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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Problematic aspects of continuing vocational training in Greece. A new perspective on quality assurance**

In collaboration with the  
**HELLENIC ADULT  
EDUCATION ASSOCIATION**



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Problematic aspects of continuing vocational training in Greece. A new perspective on quality assurance.

The study was prepared by the Hellenic Adult Education Association (HAEA) and the Small Enterprises Institute of the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals Craftsmen and Merchants (IME GSEVEE)

## Aims and objectives of the study

The starting point of this study was the awareness of the problematic quality of the CVET programs, co-financed by the European Union through the European Social Fund, that are carried in Greece. In 2019, according to a study by the European Commission, the Greek CVET system was ranked at the bottom among the EU member states with a performance of only 1.3/5. According to another similar study (Karalis, 2021), the low quality of CVET programs is the second consecutive reason in order of non-participation of adult citizens in them.

In the period 2019–2023, an intensive production of legislative framework was observed with the aim of restructuring the CVET system in Greece. At the same time, the financial support derived from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) for the period 2022–2026, aiming the enhancement of the active

labour policies (including CVET), has significantly increased. In this context, a large number of vocational training programs launched, focused mainly in green and digital skills, for employees/workers and unemployed people. These programs are expected of training a total of 500,000 beneficiaries by the end of 2026.

Despite the efforts, the situation regarding the quality of the CVET programs in Greece does not seem to be improving. Indicatively, the experts who participated in the ERASMUS+/REGALE (2023) study consider (91.3%) that the Greek CVET system is not oriented towards the real major priorities but only towards short-term priorities, that it does not respond to the needs of the labour market (86.4%) nor to the educational needs of low-skilled employed and unemployed (91.3%), and that training providers are characterized by shortages

in their staffing capacity and therefore with implications at their training actions need to be carried out (82.6%).

The OECD in an unpublished study of the *Recommendations for the introduction of a new quality assurance framework for non-formal adult education in Greece* (2023) pointed out that there is a need to design a new system for guaranteeing "a minimum level of quality of training provision"» in Greek CVET (p. 12), which "would put special emphasis on the areas most relevant for adult learning, such as the design and implementation of training programmes, responsiveness to changing skill needs and to trainee's training needs and training providers' staff" (p. 13).. Also, the OECD study points out: «In addition, the new quality assurance system requirements should ensure that the teaching methodology is appropriate

for adult trainees, and that the process to develop training materials revolves around the achievement of the planned learning outcomes by trainees" (p. 17).

Finally, a study by diaNEOsis published at the end of 2021 showed that, according to the opinion of 33 Greek experts, quality assurance should be the first priority of CVET programs (Kokkos et al., in diaNEOsis, 2021, p. 237).

According to the above, the present study aimed to consider the practices that hinder (or, in some cases, facilitate) to quality assurance in all phases of the 'training cycle', i.e., in the design, development and operation of the training programs, in the implementation, management and monitoring of the programs, in the certification of the qualifications acquired through training, as well as in the evaluation of the actions.

## Methodology of the study

The *research questions* around which the study was conducted were the following.

- In Greece, what is the actual flow/sequence of practices that take place within the framework of the 'cycle of continuing vocational training', which concerns the individual phases of preparation, design, implementation, management, monitoring and evaluation of the continuing vocational training programs, as well as the phases of certification of the qualifications acquired through continuing vocational training and the promotion of those trained into employment?
- What are the critical points, the procedures and the institutional framework of the above-mentioned practices that are most in need of improvement?
- What are the positives that possibly exist in the applied practices?

- What proposals emerge to improve and ensure the quality of the 'training cycle' practices?

The *research methods followed* were literature review and focus groups. There

were 4 focus groups, in which a total of 17 representatives of relevant governmental services, social partners, CVET providers and adult educators participated.

## Findings, questions for further exploration and suggestions

The main findings of the study is that the country's CVET system is inefficient – even considering the significant resources that have been distributed – and therefore it needs to be restructured.

