

# Transitioning from School to Workplace in Greece and Sweden: The challenges of Secondary and Post - Secondary Vocational Education and Training

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*For Professor Vasiliki Karavakou, in memoriam. Her spirituality, her dignity and her integrity of character will always be remembered.*

## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this research is to discuss the contributing factors at institutional level that affect school-to-work transition by comparing the Greek and Swedish Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems as offered in secondary and post-secondary education. We performed a qualitative research examination of both VET systems based on the literature and review of policy documents. All the collected data were analyzed using the method of content analysis. This paper gives an account of the two main factors that influence transition from VET to the labor market, namely the work relevance of educational content and the intervention of stakeholders. The results suggest that forms of work-based programming in educational structures act as a link between education and work in both VET systems. However, the role of stakeholders has to be empowered at the national level in Greece and at the local level in Sweden. Another conclusion is that both countries face the problem of a skills mismatch in terms of the needs of the labor market. This is reflected in a labor force that is over-qualified in the Greek case and in a generation shift in the Swedish case.

**Keywords:** VET in Greece, VET in Sweden, school-to-work transition

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## 1. Introduction

School-to-work transition is a key step towards labor market entry in all modern societies. Positive early work-life stages can have a good influence on later occupation prospects, in contrast to a poor start in the labor market (Barbieri et al., 2016). Certainly, interest in this problem has been sparked by an increase in under-employment<sup>2</sup> rates during the last few decades in many European countries (OECD, 2019a), providing new evidence on how post-modern society has evolved in recent years. According to Hartmut Rosa's theory, an effect of social acceleration is that conventional professional sequences fall apart, preventing people from getting a specific occupation even if they previously had access to this domain-specific knowledge. For this reason, everyone in post-modern society has to continuously upgrade their existing knowledge, skills and qualifications if they are to contribute actively to the national economy (Rosa, 2013).

Due to this complexity, the field of Lifelong Learning (LLL) and Vocational Education and Training (VET) is often considered the silver bullet in economic and social investment (Karavakou, 2018). However, the boundaries between LLL and VET are getting blurred, as the goal of every educational system is to upgrade people's life skills in order to act critically in every new social condition (Karavakou, 2011). The distinction between VET and LLL was adopted by the European Commission in its 2012 Communication, which distinguishes between general and vocational skills (European Commission, 2012). The defining criterion of vocational skills is that they are job-specific, while general skills are applicable in a wide range of contexts (Woessmann, 2018). This difference makes VET a multifarious educational activity because practical training and the learning of relevant theory are intertwined in order to prepare people for work in specific occupations (Lucas et al., 2012). Regarding VET, it is quite common to see it through the lens of initial VET (IVET) and continuing VET (CVET). The present paper critically examines only IVET because it is often more regulated than CVET. Nevertheless, the degree to which VET programs are organized varies substantially across countries. Since these distinctions can inevitably result in blurred lines, this review focuses on the types of institutions that provide VET at the secondary<sup>3</sup> and post-secondary<sup>4</sup> educational levels for young adults<sup>5</sup>, 25-34 year-olds. This selection was made based on two criteria. Firstly, VET in

most countries takes place at the secondary and post-secondary levels (Barbieri et al., 2016). Secondly, the unemployment rate is higher among 25-34 years-old (7%) than among older age groups (OECD, 2019b).

In the new social context, some young adults risk having a higher probability of experiencing nonlinear transition from education to working life (Masdonati et al., 2010). This observation stresses the need to better understand the new transition pathways and prevent chaotic transitions. Concurrently, governments are showing a willingness to adopt VET policies in order to improve the employability of their people. In fact, many comparativists, from Sadler to Cowen, have studied policy-borrowing in education (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014). Pursuing a comparative perspective, this paper explores VET system with data from two countries: Greece and Sweden. Sweden has been a reference point in this field for decades. It is known for the organization and the efficiency of its VET system. Thus it is used as a role model for other countries (Gougoulakis, 2012). In contrast to Sweden, VET in Greece remains a significant challenge for the national education system. Although reforming the VET system remains high on the Greek educational agenda, it is obvious that even the latest legislative action (Law 4336/2015) cannot by itself solve the persisting issues. Problems such as negative social stereotypes and restrictive dialogue with social partners create a vicious cycle at the expense of VET (Athanasouli et al., 2016).

