

EVA Skills:

“Evaluating the soft skills of unemployed youth”

## **Need Analysis Report (IO1)**

National Version – GREECE



**Erasmus+**

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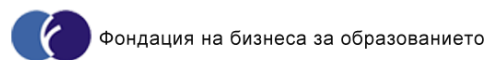
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Development, Greece



Fundatia Professional, Romania



Folkuniversitetet, Sweden



k.o.s GmbH, Germany



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Soft skills are recognized globally as being critical to success in life in general for all individuals. Unfortunately, there are many persons who do not develop these skills to their fullest potential. Educators, however, believe that the teaching of soft skills is an essential component of the development of a young person and these persons should be given the chance to explore their competences.

Nowadays the working environment for a young person is very hostile due to economic crisis. The vocation, education and training system has shown that is highly developed, but with gaps as regards the development of soft skills.

On the other hand, the companies and, in general, the employers demand high quality performance by the working force. This means that VET system is capable to support this venture.

At the following sections there is extensive analysis in matters such as the soft skills and their importance in Greece, the Greek VET system and statistics about youth employment and unemployment in Greece.

The last section includes the primary research in Greek VET trainers and employers about the soft skills.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. SOFT Skills

#### 2.1.1. The importance of soft skills in Greece – The situation

According to the Eurostat latest figures, unemployment in the European Union is at its highest rate in the last decade, with a rate of 9.8% (February 2008). It is important to note, however, that for individuals under the age of 25 the rate of unemployment is as high as double this percentage. In February of 2015, the youth unemployment rate was 22,9% in the Euro Area, while Greece had reached its highest percentage to date with 51,2% (December 2014). These statistics provide a clear picture of the situation in Greece and the need for youth to remain competitive and employable.

Non-formal and informal education had gained great interest and significance over the years, and particularly nowadays. However, competence assessment still at its initial stage in Greece, even though the recognition and validation of competences, such as soft skills, are of particular importance for individuals throughout the country as they are key factors in increasing and enhancing the overall competitiveness of the Greek economy.

In conclusion, the validation of non-formal and informal learning and the assessment of soft skills through the development of a system based on standards is still far from operational reality for the national policy agenda in Greece. The national legal/institutional framework to regulate procedures for the accreditation and recognition of qualifications through prior learning or work experience has not yet been finalized.

#### 2.1.2. The degree of integration of soft skills in the educational system of Greece

The importance of soft skills for enhancing employability, personal fulfilment and social participation is widely accepted. In Greece, the educational institutions have accepted that they should prepare their students for a complex and uncertain society and labour market. While they appear to have accepted their new vocational role, there is considerable confusion over how generic competencies, soft skills, attributes or capabilities should be defined and implemented.

### 2.2. VET system

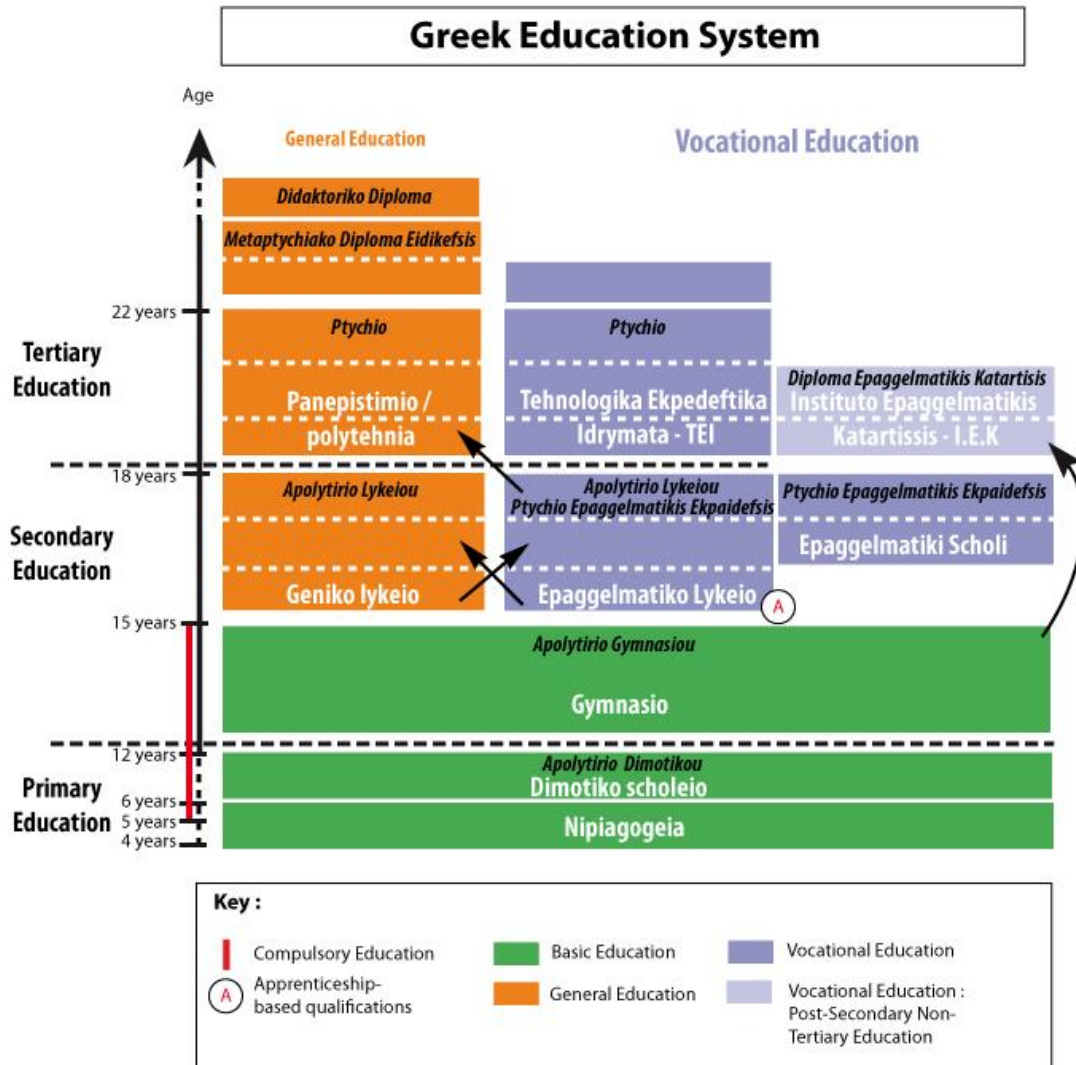
#### 2.2.1. General observations concerning vocational education and training in Greece

Education in Greece is separated into 3 stages:

- Primary

- Secondary
- Tertiary

Post-secondary initial vocational training, which leads to the receipt of a certificate, is not considered a part of the formal education system. The Greek educational system can be summed up in the following figure.



The Greek state is encouraging individuals to enroll in vocational education and training through a series of incentives that are addressed to individuals, businesses and VET providers.

The primary incentives used to encourage individuals to enroll into vocational education and training are regularity and financial. Public VET is free and upon successful completion provides certificates to its graduates on the specific specialty/field, thus enabling the individual to access the specific sector for employment. Graduates of 12-month apprenticeships who pass their examination can even receive a level 4 certification (higher education).

