

EVA Skills:

“Evaluating the soft skills of unemployed youth”

NEED ANALYSIS – Consolidated Report



Erasmus+

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1. INTRODUCTION

Soft skills are qualities, personality traits and social competencies that each person possesses to a different degree. They 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.

In the past years, soft skills have become more and more important to employers all over Europe. Moreover the improvement of the employability skills of the young people has become a key factor in the policies of the European countries in recent years. The question that arises is whether young people possess the soft skills required by the employers? Are the education systems ready to ensure adequate programs, to prepare the youth for the labour market?

The current Need Analysis Report is the combination and the consolidation of the need analysis results of each country by partners participating in the EVASKILLS project. The project EVASKILLS- Evaluating the soft skills of unemployed youth aims at the transfer of best practices of competence assessment for young persons. Additionally, within the framework of implementation of the project, trainers and other vocational education and training professionals will be trained in the use of tools and methodologies for the evaluation of social skills and thus their role will be enhanced, as they will be able to provide vocational training courses based on learning outcomes and the validation of previous non-formal and informal training.

This report is comprised by 4 chapters. Chapter 1 is the Introduction; Chapter 2 is the Literature Review. Chapter 2 comprises of three sections, Soft skills, Vet systems and Youth. In these sections there is an extensive analysis of the importance of soft skills and the degree of soft skills in the educational system in Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Romania, Germany and Sweden, general observations concerning vocational education and training, the description of VET within the education system and the diagnosis of the skills needed by the labour market. Also there is a description of youth demographics and the level of unemployment as well as Youth Employment statistics. Chapter 3, presents the Primary Research which are the results of the questionnaires for VET trainers and Employers in Greece, Cyprus, Sweden Bulgaria, Romania and Germany concerning the degree of cooperation on soft skills and the soft skills gap. The last chapter, Chapter 4 contains the conclusion of the report.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the desktop research undertaken by the partners in this project, we summarize the importance and the degree of integration of soft skills in the education system in the six countries referred above; Furthermore we present the development of VET system in these countries, the diagnosis of the skills needed by the labour market, as well as the youth demographics – levels of unemployment and youth employment statistics.

2.1. SOFT Skills

2.1.1. The importance of soft skills

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).

Cyprus

According to the Eurostat latest figures in Cyprus the youth unemployment rate of male and females was 22,4 % in 2011 and has risen dramatically the following years reaching 38.9% in 2013. In 2014 there was a small decrease in comparison to the previous year to 35,9 %.

Greece

In Greece, Non-formal and informal education had gained great interest and significance over the years. 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. 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.

Sweden

In Sweden many employers are demanding social skills when seeking new employees. According to the Swedish Academy's dictionary (1998) "social" means social, societal, and well-adjusted to the demands of society, sociable and more. "Competence" means skill, competence (SAOL, 1998). In many professions, such as service occupations, it is advantageous to have a high social competence. It is important in any job where the work is done in groups (Mannberg, 2001). The rhythm found in many workplaces today, which means constant changes without breaks, means that many working under continual stress. Opportunities to create, develop and enhance or maintain a good relationship is reduced which is a loss for both the individual and the business. It requires that employees get to know each other on other levels than just the technical professional in order to increase collaboration, networking and teambuilding. If not everyone's experience and knowledge may not come forward, it contributes to a worse result of the collaboration. It's hard to be nice and caring during stress (Herlitz, 2001).

Very many jobs today are not based on having a specific training, but simply if one has a general capacity to learn a job, and perform it well. And the training itself to cope with the job can be quite cards, and then you learn on the job . And then it will not be this theoretical training so important, but it simply becomes personal characteristics, such as motivation, perseverance, reliability, that is to be stable and punctual.

Here are the ten soft skills and characteristics that companies think are most important among employees.

- Strong work ethic
- Reliable
- Positive attitude
- Motivational driven
- Team player
- Organized, able to handle multiple priorities
- Performs well even under stress
- Effective communicator
- Flexible
- Assertive

As a comparison a test carried out already in the 1990s concerning the most important social competences, showed the following ranking of the most important competences:

- Cooperation

- Ability to listen
- Communication
- Popularity
- Image
- Contacts
- Influencing
- Conflict Resolution

Source <http://www.nkja.se/s/sok/sockomp-resultat.htm>

Bulgaria

When interviewing job candidates a growing numbers of Bulgarian employers are looking for skills like communication skills, problem solving, contributing to the team success, continuous learning and improvement. A study of the Bulgarian Industrial Association shows that soft skills have a share of 35% to 50% when making recruitment decisions. Soft skills, also called transferable skills, are important according to the employers, as they contribute to the overall personality readiness for employment and increase the ability for adaptation, learning and independence at work.

The role and importance of the soft skills is confirmed by another study made by the Bulgarian Industrial Association researching the application of competence models in Bulgaria. It is the introduction and use of competency models in a company that allows the assessment of the soft skills to be a consistent and an ongoing process. According to the study to identify the systems and tools for competency assessment used by Bulgarian companies which included 98 companies (mainly medium and large), competency models are used by 50% of the companies and another 21% are preparing for their introduction. According to the survey, the soft skills are among the most universal competences. They are accepted with high relevance to competency models of the organization, respectively weighted with high priority in the evaluation of its employees. In percentages, the importance of soft skills has the following relevance:

- In 52% of cases, soft skills are included in the competency models
- For working positions, soft skills requirements have 35% influence on job performance
- For expert positions - 40%
- For middle management level - 47%
- For senior management positions - 41%

Globalisation and technological progress have an ever-increasing effect on daily life in EU, and the demand for different types of labour and skills is evolving at a rapid pace. While enterprises try to improve their productivity and become more competitive and innovative, they may well seek to pass on risk to the labour force through greater flexibility - both in relation to those already in employment, as well as those searching for a new job.

To highlight the importance of soft skills in employability of the young people we have to bring into discussion the non-formal and informal education which is a leading learning principle in the European knowledge-based society. The non-formal education returns are at the individual's and at societal level and it contributes to the development of Romania through the cognitive constructs of its youth.

Romania

In Romania although the role of non-formal education programs is recognized in National Education Law no. 1/2011, there are challenges to efficiently implementing this type of program in schools. The desire to speak with a common voice that supports non-formal education in Romania has to create a space for collaboration between actors involved: a variety of persons in the educational system, all the way from teachers to the National Minister of Education; NGOs; representatives of institutions and companies; and others interested in the role of non-formal education in the development of youth and society. The NGOs community are the main promoters of non-formal and informal education which may lead to developing the so called soft skills or the 21st Century skills. There are some Agencies (ANC) having an organisational framework which validates the informal and non-formal learning in Romania.

Germany

In Germany in accordance with the European education strategy, in recent years there has been a shift to valuing competences and learning-outcomes in general. Most important is what somebody is capable to and less important is where or how abilities were gained. Amongst competencies, soft skills are of great importance. In fact, some soft skills – also called 'key competences' – have never been demanded by the job market as much as nowadays. Across occupations at all levels employers emphasise the needs of generic skills. Organizations attach much more value to soft skills than in the past, e.g. teamwork, interpersonal communication, initiative, creativity, entrepreneurship, leadership and management or presentation skills. Studies show that amongst most required skills by enterprises, the majority are soft skills.

Along with the growing importance of soft skills, ambitions to recognise, assess, document and certify competences of individuals have also increased. Thus, an abundance of competence assessment methods and tools for different purposes and target groups have been developed. Employers are also increasingly willing to invest in developing and improving soft skills through employee training.¹

In the course of growing skills shortages and lacking hard skills, the importance of soft skills is even more raising. Where companies cannot find technical skills and specialist expertise on the labour market they look increasingly for soft skills such as commitment, motivation, the capacity to learn new ideas, techniques or equipment as well as adaptability to new circumstances. Employers come to believe that, while hard skills they can train themselves, the same doesn't entirely apply to soft skills. Therefore, it can be of equal or even bigger importance to employers that candidates show certain soft skills and attitudes, as they are considered to be the foundation for further training of hard skills and human resources development.

However, many employers say they cannot find the demanded skills. Despite the fact that young people nowadays are better educated than ever before, school leavers often lack not only the hard but also the soft skills employers look for. Particularly companies providing VET are facing difficulties to fill vacant apprenticeship positions with suitable candidates showing skills such as ability to concentrate, perseverance, accurateness and politeness. Studies show that due to insufficient teaching of knowledge and values by school and family, abilities such as independence, sense of responsibility and work ethics (e.g. punctuality) are shown to a lower extent than they were in the past.² This is all the more a problem as generally, demands of training professions increase.

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

Cyprus

Soft skills are important for today's job market as well as for the competitiveness of Cyprus economy. Soft skills are vital for a successful employability and for much better career opportunities. In Cyprus the educational system should prepare the students for the labour market. The Educational system has accepted the importance of soft skills. One way of improving soft skills is in the form of a formal training with the advantage of

¹ CEDEFOP: Modernising vocational education and training. Fourth report on vocational training research in Europe: background report, Luxembourg: 2008, p.195ff

² Bettina Ehrenthal, Verena Eberhard, Joachim Gerd Ulrich: Ausbildungsreife – auch unter den Fachleuten ein heißes Eisen, Ergebnisse des BIBB-Expertenmonitors, 2005, online publication <http://www.bibb.de/de/16633.php>, 20.02.2015

some form of certification at the end of the course. Soft skills can be acquired informally in the form of self-training of soft skills such as socializing with friends, colleagues and other members of the society. It enhance person's communications skills.