Based on these observations, the aim of this study is to analyze the factors at institutional level which determine a smooth school-to-work transition for young adults in Greece and Sweden. In line with the purpose of this study, the following two research questions guided the present study: 1) What are the similarities and differences in the VET systems in the two countries? 2) How do VET providers in the two countries at the secondary and post-secondary levels promote a smooth transition from school to workplace? In order to frame these factors, we reviewed the relevant international literature on this topic to identify common themes and describe the initiatives of Greek and Swedish VET. This examines the related variables that influence school-to-work transition at the institutional level in Greece and Sweden. The present study provides an overall insight into the field of VET from the perspective of the two countries, both of which are members of the European Union (EU).

## 2. Literature background

Over the past few decades, school-to-work transition has become a flourishing research area. Internationally, there is an extensive literature on the factors influencing students' labor market entry after completing a VET program. The issue that is most often investigated by these studies is the variety of variables that determine the transition outcome. According to the existing literature, indicators can range from national to personal. For instance, Quintini and Martin (2014) show that school-to-work transitions tend to be longer in emerging economies than in developed economies. Moreover, Karmel (2017) finds that even if the general state of the labor market is the dominant factor in improving the transition outcomes, it remains true that the structure of education systems does make a difference. According to Hanushek et al. (2011) one effective way to achieve good school-to-work transition is to link students more closely to jobs through VET programs.

To keep this issue in context, our focus is on the literature essentially concerned with the institutional framework of VET. Hoeckel (2008) finds that factors can range from development and flexibility of the institutional framework to the work relevance of the education provided. A large body of research analyzes two main features of institutional framework. The first may be defined as the work relevance of education content. In this case, various studies suggest that work-based learning and apprenticeship programs contribute effectively to school-to-work transition (Van der Velden et al. 2001; Gangl, 2003; Lerman, 2009; Wolter & Ryan, 2011). More extensive analytic work across OECD countries has been conducted within the OECD<sup>6</sup>. Its review of Jobs for Youth notes that in countries with regulated labor markets, a dual system based on apprenticeship can secure a successful transition while in countries with a low-regulated labor market but without work-based training, transition is relatively smooth but many young people end up in inactivity (OECD, 2010). Despite the value attributed to apprenticeships, some studies reveal that they do not necessarily fulfill the interaction between schools and work (Hardy & Parent, 2003; Onstenk, 2010; Billet, 2010). As observed by Detmar and De Vries (2009) workplaces which are selected for apprenticeships are not necessarily selected because of the learning opportunities they offer.

The second feature may be defined as the intervention of the stakeholders of VET. The results of many studies conclude that intervention

should include all stakeholders of VET in order to foster successful school-to-work transition (Masdonati et al., 2010; Begu et al. 2017). The issue of the stakeholders' participation as a major factor for school-to-work transition has raised much concern in the EU. The final report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving emphasizes strong and continuous commitment by stakeholders at all educational levels as the most effective way to tackle the problem of early leavers from education and training (Flisi et al. 2015). As a matter of fact, Hoeckel (2008) shows that collaboration between different players involved in VET has to be strong, and social partners have to be admitted into the decision-making process. However, the picture seems to be fragmented in many countries (OECD, 2005). Stakeholders sometimes tend to operate with little coordination between educational institutions, employers and other work-based education opportunities (Versnel et al., 2011). Thus the role of stakeholders differs significantly between countries.

On the basis of these two key variables, a comparison of school-to-work transition in Greece and Sweden has, to the best of our knowledge, not been made. The strong contrasts in their approaches to educational issues reveal different forms of the VET system. A comparison between these two countries will hopefully increase our understanding of the factors that affect the transition from vocational education to working life in each country. As no previous study has compared this transition from secondary and post-secondary levels, the aim of this paper is to fill this gap.