Other incentives include the updating of one's knowledge, skills and competence by:

- Linking non-formal education programmes to the formal education system through accredited modular programmes

- Granting education leave for participation in LLL programmes
- Setting up personal education accounts, with contributions from the employer and employee
- Establishing personal learning time accounts to let workers take part in such training programmes

Finally, many companies even receive financial incentives to offer training places to students in or graduates of VET programmes. They can thus contribute to the education and training of trainees.

### 2.2.2. Description of VET within the Greek education system

Greece has a strong Vocation, Education and Training System. For this reason there is high level of participation in education. Specifically, more than 30% of people between ages of 30 to 34 had tertiary level qualifications (in 2012). Furthermore the percentage of young people leaving education and training early has decreased since 2006. For this reason, the early leaving rate in Greece (11.4%) is below the European average (12.7%) and even above the target that is set for 2020.

Table 5. Early school leaving rates, 2006-12

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
EU-28	15.4	14.9	14.7	14.2	13.9	13.4	12.7(*)
Greece	15.5	14.6	14.8	14.5	13.7	13.1	11.4

(\*) Interim data.

Source: Eurostat, website database, 2013.

In terms of lifelong learning, there was a 2.4% rate of participation in 2011. The European average was at 8.9%. The rate of participation in education activities of people with tertiary education was 31.8% (double than those with a secondary education and eight times higher than those with only a primary education).

The Greek public has always shown a great demand for general education and university degrees. Vocational education and training in the past only had minimal interest for young people. The same applies still today. Even the Greek government is trying to promote VET as an option of equal standing. Most young person prefers the general upper secondary education, which gives access to university studies (approximately 75%).

The Vocational education still remains the second choice for most parents and children. It tends to attract individuals with low performance or who belong to lower economic brackets. These statistics also tend to reinforce negative stereotypes at the expense of vocational education and training. VET early leaving rates is also quite high – more than 20.3% for Greece as a whole, compared to 3.3% early leaving from the unified lyceum. High regional differences exist, with highest early leaving rates observed in Crete, Epirus and Central Macedonia and lowest in the Ionian Islands. The main reasons for early leaving in VET are seen to be low social/economic/educational level.

Eight (8) out of ten (10) individuals that opt for VET choose vocational upper secondary school, with only two (2) out of ten (10) choosing an apprenticeship school. According to new legislation, which aims to attract more individuals to VET, the following options are provided in addition to upper secondary school:

- Initial vocational education within the formal education system in the second cycle of secondary education at a vocational upper secondary school (day or evening classes)
- Initial vocational training outside the formal education system (also known as non-formal) in vocational training schools, vocational training institutes and centers for lifelong learning and colleges.
- Vocational education and training for special groups
- OEAD apprenticeship programmes

In addition to the aforementioned below are a few more examples (non-exhaustive list) of vocational education and training provided in Greece:

- A large number of enterprises also provide systematic organized training programmes for their employees (in-house training), primarily through seminars and accelerated programmes.
- Social partners implement training programmes for their members and for other groups of citizens (European Social Fund)
- GSEE implements VET aimed at workers in the private sector, unemployed individuals and union officials.
- The Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen and Merchants (GSEVEE) implements training and retraining programmes in the fields of environmental management, tourism, technical vocations etc.

Lately, the Greek government made reforms promoting the lifelong learning. Lifelong learning takes into account different types of learning that an individual undertakes throughout his life, with the aim of gaining new knowledge, skills and competences and/or updating existing competencies. It is a relatively new policy priority in Greece and is embedded in the growth model of the country. The Hellenic Qualifications Framework is developed to serve this purpose and to align with the EQF.

The National Network of Lifelong Learning (NNLL) has been launched in the learning areas of:

- Initial vocational education and training (IVET)
- Continuing vocational education and training (CVET)
- General adult education

The network supports cooperation in operations as follows:

- ✓ Diagnosis of adult education and training needs in response to labour market needs and social growth,
- ✓ Provision of lifelong learning guidance and counselling services,
- ✓ Accreditation of providers, trainers, occupational profiles and non-formal education curricula,



- ✓ Recognition of occupational qualifications and certification of knowledge, skills and competences,
- ✓ Recognition of professional rights in equivalence to occupational qualifications,
- ✓ Information, dissemination and communication.

The LLL policy and activities are implemented by a number of different actors, including:

1. General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning (GSLL)
2. Regional LLL department units (Attica, Central Greece, Central Macedonia, East Macedonia and Thrace, Western Greece, Western Macedonia, Epirus, Thessaly, Ionian Islands, Crete, Peloponnese)
3. Municipal LLL department units (Athens, Thessaloniki)
4. National Organization for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP)
5. National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government (EKDDA)

### **2.2.3. Diagnosing the skills needed by the labor market**

There is a general recognition of the importance of "soft skills" in improving the productivity of the workforce, but there is still quite a degree of ambiguity in defining their boundaries. In general, soft skills are seen as people-oriented skills and self-management skills. There are a number of soft skills generally demanded by enterprises. Highly required are the following:

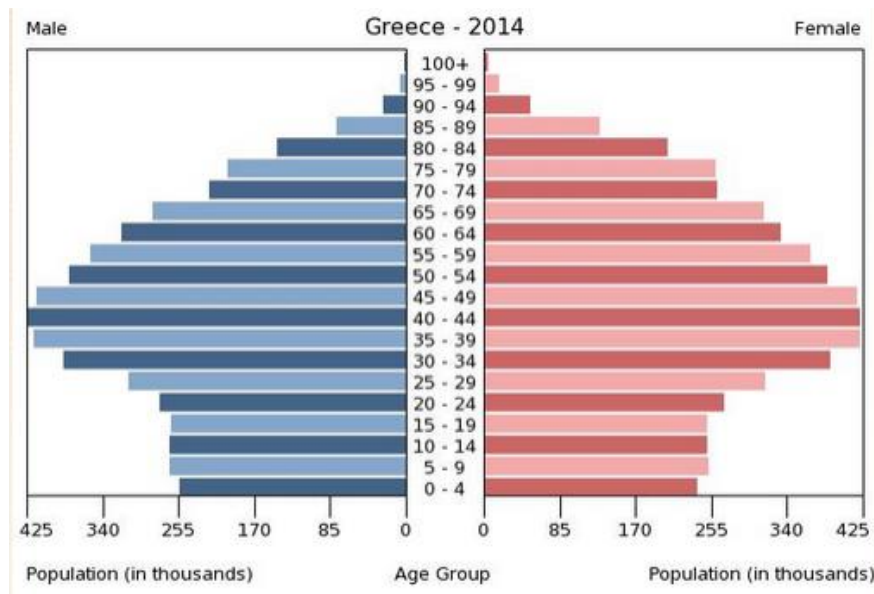
- ✓ Communication skills
- ✓ Influencing and negotiating skills
- ✓ Assertiveness and diplomacy skills
- ✓ Leadership skills
- ✓ Supervisory skills
- ✓ Problem solving skills
- ✓ Team-working skills
- ✓ Conflict resolution skills
- ✓ Flexibility
- ✓ Coaching, counseling and mentoring skills
- ✓ Creativity

In conclusion, the growth in employment in the services sector, both in Greece and internationally, has also resulted in an increasing need for soft skills as, traditionally, soft skills have been core to the success of this sector. The increasing emphasis on customer care has further emphasized this.

