

Case study Thessaly

This case study determines background factors that support or obstruct the use of e-services in the provision of information, advice and guidance (IAG) regarding education, training, and career opportunities in Greece in general and, as far as data is available, in the region of Thessaly in particular. To this end, it provides an overview of (a) the structure of the vocational and educational training (VET) system, (b) the IAG System, and (c) the status of digitalisation. Thus, the case study provides insights into why the expected logic of intervention of GeGS ultimately might succeed or fail in the specific Greek context.

The VET system¹

Vocational education and training (VET) in Greece encompasses several pathways, including initial vocational education in vocational upper secondary schools (EPAL) and vocational training institutes (IEK), as well as continuing vocational education through lifelong learning centers (KDBM) and specialised training programs. Dual VET programs and apprenticeships, such as those offered by EPAS Apprenticeship Schools and the post-secondary apprenticeship year, provide practical, hands-on experience. Higher vocational education is also available through university departments and technological educational institutes (TEIs), offering advanced technical training with practical components.

Structure

VET in Greece is offered after the completion of compulsory schooling, mainly at upper secondary and post-secondary level. Secondary vocational education is typically offered within the framework of the second cycle of secondary education, known as Lyceum. Students in the Lyceum can choose from various specialised vocational streams, each focusing on a particular field or profession. These programs typically last for three years and provide a combination of general education and vocational training. After completing Lyceum, students can choose to continue their vocational education at post-secondary vocational schools or technical colleges (public and private vocational training institutes, IEK). These institutions offer more specialised vocational training in various fields, such as engineering, technology, health care, and tourism. Post-secondary vocational programs often lead to diplomas or certificates and can provide a direct pathway to employment. In general, the Greek government and educational authorities aim to align vocational education programs with the needs of the labour market. This involves

¹ Cedefop; EOPPEP - National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (2022). Vocational education and training in Europe - Greece: system description [From Cedefop; ReferNet. Vocational education and training in Europe database]. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/greece-u2>

close collaboration with industry stakeholders to ensure that graduates have the skills and knowledge required by employers. National standards, training regulations and the quality assurance framework ensure the quality of VET programs.

It has to be noted that Greek society strongly favours general education and appreciates university studies. Both these factors reflect sociological stereotypes rooted in long-lasting perceptions and have affected overall VET attractiveness.² That also implies that until recently, VET mostly took place in a school-based context. In recent years, Greece has been working on implementing a dual education system in addition to these school-based types of VET. This model combines classroom-based learning with practical, on-the-job training. It allows students to gain real-world experience while pursuing their vocational studies. Dual education programs are often conducted in collaboration with employers and businesses. E.g., apprenticeship programs are offered by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and in the vocational schools of Manpower Organisation (Scholes Mathiteias EPAS of The Greek Employment Service OAED) and schools of vocational training (ESK) of the Public Employment Service (DYPA) and operate under the dual education system. Upon successful completion of an apprenticeship program, apprentices are awarded certifications and qualifications that hold significant recognition in the labour market.

Besides the I-VET system, there is also a C-VET-system for continuing education and upskilling which offers adults opportunities to participate in vocational training and continuing education programs to update their skills or acquire new ones, thus enhancing their employability.

Key players and stakeholders

The Greek vocational education system involves various key players and stakeholders who play important roles in its development, implementation, and oversight. These stakeholders work collaboratively to ensure the effectiveness and relevance of vocational education in Greece. Some of the key players and stakeholders in Greek vocational education include:

1. **Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs:** The ministry oversees education policies and regulations in Greece, including vocational education. It sets educational standards, approves curricula, and allocates funding for vocational education programs.
2. **General Secretariat of Vocational Education, Training, Lifelong Learning and Youth** is a government agency responsible for vocational education and training. It plays a focal role in planning, implementing, and monitoring vocational education programs and initiatives. The GSVETLLY, which operates under the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, is responsible for overseeing both public and private providers of non-formal vocational training. In order to ensure that the training programs are relevant and meet the

² <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/greece-2019>

necessary occupational qualifications, the curriculum for each specialization must take into account the corresponding job profiles. The GSVETLLY is also responsible for developing and monitoring the curricula for initial vocational training programs, which are then certified by the **National Organization for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP)**.

3. **Vocational Education and Training (VET) Schools:** VET schools, both at the secondary and post-secondary levels, are responsible for delivering vocational education programs. They collaborate with industry partners to design relevant curricula and provide hands-on training.
4. **Employers and Industry Associations** (e.g., the Association of businesses and industries in Thessaly, STHEV) are vital stakeholders in vocational education. They provide input on the skills and competencies needed in the workforce and often participate in work-based learning programs. For example, companies offer apprenticeships in compliance with the training guidelines established by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs in collaboration with social stakeholders.
5. **Regional Authorities:** Regional governments and authorities have an important role in vocational education, particularly in terms of coordinating regional development plans and initiatives that align with the skills needs of local industries. **The Region of Thessaly** collaborates with local authorities, businesses, and educational institutions. For example, the University of Thessaly engages with regional authorities and stakeholders to support regional development and educational initiatives, which helps tailor the vocational training to the region's economic needs.³ Additionally, the Regional Directorate of Primary and Secondary Education of Thessaly oversees educational policies and the implementation of VET at the regional level, ensuring that training programs meet local labour market demands.⁴
6. The **General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE)** and the **General Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen, and Merchants (GSEVEE)** shape the Greek VET system by advocating for workers' and SMEs' interests, developing tailored training programs, and conducting labour market research. Through their educational institutes, INE/GSEE and IME GSEVEE, they provide specialised courses, continuous professional development, and support lifelong learning initiatives. Their collaborative efforts with government bodies