Greece

In Greece the importance of soft skills for enhancing employability, personal fulfillment 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.

Sweden

The integration of soft skills in the educational system in Sweden is not very developed from a national point of view, however there are some local initiatives and participation in European projects, like the GRASS (Grading Soft Skills) research project (<https://sites.google.com/site/llpgrassproject/>)

The term "soft skills" refers to a collection kind that a person can benefit from a job or training environment, in addition to the actual mechanical skills or skills and techniques to perform a job. Mentoring is a skill that is focuses primarily on helping others complete their tasks and objectives. This may include assist students in school, help apprentice in a specific area, monitor a professional in a certain work or individual coaching to a target auto-set.

Other words that contain similar attributes as a "mentor" is a consultant, teacher, consultant, educator, mentor, coach, counselor, teacher, guide and instructor. Qualifications linked to each of them can either focus on a vast world of experience, or can lend to very specific tasks within a particular vocation or function. If the soft skills matters is how mentors interact (quiet, secure, and so self-confident), and the effectiveness of his abilities as seen in the results experienced by the person mentor.

Mentoring in schools

As school and college students are progressing educational goals, most likely meet different mentor along the way. These may be people who will help them prepare for exams, which helps in selecting appropriate areas of the curriculum, and monitors a project towards completion of a class. Interactions can be during school hours or after line. Some people prefer to work one-on-one with a mentor who you know you

comfortable. Others prefer to work in small groups with a supervisor who is adept at juggling the needs several people.

Mentoring in Business

When a person is hired for a new job or change positions, you may first need a Guide to promote the desired results. A good leader will pay the new employee to someone whose mentoring skills have shown - typically someone who knows ropes in all matters, and who have excellent interpersonal skills. The business mentoring will be a clear communicator that easily balance the needs of the business with the new employee. Mentor will contribute to all that is necessary, as a guidance for the programming and operation details.

Mentoring in a particular profession or field

Filmmakers, photographers, nurses, pilots, geologists, plumbers, musicians and techniques are just some of the many professionals who can choose to mentor others.

The relationship built between the professional and the person who wants to achieve status similar can vary greatly. A good mentor really control the individual, taking his "during wing "in a generous toward becoming excellent in the profession he has chosen. The person mentor serves tips and specific comments based on their experiences of the mentor, and can become experts by spending time with the mentor while in the area, on the site, or focused on the necessary elements for developing task hand.(Source: <http://sv.mega-lib.com/affars/mentorskap-som-en-mjuka-fardigheter.php>)

Train and develop future skills at school

A mission of the school is to help students become active, creative, competent and responsible individuals and citizens. These "soft" skills that are often difficult to measure are also important skills and abilities for employment during the 21st century. January Hylén 2012 has made an overview of international initiatives in the "Development of young people's competencies for the future." Now that we launched in 2015, I have tried to find different approaches to design instruction so that students train and develop these future capabilities. This has meant that I started to use my digital brands and trained me in the use of Microsoft materials in the "21st Century Learning Design" to evaluate my lesson plans.

Students can use effective communication to adapt the message to a specific audience and use different media.

There is cooperation based on shared responsibility and leads to students' work reaches a higher quality when they worked together.

Knowledge-building is based on the student applying his knowledge and use of the subject integrated teaching.

Students use ICT and design their own IT products.

Teaching involves problem solving real problems, which leads to creativity and innovation.

Students are able to plan their own work based learning objectives and related success criteria and have the opportunity to improve their work based on feedback.

Bulgaria

The integration of soft skills in the educational system in Bulgaria is not well developed from a national point of view. At the same time a desktop study indicates that there are a number of local initiatives and European projects in which the main focus is namely the creation of programs and concepts for the development of so-called soft skills and key competencies. The list of projects in the field of lifelong learning is quite long. Such projects as "Advalue: Training and validation of transferable skills for adults" <http://www.advalue-project.eu/> ; Project DE / 10 / LLP - LdV/TOI/147336 "UniKom: Development of entrepreneurial competence in vocational training to work in an international environment" www.leo-unikom.eu; Project "Different way to develop social and cognitive skills" <http://www.euro-cordiale.lu/outils-cognitifs/BG/CS/CS-INTRO.pdf> Project "SGSCC -electronic training games to developing social and creative competences" <http://games4competence.eu/bg/>; Project- "TANDEM -Creating intergenerational and intercultural communication and providing transferability and transparency of competences in VET" www.tandem-project.eu and many others.

These and other similar initiatives and projects depend on pro activity of specific people, school boards, local authorities and have no nationwide application. Largely transferable skills develop in non-formal education, while formal education lacks a clear concept and requirements for their development.

According to a study by the Institute for Market Economics in 2013 on the status and trends of school education in Bulgaria, reveals that the results of all evaluations of the capabilities of students show educational system is oriented to provide theoretical knowledge rather than practical skills, particularly soft skills, which runs counter to modern perceptions of education and real needs of students and businesses. To address

this problem, the way of presenting the material should be revised and the balance between theoretical and practical tasks should be improved.

Romania

In Romania the education system is predicated on the idea of academic ability which has really come to dominate our view of intelligence, because the universities designed the system in their image. The whole system of public education around the world is a protracted process of university entrance. And the consequence is that many highly-talented, brilliant, creative people think they are not, because the thing they were good at school was not valued, or was actually stigmatized.

In the next 30 years, according to UNESCO, more people worldwide will be graduating through education than since the beginning of history. Suddenly, degrees are not worth as they used to be.

Speaking of the integration of the development of soft skills in Romania we can refer to the mentoring and coaching approach in education which is not generalized but it is practiced by teachers, school psychologists, councilors and teacher-trainers. It is more something extracurricular than included in the regular syllabus.

Germany

In Germany most enterprises demand certain soft skills; however, only a few actually provide their staff with respective training. If at all, training is largely targeted at management level. Enterprises often don't consider themselves as provider of soft skills training but rather expect their staff to already possess respective abilities. Thus, there is a high demand in training soft skills prior entering the job market, often even prior starting an apprenticeship.

However, despite the fact that soft skills gain increasingly in importance, they are nowhere trained adequately. Educational experts demand to develop soft skills as early as possible, ideally already as essential part of school education, thereby reacting on a trend according to which parents convey such skills to ever less degree. Also, an abundance of approaches and concepts of how to convey soft skills has been developed.

The reality, however, lags behind theory and expert recommendations. On the positive side, soft skills are part of school's syllabus to some degree. There are also countless initiatives and projects to develop soft skills in schools, partially promoted by public policy. The same is true for VET schools. Soft skills are also part of training units for young apprentices in enterprises. Further, there are extern providers offering training

with costs in certain soft skills to individuals. On the negative side, however, these activities often suffer from the following issues:

- they are of temporary project character and not integrated in regular school subjects or regular training routines in enterprises; thus, there is no or little repetition and skills don't get sufficiently internalised,
- they are limited to a number of few skills such as presentation skills or customer orientation,
- teachers and trainers are overstrained with conveying such skills, lacking resources and knowledge of how to do it.

These issues lead to the fact that training in soft skills often is not efficient enough. In general, compared with hard skills, little priority is given to soft skills. In syllabus, they are underrepresented.

2.2. VET system

2.2.1. General observations concerning vocational education and training

Cyprus

In recent years, in Cyprus there was a shift of valuing the competences and learning outcomes. Competence is a skill that you need in a particular job or for a particular task. Soft skills are among the competencies required in the labour market. In Cyprus vocational education provides education and training in a lifelong learning perspective. The integration of soft skills is not highly developed.

Education is available from pre-primary to post graduate levels. It is compulsory at the pre-primary, primary and lower secondary levels, until the student reaches the age of fifteen. The structure of the education system in Cyprus is presented in Figure 1.