A second major finding is that the functions of the CVET system are primarily overdetermined by the pursuit of short-term goals, which are directly related to the EU funds absorption and the need for eligibility of actions. This prioritisation of financial and managerial issues leads to significant reductions in the quality of learning process and outcomes.

Furthermore, the study has identified that the policy designed to ensure the quality of CVET system, it does not produce tangible results. More specifically: a. The various ISO certificates required for the eligibility of CVET providers may have brought about a slight improvement in administrative procedures (taking into account the corresponding cost of obtaining this certification), but have not contributed in a noticeable improvement in their training services. b. The procedures for certifying the qualifications acquired after the end of

CVET activities, through examinations in accordance with the ISO 17024 standard, do not have, in most cases, any impact and practical use on the labour market, nor for businesses (reliable information from employers about the qualifications of candidate employees). c. The current system of certification of adult trainers is problematic, firstly because the relevant exams are based on the outdated and incomplete syllabus of a bank exams, and secondly because a certified training program is not offered to candidates for certification. d. The mechanism connecting CVET with the needs of the labour market and the educational needs of trainees is required to be strengthened and for its coordination to be more functional. e. The evaluation system of CVET programs and CVET providers is deficient.

A final finding is that each of the critical factors impeding the implementation of quality CVET programs is highly complex, amenable to several plausible interpretations, and at the same time interdependent on the others. In this light, the field of CVET can be seen as a

complex system, a "Whole", containing its parts as interacting and co-forming elements, while at the same time each part contains the fundamental characteristics of the "Whole" (inefficiency, short-term focus). Consequently therefore, it was found to be of dubious effectiveness to attempt to formulate "definitive", "valid" suggestions for each individual issue examined. In particular, it was found that, due to the complexity of the issues, any potential proposal to deal with a particular issue, however well-documented it may be, may raise reasonable questions as to its completeness, which in turn may lead to alternative and equally interesting proposals.

For example, one of the major problems that emerged in the context of the study is that, due to the fact that almost all the *for the planning and implementation conditions* of CVET are predetermined and inflexible, and at the same time the volume of administrative and management actions that have to be carried out is huge, providers find it difficult to take initiatives in order to develop the quality of the content, the educational methodology and the educational material of the programs and to adapt them to the needs of the local labor market and the educational needs of the trainees. An 'obvious' final suggestion would be to reform the institutional framework so that providers can act flexibly. However, this proposal could raise reasonable questions and ideas for alternative courses of action, such as, but not limited to:

- Should – and do they want – all providers to successfully respond to such an arrangement? Do they all have the necessary CVET culture and know-how and the necessary human resources?
- Would it be necessary the ongoing training of the staff and trainers of the CVET and if so, under what conditions, at what cost and with what provision for its implementation?
- The system of the evaluation of CVET providers might need to be revised and there should be provision for external (intermediate, ongoing, etc.) and internal evaluation?
- How would it be possible to reduce the bureaucratic obligations for the CVET providers, so that they focus their attention on ensuring the quality of training?
- Eventually, given that the entire CVET system, and of course, the part that concerns the work of CVET providers, is primarily oriented towards the absorption of EU funds and compliance with the complex regulations, would it be feasible to formulate a national CVET policy, possibly after consultation with stakeholders and the relevant EU agencies, that would combine the need for absorption of funding with the concern for ensuring the quality of the system?

It becomes clear that a project of consideration of parameters, synthesis of data, as well as formulation and evaluation of alternative proposals for all components of the Greek CVET system is of great scope and exceeds the limits of the present study. For this reason, in the following paragraphs we are limited to identifying some of the most critical factors that hinder the development of qualitative CVET, and to formulating questions and alternative ideas for action plans, as we have already done for the issue of how providers operate.