³ Adamakou, M.; Niavis, S.; Kallioras, D.; Petrakos, G. Understanding the Regional Engagement of Universities from a Stakeholders' Perspective: The Case of the University of Thessaly, Greece. *Sustainability* 2021, 13, 10565. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su131910565>

⁴ Regional Directorate of Primary & Secondary Education of Thessaly, <https://pdede.sch.gr/>

and other stakeholders ensure that VET programs are responsive to market needs and help improve employability and business competitiveness.

The IAG system⁵

The Greek IAG system falls under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Welfare. The ministries are responsible for overseeing education policies, including the development and implementation of IAG services in schools and educational institutions. Administration and coordination of IAG happen through the activities of the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP). The EOPPEP's task is to foster the quality, efficiency and reliability of both lifelong learning and guidance services. It supports professionalisation of IAG services as well as networking between the relevant institutions and stakeholders on the regional and local level.

The Greek VET system presents several challenges for Information, Advice, and Guidance (IAG) services. These include the persisting perception of VET as less prestigious, the absence of dependable labour market information data, a lack of systematic synergy, collaboration and coordination among various guidance service providers, and stakeholders in the fields of education, training and employment. Furthermore, there has been shortcomings in the development and implementation of a national career guidance policy, and the absence of a proper institutional framework for the career guidance and counseling profession.⁶ Despite these challenges, IAG services in Greece provide individuals with comprehensive support and resources for making informed decisions regarding their education, training, and career paths. To this end, IAG is provided through different channels: First, it is integrated into the national education system, starting from secondary schools (in the form of school counsellors) through to higher education institutions (career liaison offices) and adult education centers (vocational education liaison offices or career development offices).

Second, Lifelong Learning Centers provide career guidance services to adults. They are staffed by trained guidance counsellors and advisors who provide one-on-one or group counselling sessions with the aim of deriving an individual plan for continuous VET and upskilling. These centers often maintain up-to-date resources on educational and vocational opportunities, scholarships, and employment trends. Several of them are administered by social partners and trade unions, such as the Information and Counseling Support Network for employees and unemployed of the

⁵ Cedefop (2023). *Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices - Greece*. CareersNet national records. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/inventory-lifelong-guidance-systems-and-practices-greece-0>

⁶ Kassotakis, M. (2017). Career counselling and guidance in Greece: past, present and future. In: Sultana, R.G. (Ed.). *Career guidance and livelihood planning across the Mediterranean: challenging transitions in South Europe and the MENA region*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, pp. 302-322.

Labour Institute (INE) and the Information Center for the Employed and Unemployed (KEPEA) operated by the Greek Workers' Confederation (GSEE).

Third, some organisations and initiatives cater to specific populations, such as youths (NEETs)⁷, individuals with disabilities⁸, migrants⁹ or older adults¹⁰, addressing their unique needs and challenges. These initiatives reflect a broader effort across Greece to provide tailored support and resources to vulnerable populations through specialised IAG services.

The Greek Manpower Employment Organization (OAED) delivers Information, Advice, and Guidance (IAG) services primarily to unemployed individuals, including youths, adults, and vulnerable groups such as long-term unemployed and individuals with disabilities. OAED's range of services encompasses job matching, vocational counseling, career guidance, and training programs designed to enhance employability and facilitate labour market integration. Special initiatives like the **Youth Guarantee** are provided for young people, as well as tailored support for other disadvantaged groups to help them secure job opportunities and access relevant vocational training.

In recent years several online career guidance portals have been launched in an attempt to improve the access level to career guidance services. For example, the e-STADIODROMIA Lifelong Career Development Portal, created by the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP) as the Euroguidance Centre of Greece, offers a wide range of resources and tools for career development. It provides extensive career information, planning resources, self-assessment activities, and digitised questionnaires to help individuals explore their interests, values, and decision-making skills. Additionally, it offers an e-

⁷ Unemployment in Greece has a strong age dimension, since it disproportionately affects young people (under 30) but also older people age (60 years or older), while it demonstrates one of the highest rates of NEETs in the EU-27 [...]. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/inventory-lifelong-guidance-systems-and-practices-greece-0#guidance-for-neet>

⁸ KESYs (Centres for Educational Support and Counselling) were transformed into Centers for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counseling, and Support (KEDASYs) with the introduction of Law 4823 in 2021. These centers have shifted their focus from providing general career guidance services to students (as per article 11) to focusing mainly on supporting disabled students. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/inventory-lifelong-guidance-systems-and-practices-greece-0#introduction>