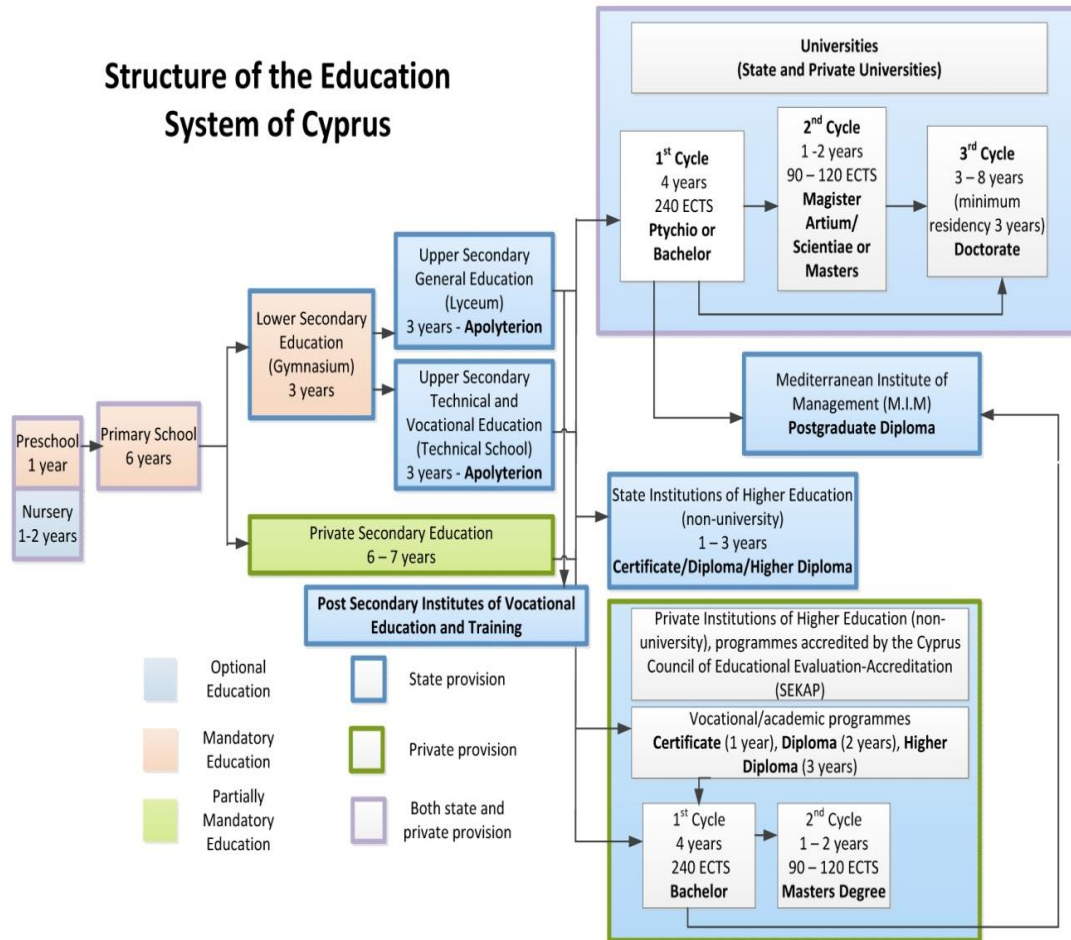


Figure 1: The Education System in Cyprus.

In Cyprus there are two types of schools in the upper secondary education with a duration of three years. It is the unified lyceum and the technical schools. As of the academic year 2012-2013 the post-secondary VET is provided at the post-secondary institutes of vocational education and training. Tertiary education includes postgraduate courses that are provided by public and private universities. Government regulated VET provision and offer qualifications such as diplomas, degrees, certificates. All the activities of the VET are legitimized by the Council of Ministers and by laws passed by the House of Representatives. Vocational education and training creates conditions for professional qualifications and improvement. The structure of vocational education and training consist of career guidance, student counselling, professional qualification of the professions and its development and progress.

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.

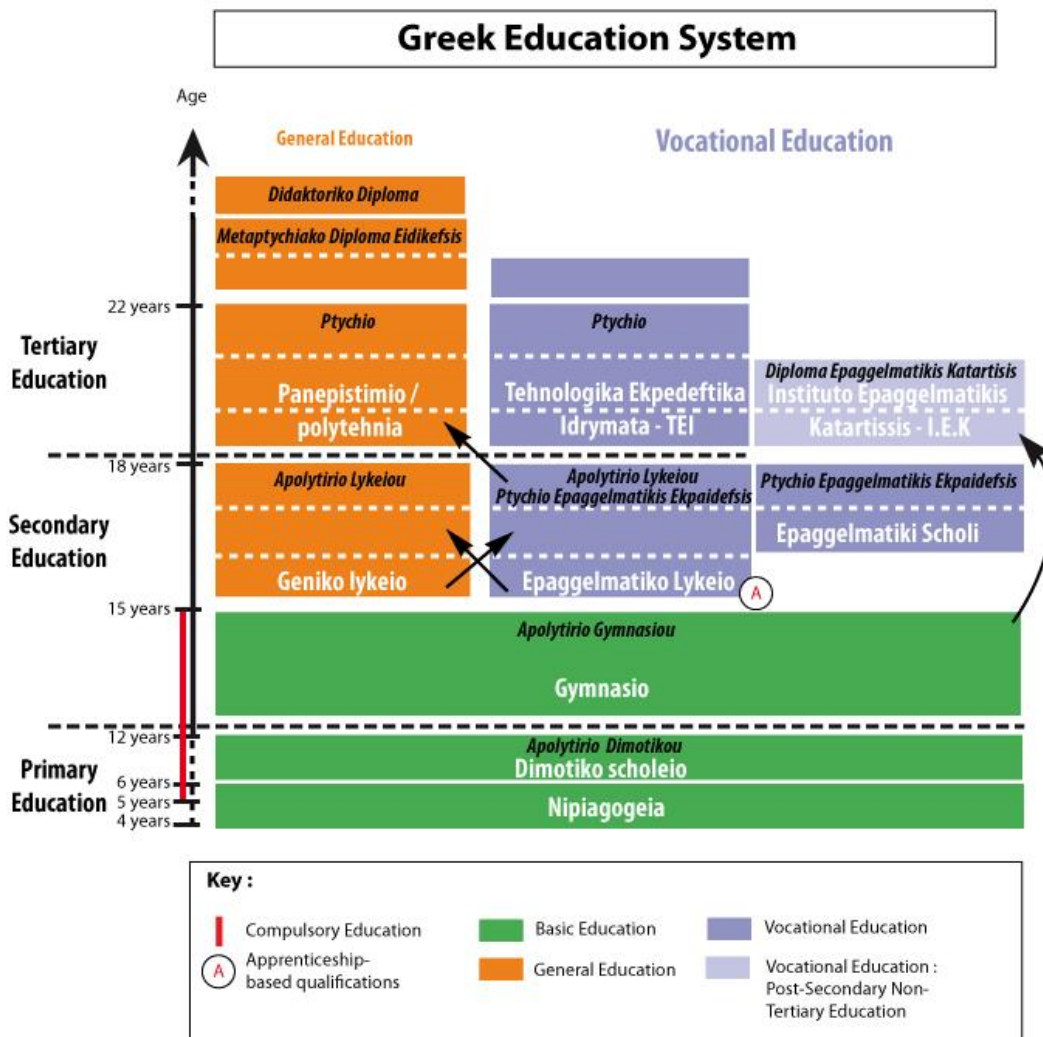


Figure 2: Greek Education System

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.

Sweden

In Sweden initial vocational education has a variety of different, politically defined aims: to qualify for employment in a specific occupation, prepare for future mobility on the labour market, promote competitiveness and economic growth, qualify for studies at the tertiary level of education and prepare for lifelong learning, as well as facilitate the student's development as a person and as a democratic citizen, and in order to contribute to social cohesion (Olofsson & Panican 2008; Antikainen 2006).

Furthermore, VET is also expected to be inclusive for weak learners, retain most (preferably all) young people who start in a programme and provide conditions for completion in the form of a degree or a certificate. These di-verse aims are to some extent competing or even contradictory (Powell & Solga 2010). For example, being socially inclusive makes it difficult for VET to also be attractive for ambitious students and for high skill companies. Giving priority to work-based learning, specific occupational skills and employability also makes it difficult to achieve HE entrance qualifications for all students. Developing VET for the future thus involves coping with inherent and recurring dilemmas, trade-offs and contradictions.

Bulgaria

Vocational education and training in Bulgaria is regulated by the Law on Vocational Education and Training. It helps provide conditions for functioning and development of the vocational education and training, and regulates its organization, institutions of

governance and financing. The main objective of vocational education and training is to create conditions for acquiring professional qualification and its continuous improvement.

In its structure, the system of vocational education and training includes career guidance, vocational training and vocational education. Career guidance provides information, advice and counselling to students and others on the choice of profession and career development. Vocational training provides the acquisition of professional qualifications or part of the profession and its improvement. Vocational education provides mastering of the educational minimum for secondary education and the acquisition of professional qualification.

Vocational guidance, vocational training and vocational education are carried out for professions and specialties included in the List of professions for vocational education and training.

One distinctive feature of the Bulgarian VET system is equality of VET provision for students and adults. This is based on common framework programmes and national educational standards that regulate vocational qualifications, and opportunities given to VET schools to extend their capacity and facilities for their main function of training young people to training adults.

Vocational education and training is offered throughout the country by a large number of centres licensed by the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET). They train unemployed as well as employed people who want to increase their qualifications. There are also several Bulgarian-German Vocational Training Centres of adults in Pleven, Pazardzhik and Stara Zagora. The centres conduct long-term and short-term module courses using the dual system. Each of them is licensed by NAVET for organizing and conducting qualification courses for certain professions.

Romania

Since it joined the European Union, Romania has reformed its education and training system. It undertook to knock down the barriers separating vocational and technical pathways from mainstream secondary school education.

It has developed streams leading to higher education and horizontal mobility with mainstream pathways. It has renovated the teacher-training system. To meet the demands of the working world, Romania has called on social partners to define training and qualifications standards and to cooperate with examination committees etc.