### *1. Linking the CVET with the needs of the labour market and trainees*

The study highlighted problematic aspects of the operation of the National Skills Development System, as well as the dysfunction of the system in identifying the thematic modules of the CVET programs in the context of a "top-down" approach, and even at a national and general level (e.g., general references to digital or green skills), despite the fact that the differences in skills needs between the individual geographical units and local communities are significant. Also, very often the insightful/well-aimed identification of skills needs resulting from the Labour Market Needs Diagnostic Mechanism does not reach the designers of CVET programs promptly and in a usable form. Finally, it was found that mechanisms and procedures for linking programs to the training needs of trainees are not in place or do not function satisfactorily. The

questions and the resulting suggestions are, indicatively:

- How can the diagnosis of labour market needs be more coordinated and effective, with emphasis on the local and sectoral/professional level?
- How can the diagnosis of skills needs be complemented by a diagnosis of training needs (since every identification of a skills gap does not necessarily imply that training needs to be provided)?
- How can the time between the diagnosis of training needs and the implementation of the programs be reduced?
- How can the data from the job descriptions be adequately integrated into the design of the modules?
- How can the systems of Individual Action Plans and Individual Learning Accounts work efficiently, combined with the quantitative and qualitative upgrading of counselling services?
- How can the formation of homogeneous learning sections be ensured where this is necessary?

### *2. Formulation of educational methodology*

The study showed that the institutional framework contains several positive elements regarding the educational

methodology to be followed. However, it does not include a) the set of basic quality standards of Adult Education and Training and EQAVET, b) measures obliging providers to ensure the quality of the training methodology. It also does not include the educational methodology parameter in the evaluation criteria for the assessment of programs and CVET providers. The questions and the consequent suggestions that arise are indicatively as follows:

- What consultation process could be used to complement the current institutional framework so that it more effectively promotes the integration of quality educational methodology into the CVET programs?
- How could it be ensured that appropriate methodology is incorporated into the day-to-day practice of the programs? Would it perhaps be necessary to carry out on-site evaluation visits to providers' premises, as is the case in several European countries? In that case, what would be the specifications/standards for the visits? How would providers and trainers receive feedback and further support? What would be the equivalent procedure with regard to distance learning programs?
- Would it be feasible and fruitful to implement some experimental/

pilot CVET programs to test alternative ways of working with trainees with the aim to achieve quality? How could the lessons learned from their implementation be used?

### *3. Operation of distance learning*

It was found that the CVET system is characterised by a lack of expertise in distance learning, and by difficulties in the development of appropriate and original training material for distance learning. Questions and alternative suggestions:

- How can distance learning relate to the principles and standards of adults' education and training?
- How to make e-learning more interactive?
- Which categories of adults' trainers need to be trained in the use of e-learning?
- How can e-learning be made accessible to people with limited ICT skills?

### *4. Level of competence of adults' trainers*

It was found that a large proportion of adults' trainers have not been properly trained, so it is doubtful whether they have the necessary teaching expertise. Furthermore, the current way of certifying trainers through the current database of examination topics is unreliable. Questions and alternative suggestions:



- What could be a new training system of candidates for the trainers' certification (topics, duration, training methodology, teaching material)?
- Do already certified trainers need to be trained? If so, on which subjects? What incentives would they have to participate in a training program?
- How would it be possible to identify certified trainers who do not need training at this stage?
- Will there be a need for training of trainers of trainers and assessors of trainers' teaching competence?
- What would a system of continuous training and evaluation of trainers look like?

### *5. Selection criteria and incentives for trainees' participation*

In the context of the focus groups that took place, the opinion was expressed by some participants that the expectation of receiving an allowance on the part of trainees is the main motivation to participate in co-funded CVET programs, which does not contribute to the development of a CVET culture by providers and beneficiaries, nor, by extension, does it contribute to the development of quality programs. Furthermore, significant barriers to participation in CVET for socially vulnerable groups have been identified. The questions raised and alternative

suggestions are, for example:

- Would it be a solution to organically link the CVET to the acquisition of professional rights?
- Would it be feasible and fruitful to run some pilot CVET programs to test alternative ways of engaging beneficiaries in order to stimulate their participation? How could the lessons learned from the pilot be used?
- To what extent and how could the institution of Counselling contribute to the formation of essential incentives for participation?
- How can the participation of socially vulnerable groups in the CVET be enhanced?
- How to build on the results of the piloting of the Individual Learning Accounts?