### 3. Methods

"A Framework for Comparative Education Analysis", known also as the Bray and Thomas Cube, is applied in this paper as a methodological framework. The present paper uses the entire set of three dimensions of comparisons proposed by Bray and Thomas (Bray et al., 2007: 8). The first dimension is called "the geographic/locational level", the level of the chosen country, namely Greece and Sweden. The second dimension is called "aspects of education and society". The aspect considered here is education levels, and more specifically the secondary and post-secondary education levels. The third dimension pertaining to "nonlocational demographic groups" includes the populations of Greece and Sweden (Bray et al, 2007).

We performed a systematic examination of the literature with the aim of identifying and critically reviewing previous relevant research findings. The databases searched in this examination included those identified as relevant to VET. For this reason, search engines tried to cover research not only in electronic research databases on general education and VET and academic databases on VET topics but also in international organisations doing VET research. The databases used for literature research included ERIC, Taylor and Francis Online, OECD Library, Eurydice and Cedefop. We used the following key words: “Vocational Education and Training” or “VET plus ‘transition,’ ‘secondary’ and ‘post-secondary’ combined with the countries’ names. The search terms were modified to fit the search interface of each database. This resulted in approximately 1,572 sources. Since the search of the literature was limited to the specified keywords and databases, this literature may not include all the available sources.

A number of further criteria were specified to select appropriate studies for inclusion in the review. Inclusion of a study was based on three criteria: (a) how relevant it is to the topic, (b) whether it is written in English or Greek or Swedish, and (c) its date of publication, between January 2010 and April 2020. This last criterion was used in order to capture information that is as contemporary as possible; 83 papers met the inclusion criteria and were identified as relevant to the current review.

Additionally, we performed an analysis of policy documents at a national level. We focus on them to identify the extent to which each VET system affects the process of transition. An approach to the Greek and Swedish educational policies has been attempted through the use of official policy documents. These documents were obtained from the relevant government offices (GGDVM<sup>7</sup> and Skolverket<sup>8</sup>) in order to obtain information about the government’s commitments to what needs to be done in the field of VET. We consider that, collectively, they may generate further insight into VET development.

#### **4. The role of the Greek and Swedish VET systems in school-to-work transition**

The VET system is an important institutional characteristic that shapes the pattern of school-to-work transition (Barbieri et al., 2016). Indeed, a strong VET system will favor faster and better labor market entries. A

vast amount of literature suggests the positive influence of strong VET systems on less-academically-oriented students (Barbieri et al., 2016). For instance, VET school-leavers are partly trained to perform a specific occupation. As a result, employers can easily anticipate their productivity and training costs by looking at their curricula and rapidly completing their trial or training period. In contrast, an example of how a VET system can have a negative impact on school-to-work transition is the existence of VET programs that transmit narrow occupations or outdated knowledge (European Training Foundation, 2008). These programs provide a lack of possibilities for progression for people who follow them, from a labor market perspective.

In literature, the relationship between educational system and labor market success is well established (Bills, 2003). A number of variables related to the educational system can have important consequences for school-to-work transition (e.g. educational attainment, employment/unemployment rate, NEETs<sup>7</sup>, duration of unemployment). From the statistical standpoint, these variables are summarized in Table 1 (OECD, 2019b).

Looking retrospectively at the ways in which the two countries performed, some striking differences become evident. The only similarity refers to educational attainment, which could mean that young adults are highly educated in both countries. On average, a higher level of educational attainment tends to be associated with lower NEET rates (OECD, 2019b). However, the proportion of NEETs in Greece remains much higher than in Sweden. Of particular concern is the employment and unemployment rate, which shows a major difference between the two countries. This difference is also reflected in the duration of unemployment, which is longer for young Greek adults compared to their Swedish counterparts. This could be due to the different impacts of economic status on the employment rate. Sweden has been a country where economy tends to be stable and highly productive; its per capita gross national product is among the highest in the world (OECD, 2019d). In contrast, Greece faces a strong economic crisis as a result of pursuing a restrictive fiscal policy to prevent over-indebtedness and facilitate economic recovery (OECD, 2018). One of the main consequences may be related to the growth of unemployment. In this context, those who do not have the appropriate skills for the labor market when the unemployment rate is high tend to spend a significantly longer time finding a job.

