

Involve Project

# Main Findings

Synopsis

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## List of Abbreviations

EOPPEP: National Organization for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance

EPAL: Vocational High School

EPAS: Vocational Education Schools

EQF: European Qualifications Framework

GSEE: General Confederation of Greek Labour

GSEVEE: Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen and Merchants

IEK: Vocational Training Institutes

IEP: Institute for Educational Policy

KEE: Central Scientific Committee

KSEEK: Central Council of Vocational Education and Training

LLL: Lifelong Learning

OAED: Greek Manpower Employment Organization

SSPAE: Production and Labour Market Association Council

VET: Vocational Education and Training



## 1. Introduction

INVOLVE project (“Involving social partners in Dual VET governance: exploring the contribution of social partners in the design, renewal and implementation of Dual VET” VS/2020/0145), funded by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission, was implemented between 1/1/2020 and 31/7/2022. The main objective of the INVOLVE project was to analyse and foster social partners’ integration into the governance of Dual Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems<sup>1</sup> in four countries, i.e. Greece, Spain, Portugal and Poland. These are countries that have recently developed projects of Dual VET systems where social partners play a limited institutionalized role in policymaking.

The current brief report draws from the findings of the deliverables produced under the framework of the INVOLVE project, which are the following<sup>2</sup>:

- A “Desk Research Report”, which presents Dual VET in Greece (e.g. apprenticeship programmes, main governance characteristics),
- A “Fieldwork Report” that outlines the main findings of a qualitative research, based on semi-structured interviews with experts on Dual VET in Greece,
- A “Scenarios Report”, which evaluates the new governance system and proposes a new one.

The current report first introduces readers to the Dual VET governance system in Greece and then describes the main research findings of the project, concluding with proposals for the governance system’s enhancement.

## 2. Dual VET Governance System in Greece

The apprenticeship system in Greece has a long-established history. It was first introduced as a distinct choice of VET in the 1950s, provided by the Greek Manpower Employment Organization (OAED). The reforms of 2013 and 2016 have been the most important milestones for the Greek Dual VET system, followed by the most recent reform in 2020. The current system was established through that legislation. i.e. Greece’s National Reform Programme (4763/2020), while its elaboration was made through Ministerial Decisions that followed (K3/145328 [1/12/2021], K3/30446 [21/3/2022]). Currently, the apprenticeship system in Greece has been expanded and includes the following:

- The programme of Vocational Education Schools (EPAS), operated by OAED

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<sup>1</sup> In the framework of our project a concrete focus has been given to apprenticeship as the main form of dual VET. As such, in the current report the two terms - Dual VET and Apprenticeship - are used interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> The full version of those deliverables is available in the project’s website (<https://involveproject.eu/>).



- The "post-graduate year-apprenticeship class" of Vocational High Schools (EPAL), run by the Ministry of Education
- The apprenticeship programme of Vocational Training Institutes (IEK)

The structure of the current governance system is presented in Graph 1 below:

## SYSTEM GOVERNANCE



Graph 1: The Current Greek VET Governance System

In Article 3 of the current legislation (4763/2020), it is stipulated that the “basic principles of VET and Lifelong Learning are... the direct connection with labour market through the effective participation of social partners in their planning”. This indicates the complexity of the Greek VET governance system, as well as the importance of the role of social partners within it.

**At national level,** the governance system gives vital policymaking role to the Central Council of VET (KSEK). KSEK operates under the Ministry of Education, with main aim the submission of proposals and recommendations related to VET to the Ministry. As such, KSEK has a key role to play regarding policymaking. KSEK submits policy proposals and suggestions to the Minister of Education on nationwide plans for VET as well as for Lifelong Learning. In KSEK, besides the General Secretaries of the involved Ministries (Ministry of Education Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Finance), participate also representatives of the General Confederation of Greek Labour (GSEE) and representatives on behalf of the national employers’ organizations. KSEK also includes representatives from other institutions and organizations, such as regional administration, chambers, as well as, several other state organizations.