## 2.3. YOUTH

### 2.3.1. Youth Demographics

According to the most recent census, the largest age population group currently in Greece, which makes up more than 40% of the entire population, is the age group between 25-54 years of age. Individuals between the ages of 15-24 make up 9.8% of the overall population.



Source: CIA World Factbook (15/04/2015)

### 2.3.2. Levels of Unemployment

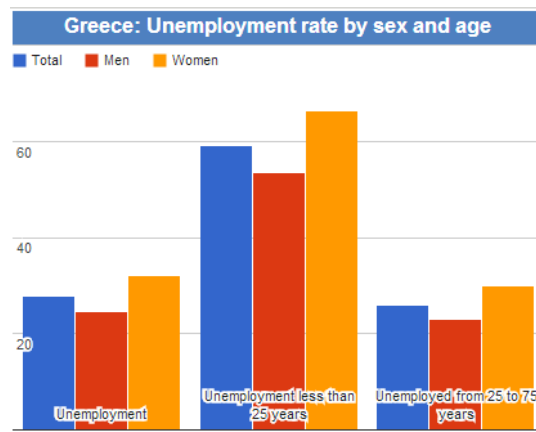
It is widely known that Greece is facing an acute economic crisis, with over 40% of young Greeks currently being unemployed, according to the latest figures from Greece's labour force survey.

The unemployment rate in April 2013 for individuals between the ages of 15-24 was more than 43%, compared to the national rate of unemployment at 15.8%. Youth unemployment, as it can be observed has risen sharply, sharper than any other national rate since 2006.

The total number of employed individuals in October 2013 amounted to a total of 3.579.779, which was a decrease of 94.531 individuals compared to the same month in 2012 (-2.6 percent).

The number of total unemployed persons amounted to 1.387.520, while the total number of inactive persons even reached 3.360.513 in total. The level of unemployment thus increased by 6.6 percent from the previous year.

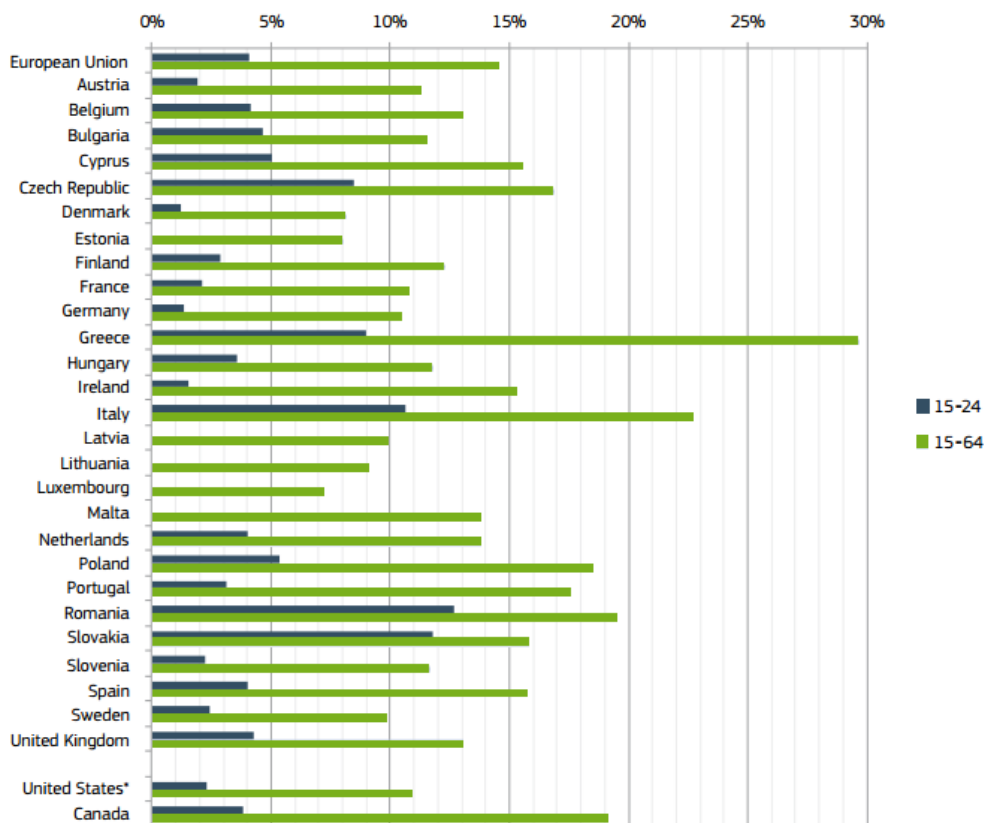
The figure below presents the situation of unemployment in Greece according to different age groups. The problems faced by youth are highly visible and quite disturbing.



### 2.3.3. Youth Employment Statistics

According to the OECD "Policy Brief on Youth Entrepreneurship – Entrepreneurship Activities in Europe" the total number and proportion of young individuals that are self-employed varies largely between different countries. This may mean that there are different barriers or opportunities in different countries. Those countries that show high levels of self-employment may provide with more opportunities and therefore give a bigger "push" into self-employment.

Figure 2: Self-employment rates by country and age, 2010



Note: Data for the US cover those aged 16-24 and are for 2009.  
 Source: Data for European Union Member States and European Average from Eurostat, "Labour Force Survey" (Data for 15-24 age group are not available for Estonia, Latvia, Luxembourg and Malta); Data for the United States from the Bureau of Labour Statistics, "Labour Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey"; and Data for Canada from Statistics Canada, "Labour Force Survey".

Greece, as observed above, has been particularly struck by the economic crisis and by youth unemployment. The participation of youth in the labour force has generally been low over the years, with larger age groups comprising the largest part of the labour market. The country, however, has taken different measures so as to alleviate these problems. There are national employment policy programmes (EU structural funds, the Equal Community Initiative etc.) and measures, such as vocational training, that are targeted to youth and to those in remote areas.

In addition, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security has developed an Action Plan aimed at enhancing youth employment and youth entrepreneurship. The Action Plan is aimed towards the implementation of specific policies and measures, which are primarily targeted to youth in two specific age groups: 15-24 and 25-35 years of age. The Action Plan will particularly place emphasis on the creation of job opportunities, enhancement of vocational education and training, adoption of school-to-work programmes, vocational and entrepreneurship guidance and the provision of support for youth entrepreneurship focusing on new products and services, as well sectors (*Youth Unemployment in Greece*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, November 2012).

### 3. PRIMARY RESEARCH

#### 3.1. Questionnaire for VET Trainers

##### 3.1.1. Cooperation on soft skills

1. How are your members working to promote soft skills among VET students?

The given answers are summarized at this: Mainly through experiential education, discussions, interviews, esteem exercises and holistic approach that involves integrating the development of skills, knowledge, values and attitudes.

2. Are you aware of good examples of how VET providers and enterprises collaborate on promoting soft skills and competences?

Almost all VET trainers did not know any examples of collaboration.