**Table 1.** *VET providers in different educational level in Greece and Sweden*

Variable	Educational level	Greece	Sweden
<i>Young adults (aged 25-34)</i>			
1. Educational attainment	Below upper secondary	13%	17%
	Upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary	44%	34%
2. Employment rate	Below upper secondary	54%	66%
	Upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary	62%	85%
3. Unemployment rate	Below upper secondary	27%	17%
	Upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary	25%	5%
4. NEETs rate	-	14.1%	6.1%
5. Duration unemployment	Below upper secondary	74% 12 months or more	45% 3 months to less than 12 months
	Upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary	73% 12 months or more	45% 3 months to less than 12 months

Source: Compiled by the author

In this context, VET can play a crucial role in equipping young adults with the skills demanded in the labor market, ensuring better integration into work (OECD, 2019b). The fit between education and job can de-



pend on the relation between the acquired and the required skills (Szydlik, 2002). Owing to rapid economic and technological change, skills mismatch has become a prime concern for policy makers in many European countries. The problems reflected in the labor force are over-qualification in the case of Greece and a generation shift in Sweden. Greece has one of the highest rates of over-qualified native-born workers (32%) while Sweden has one of the lowest (11%) (OECD, 2017). However, Sweden is expecting a generation shift in the labor market, with expected retirements resulting in labor force stagnation or decline (Israelsson et al., 2017). Therefore, the reform of the VET system can play a key role in preventing skills gaps from being entrenched in both countries.

To get a better understanding of the role of a national VET system in school-to-work transition, it is necessary to detect the external determinants in which it is embedded (Wolhuter, 2002). Table 2 shows the national differences between Greece and Sweden in four areas of external determinants: the level of the welfare state, the funding level, the political level and the governance level.

**Table 2** *Comparison of common determinants between Greece and Sweden*

Determinants	Greece	Sweden
1. Welfare state	free of charge and a wide range of VET programs	free of charge and a wide range of VET programs
2. Funding level	dependent on European funds	dependent on national resources
3. Policy level	political instability	political stability
4. Governance level	Centralized	Decentralized

Source: Compiled by the author

The main difference between the two countries is the governance level. The Swedish VET system could be characterized as politically decentralized compared to the Greek VET system. This means that both governments are responsible for setting the nationwide VET goals. Ho-

wever, the Swedish state's role is minimized by design; responsibilities are delegated to local actors, who are accountable for the outcomes within their area of responsibility (Lundahl & Olofsson, 2014). This difference can be highly influential in shaping school-to-work transitions. Countries with the sub-protective transition regime model, like Greece, are often characterized by national framework standards, prolonged periods of job search and a long waiting-list phase during which people depend on their families for support (Schoon & Bymeer, 2019). In contrast, in countries with the universalistic transition regime, like Sweden, the transition to employment is usually facilitated by identifying individual learning plans and providing equal employment opportunities, which are typified by an extended public sector (Schoon & Bymeer, 2019).

In sum, both VET systems seem to face challenges in responding to changing demands for skills in the labor market, which moves the focus of the approach that each country adopts to facilitate school-to-work transition. According to Hanushek et al. (2011) countries tend to differ fundamentally in their focus on job transition. For this reason, the next section takes a closer look at the secondary and post-secondary VET systems in Greece and Sweden and how they influence estimates of the employment trajectory.

## **5. Findings regarding the factors affecting the transition from school to workplace in the secondary and post-secondary Greek and Swedish VET system**

As Brunetti and Corsini, (2019) state, the actual structure of a VET system may be one of the factors affecting labor market outcomes. Nevertheless, it is complicated to compare the VET systems in two countries because their institutional structures may be quite different (Schoon and Bymeer, 2019). Data presented in Table 3 summarize the types of VET providers offered at different educational levels in Greece and Sweden for young adults (GGDVM<sup>8</sup>, 2013; Skolverket, 2018).