### *6. Certification of the acquired skills / qualifications*

The study highlighted a number of problems in the process of certifying qualifications acquired through participation in CVET programs (unreliability and inadequate methodology of the examinations conducted by accredited private bodies, implementation of minimal, albeit valid, accreditation activities carried out by EOPPEP, asymmetric relationship between the certification

of qualifications and the acquisition of professional rights, lack of control of certification bodies, bribery between providers and accredited certification bodies, etc.). The resulting questions and alternative suggestions are, indicatively, as follows:

- Is it possible, and how, to radically improve the current certification system?
- Would it be appropriate and feasible to replace this system with another one, following the model of several European countries, where certification exams are conducted either by the state, by the Chambers of Commerce or by businesses, insofar as the latter certify knowledge and skills that related to their own products?
- Is it possible, and under what institutional framework, to link certification to professional rights?
- Is it a workable solution to abolish the certification process and replace it with knowledge and skills assessment tests by the training provider itself (as is the case in many countries), so that relevant resources can be allocated to enhance the quality of CVET programs and counselling services?

### *7. Professional rights*

It was found that the process of certifying the qualifications acquired through the

CVET system it remains unrelated to the acquisition of professional rights. Arising questions and suggestions:

- How can certification of qualifications be linked to the acquisition of professional rights?
- Can the CVET, and by what procedures, lead directly to the acquisition of professional rights without requiring a certification process?
- Is it appropriate and feasible to value and recognise prior informal learning (e.g., acquired through work experience) as a channel for acquiring professional rights?

### *8. System of evaluation of providers*

The study has shown that the system for evaluating CVET providers is flawed. Firstly, it is based on minimal criteria, ignoring a number of others (such as the structure of the content of the programs carried out and its correlation with the needs of the labour market and the educational needs of the participants, training methodology, training materials, the functioning of trainers, the participation of trainees from socially vulnerable groups, trainer-trainee relations, etc.). Secondly, some of the criteria of the current system (finding or keeping a job) are questionable in the international literature. Thirdly, there is no institutional obligation for providers to activate internal evaluation. Finally, there is no provision for using the results of

the evaluation with the aim of providing feedback and improving subsequent training activities. The resulting questions and alternative suggestions are, for example:

- By what consultation process is it possible to can be used to reshape and complement the evaluation system?
- How can the internal, formative and final evaluation of providers be efficiently activated with the participation of trainees, VET managers and trainers?
- What methodology and procedures can be used to make use of the evaluation results?
- How can a culture of evaluation be developed throughout the CVET system?

### *9. Level of competence of providers*

Finally, it was found that a sufficient number of CVET providers have a lack of competence in terms of the design and implementation of CVET programs, improving employees with the necessary competencies and skills and their self-evaluation process. Questions and alternative suggestions:

- What incentives can be proposed for providers to self-assess? How will the effectiveness of self-evaluation be monitored?
- Is additional evaluation by external

evaluators (e.g., through on-site visits to providers) required to upgrade the work being done? If so, what will be the characteristics of the evaluators? Will they need to be trained in order to undertake this task?

- How would it be possible for providers to acquire a training culture?

## Concluding thoughts

According to what has been mentioned, the main conclusion is that the Greek vocational education and training system, although it contains some positives at institutional level and manages to absorb significant European resources, does not provide quality training and vocational skills, but only to a very small extent. Therefore, the system needs to be radically reformed and upgraded in order to function efficiently and to be able, after the decrease in European funding that is expected to occur in a few years, to be sustainable and to play its essential role of contributing to the economic and social development of the country and to the personal development of the trainees.

Summarizing the key points of the study, it is worth pointing out that what has been already mentioned regarding questions, proposals and alternative action plans aimed at improving the quality of the 'training cycle' are indicative and cover only part of the issues that need to be discussed and explored. In order to complete the project, a broad consultation between representatives of governmental bodies, social partners, experts, providers, and staff and trainers in the field of CVET is necessary, as well as a subsequent extensive research approach involving all stakeholders, aimed at formulating short-term, medium-term and strategic proposals for intervention with the aim of upgrading the quality of the field and ensuring its sustainability.

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