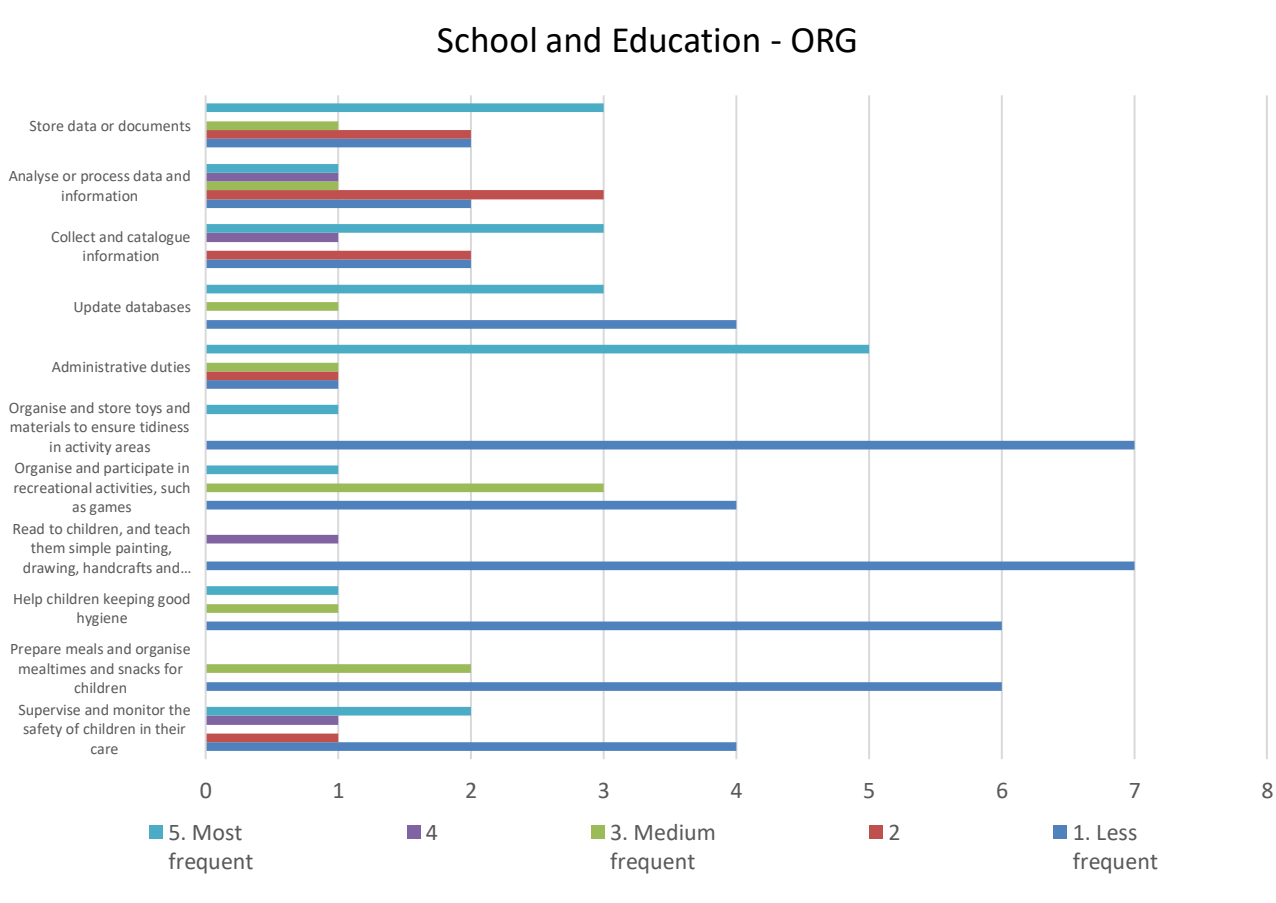
10.13. Public administration