These data can lead us to an assumption about the plurality in VET providers, mostly at post-secondary level, in both countries. The factors associated with this variation cannot easily be explained but it may be due to the different characteristics and outcomes of the VET providers. However,, this plurality could reflect the fact that both VET systems are

**Table 3.** *VET providers in different educational level in Greece and Sweden*

Country	Greece	Sweden
<i>VET providers at every educational level:</i>		
<b>1. Secondary</b>	Second Chance Schools (SCSs)	There is no vocational education at secondary school (Junior High School, grade 7-9)
<b>2. Upper-secondary</b>	Evening Schools (ESs)	Upper secondary schools offer today 18 national programs, of which 12 are vocational programs that provide a foundation for working life and further vocational education. (In 2014, the share of beginners in the 18 vocational programs was 26%). <hr/> Vocational Education at Upper-secondary level for adults Gymnasial vuxenutbildning (Gymnasievux)
	Vocational Training Schools (EPAS)	
<b>3. Post-secondary</b>	Initial Vocational Training Institutions (DIEK)	Yrkeshögskolan (Yh)

Source: Compiled by the author

given the task of providing more educational routes to support employment opportunities. Based on statistics, those with VET qualifications have better opportunities to find a job than those with a general education (CEDEFOP, 2014). Nonetheless, the participation rate in VET remains low in the countries examined. Based on the UNESCO<sup>10</sup> (2017) report, the participation of Greek students in VET tends to be lower than that of Swedish students. However, there have been opposite trends in both countries. The participation rate in VET has increased in Greece while it

has decreased in Sweden. To deal with this decreasing trend, the Social Democratic Swedish Government recently announced its intention to amend the law so that the upper-secondary VET programs will give eligibility for higher education (Gougoulakis & Moreno Herrera, 2018). The results of the UNESCO (2017) report show that achieving a high participation in VET remains a challenge for many countries, including Greece and Sweden. In this context, both governments have to try to make the VET profile more attractive. On the one hand, Greece deals with negative stereotypes for VET, such as low educational attainments, predominance of male trainees and restrictive opportunities for improvement of their social and professional status (Paidousi, 2016; Valkanos et al., 2013). On the other hand, participation in Sweden remains low due to low company participation, low involvement of social partners and quality shortcomings in providing work-based learning such as teachers failing to visit their students during work placement, unclear assessment criteria of the students in workplace-based learning and dissatisfied supervisors at the workplace (Gougoulakis & Moreno Herrera, 2018; Kuczera & Jeon, 2019).

Owing to the limitations of this paper, an analysis of all the factors affecting the transition from school to workplace in the secondary and post-secondary Greek and Swedish VET systems would undoubtedly be impossible. For this reason, the focus in the present paper lies only on two main relative common characteristics at the institutional level: 1) the work relevance of the educational content and 2) the intervention of stakeholders. As already mentioned, these main factors represent distinct policy choices at the institutional level that can affect labor market outcomes.

An important feature of school initiatives is the amount of work-based programming, which is a key condition for a smooth school-to-work transition. Although there is no vocational education at secondary school level, SCSs in Greece and Grundvux in Sweden stand out as offering adults a second chance to complete their compulsory education in order to get a job. Although only theoretical subjects are included in these structures, they promote the development of the students' social skills through a holistic approach of knowledge, providing them with the basic skills and knowledge needed in the labor market. At upper-secondary level, there are ESs and EPASs in Greece and Gymnasievux in Sweden. All these institutional structures are equivalent to upper-