##### 3.1.2. The Soft Skills Gap

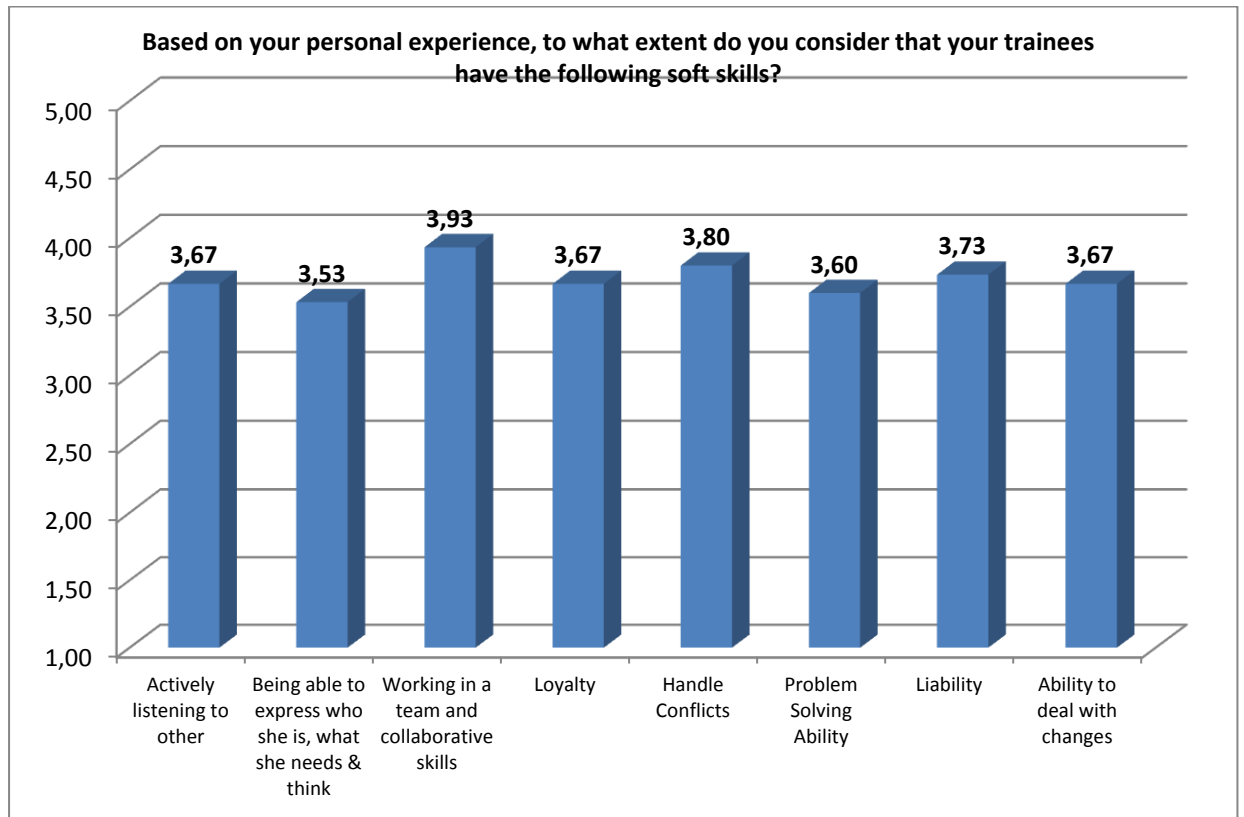
3. How important are the following soft skills for the company you cooperate with?

In the chart below, you can see the results for all the soft skills. The scale ranges from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Very important). As you can see the trainers consider very important all the following skills. For this reason they were rated above average.



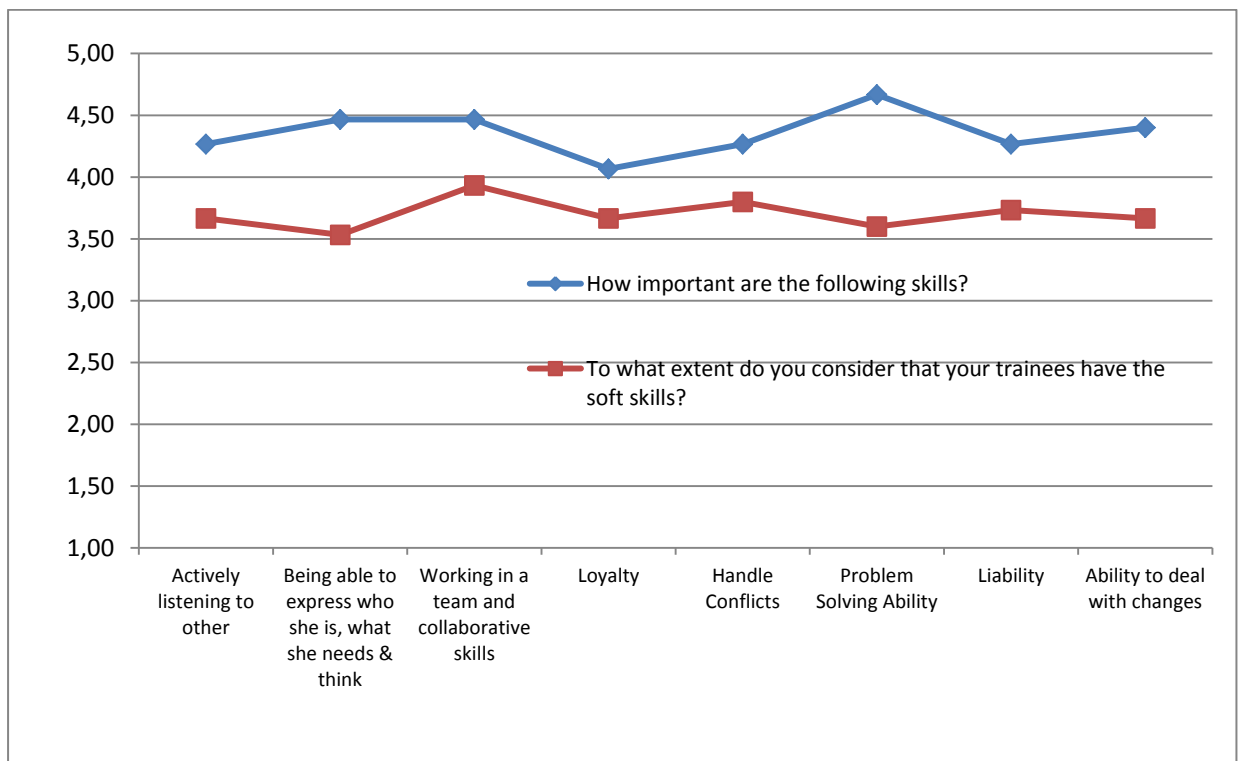
4. Based on your personal experience, to what extent do you consider that your trainees have the following soft skills?

In the chart below, you can see the results for all the soft skills. The scale ranges from 1(Not at all) to 5 (Very important). As you can see the trainers consider that their trainees have largely the following skills (all the skills were rated above 3.50).