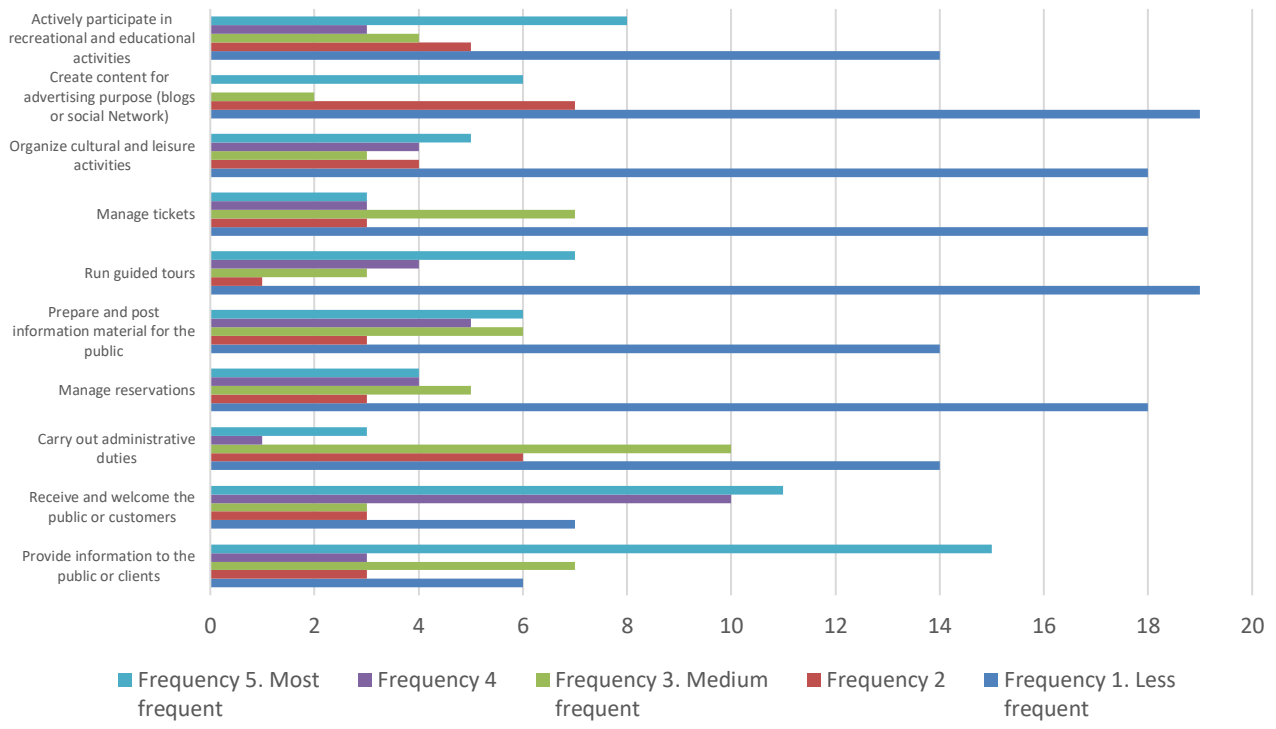


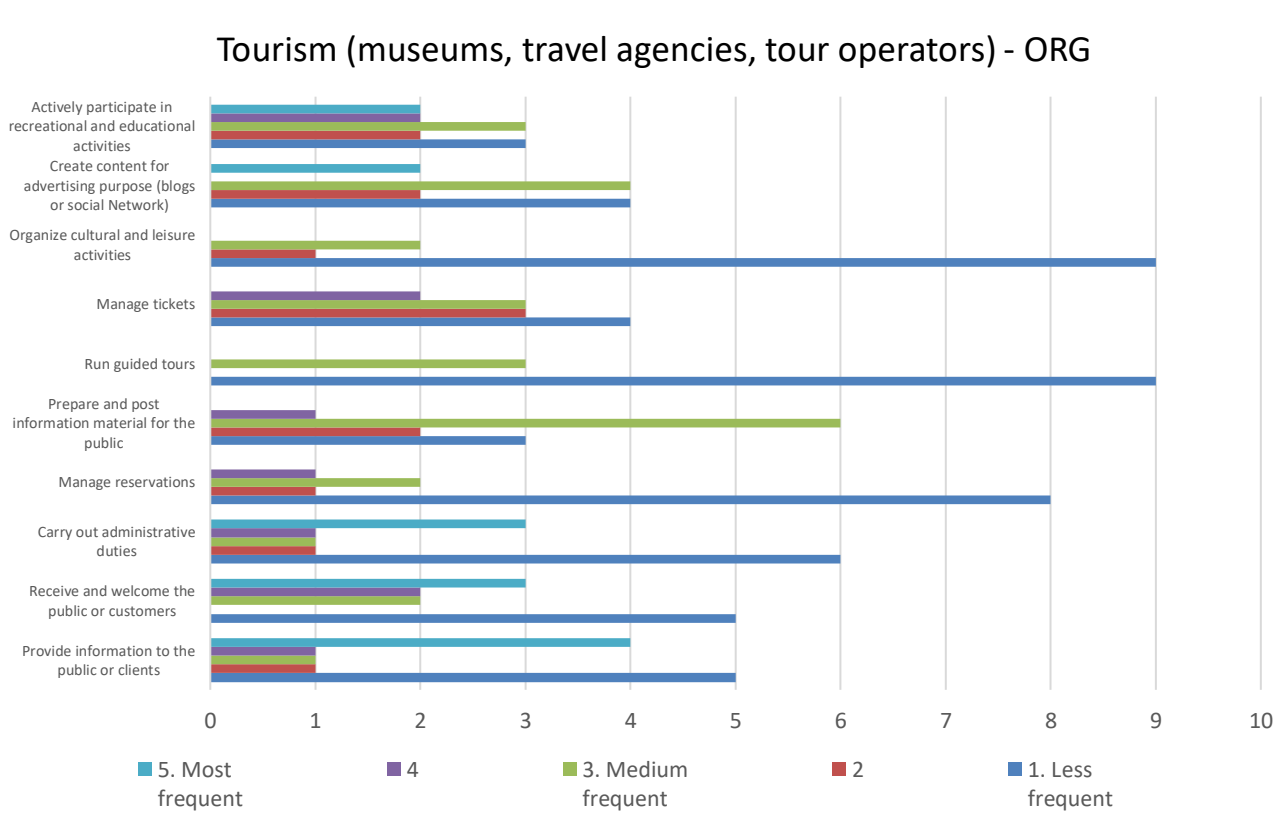
10.14. School and