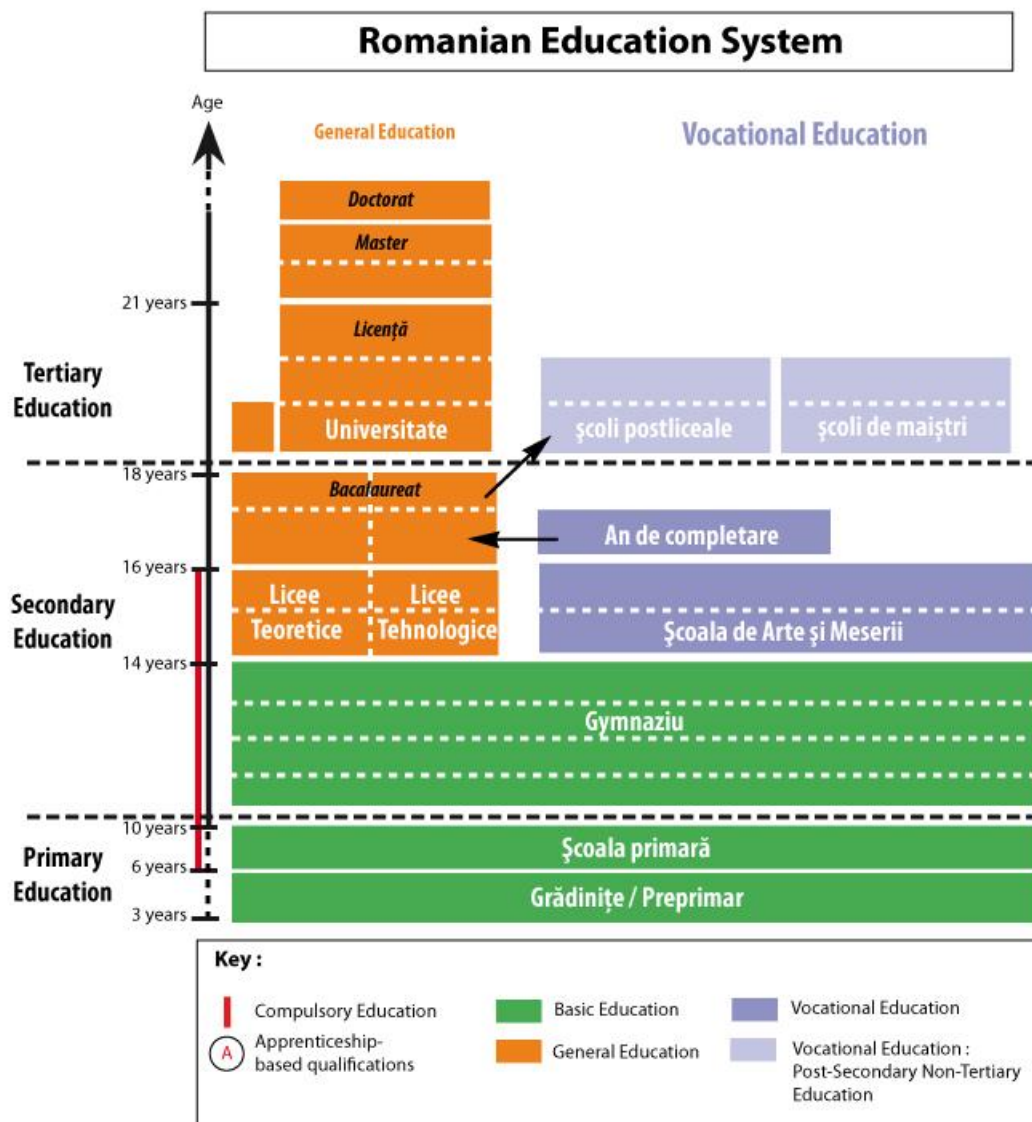


Figure 3: Romanian Education System

Education in Romania is free and compulsory for children aged 6-16, including one mandatory year of pre-primary education. Upper secondary education, which starts in grade 9, is composed of two consecutive two-year cycles. Upper secondary schools are operated and funded by central government, with municipalities contributing to some capital costs.

Recent reforms mean that entry to vocational schools has been postponed by two years, as from 2012. Students can now choose to enter VET schools at the age of 15-16 (grade 9), after two years in comprehensive general lower secondary education.

An OECD (OECD, 2000) report argued that one explanation for Romania's disappointing economic performance during the transition period may be the inflexibility of vocational training. The report recommended a reanalysis of the level and quality of qualifications provided by the VET system and their coherence with the requirements of the labour

market; this should include re-adjustment or development of new curricula, staff development for teachers and administrators, and development of quality control mechanisms. It also recommended innovative financing through the identification of other sources than the state budget – stimulating investment in training by the employers, social partners and others.

A number of major challenges and obstacles exist. The education system in Romania is still not adapted properly to the knowledge-based economy. It is undergoing a deep transformation induced by the qualification approach brought by EQF and the National Qualification Framework (CNC), both for secondary and higher education (CNCIS). The goal is for curricula to focus on practical matters and applications rather than on transfer of theoretical knowledge; closer ties with the societal and economic sectors are sought.

Germany

Traditionally, Germany has got a strong VET system that provides young people with high-qualitative training, thereby opening promising opportunities at the labor market. There are many advantages for young people deriving from training within the VET system: it is much more affordable and shorter than academic education and early on, people earn their own money and get independent. Most importantly, young people gain valuable practical experience that supports the transition to the labor market; most graduates start their career right after having finished training.

Thus, being trained within the VET system is nearly a popular educational choice as academic education. For many decades, the majority of graduates entered the dual system of vocational training. Half of young German people believe that, compared with university degrees, a VET degree doesn't necessarily imply adverse job opportunities. Nearly every tenth young person considers an apprenticeship even as a more promising educational choice.³

However, recently it could be seen that educational aspirations of young people have been changing. This development has already started challenging the German VET system and is expected to cause significant difficulties in the near future. 2009 was the first year showing more school leavers deciding for an academic education instead an apprenticeship. Since, the numbers of young people attending university is steadily rising while the numbers of those deciding for an apprenticeship decreasing. Top performing young people, in particular, are looking increasingly to academic education, while

³ Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach: Duale Ausbildung: Gutes Image, schlechte Quote, Frankfurt/Berlin, 2014, p.8

apprenticeships are often not considered the most attractive educational option. This also stems from an image problem. Other educational paths are considered more socially prestigious and are therefore preferred even though they may offer fewer career opportunities.

In consequence, enterprises face increasingly difficulties in filling vacant apprentice positions. In 2013, 29% of enterprises involved in VET were unable to fill these positions – twice as many as in 2005. Difficulties are widespread especially amongst SME and industries considered less attractive by young people. Such issues exist despite around one third of school leavers interested in in-company training being unable to find apprentice positions. Mostly individuals without school certificates or low education, young people with migration background and disabled young persons are affected. The so-called skills mismatch – that is, the disparity between skills supply and demand – is the cause of this problem. Companies are not finding the skill sets amongst young people that they consider to be necessary to start an apprentice position.

This is all the more a problem considering skills shortages that already today one third of German companies feels affected by. Due to the demographic change there are increasing numbers of skilled workers who retire and decreasing numbers of young people replacing them. Against this background, VET is massively gaining in importance. Enterprises are under pressure to train the staff that they cannot find on the external labour market anymore.

Public policies are there to support enterprises in building up or extending their training commitment. There is an abundance of various initiatives and measures targeted at raising the attractiveness of VET to both, enterprises (especially SME) and young people, covering issues such as:

- improving the image of VET,
- raising the quality of apprenticeships,
- implementing/strengthening inter-company vocational training centres (überbetriebliche Berufsbildungsstätten ÜBS) or coherent training structures (Ausbildungsverbände) that supplement external training measures to SME,
- improving vocational orientation strategies,
- providing prevocational training measures and introductory training for young people,
- providing training support, e.g. Assisted Apprenticeships,
- providing support for special target groups, e.g. disabled young persons,
- preventing VET drop-outs,

- improving permeability between different educational pathways.

2.2.2. Description of VET within the education system

Cyprus

Cyprus need to focus and put significant effort to teach soft skills through lifelong learning path. According to Eurostat, in Cyprus there is a high increase of the percentage of participation in tertiary education. In 2011 it was 46.2%, it has risen to 52.5% in 2014 with a small decrease in 2013 (see Figure 4).

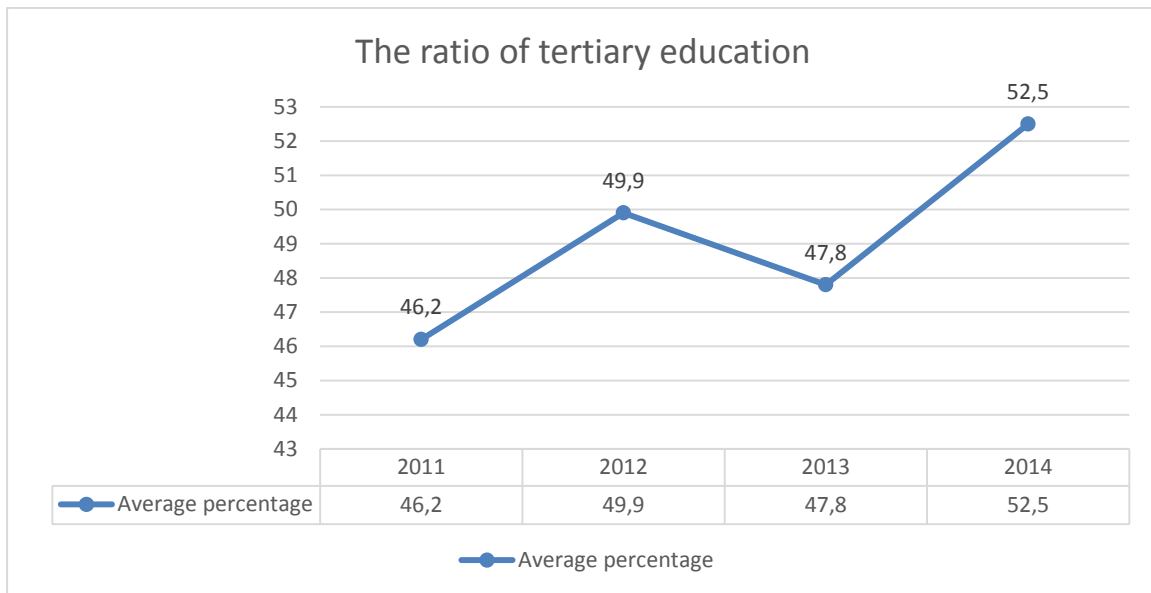


Figure 4: The ratio of tertiary education

There is a drop of the percentage of early leavers from the education and training program between the ages of 18-24 between the years 2011 to 2014. In the year of 2011 the percentage was 11.3% and drop gradually to 6,7 % in 2014 (see Figure 5).