secondary education school and their curricula include the integration of theoretical subjects and vocational subjects (except for EPAS, which has only vocational studies). Nevertheless, they have features that seem to differ. ESs are designed for working students, so they take place between 18.00 and 23.00 (CEDEFOP, 2014). EPAS provides a two-year study cycle, which is spent at school (1 morning class and 4 evening classes a week) and in a workplace (4-5 days) (CEDEFOP, 2014). In Gymnasievux, the scope of courses is defined by credits enabling students to combine different courses in program specialisations (Skolverket, 2016). Both governments have established VET systems that pay attention to work-based learning and safeguard the supply of skills for companies. In the same framework there are DIEKs in Greece and Yhs in Sweden at post-secondary educational level which are also vocationally oriented. Both structures give priority to work placement with a large part of the studies combining theory with practice (GGDVM, 2013; Skolverket 2018). Regarding the educational content, there is a main difference between DIEK<sup>11</sup> and Yh<sup>12</sup> in relation to the planning of their programs. In the Swedish case, employers and industry contribute to the program content by taking part as lecturers, joining in projects and offering work placements (Skolverket 2018). In contrast, the Greek industry does not play a significant role in the planning of DIEK's programs. Moreover, after graduation from a post-secondary VET program, Swedish students go straight into employment whereas Greek student have to take the examinations for VET certification on a nation-wide level (GGDVM, 2013; Skolverket 2018).

Another special variant of work-based training is the apprenticeship training program, which takes place at upper-secondary and post-secondary educational levels in Greece and Sweden. This program often combines training at a company, in the form of employment with theoretical training (GGDVM, 2013; Skolverket 2018). Although students preserve their student status during apprenticeship, they receive a "salary" as an extra incentive (GGDVM, 2013; Skolverket 2018). Nevertheless, the Greek and Swedish VET systems differ in their implementation of the apprenticeship system. In Greece the company takes the main responsibility for the student's time and training within the company, whereas in Sweden responsibility is divided between school and company (GGDVM, 2013; Skolverket 2018). Over the past few decades, a number of surveys have been conducted that analyzed the benefits of

apprenticeship to reinforce the connection with the labor market. The Greek and Swedish governments try to promote apprenticeship path by introducing policy reforms. In Greece the latest 2013-16 policy seems to have increased participation in apprenticeship but it has also created challenges for government, VET providers and companies (CEDEFOP, 2018). In Sweden, despite government initiatives, such as grants support for employers and VET providers, this interest is not reflected in the number of participants, which remains low (Kuczera & Jeon, 2019).

The second salient factor relates to the intervention of stakeholders in VET system to foster successful school-to-work transitions. The participation of social partners in the process of decision-making for VET happens at a national level in Greece but at both national and local levels in Sweden (OECD, 2019c). This form of governance is reflected in the participation of social partners. In Greece, the decision for workplace learning and apprenticeship is usually made by the Minister of Education, without previous consultation with social partners (Zafiris & Manavi, 2017). In contrast, the situation in Sweden seems to have improved slightly regarding the social partners' engagement in VET at the national level but their involvement at the local level has to be increased (Kuczera & Jeon, 2019).

In order to strengthen the relationship between vocational education with training and the direct connection with employment, both countries organize councils at the national (Greece) and local level (Sweden). These councils usually include representatives from trade unions, employer organisations and education systems (Peters et al., 2010). One example in Greece is the Employment Observatory Research Informatics S.A (Paratiritirio Apasxolisis Erevnitiki) and for Sweden the Labor Market Council (Arbetsmarknadsråd). The most notable difference is that Sweden seems to give each stakeholder a more active role compared to Greece (Peters et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, various challenges have emerged for both countries that affect school-to-work transition. In Greece, phenomena such as weak trust in the political elite, bureaucracy and dominance of clientelism undermined the dynamics of cooperation between institutions, social partners and businesses (Zafiris & Manavi, 2017). In Sweden, there is much variation in the quality of local partnership and the opportunities for a smooth transition to working life remain unequal among regions. (Kuczera & Jeon, 2019).

To summarize, reviewing the factors affecting the transition from school to workplace in the secondary and post-secondary Greek and Swedish VET systems makes it clear that there are considerable variations between the two systems. However, the trend towards fragmented school-to-work transition is observed in both countries. Therefore, it is crucial to adapt secondary and post-secondary VET systems to meet specific skills requirements in response to labor shortages.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusions

This study attempts to discuss the contributing factors at institutional level that affect school-to-work transition by comparing the Greek and Swedish VET systems offered in secondary and post-secondary education. In this framework, we defined the formal aspects of each national VET system through the role of the institutions in providing the work relevance of the educational content and in developing relations with their stakeholders. The interaction of these variables can affect a smooth school-to-work transition.