Education



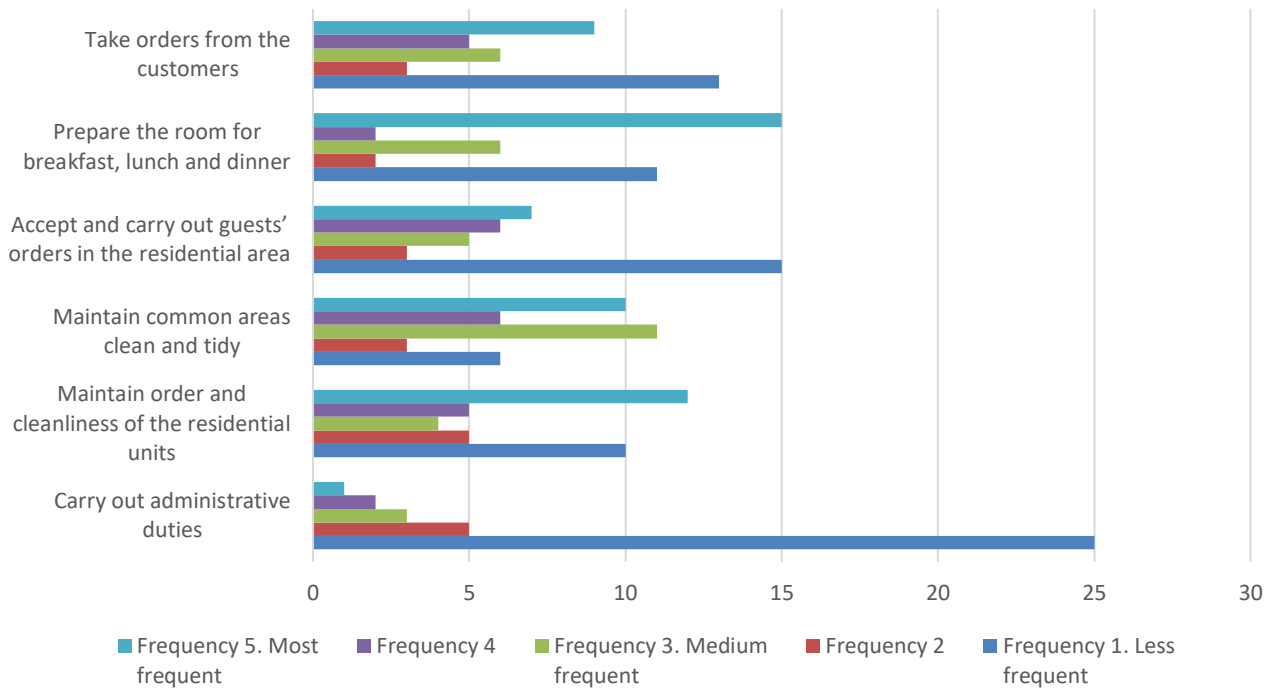


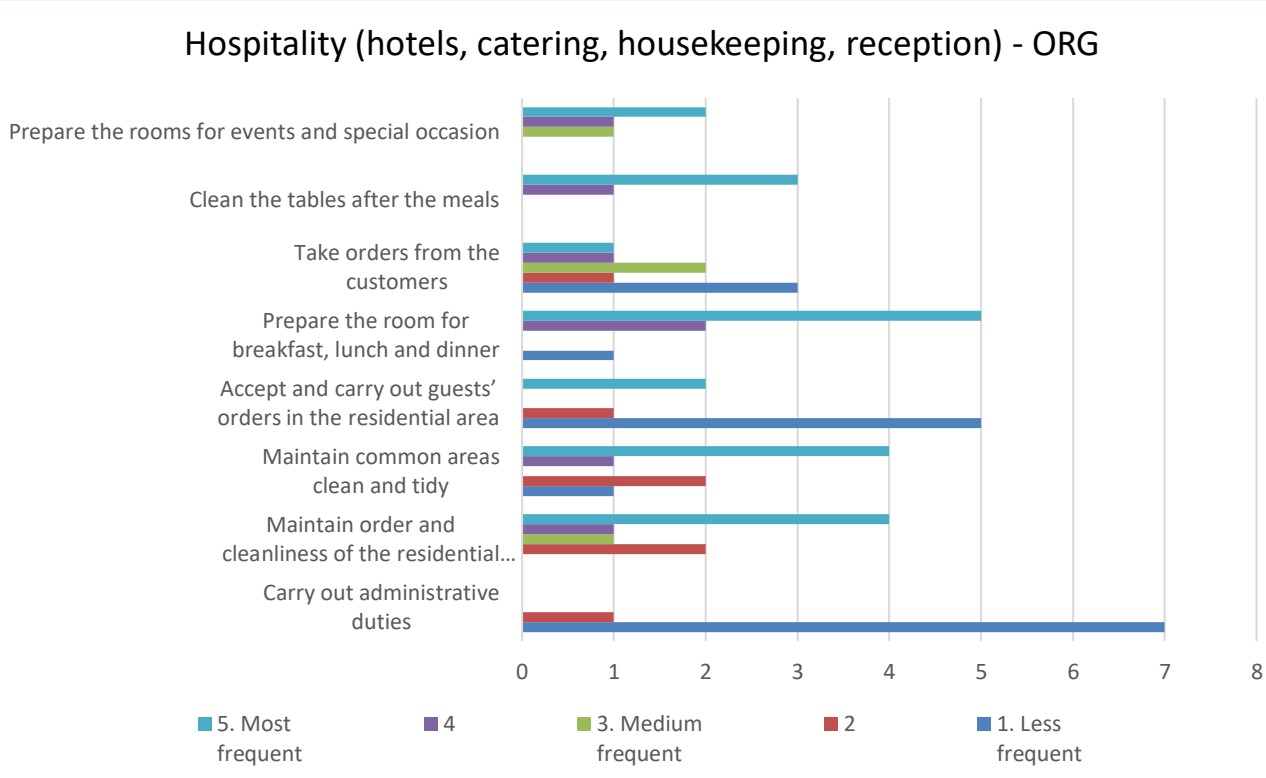
