

RESEARCH FOR A SUSTAINABLE IMPLEMENTATION OF APPRENTICESHIP AT LOCAL LEVEL

ABSTRACT

The global political-economic crisis and the rapid technological developments of recent years, have increased unemployment within the European Union (EU), while, there are regions and labour sectors in which labour demand and skill needs cannot be fulfilled. This imbalance between the available individual's competences and the needs of the labour market – called skill mismatch – has a negative impact on competitiveness and development of European economy, increases unemployment, exacerbate inequalities, undermines social inclusion and generates significant economic and social costs.

The response of European policy to the above problems is to invest in improving Education and Training (ET). ET has a key role to numerous EU strategies and initiatives, such as, the Europe 2020 Strategy, the Youth Employment initiative and the Digital Single Market initiative.

In the context of economic development and employment, the role of Vocational Education and Training (VET), in particular, is crucial. It is commonly accepted that VET systems, which have developed efficient quality assurance mechanisms and include work-based learning and apprenticeships, are able, in high level, to fight youth unemployment, skill mismatch and to facilitate transitions of young people to employment.

Greece, in an attempt to boost its economy, following the 2009 financial crisis, proceeded in 2013 in a reform of its VET system. One of the major reforms is the improvement of apprenticeship system. Apprenticeships have existed in Greece since 1952 under the competence of the Ministry of Labor, where the conventional apprenticeship scheme was through EPAS. In the 2013 reform of VET, apprenticeship provision was introduced as an option at post-secondary level through EPAL and vocational training institutes (IEK) that fall under the authority of the Ministry of Education. The implementation of this law had poor results. But in 2015, because of the *Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)*, which included a set of key measures to promote efficiency of VET in Greece, including apprenticeship, the apprenticeship system changed.

Regarding the apprenticeship scheme provided by EPAL, in early 2017 three small-scale pilot projects for apprenticeships were launched and in March of 2017 the first extended phase started. Apprenticeship through EPAL belongs to a unified apprenticeship system (EPAL, EPAS and IEK) and has quality framework and provision for the creation of a national coordinating body for the design and implementation of apprenticeship.

During the first and second phase of implementation we noticed that in our area, contrary to what was happening nationwide, in the majority of the specialties we witnessed a high interest by the labour market and lack of interest by the students to participate. Furthermore, it seems that companies' incentives vary across different sectors.

In our institutional role, as Directorate of Secondary Education of Chania, we are planning a research in local level with the objective both to explore ways to attract more students to the program and to identify motives and needs of the local market. The results will allow us to intervene, as far as it is possible, in order to maximize apprenticeship's benefits in our area and establish sustainable implementation of the program.