In conclusion, you can see the chart below which depicts the soft skills gap between how the VET trainers rate the importance of the soft skills and the extent that they consider that the trainees actually have these skills. The major gaps appear at the following skills:

- Being able to express who s/he is, what s/he needs & thinks
- Problem Solving Ability

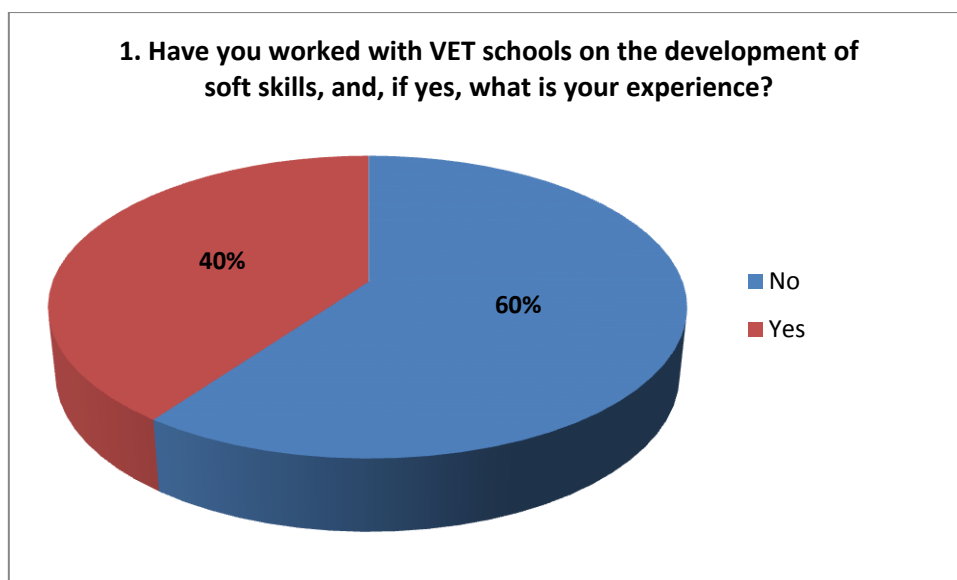


### 3.2. Questionnaire for EMPLOYERS

#### 3.2.1. Cooperation on soft skills

1. Have you worked with VET schools on the development of soft skills, and if yes, what is your experience?

60% of the respondents have not worked with VET schools.



2. Do you have any thoughts on how a closer cooperation between VET schools and companies could contribute to the development of soft skills?

The given answers to this question were different. We can summarize them as follows:

- Development of activities together (seminar and training in the business).
- Cooperation with VET schools in order to fill the gap between education and the requirements of the working environment.
- Through tools and methodologies that would initially a. chart the already existing soft skills of employees and b. through the feedback received by the employers on what soft skills they would like to see from their employees. The VET schools should then process this material and elaborate training curricula for the strengthening of the social skills in question.
- Systematic cooperation according to the company's needs. The VET schools should take into account the job requirements of each industry.

### **3.2.2. Public policy**

3. What could be done from a public policy stand-point to ensure that your company has access to human resources with the right soft skills heading into the future?

The given answers in this question were different, too. But we can summarize them as follows:

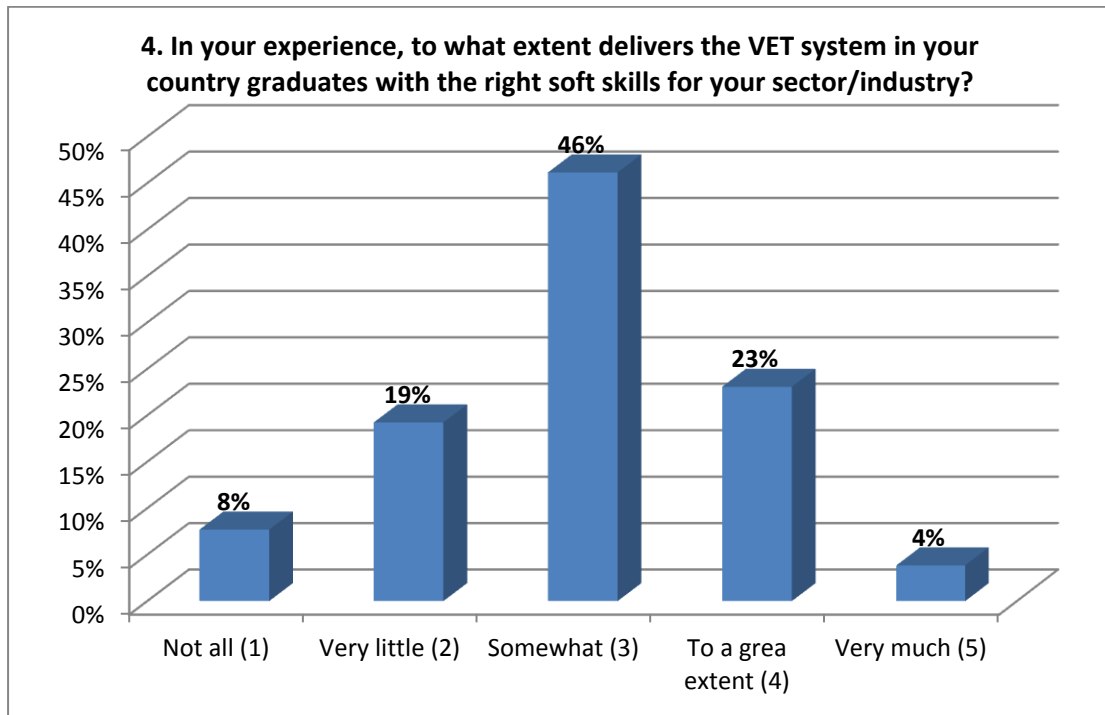
- Develop with the VET schools a more suitable training system.
- Identify soft skills necessary to be able to incorporate oneself in a given working environment.
- The state should provide grants to VET Schools for giving attention in developing the soft skills.
- The State should develop an educational system which will evaluate the soft skills.

### **3.2.3. The Soft Skills Gap**

4. In your experience, to what extent delivers the VET system in your country graduates with the right soft skills for your sector/industry?

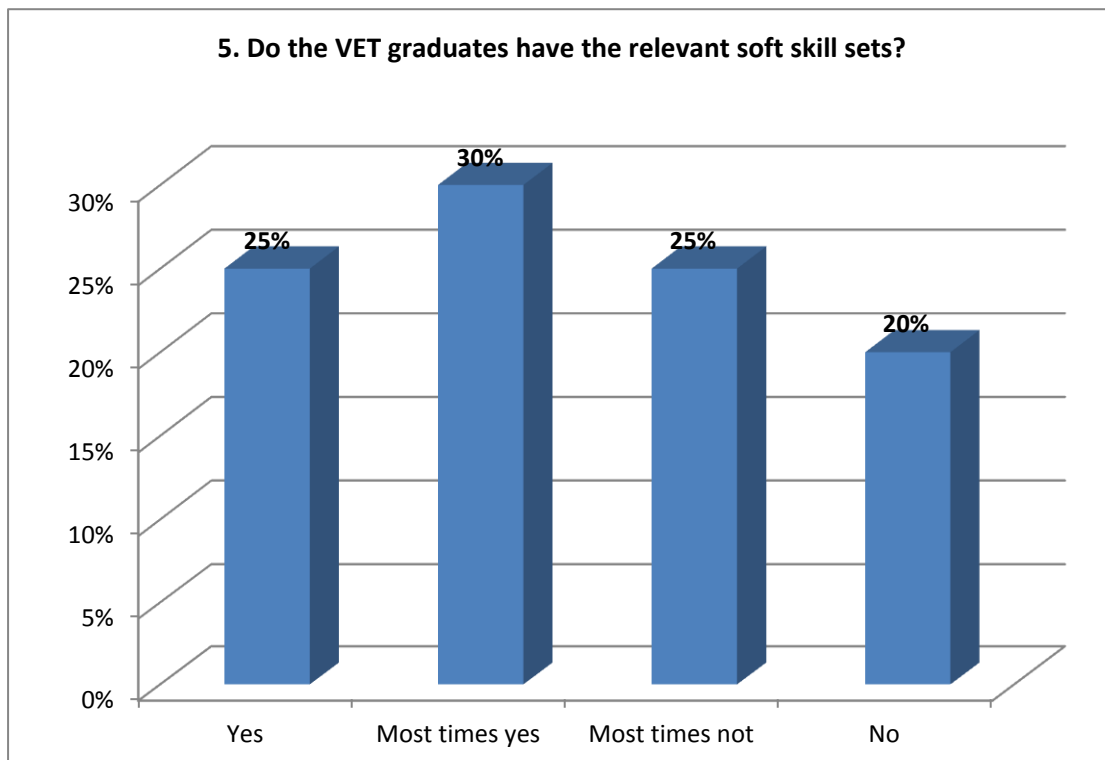
Almost the half of the respondents believes that the current VET system in Greece is not as adequate as it should. 27% has a positive outlook and the other 27% a negative one.