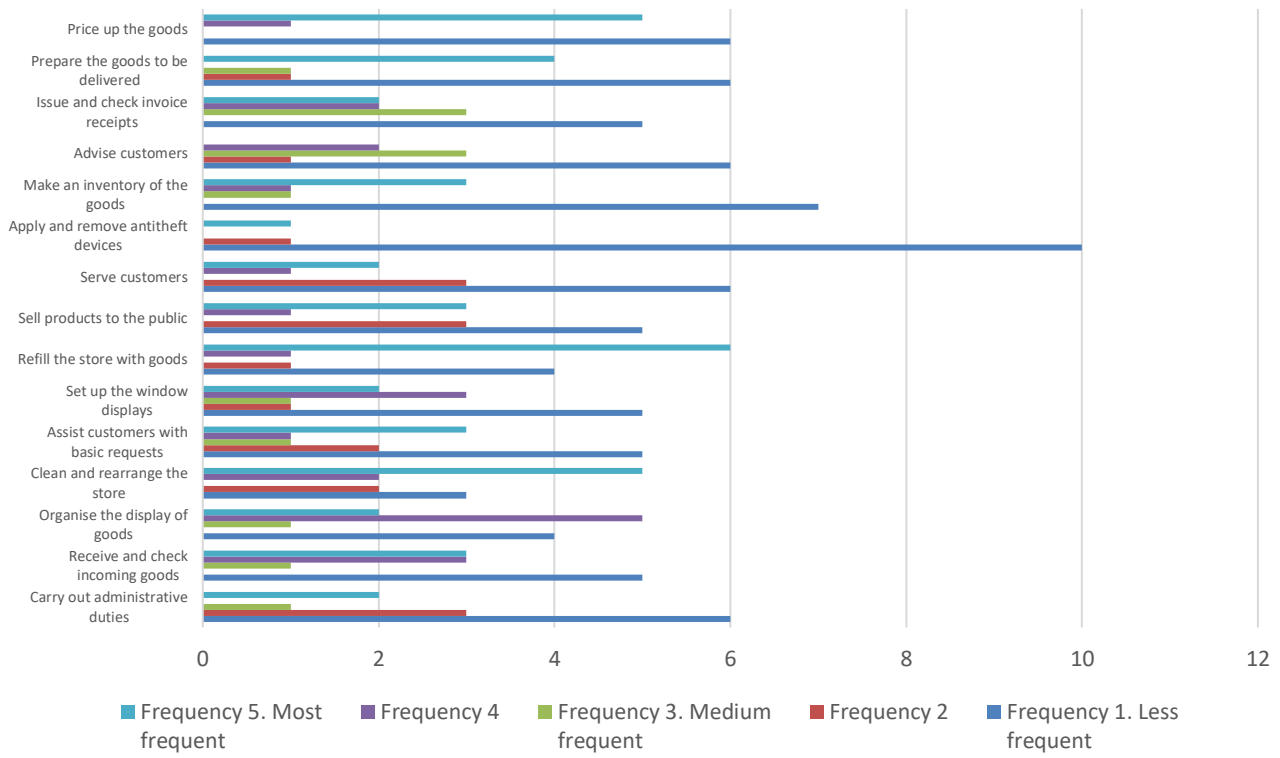
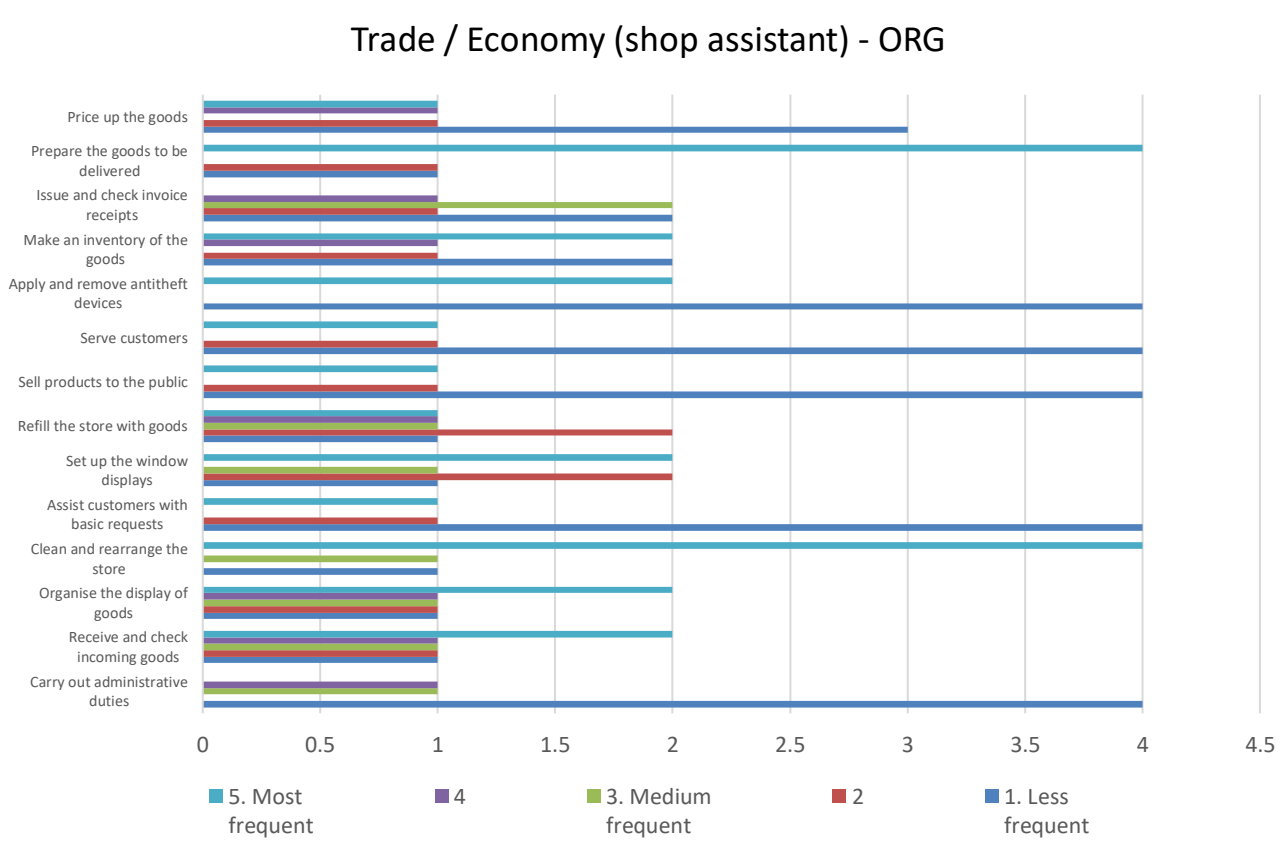
10.15. Tourism (museums, travel agencies, tour operators)





10.16. Hospitality (hotels, catering, housekeeping, reception)





10.17. Trade / Economy (shop assistant)