The analysis of the data showed that VET has been promoted largely by government policies in Greece and Sweden to improve school-to-work transition. As expected, each nation has developed a secondary and post-secondary VET system with a different focus on school-to-work transition. These differing perspectives exist in three areas: the funding level, the political level and the governance level. The governance level is the most salient distinction, because it can be highly influential in shaping school-to-work transition. The management of the VET system is highly de-centralized in Sweden compared to Greece. Doubts could be expressed about both types of administration. The sub-protective transition regime model is more common in southern Europe and is broadly related to centrally standardized, non-selective and comprehensively structured education systems. As Schoon and Bynner (2019) suggest, the sub-protective transition regime could contribute to a seamless link between education, trainees' needs and the labor market, resulting in reduced transitions. In contrast, the universalistic transition regime model of the Nordic countries is based on assumptions about the importance of collective welfare and is characterized by a comprehensive and inclusive education system, with many diversified educational routes. Is-

raelsson et al. (2017) support the theory that the universalistic transition regime could strengthen competition between educational structures, going as far as commercialization (Lundahl & Olofsson. 2014).

Despite these differing perspectives between the Greek and the Swedish VET systems, both countries deal with the problem of skills mismatch. Notably, the forecasting of future needed skills is performed more actively in Sweden compared to Greece. The government agency Statistics Sweden shows a generation shift in the Swedish labor market with large-scale retirement of elderly skilled professionals, which can gradually create more job openings in the market than those that the system was supposed to fill (Israelsson et al., 2017). Meanwhile, the Ministry of Labor, Social Security and Welfare, because it is at an initial stage of development, cannot provide a complete feedback loop to policy-makers, while the Greek labor market deals with over-qualification (Skills Panorama, 2017). Therefore, the VET systems in both countries need to be reformed if they are to play a leading role in ensuring a balance between the skills required at work and the skills that the trainee has.

The reason for the need of this reform can be explained by exploring the factors that impinge on the process of school-to-work transition at the institutional level. These factors seem to be related to the work relevance of the educational content and the intervention of stakeholders. Based on the findings, it is clear that these factors vary considerably between the countries examined. Both countries face challenges in the school-to-work transition. In Greece, the problems are often blamed on an inflexible training content that is not aligned with labor market needs (CEDEFOP, 2018), whereas in Sweden, even though there is a strong trend to provide a flexible educational content, there is a widespread view that VET is heavily driven by student preferences and not by real labor market needs (Lundahl & Olofsson. 2014). Nevertheless, our findings conclude that both countries promote vocational orientation as a way to facilitate young adults' transition from school to working life by providing work-relevant subjects at the secondary educational level and apprenticeship training and workplace-related training at the post-secondary level.

Regarding the intervention of stakeholders, the need for more active involvement by the social partners in the decision-making process is evident in both countries, but on different grounds. For example, the role of VET providers in decision-making can range from a purely advisory role



in Greece to full decision-making powers in Sweden. Generally speaking, the involvement of stakeholders in Sweden tends to be more active compared to Greece. In addition, in Sweden the stakeholders participate at both national and local levels, whereas the social partners' involvement is limited to the national level in Greece. This is apparent in the low participation of companies which provide apprenticeship training (Kuczera & Jeon, 2019). In Greece, collaboration between the various stakeholders involved in VET is weak. No clear definition of the responsibilities of the relevant institutions and labor market actors leads to the poor participation of companies due to lack of information and incentives (CEDEFOP, 2018). Even though councils with the relevant stakeholders take place in both countries, the need to explore a more active cross-sector dialogue is considered imperative to foster successful school-to-work transition. Cooperation between education and the world of work could be a permanent platform for dialogue on the quality, content and organization of VET. By taking this cooperation into consideration, the Swedish government authority seems to give approval to all VET programs that are compiled in response to industry's needs.