**At regional level,** operate the Production and Labour Market Association Councils (SSPAE). SSPAE submit technical-strategic suggestions to KSEK regarding VET issues and, in particular, for sectors and specialties that must operate in the different Dual VET programmes. Their contribution is also important in the selection of specific courses, programmes and activities, in order to strengthen the development of the particular region. Participants of SSPAEs include representatives from each one of the three Greek apprenticeship systems, representatives from GSEE, representatives from



employers' organizations as well as representatives from regional administration. The main aim of SSPAEs is the provision of proposals to KSEEK.

The third key institution of the Greek VET governance system is the Central Scientific Committee (KEE). This is a **scientific body**, with main aim to support at technical-strategic level, both the Ministry of Education and KSEEK. Its role is to study, to conduct scientific research and to document on improving the quality and efficiency of VET and Lifelong Learning programmes. Members of the body, are university professors, as well as, experts from related scientific fields and institutions, without, however, the participation of social partners.

Finally, the new institutional framework makes provision for the operation of another body, that of Sectoral Skills Councils, which focus on skills' identification in several occupational fields. This institution has not operated so far (May 2022).

In terms of social dialogue on Dual VET in Greece, throughout the last decade there have been several efforts for the establishment of an effective apprenticeship governance system, with the most recent one that of the last legislative reform (4763/2020). Several institutions (national and transnational) have tried to deal with the topic of apprenticeship, covering issues like quality, regulation, institutional framework, evaluation, modernization, etc. Apart from the Ministry of Education, which is the main regulatory body, the most active players in the ongoing debate for apprenticeship in Greece are the Ministry of Labour, OAED, the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP), the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP) and national social partners such as GSEE and the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen and Merchants (GSEVEE).

One of the main features of social dialogue on VET in Greece is the lack of comprehensive integration and continuity. The main reason for this is the fragmented way in which consultations and talks between stakeholders take place. It is characteristic that, on many occasions, social partners are called upon either to legitimize decisions already taken, or to ratify with their presence a "participatory" process as required by the relevant legislation. Still the state lacks any commitment regarding the implementation of whatever decisions may be collectively made.

The main issues in social dialogue on VET in Greece is VET's lack of attractiveness and challenges such as increase of participation, involvement of employers, adjustment of apprenticeship programmes to labour market needs and development of a quality assurance framework.

### 3. Research Findings

A complete and valuable evaluation of social dialogue on Dual VET cannot be achieved without a thorough understanding of conditions and practices implemented so far. For that reason within the framework of INVOLVE, a qualitative research was conducted. More specifically, semi-structured interviews took place with representatives of state authorities, social partners, stakeholders,



companies, schools, as well as, apprentices. The research purpose was to explore a number of issues regarding the Greek governance system of Dual VET, mainly focusing on apprenticeship. Among the issues explored, were the general views on the Greek apprenticeship system, as well as, the main assets and main problems of the system, the role of social partners in the recent reforms of Dual VET, the experience of collective bargaining on working conditions of in-company training, and the future needs for implementing an effective governance system.

Based on the project's methodology, interviews were categorized in three concrete levels:

- the Political Strategic, which includes policymakers, both at national and at European level,
- the Technical Strategic, which includes social partners' representatives and stakeholders, and
- the Technical Operational, which refers to members of the related ministries or other institutions directly involved in the implementation of the policies adopted.

In addition, our sample included 3 mini case-studies, each one composed of one VET provider, a company member (participating in in-company training) and an apprentice. In total, 24 interviews were conducted. The research period was between April and June 2021.