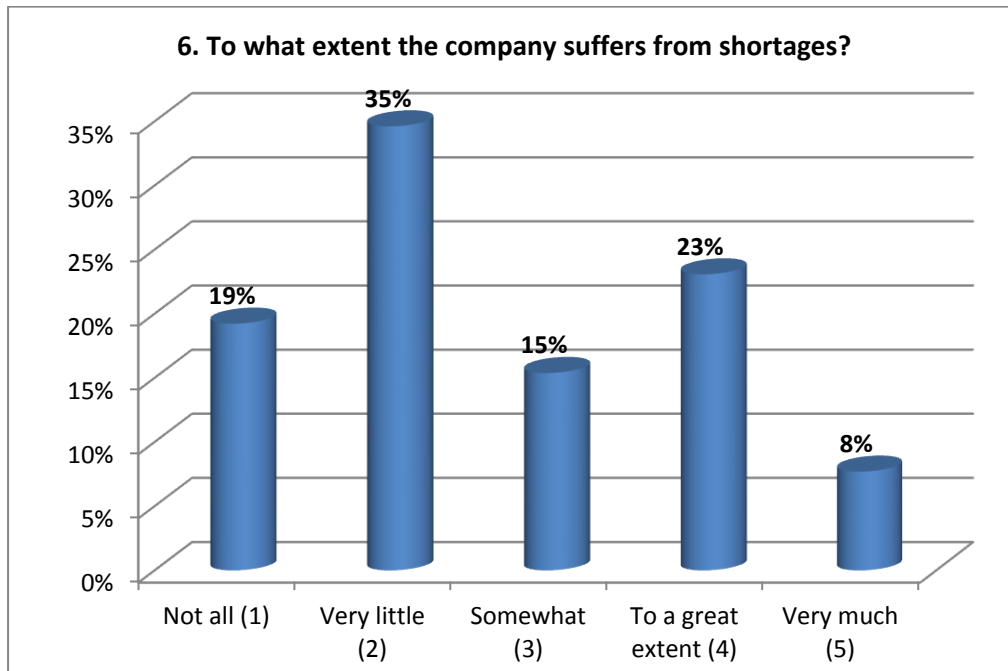
5. What is your experience when recruiting VET graduates? Do they have the relevant soft skill sets?

From the chart below, you can see that 55% of the employers consider that the VET graduates have the relevant soft skills. On the other hand, 45% has a negative opinion.



6. To what extent the company suffers from shortages?

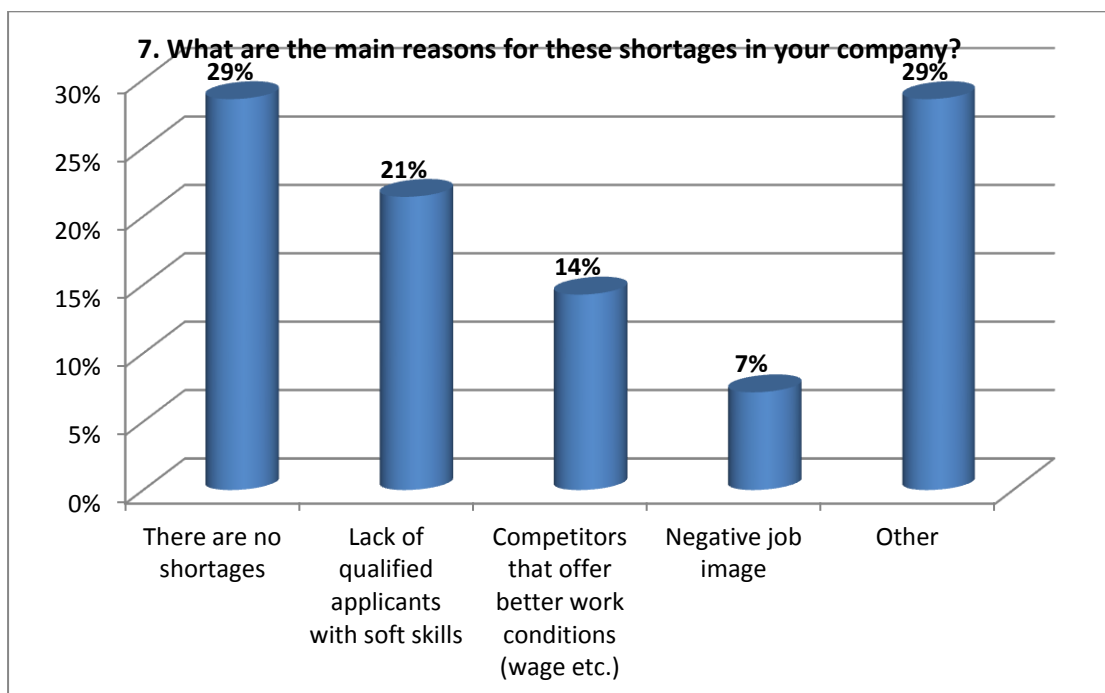
54% of the employers believe that their company does not have or has very few shortages. Only 31% believes that the company has significant shortages.



7. What are the main reasons for these shortages in your company?

According to the answers, the main reasons are the following:

1. Other: No response/economic crisis, 29%
2. There are no shortages, 29%
3. Lack of qualified applicants, 21%
4. Competitors that offer better work, 14%
5. Negative job image, 7%