In summary, our research shows that each country develops a VET system in its own way. Therefore, the factors work relevance of educational content and the intervention of stakeholders seem to play an essential role during school-to-work transition in both Greece and Sweden. Thus, even if Sweden can be used as a reference point for VET, the efforts that Greece has made during the last few decades should not be underestimated. It is vital to underline that the purpose of an international comparative study such as this is not to find a role model that fits everyone (Tate, 2012 in Marshall, 2014). On the contrary, it functions as a way to interpret the world through individual paths and to change it for the better (Cowen & Kazamias, 2009).

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## Endnotes

1. This research was conducted during my master studies at Stockholm University (MA International and Comparative Education) within Erasmus+ Program.
2. The term under-employment refers to workers who are employed in jobs that require lower qualifications or skills than they possess (OECD, 2019b).
3. Secondary VET it is offered to people who do not have the opportunity to complete the years of compulsory education (OECD, 2019b).
4. Post-secondary VET is offered to people who want to broaden rather than deepen the knowledge, skills and competencies gained in upper secondary level (OECD, 2019b).
5. Young adults refer to 25-34 year-olds (OECD, 2019b).
6. OECD is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
7. NEETs are people neither in employment nor in education and training.
8. GGDVM is the General Secretary of Life Long Learning in Greece.
9. Skolverket is the National Agency for Education in Sweden.
10. UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
11. DIEK is a post-secondary form of education that runs for 2 years and participants have to attend theoretical, practical and combined subjects (more information available at: <http://www.gsae.edu.gr/el/epaggelmatiki-katartisi/i-e-k-institoyta-epaggelmatikis-katartisis/mathe-gia-ta-institoyta-epaggelmatikis-katartisis>) (in Greek).
12. Yh is a post-secondary form of education that combines theoretical and practical studies in close cooperation with industry. Most programs are between 1-2 years in duration (more information available at: <https://www.yrkeshogskolan.se/in-english/>).

## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

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Σκοπός της παρούσας έρευνας είναι να διερευνήσει τους θεσμικούς παράγοντες που επιδρούν στην μετάβαση από την εκπαίδευση στην αγορά εργασίας μέσα από τη σύγκριση των ελληνικών και των σουηδικών συστημάτων Επαγγελματικής Εκπαίδευσης και Κατάρτισης (EEK) σε δευτεροβάθμιο και μετα-δευτεροβάθμιο επίπεδο. Για τη μελέτη των δύο συστημάτων EEK πραγματοποιήθηκε ποιοτική έρευνα, με τη χρήση δεδομένων βασισμένων σε ανασκόπηση βιβλιογραφίας και πολιτικών εγγράφων. Για την ανάλυση όλων των δεδομένων που συλλέχθηκαν εφαρμόζεται η μέθοδος ανάλυσης περιεχομένου. Η έρευνα περιγράφει δύο βασικούς παράγοντες που επιδρούν στη μετάβαση από την εκπαίδευση στην αγορά εργασίας, συγκεκριμένα τη συνάφεια του εκπαιδευτικού περιεχομένου με την εργασία και τη συμμετοχή των εμπλεκόμενων φορέων. Τα αποτελέ-

σματα δείχνουν ότι και στα δύο συστήματα ΕΕΚ υπάρχει η παρουσία εκπαιδευτικών προγραμμάτων για τη σύνδεση εκπαίδευσης και αγοράς εργασίας. Παρόλα αυτά, ο ρόλος των εμπλεκόμενων φορέων χρειάζεται να ενισχυθεί σε εθνικό επίπεδο στην Ελλάδα και σε τοπικό επίπεδο στη Σουηδία. Ένα άλλο συμπέρασμα είναι ότι οι δύο χώρες αντιμετωπίζουν αναντιστοιχία δεξιοτήτων με τις ανάγκες της αγοράς. Αυτό είναι αποτυπωμένο στο εργατικό δυναμικό ως υπερβολικά προσόντα για την περίπτωση της Ελλάδας και ως γενεαλογική μεταβολή για την περίπτωση της Σουηδίας.

**Λέξεις κλειδιά:** ΕΕΚ στην Ελλάδα, ΕΕΚ στη Σουηδία, μετάβαση από την εκπαίδευση στην αγορά εργασίας

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