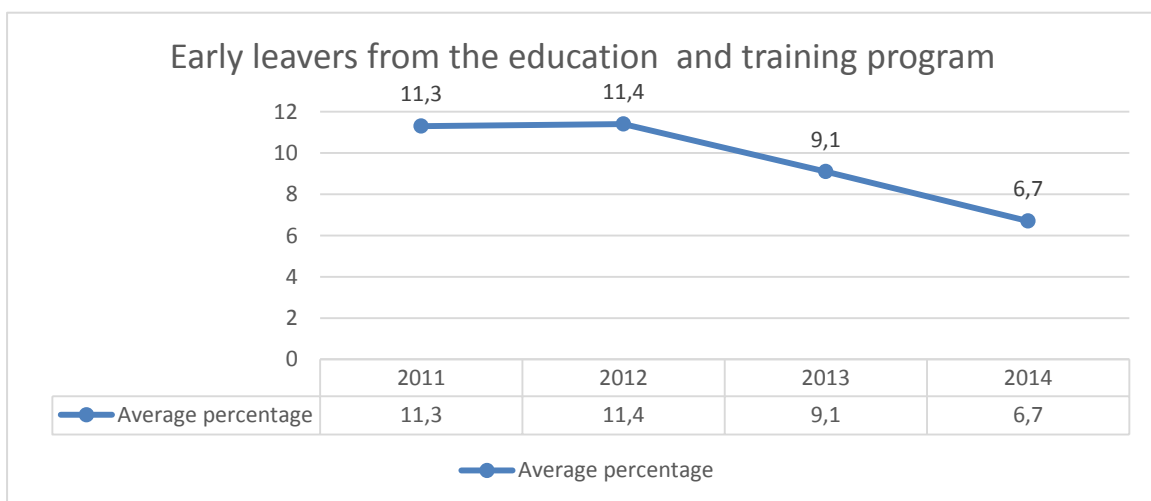


Figure 5 Early leavers from the education and training program

The apprenticeship system in Cyprus is a two year initial VET Program. The VET program has practical and a theoretical program addressed to the young people who had not successfully completed their secondary compulsory education and they wish to be trained and employed in technical occupations. It embraces young people who have withdrawal from the compulsory formal education and who have successfully completed compulsory education or completed preparatory apprenticeship between the ages of 14-21 years old at two levels. The preparatory level and the core level. It is a free of charge.

VET at the upper secondary level is provided at the technical schools to young people aged 15-18 years old and at the evening technical schools. Additionally they offer afternoon and evening classes for the adults. Also the secondary technical and vocation STVE provides a broad range of initial training program to gymnasium leavers and adults. The STVE was reform by a direct involvement and cooperation of the VET stakeholders. Therefore STVE school leavers are qualified to attend a university or any other tertiary education institutions. The quality and the efficiency of VET has been improved through the further development of the infrastructure of technical schools and the introduction of modern technology in VET curriculum. The new curriculum will enhance the VET and match specializations with the current needs of the labor market in order to be more competitive.

Greece

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:

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

Bulgaria

The Ministry of Education and Science coordinates national policy on vocational education and training (VET), while other ministries are in charge of schools in the areas they are responsible for (art, sports, etc.). The main VET providers are VET schools (VET secondary schools, art schools, sports schools), VET colleges and licensed private and public continuing vocational training (CVT) centres. Framework programmes regulate acquisition of VET qualifications by setting age and entry level requirements and specifying content and duration. There are six framework programmes:

- school-based initial VET (IVET) programmes 'A' leading to first level VET qualifications (EQF 2), can be accessed at age 13 at the earliest, after completing at least the sixth year of lower secondary education. The duration of these programmes is one to three years and varies with learners' previous educational backgrounds;
- school-based IVET programmes 'B' leading to second level VET qualifications (EQF 3) can be accessed after completing lower secondary education. These programmes give access to higher education (HE);
- school-based VET programmes 'C' for second and third level VET qualifications (EQF 4) can be accessed after completing lower secondary education and give access to HE. They are available after a one-year introductory programme to learners completing the seventh year of lower secondary school;
- school-based post-secondary non-tertiary VET programmes 'D' leading to fourth level VET qualifications (EQF 5) are offered by VET colleges;
- CVT centres offer workplace-based IVET programmes 'E' (apprenticeships) for individuals over 16. Usually, these programmes are short-term training courses for partial qualifications or courses enabling people to upgrade their VET qualifications;
- CVT programmes 'F' update or broaden professional qualifications and/or lead to first, second or third level VET qualifications. CVT centres offer these programmes for individuals over 16.

Qualification levels reflect complexity and what is expected from learners, ranging from the first level, which involves learning/performing routine activities carried out in stable conditions, to the fourth level, which encompasses performing complex activities in changing conditions, combined with management responsibilities. In school-based programmes, at least 40% of compulsory VET subjects are taught through practical training. All framework programmes, including A, B, C and D are available to adults.

VET qualifications are acquired after completing training and passing State exams that correspond to national educational standards for VET qualifications.

In addition to assessing learning outcomes of VET graduates at institutional level, social partners are involved in designing and approving national educational standards coordinated by the National Agency for VET, before they are embedded in legislation.

Adult participation in lifelong learning is low. For many unemployed people, especially from disadvantaged groups, training at CVT centres is the only opportunity to enter the labour market, and for employees, to retain their jobs. These training courses are predominantly financed through active labour market policy schemes supported by the European Social Fund.

According to data from the ADMIN system of the Ministry of Education and Science for the period 2010-2012 there is a tendency to reduce the number of classes in vocational schools with 3.4% and the number of students by 4.5% (2012 to 2010).

School year	2010/2011 г.	2011 /2012 г.	2012/2013 г.
Number of vocational schools	487	477	494
Number of classes	6 521	6 360	6 301
Number of students	149 535	145 728	142 733

Romania

Since the reforms of 2003, the Romanian upper secondary education system has been divided into 4 pathways:

- a mainstream pathway in secondary schools (Liceu Teoretice) leading to an A level type diploma after 4 years of study;
- a technical pathway in technology secondary schools – Vocational education (Liceu Tehnologice). This stream leads to both A-levels and one of the 19 level III vocational qualifications available.
- a pathway leading to specific artistic, aesthetic and spiritual careers (theatre arts, fine arts, architecture and religious orders).considered as Vocational Education. This is a small unit specific to the Romanian system.
- a more specifically vocational pathway called the « progressive pathway » (ruta progresiva), with studies lasting for 2 years in arts and crafts schools (Școli de arte si meserii), leading to a level I qualification, followed by a post-compulsory « finishing year », leading to one of the 135 level II qualifications. Students from this stream can then study for a level III qualification by following a 2-year secondary education course. At the end of the cycle, pupils receive « dual

qualifications », i.e. a vocational qualification (level III) and their A-levels. Vocational programmes are organised in modules. A number of credits are applied to each module according to specific criteria.

Outside the university sector, there are post-secondary education schools and master's schools (școli postliceale / școli de măștri). These schools are open to students coming from theoretical or technological secondary education and offer a whole range of qualifications over a 2-year course.

University education is much sought after in this country and concerns approximately one third of young people.

Romania does not have a recent tradition of apprenticeships. Legislation has recently been adopted to provide a framework for apprenticeship contracts, but they are rare: only 100 apprenticeship contracts were signed in 2012. (Cedefop)

However In Romania, real efforts are being made to create avenues between different levels, and between vocational and more academic programmes, to raise the status of VET, and to give vocational tracks parity of esteem with more academic tracks. At the secondary school level, recent reforms focus on making the choice of VET more attractive for students (they now receive a monthly scholarship, encouraging them to pursue two-year programmes in these schools) and more relevant (VET schools have to establish partnerships with local employers to be able to offer training places, and work placement represents 75% of the second year).