Interviewees were asked to refer to the main advantages and disadvantages of the Dual VET system in Greece. The main findings are presented in Table 1 below:

*Table 1: Main advantages and disadvantages of current Dual VET system in Greece*

<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
Acquisition of necessary skills and knowledge	Lack of necessary procedures for updating curricula and specialties based on a commonly accepted methodology
Bridging of gap between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation	Lack of a sufficient coordination at central level regarding the different systems of Dual VET and apprenticeship
Company's ability to find easier and better trained staff	Bureaucratization of several procedures, making the whole system more demanding
Reduction of youth unemployment	Low level of social partners' involvement as in most cases their participation is limited to an advisory role, while in several cases it can be characterized as fragmented and ad hoc



Officially recognized qualifications	Limited involvement of companies in apprenticeship
Apprentices' familiarity with a working environment	Insufficient and unsystematised evaluation of companies' involvement
Better adjustment to the future needs of a profession	Existence of many different systems of in-company training, which act competitively to apprenticeship
	Lack of a concrete supporting system for apprenticeship

As mentioned above, the research period coincided with a transitional period for the Greek governance system. The adoption of a new legal framework during December 2020 foresaw new governance institutions for VET. As such, respondents had the chance both to evaluate the previous governance structure, and also to present an initial evaluation, expressing their expectations on the newly adopted institutions.

At the Political Strategic level, that is concerning KSEEEK, respondents were reluctant regarding its impact on the apprenticeship system and on the enhancement of social partners' involvement. Although interviewees acknowledged that KSEEEK and the jurisdictions accompanying its operation are on the right direction, a general hesitation was evident in relation to its actual role and impact, given its limited role to advisory. Moreover, it was deemed that KSEEEK, as an institution with a broad spectrum on VET, cannot do justice to Dual VET. As a result, there is a concern that the interest on apprenticeship might be marginalised. Based on that, a question that arises is whether there is a need to include in the governance system an institution which is solely responsible for Dual VET.

More complicated is the Technical Strategic level, given the existence of several institutions in the governance system. The most prominent institution of the current governance system is that of SSPAE, which operate at regional level. SSPAEs have an advisory role, which mainly focuses on the enhancement of VET regionally. In addition, SSPAEs submit proposals to KSEEEK related to specialties and apprenticeship based on regional market needs, while they are responsible to promote in their region the decisions of KSEEEK.

During our research period, SSPAEs were about to have or just had (depending on the region) their first meeting. Most of our respondents believe that SSPAEs constitute a positive initiative, although they are very reluctant about their future impact on apprenticeship as a result of several parameters (e.g. members' previous experience, lack of capacity among stakeholders, vague identification of roles and fields of intervention). In addition, some respondents expressed



reservations regarding specific aspects of SSPAE. One of them was related to the composition of SSPAEs and the large number of representatives coming from the educational structures of the apprenticeship systems and mainly those operating under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education. It was mentioned that this might result to overemphasising on those systems and mainly on educational issues. Furthermore, another reservation was the wide range of issues included in SSPAE agendas, which could result to a marginalized interest concerning apprenticeship, since SSPAEs (like KSEEK) are involved with VET in general and not only with Dual VET.

In addition, the new legal framework makes a specific provision for the creation of a scientific body that of KEE. KEE mainly aims to offer scientific support to KSEEK and the Ministry of Education, as the main responsible institutions for VET. Participants in our study claimed to have a positive view of KEE, given that it was deemed necessary to have a body providing the governance system with scientific knowledge. At this point, it should be noted that during our research, the necessity for data related to apprenticeship in general and to current and future skills' needs was repeatedly highlighted. This is necessary for deciding upon the specialties to be implemented. Although KEE cannot fully cover the specific need, it can contribute towards it. An important criticism, however, is that social partners do not participate in KEE. Participants in our study suggested that this should be re-evaluated, especially given that most social partners operate research institutes which dispose great technical expertise and thus can contribute effectively towards the operation of KEE.

It should be noted that the existing governance system also includes several other institutions, whose role is strictly circumscribed to specific fields. The most important are EOPPEP, with their role in certifying and evaluating qualifications and IEP, whose field is the provision of scientific support on general educational issues.