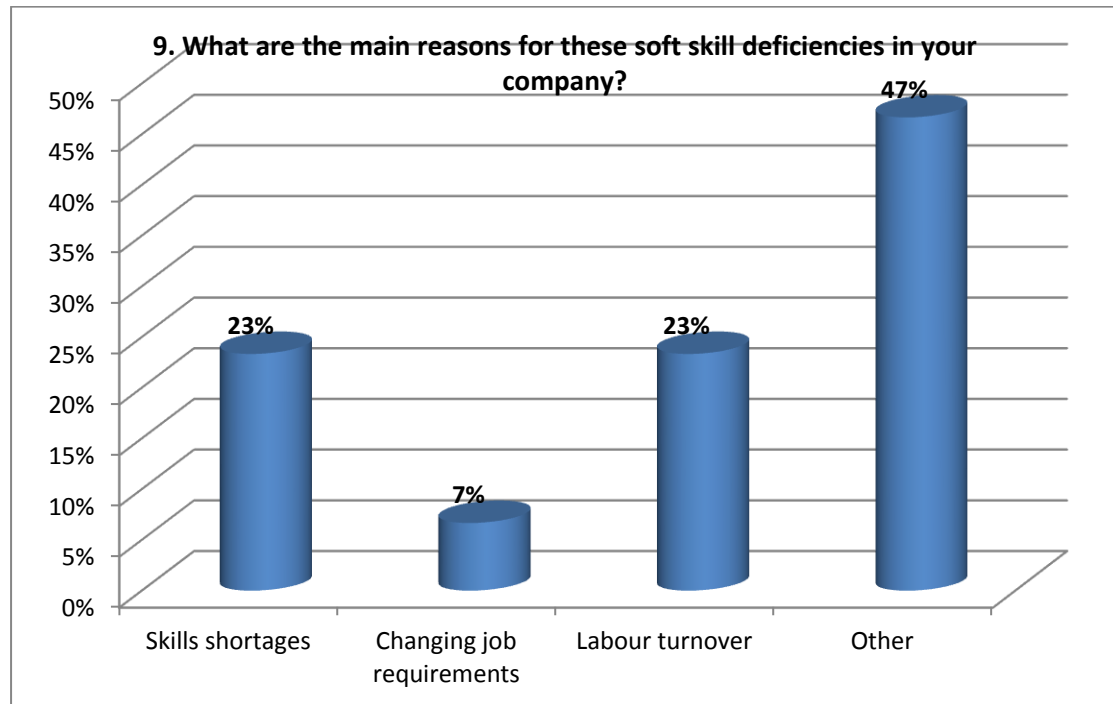


8. Are there any occupations in which existing employees do not have the required soft skills to perform the job to acceptable or most efficient levels?

The majority of the respondents did not answer this question. Those who did, answered that there are not.

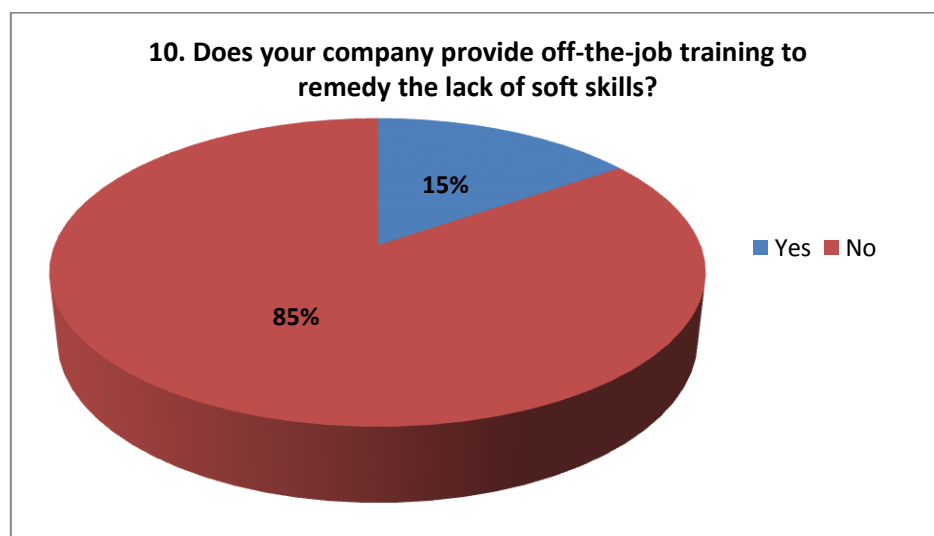
9. What are the main reasons for these soft skill deficiencies in your company?

The chart below depicts the percentages in each category. The other category has the biggest percentage due to the fact that most employers believe that their working force has not any particular skills deficiencies.



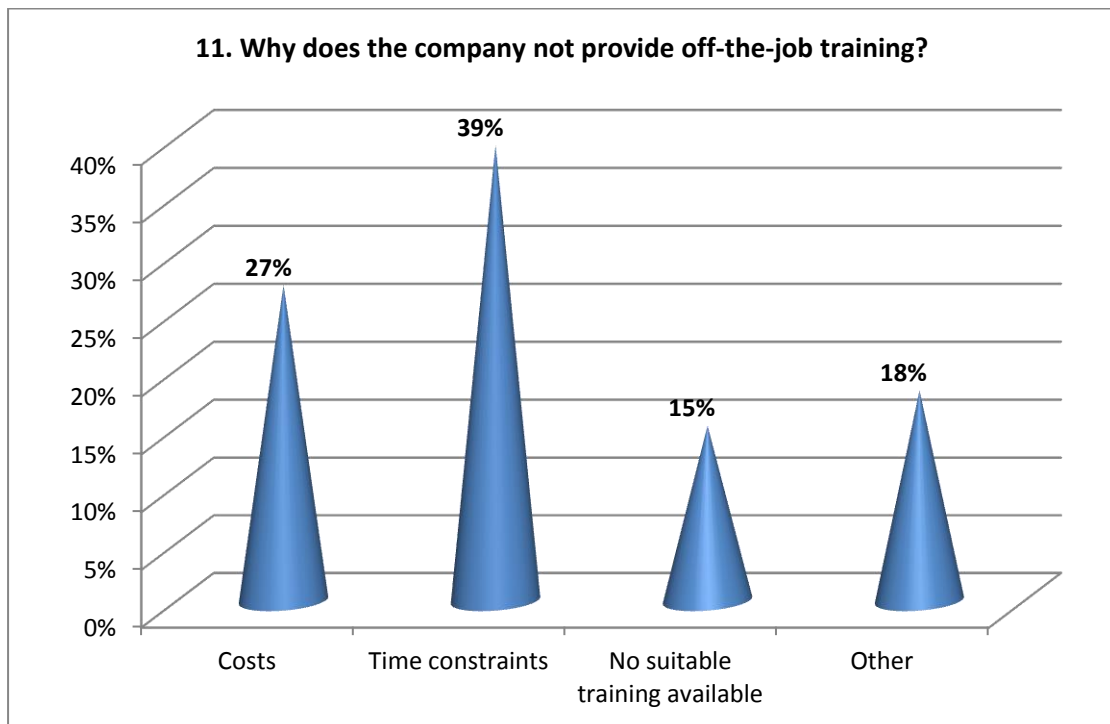
10. Does your company provide off-the-job training to remedy the lack of soft skills?

The overwhelming proportion of respondents (85%) does not provide off- the-job training.