Even though foreman schools are organised by the Ministry of Education rather than by the professions themselves, and are not specific to apprentices, these schools have many points in common with the Germanophone professional examinations. The foreman schools offer programmes designed to enable experienced technicians to assume more extensive responsibility and management functions in their workplace such as management skills which provide them with the skills to supervise students during placements and possibly teach vocational subjects in schools, and update their technical skills. Such a qualification is often necessary to become self-employed and/or to start a company. Foreman schools are able to offer their own programmes based on the needs of the local employers, in some cases the programmes can focus more on giving future foremen the skills needed to run a team, in others they focus on the pedagogical skills needed to manage the practical training of students.

In Romania, a demographic downturn means that fewer young people will be entering the labour market: the relative importance of adults and therefore adult learning in skilling the labour force is therefore increasing, and foreman schools, with the capacity to

train people already on the labour market, will be increasingly important. The fact that they are typically part-time makes them very attractive for adults in employment.

Furthermore all postsecondary programmes include work placements (with variable lengths, according to the programme, but typically around ten weeks), with quality assurance mechanisms (supervision by a foreman in the workplace, student portfolio and a contract between the school and the employers). Work-place training is also mandatory in upper secondary vocational programmes. The mandatory principle is important because it binds training provision to employer requirements and cements the partnership between local vocational programmes and employers.

In Romania, employers are very involved in the design of qualifications through 25 sectoral Committees and through reviews of qualifications every five to six years. The sectoral committee in construction, for example, was involved in the design of 25 qualifications.

A National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was implemented in 2005, through a tripartite agreement between the government, the national representative trade union confederations and employers' associations (CEDEFOP, 2011). The NQF aims at ensuring the recognition of qualifications acquired in any context, based on national standards (elaborated by experts and validated by sector committees), used both in training and evaluation of competencies. The National Authority manages the qualifications, with the support of the sectoral committees.

Moreover post-high school programmes are intended for young people in initial training, and foreman programmes for technicians in employment. Despite the strengths of these options, this leaves a gap in provision in programmes for adults, including displaced workers, who want to enter or re-enter the labour market. Post-high school programmes are usually not offered in part-time mode. The system as a whole offers relatively few second chance options.

However, in Romania, transitions between vocational and academic programmes at the postsecondary level (in particular between post-high school two-year programmes and universities) are often difficult for students, and credits are not readily portable. Students that have completed postsecondary vocational programmes sometimes find it difficult to use these programmes to obtain credit in subsequent university programmes: even if course exemptions are possible in theory, they depend on the university. The OECD team heard anecdotal evidence that some universities could be reluctant to give credits, and course exemptions to students from VET programmes, especially private universities

who charge high annual tuition fees and have few incentives to offer exemptions. In Romania, university degrees are extremely valued by students, their parents and employers, so the lack of articulation between postsecondary VET programmes and universities could discourage students from pursuing VET programmes.

Apart from this, sustainable efforts have been made by the British Council in Romania who has become the Romanian Ministry of National Education's main strategic partner. BC has worked at both policy making and implementation levels to support and strengthen reform in key educational areas. Much of their work in collaboration has focused on the consolidation of English as the first choice of foreign language for business and communication and these objectives are in line with the national agenda for technical vocational education reform, and the project generated change at both school-based and national curriculum frameworks. New ways of collaborative working between education authorities and practitioners, students and employers have been created within some projects. 'Skills for Employability' has improved the teaching and learning of subjects in the area of agritourism and rural tourism, and generated resources for teaching in these fields, which are now included in the national curriculum.

Sweden

The vast majority of vocational education and training system in Sweden falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research. The Swedish school system is goal-based with a high degree of local (i.e. municipal) responsibility. The Swedish Parliament and Government sets out national goals in the Education Act (1985) and subsequent regulations. In 2006, a new Government was elected and stated its intention to reform the current integrated upper secondary education into these three components 1) general/academic programmes; 2) vocationally-oriented programmes; and 3) upper secondary apprenticeship programmes. Recent reforms have concerned regulations on secondary apprenticeship (2007:1349), assignment for teacher training (2007:223) and on state teacher training (2007:222). Regulations on municipal adult education were defined prior to this under regulation no. 2002:1012. Advanced vocational training comes under act 2001:239 and is regulated by two further regulations (2001:1131) and (2006:906) with other regulations defining such matters as state aid or the relevant authorities powers.

The Swedish government created the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket) as the central administrative authority for the Swedish public school system. The Agency is responsible for children, young people and adults, as well as for preschool activities and child care for school children. The Authority for qualified Training is

responsible for Advanced Vocational Education. As regards to other actors in the VET system, it should be noted that the municipalities have a high level of authority due to the decentralised system operating in Sweden and a recent OECD report on VET in Sweden has reported that there is “little framework for cooperation between VET providers and the social partners” .

In terms of recent developments in policies and programs related to VET in Sweden, the Swedish government has created an Upper Secondary Commission (Gymnasieutredningen), which will elaborate plans for a three-track upper secondary system, introducing new apprenticeship system alongside updated forms of the current academic and vocational tracks. The Government Proposal 2008/09 is another relevant development that aims to ensure that polytechnic post-secondary vocational training responds to working life by providing practical and theoretical skills suitable for the workplace.

IVET

There is little distinction between VET and the general school system in Sweden. Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) are provided in three different levels:

Upper secondary level: This level of education gives students the basic skills needed to live and work in the community, and prepares them for further study. As of 2007 there were 17 national programmes, all of which are 3-year programmes. The programmes provide a broad general education and eligibility to study at university or post-secondary level;

Post-secondary level: Advanced Vocational Education and Training, (Kvalificerad Yrkesutbildning, KY) is a form of post-secondary education designed to meet current competence needs in working life;

Tertiary level: All higher education is pursued in courses, which can be taken independently or in a combination to form one of the three general degrees in undergraduate education and the higher education diploma.

In 2008 the Swedish National Agency for Education launched an IVET skills database to facilitate validation. This was developed to support validation of the VET skills in 2004-2007.

CVET

The majority of Continuous Vocational Education and Training (CVET) in Sweden is publicly approved and funded programmes. CVET are mainly provided in four different categories:

Publicly-promoted CVET for all: The publicly-promoted CVET has four elements: adult education and training; post-secondary and advanced vocational training; labour market training; and in-service training and professional development;

Training for unemployed people and others vulnerable to exclusion: Labour market training is available for unemployed people and can comprise basic or supplementary training. The principle of equity in the Swedish education system results special schools for some people with particular needs;

CVET at private enterprise initiative or promoted by social partners: Many workplaces provide, on a voluntary basis, comprehensive in-service training for personnel at all levels of the organisation. This type of training can involve everything from practical vocational skills to extensive theoretical study;

CVET at individual initiative: Since 1975, all employees are entitled by law to unpaid leaves of absence for studying, provided they had the same employer the last six months or for at total of 12 months during the two previous years.

Germany

Compared with other EU countries, a high proportion of people in Germany have upper secondary level qualifications (58.7% in 2011). One reason for this is the longstanding tradition of the dual system of vocational training. For higher education, Germany approximates the EU average. The proportion of people with a low level of qualification is extremely below the EU average (13.7% in 2011).⁴

While there are different IVET pathways in Germany, the dual vocational training / apprenticeship system is dominating. It is based on two learning venues: the enterprise and the vocational school. Enterprises contract with apprentices who become employees for usually three years and get paid by the enterprises. Enterprises are obliged to cooperate with vocational schools and agree on scale and times apprentices spend at school (e.g. 30% of the time, 1-2 days a week). For apprentices accessing the dual training system, there is formally no other requirement than completed school education.

⁴ CEDEFOP: Germany. VET in Europe – country report, Bonn, 2012, p.7ff

Since 1969, there has been a legal frame for the German IVET system. Today exist 329 recognized occupation profiles. Traditionally, there has been strong emphasis on input-quality with legally fixed training-regulations and fixed duration of the training. Exams are carried out by corporations under public law, e.g. by chambers of commerce. New training regulations for recognized training occupations may be only implemented under participation of social partners (e.g. representatives of employers and trades unions) as well as representatives of ministries of three federal states.

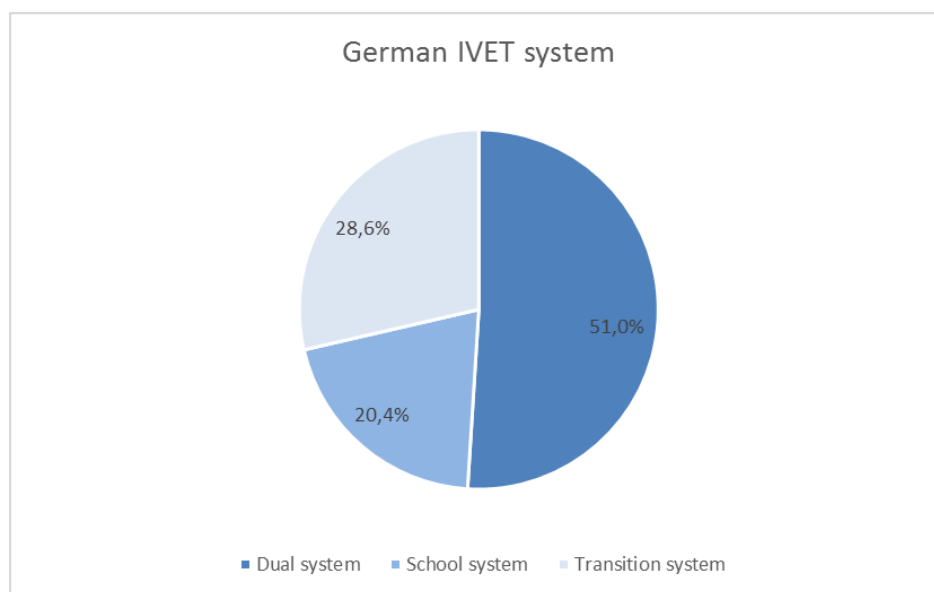


Figure 6: German IVET System

While about half of Germany's IVET students are part of the dual system, every fifth student attains vocational fulltime schools. Further, more than a quarter (28.6%) doesn't manage to get into training and therefore, ends up in the so-called transition system that prepares young people for training.⁵

For the school year 2013/2014, vocational schools are only 435 according to ADMIN system, and students are 130,189.