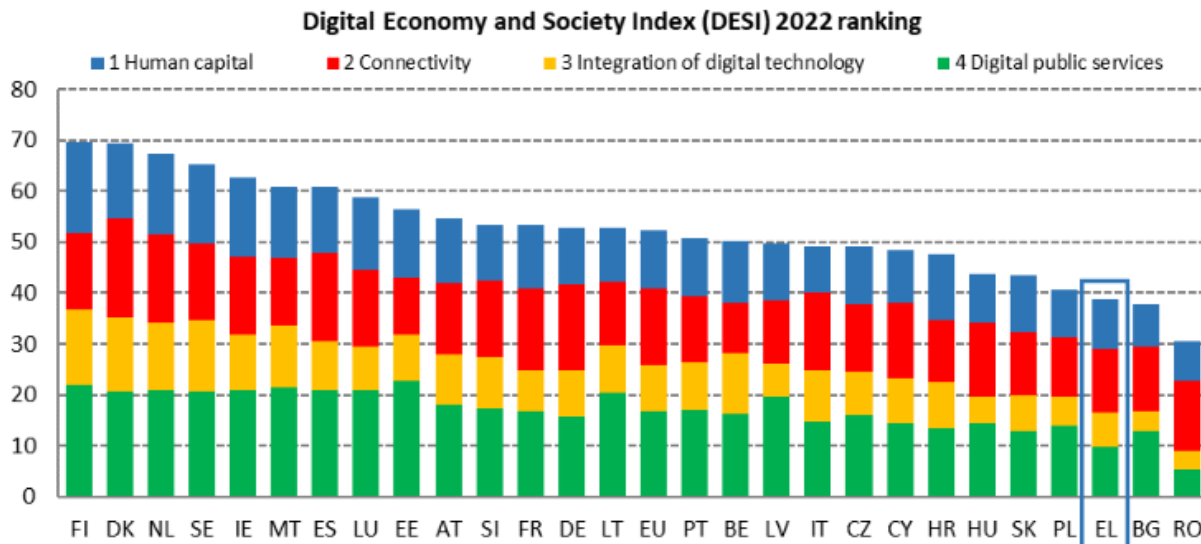
⁹ Migrant Integration Centers (M.I.C.) offer information, services, and career guidance to third-country nationals in order to promote social inclusion. They provide assistance with social integration, legal matters such as residence permits and refugee identification cards, as well as issues related to social networking. Additionally, they refer individuals to other relevant organizations, services, or agencies. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/inventory-lifelong-guidance-systems-and-practices-greece-0#guidance-for-immigrants>

¹⁰ A significant barrier to training for older adults is the limited availability of suitable options that cater to their specific needs. To improve services, the development and implementation of support mechanisms, including counseling procedures, mentoring services, and training programs specifically designed for older adults, have played a crucial role. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/inventory-lifelong-guidance-systems-and-practices-greece-0#guidance-for-older-adults>

portfolio development tool, which is also available in English, thematic information catalogues, useful links, and information on guidance services tailored to adults of all ages.¹¹

Digitalisation

In the 2022 Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI)¹², Greece holds the 25th position out of 27 EU Member States. Despite this ranking, Greece has shown significant progress in recent years compared to other EU countries, indicating a positive trend of catching up.



Source: Digital Economy and Society Index 2022 Greece

The country has made progress in basic digital skills, with 52% of the population having such skills, closely aligning with the EU average of 54%. In terms of connectivity, Greece has improved regarding Very High-Capacity Networks (VHCN) and 5G coverage. However, indicators such as a fixed broadband of at least 100 Mbps and 5G coverage remain below EU average. Regarding digital public services, there has been an increase in the number of active users of e-government services in Greece (69%), surpassing the EU average (65%). In the integration of digital technologies into business activities, Greece falls below the EU average, with only 39% of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) having a basic level of digital intensity compared to the EU average of 55%. However, 20% of SMEs in Greece engage in online sales, exceeding the EU average of 18%. At the core of improving the provision of digital public services is the single 'Gov.gr' portal, which operates as a single digital gateway and hosts more than 1,300 digital public services. In order to further foster digitalisation in public services, training programmes for civil servants are developed which enables them in using advanced technologies.

¹¹ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/inventory-lifelong-guidance-systems-and-practices-greece-0#guidance-for-older-adults>

¹² European Commission: Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2022 – Greece. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/digital-economy-and-society-index-desi-2022>

In July 2021, Greece enacted a digital strategy called the 'Digital Transformation Bible'¹³ which consists of a 5-year strategic plan for digital evolution across six pillars: connectivity, digital skills, digital state, digital business, digital innovation, and integration of digital technology in every sector of the economy. Implementation of the digital strategy is supported by the Greek recovery and resilience plan (RRP) and the Operational Programme for Digital Transformation for the 2021-2027 EU cohesion policy.¹⁴

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¹³ Hellenic Republic Government: Digital Transformation Bible 2020 – 2025. <https://digitalstrategy.gov.gr/en/>

¹⁴ <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/stories/s/Cohesion-policy-supporting-the-digital-transition-/vaxt-7rsr/>