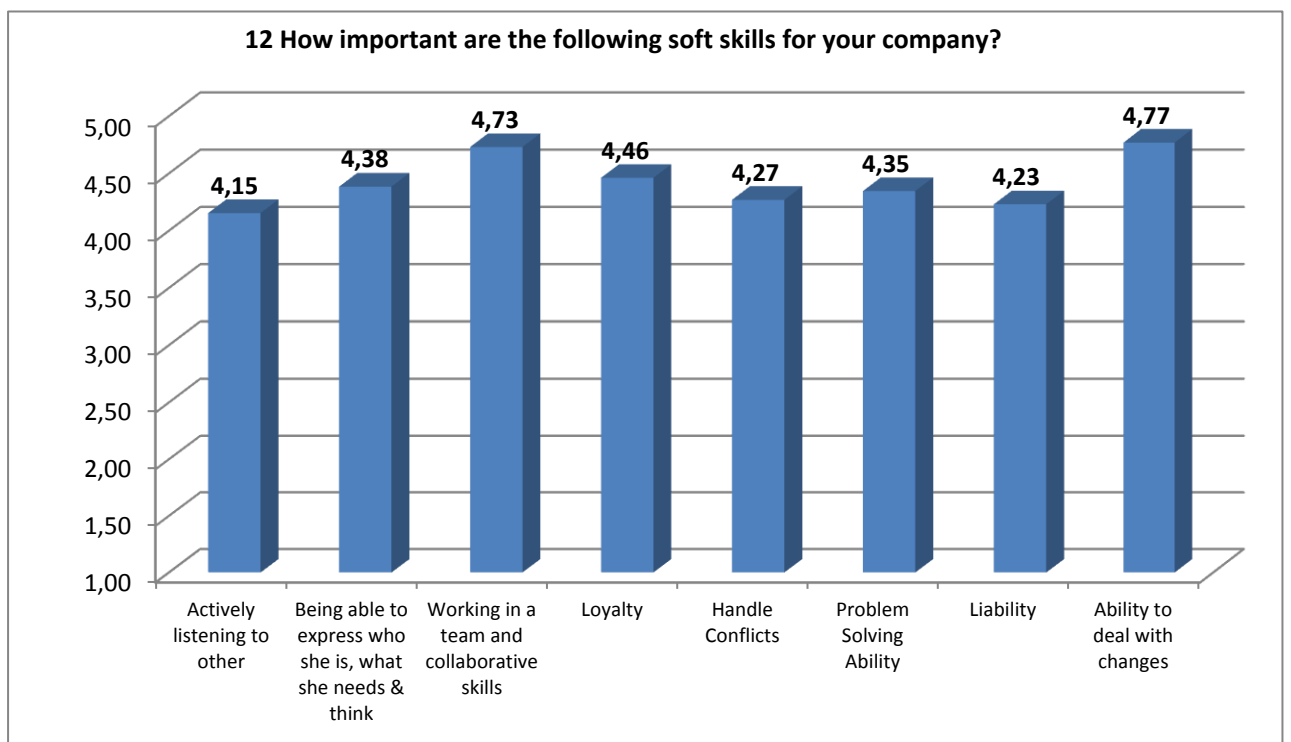
11. In case you have answered NO to the previous question, why does the company not provide off-the-job training?

This is due to time constraints (39%), training costs (27%), no suitable training available (15%) and other reasons (18%).



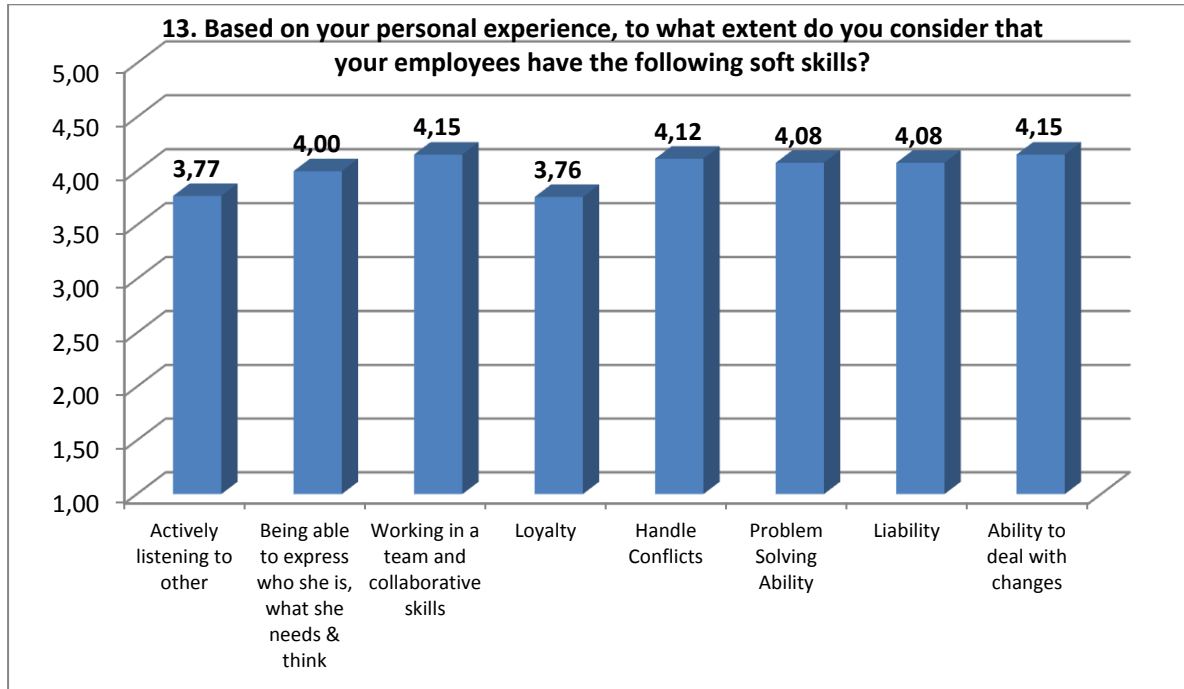
12. How important are the following soft skills for your company?

In the chart below, you can see the results for all the soft skills. The scale ranges from 1(Not at all) to 5 (Very important). As you can see the employers consider very important all the following skills. For this reason they were rated above average.



13. Based on your personal experience, to what extent do you consider that your employees have the following soft skills?

In the chart below, you can see the results for all the soft skills. The scale ranges from 1(Not at all) to 5 (Very important). As you can see the employers consider that their employees have largely the following skills (all the skills were rated above 3.50).



In conclusion, you can see the chart below which depicts the soft skills gap between how the employers rate the importance of the soft skills and the extent that they consider that their employees actually have them. The major gaps appear at the following skills:

- Loyalty (0,70 difference).
- Ability to deal with changes (0,62 difference).
- Working in a team and collaborative skills (0,58 difference).

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## 4. CONCLUSIONS

According to the research there is a consensus between the VET providers and the companies about the importance of the soft skills. More specifically we can summarize the final findings as below:

- ❖ Both VET providers and companies agree that there is no adequate cooperation between them on promoting soft skills.
- ❖ The owners of companies recognize the importance of soft skills and propose a better collaboration with VET schools in order to fill the gap between education and the requirements of the working environment.
- ❖ The employers want a public policy to be developed in order to enhance the training system and create an assessment system of the soft skills.
- ❖ They consider that the current VET system is inadequate. For this reason, the VET students do not have the relevant soft skills required by the business environment. However, they believe that their companies do not suffer from any skills' deficiencies.
- ❖ The majority of the employers do not provide any off-the-job training due to time constraints and costs.
- ❖ Both VET trainers and employers have rated all the soft skills as very important.
- ❖ The gap between how the VET trainers rate the importance of the soft skills and the extent that they consider that the trainees actually have them has identified the following skills:
  - Being able to express who s/he is, what s/he needs & thinks.
  - Problem Solving Ability.
- ❖ On the other hand, the gap between how the employers rate the importance of the soft skills and the extent that they consider the employees actually have them is identified in the following skills:
  - Loyalty
  - Ability to deal with changes
  - Working in a team and collaborative skills