Existing problems in the field of vocational education in the country are:

- reduction of young people studying for II degree of professional qualification - 24.85% (school year 2012/2013);
- aging of teachers and lack of motivation among young graduates to work as teachers;
- imbalance in professional fields and low participation of the social partners and businesses.

⁵ Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung: Bildung in Deutschland 2012. Ein indikatorengestützter Bericht mit einer Analyse zur kulturellen Bildung im Lebenslauf, Bielefeld 2012

Qualification acquired in secondary education, rarely supports the integration of young people on the labour market. The results of the 2012 national poll a longitudinal study among young people shows that over one third of respondents have received (or will receive, in the case of pupils) diploma of qualifications after leaving school. More than half (54%) of 18-29 year olds report that the document has not helped them find work.

To address this alarming statistics, a new strategy for the development of vocational education and training in Bulgaria for the period 2015-2020 was adopted in September 2014. The aim of the strategy on the one hand is to provide highly qualified employees for the business and on the other to overcome early drop out of children from poor families, as well as to enable adults to gain qualifications in specific fields in vocational schools and vocational training centres in order to be successful on the labour market.

The strategy has paid attention to ensuring both quality and effective vocational education and training through work (dual education). This is done through partnerships between vocational schools, colleges or vocational training centres and one or more employers.

2.2.3. Diagnosing the skills needed by the labor market

Cyprus

Soft skills are important towards improving the productivity of the workforce. Soft skills are much more interpersonal skills and they are demanded in the labor force. Highly required soft skills by enterprises are:

- Good Communication skills – The ability to transfer information to another effectively and efficiently.
- Problem solving skills -The ability to identify the nature of the problem and have the ability to solve the problem efficiently in an appropriate time.
- Self-motivation – The ability to undertake initiative or continue a task without supervision.
- Self-awareness – The ability to recognize oneself personality or character.
- Counseling skills – The ability to help, advice, train supervision of others.
- Team building – The ability to be able to work with a group of individuals.
- Flexibility – The ability to be easily adapt.
- Conflict resolution and negotiation - The ability to negotiate when there is a dispute and be able to resolve the disagreement.
- Critical thinking – The ability to analyze an issue and reach to a decision.
- Strategy thinking – The ability to be able to come up with an effective plan

- Efficiency - The ability to manage job tasks and achieve professional results.
- Honesty – The ability to have morals and straightforwardness.
- Integrity – The ability to have strong moral values.
- Organizational skills - The ability to use resources time energy etc. in order to be successful.
- Time management skills - The ability to use their time more efficiently such as prioritization, scheduling, goal settings.

Soft skills are important for all ages or sex, it's not just important for young applicants in the workforce especially in the relation of modern soft skills. Young people below the age of twenty five are over confident on their educational skills and they ignore their soft skills such as good communication skills, flexibility and positive attitude. They also need to learn to take initiatives and responsibilities in solving problems.

In conclusion, it is important to maintain soft skills capabilities through development and training. Soft skills are significant in the productivity of the workforce. Professional skills and knowledge as well as the willingness to learn new skills is vital to the efficiency towards the productivity of the workforce. Additionally, it is also vital to have the opportunity and the ability for lifelong learning of new and different skills that will lead to more professional labour force.

Greece

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.

Bulgaria

According to a survey of the Bulgarian Industrial Association in 2012, among managers and human resources professionals from the sectors of electrical engineering, metallurgy, furniture industry, meat processing, tourism, electronics and engineering, the acquisition of diploma level of education is not always a proof for sufficient knowledge and skills. The range of skills required is becoming wider. Excluding specific professional skills which are very important for 66% of respondents, orientation to quality and customer care (62%) and use tools, equipment and technology (55%), respondents state skills such as communication, problem solving, contribution to team success, continuous learning and improvement with a degree of importance between 35 and 50%.

According to the participants in the survey, graduates of vocational education are not sufficiently prepared to work as skilled workers (43%), professionals (39%), maintenance workers (35%), operators of machinery and equipment (33%). Rather well prepared are the students acquiring diploma for administrative staff (38%).

According to respondents, the largest deficit in knowledge and skills of graduates of vocational high schools and young professionals are: knowledge of business, market and competitors (52%); skills to deal with problems and conflicts (52%); knowledge of processes and technologies (49%); ability to plan and organize (42%); ability to work with instruments, machines and equipment (34%). The deficits are both in key and specialized competencies.

In 2010, the Business Foundation for Education conducted an extensive study to determine to what extent young people in the country have the skills to find and keep work, adequate of those from which employers need.

A total of 119 human resource managers, company owners, managers and key employers participated in the survey. Parallel to that, from all over the country were surveyed 1023 young people below the age of 35.

For the purposes of the survey a list of 20 sets of competences was created and included a short definition and description so that we have definitions which are standard and comprehensible to both groups.

One of the main questions answered by both groups simultaneously was: „Which are the most important skills for employers when hiring new employees?“

According to the results the 5 most important skills, which are required by the companies when hiring a new employee, both for the employers and for the young people are:

- Professional skills and knowledge - specific skills and knowledge in the professional area, adequate notion about the job;
- Willingness to learn - receptivity, studiousness, desire to improve oneself, looking for and accepting feedback;
- Adaptability - ability to adapt to the company's culture, flexibility, quick orientation towards the demands of the changing environment, including ability to work under stress and with short deadlines;
- Interpersonal skills - ability to work in a team, cooperation, overcoming of conflicts, sociability, creating contacts;
- Efficiency - ability to cope with the job tasks and achieve good result

A comparison was made in the study between the skills that employers value as most important for their business at present and those which will be most important in the coming years. The employer's expectations about the skills they will need in the next years are different from the ones they have selected as the most important for their business at present:

The professional skills and knowledge and the willingness to learn continue to be at the top of the scale. The interpersonal skills, efficiency and staff motivation will have an increasing significance for the companies. The self-management skills will be more and more required from the new employees. According to the employer's forecasts the customer service skills and the leadership skills will have almost doubled their significance in the future.

As it is stated in the report by the Lisbon Council „Europe 2020: Why Skills are Key for Europe's Future“ in the coming years the most important skill will be to define complex decisions for new and unfamiliar problems, as well as the ability for lifelong learning of new and different skills.

Romania

It is evident therefore, that employability is an extremely complex, and somewhat vague, concept that is both difficult to articulate and define. However, by synthesizing the available literature, it is possible to identify key 'transferable' soft skills and competencies integral to young people in search of employability:

- Liability;
- Active listening;
- The ability to cope with uncertainty;
- The ability to work under pressure;
- The ability to plan and think strategically;
- The capability to communicate and interact with others, either in teams or through networking;
- Good written and verbal communication skills;
- Information and Communication Technology skills;
- Creativity and self-confidence;
- Good self-management and time-management skills;
- A willingness to learn and accept responsibility

(Adapted from: McLarty, 1998; Tucker et al., 2000; Nabi, 2003; Elias and Purcell, 2004).

In utilising and amalgamating the above skills and competencies for the purposes of defining graduate employability, the intrinsic link between graduate skills and competencies and the needs of the labour market (Trunk et al., 2006) was considered of paramount importance.

Thus, in order to promote business-graduate employability on a pan-European scale, business schools across Europe need to make sure business graduates are equipped with more than hard business-focused skills and competencies. Work experience, and an ability to utilise softer business-related skills and abilities are also vital. With graduate numbers increasing on a global scale, European business schools have a responsibility to promote the employability, work readiness and mobility of their graduates. In doing so, they will produce highly qualified, flexible and employable individuals, able to meet the ever-changing demands of modern-day European business.

Sweden

The background to that within the Social Services Department - not just in one city in Sweden - began to seek new ways to evaluate job applicants, a number of young people have trouble achieving pass in the core subjects of mathematics, English and Swedish.

But to become a good nurse maybe you don't need to be certified in these subjects it's not the most important competence.

- This is a job where social skills are crucial, says an employee. We work with older people who often are ill or demented. I've seen people with good grades that are completely horrified the problems they encounter in geriatric care. And of course they cannot work in this field.
- You must be able to empathize and have empathy, she continues. Of course I have also met people that I never thought would be able to work here, but their development has been amazing and they become excellent in their work.
- We are therefore trying to find other ways to get staff. Schooling Days is one way, another validation. I believe we will shortly introduce more opportunities for different forms of apprenticeship. A theoretical background is essential but it is important that it is linked to practice. Source <http://www.utbildningsinfo.se/sb/d/195/a/456>

This is shown from various surveys and prognosis made by the Public Employment Service in Sweden where the main feature in the employment process is basic skills, the employers takes more notice in how people interact and communicate both internal and external than they do about occupational skills which is seen as secondary, but assumed they exist to a certain extent, in the sense they can be thought without difficulties.