At Technical Operational level, the formal role played by social partners is quite limited given that no specific governance institution has been adopted. Some respondents mentioned that several – mostly ad hoc – initiatives have taken place in order to build cooperation between schools and sectoral or regional representatives. This tends to be instigated by schools, which are undertaking the specific initiative in order to propose or adjust specialties based on real market needs. Although some of those initiatives seem to have a considerable impact, this has not always been the case, as it requires commitment on behalf of sectoral representatives, but also institutionalized procedures to be put in place.



#### 4. Alternative Governance Scenarios

Building on the interview findings, a “scenario” workshop was held at the end of January of 2022, by INE GSEE, with the participation of many key players and stakeholders of the apprenticeship schemes in Greece. In particular, 15 people attended the workshop representing:

- the General Secretariat for VET (Ministry of Education)
- OAED (Ministry of Labour)
- the Ministry of Tourism and
- several Social Partners.

Participants were presented with alternative governance scenarios for Greek VET, which attendees commented upon. The open discussion highlighted the weaknesses of the current system and presented proposals for its improvement. More specifically, given that the current governance system operates for less than a year, it was deemed necessary to retain the existing structure and to promote initiatives that would develop the current system.

Taking for a fact that the existing system is targeted to VET in general, there were two major proposals for its improvement. The first one was that of the creation of a subcommittee as a part of KSEEK, solely responsible for dual VET issues. Another proposal was the scheduling of periodical meetings with an agenda focused on dual VET. Participants argued that the existence of a governance system solely for Dual VET is an ideal prospect. However, all participants were sceptical about such a perspective. In most cases reservations were expressed concerning the viability of such a system. Their main concern focused on the lack of necessary resources and structures to support too many parallel governance systems (e.g. VET, LLL, Dual VET). Especially, among social partners’ representatives, it was clarified, that at this point they cannot undertake the primary role of becoming the leading actors of the system.

Furthermore, it was agreed upon that any potential change of the governance system should take into consideration that the major actors of dual VET, at this point, are the main users involved, i.e. state authorities and schools. The existing system, however, should be more flexible, with fewer members and better identified authorities. The existence of more flexible and small governance institutions was evaluated as very important for the effectiveness of social dialogue.

Currently, skills’ and specialties identification are two crucial issues that should be determined based on effective procedures of social dialogue. Regarding skills’ identification, the setup of Sectoral Skills Councils, which have not operated yet, is an important decision which may have an effective impact on the system's operations. Given that their operation will take place under social actors’ jurisdiction, it is of major importance to recognise a number of issues, such as participants’ role and supervision procedures.



Furthermore, specialties' identification is another issue of major importance that should be looked into within the framework of the governance system. So far, the co-existence of different systems of dual VET and apprenticeship (e.g. EPAL, EPAS, IEK) lacks concrete coordination. For that reason, the same specialties are offered in different systems and EQF levels, without a well-defined procedure. This often generates confusion among dual VET main users, namely trainees and companies. The role of social dialogue at this point is critical, with a considerable effect at all systems of in-company training.

Finally, another suggestion for the governance system was the involvement of local representatives (e.g. social partners, schools, local administration) in Dual VET, given that local structures are considered more appropriate to identify needs (e.g. labour market, schools) than national or regional ones. Still, despite this suggestion, a general hesitation was evident on whether local representatives of the involved acting parties, such as social partners and chambers, have the capacity to respond to such an enhanced role, especially under the current circumstances, given their lack of required human resources.

## 5. Challenges and Visions on the Governance of Dual VET in Greece

Over the last years, several efforts have taken place in Greece for the establishment of an effective governance system. Although VET constitutes a privileged field of social dialogue, so far, the policies and institutions adopted have been characterized by limited effectiveness. The newly established governance system, although too early to be evaluated, presents some positive characteristics but also some identified disadvantages. Based on the analysis above, one can identify the following challenges for the effectiveness of the governance system:

- The creation of an effective and productive governance system presupposes a **long-term vision** with long-lasting institutions. So far, governance systems adopted have been fragmented and short-termed, a condition which results to the limited engagement of stakeholders.
- As a major pillar of VET, **social dialogue on Dual VET should be based on concrete procedures**, even in the existing governance system. In that case, several proposals have been submitted (e.g. subcommittee responsible for Dual VET, meetings solely for Dual VET).
- Participants argued that the existence of a **governance system solely for Dual VET** is an ideal prospect. However, all participants were sceptical about such a perspective. Their main concern focused on the lack of necessary resources and structures to support too many parallel governance systems (e.g. VET, LLL, Dual VET). Especially, among social



partners' representatives, it was clarified, that at this point they cannot undertake the primary role of becoming the leading actors of the system.

- **Further participation of social partners at local level** (regional social partners, local administration, etc.) **is of major importance**, given that local structures are considered more appropriate to identify needs. However, this is **not considered feasible under the current conditions** (e.g. in terms of resources and expertise). In that case, a preparatory period and procedure (e.g. actors' informative activities) is deemed necessary. Contrary to the aforementioned advantages, a general hesitation was evident on whether local representatives of the stakeholders, such as social partners and chambers, have the capacity to respond to such an enhanced role, especially under the current circumstances, given their lack of required human resources.
- A more effective participation, on behalf of all stakeholders, is also related to the **adoption of clearly defined priorities of the governance system**, as for example in skills' identification, specialties' selection, and companies' participation. In that case it would be much easier for stakeholders to invest the necessary resources (e.g. human) for their effective participation.
- **The establishment of an inclusive and effective scientific scheme** (e.g. participation of social partners) is considered one of the main challenges for the existing system. National social partners operate research institutes which dispose considerable expertise and knowledge. As such, their participation in KEE would be crucial.
- Any strengthening activity of the governance system should acknowledge that in Greece, the **main actors are the main users involved, i.e. state authorities and schools**. In any case, the **existing system should be more flexible, with smaller governance institutions / committees and better identified authorities**, so as to achieve a more effective social dialogue.
- Even if governance institutions have no decisive jurisdictions, still, **a procedure of evaluation of the policies adopted should be followed** (e.g. whether they were based on institutions' proposals). This procedure would offer an extra motive for stakeholders in order to acquire a more adequate cooperation, but it would also offer further 'legitimisation of the respective policies implemented.
- **Dual VET is considered a privileged field of social dialogue among social partners and the state**. The adoption of commonly accepted procedures and the formation of a successful scheme of social dialogue, may constitute a case study for other social and educational fields (e.g. health, labour), where social dialogue faces greater obstacles.



## 6. Closing Remarks

Although the current governance system has a very ‘short history’ so far, some initial observations on its structure and operation can be useful. First of all, the governance system remains highly centralized, given that state institutions hold the main powers and responsibilities. The role of the competent bodies is restricted merely to an advisory one, a condition which hampers participants' contribution and disposition. As such, local and sectoral needs are overlooked. Moreover, scientific contribution on the issues of Dual VET is not sufficient and systematic.

Nonetheless, besides these drawbacks, we should admit that some improvements have been made during the last years. Since 2015, Greece has taken measures to develop and implement apprenticeship, strengthen the governance and quality assurance of VET, and set up a skills' forecasting system to guide the development of VET provision. Steps have been taken to improve access for all to VET, particularly through permeability measures. The VET system has been upgraded and higher level VET has been reinforced. Progress has also been made in further developing the Hellenic Qualifications Framework and the validation system, while initiatives have been undertaken to support the initial and continuing training of VET school teachers and in-company trainers. For all these improvements, the contribution of social partners through social dialogue has been crucial. As such, their enhanced participation in the VET governance system should be further endorsed.