All staff in organizations today are more visible and more exposed to each other and to external contacts, like customers, suppliers, stakeholders and other companies or competition. Organizations today cannot afford to neglect their outer world and they have to make sure that their organization is up to a certain standard regarding basic skills.

This is clearly shown when we view the problems on the labour market today, and for the past 15 years, where people with low or very low basic skills tend to be left outside the labour market for very long periods of time. This is a problem with many dimensions, it is not only due to the fact that these people have low basic skills, it also has to do with the development on the labour market, i.e. technical development, organizational development and the view on education and employment.

Germany

There is a number of soft skills generally demanded by enterprises. Highly required are the following:

- Ability to communicate
- Problem-solving thinking
- Capacity for self organised learning

- Analytical abilities
- Ability to work in a team
- Ability to accept personal criticism
- Ability to manage conflict situations
- Ability to work independently
- Ability to manage time
- Assertiveness
- Empathy
- Commitment
- Motivation
- Reliability.

Regarding VET in particular, certain competences are required in order to be accepted for an apprenticeship. The Federal Employment Service in Germany has set up a list of criteria as to apprenticeship entry maturity that imply next to certain hard skills a number of soft skills, which are the following:

- Retentiveness
- Processing speed
- Capacity for sustained attention
- Perseverance
- Ability to communicate
- Ability to manage conflict situations
- Ability to accept personal criticism
- Commitment
- Ability to work independently / self-organisation
- Accurateness
- Ability to work in a team
- Manners
- Sense of responsibility
- Reliability.

2.3. YOUTH

2.3.1. Youth Demographics

Cyprus

In Cyprus, there is a tendency and encouragement of young people to continue their studies to the tertiary level. Families play an important role towards encouraging and

supporting their kids to continue to higher education. For the age group 20-24 for both male and female there is a steady increase to the average percentage at the tertiary level of education between the years 2011 to 2014. The average percentage of male and female at the tertiary for the year 2014 is 35.7%. Additionally, for the age group 30-34 it can be seen from the table below that there a steady increase at the tertiary education. The average percentage of male and female for the age group of 30-34 it can be seen that the average percentage is 52.5% for the year 2014. Students in Cyprus are characterize by a high level of education because the students that complete upper level of education seek places in institutions of higher education.

Population for the age 20-24, 30-34 years of age by level of education for the period of 2011-2014

Male and female	Year 2011		Year 2012		Year 2013		Year 2014	
	Average		Average		Average		Average	
Age 20-24		%		%		%		%
Less than upper secondary	6,902	12.4	7,003	12.2	5,954	10.5	4,260	7.6
Upper secondary	32,424	58.3	33,340	58.4	31,774	56.2	31,962	56.7
Tertiary	16,319	29.3	16,880	29.5	18,810	33.3	20,095	35.7
Age 30-34								
Less than upper secondary	12,284	17.9	11,904	17.1	11,102	16.0	10,452	15.2
Upper secondary	24,591	35.9	22,957	33.0	25,067	36.2	22,277	32.3
Tertiary	31,706	46.2	34,740	49.9	33,151	47.8	36,140	52.5

Greece

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.

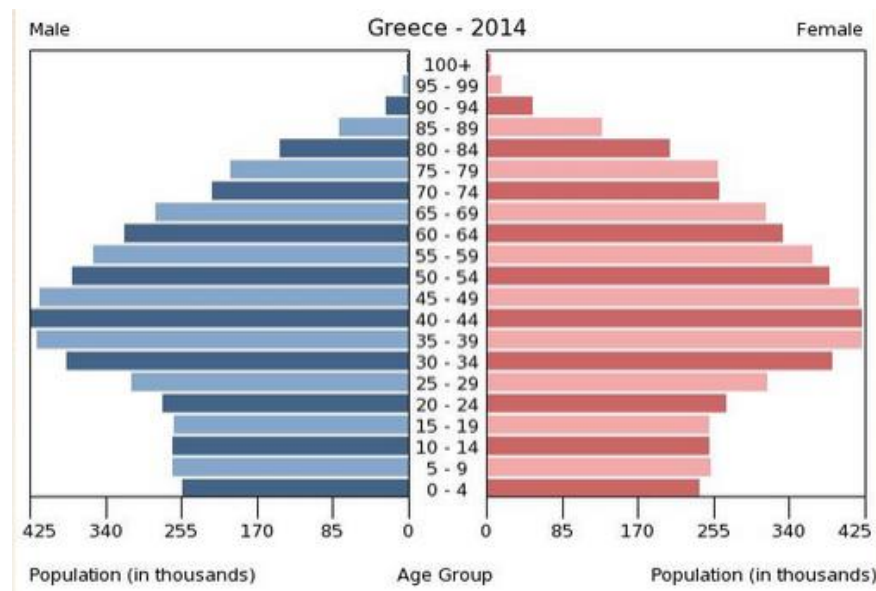


Figure 7: Population in age groups in Greece (

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

Bulgaria

For several years, in Bulgaria there has been a tendency of decreasing the number of population and its aging. The share of people aged over 65 is increasing, while the number and proportion of the population under the age of 15 is going down - a problem typical for other EU countries, as well. The share of young people in the country for 2012 was 17.88% or 1,301,700 people, which is a decrease by almost 1% for the period 2010-2012 (1324 481 2011 and 1334 300 2010). Target forecast of the National Institute of Statistics shows that in 2020 the number of young people will decrease, especially this will sharply affect the age groups 15-19 and 20-24 - if in 2011 people aged 15-29 years were 1,324,481, in 2015 their number will be 1,177,433, and in 2020 it will be around 1,006,884.

After a sharp decline in immigration sentiment in the period 2002-2006, in recent years there has been a renewed increase in the desire for emigration of young people, especially in the age 20-29. Reasons for emigration are related to aspirations for education and career development and providing employment, higher incomes and a higher standard of living. This process has serious economic and social consequences for

the future development of the country. Emigration has a strong negative impact on the reproduction of the population, as the women leaving the country are of childbearing age, which lowers levels of the future births for a much longer period - 40-50 years.

According to the National Statistical Institute, 31.12.2012 about three-quarters of young people are living in urban areas (76.16%) and only a quarter in villages (23.8%). There is also a tendency for significant territorial movement in the direction "city-city". Significantly smaller in number and share migration flows in the direction of "village-village". The number of people who has migrated from villages to cities is greater than in the opposite direction "town – village". Demographic processes in the period 2010 - 2012, had greatest impact on young people living in the villages. Their number has decreased by 6.20%, while with the young people living in the cities this rate is relatively low - 1.21%. Worryingly, every eighth young person has specific intentions in the foreseeable future to emigrate. Over a quarter of young people in the country are definitely interested in temporary labour migration abroad. It is positive that the educational structure of the emigration flow is changing - predominantly young people with secondary (11.9%) and lower education (10.2%) are leaving the country. Graduates increasingly see opportunities and prospects for a good financial situation in the country and only 7.5% declare desire for fulfilment abroad. The largest share of immigrants is young people who work part-time (56.85) or were unemployed (48.1%).

The data listed in table "Population of 15 to 29 years of age by level of education for the period 2009 - 2012" shows a tendency of increase in the number of graduating young people and in 2012 they have increased by 29 thousand as compared to 2009, that is by 3.1 percentage points. 54.4% of young people in the country have completed secondary education in 2012. For the last four years the trend is to reduce the proportion of young people without secondary education (an increase of 5.6% in the proportion of young people with secondary education compared to 2009). At the same time, during 2009-2012 there was a significant reduction in the proportion of graduates from secondary vocational qualification among graduates of secondary general and vocational education with 6.5% at the expense of those with secondary general education. The number of young people who complete only their primary education is going down - in 2012 they were 27.5% of all young people in the country and the decrease compared to 2009 was 7.2 percentage points.

Population of 15 to 29 years of age by level of education for the period 2009 - 2012								
	2009		2010		2011		2012	
Total	1386,9	%	1334,3	%	1349,8	%	1301,7	%
Higher	136,3	9,8	131,1	9,8	160,2	11,9	167,5	12,9
Secondary	676,7	48,8	669,0	50,1	735,3	54,5	708,2	54,4
Secondary with vocational qualifications	340,3	50,3	326,2	48,8	340,4	46,3	310,4	43,8
Secondary general	336,4	49,7	342,8	51,2	394,9	53,7	397,9	56,2
Primary	481,1	34,7	458,5	34,4	383,3	28,4	358,1	27,5
Primary and lower	92,7	6,7	75,7	5,7	71,0	5,3	67,9	5,2

Romania

The high rates of inactivity inside what is the economically active age category of the population, the large number of people working in subsistence farming (estimated at four million people) and migration of labour (estimated at two million people) are occurrences that could account for the decrease in the number of people earning wages.

A worrying phenomenon, however, is the incidence of long-term unemployment among young people: 59.7% of Romanians unemployed over six months were young, in 2014, according to a report released by the INS.

The same document shows that most Romanians are active in agriculture, forestry and fishing. Also, a large percentage of the population is given by qualified workers, service employees and "experts" In 2014, the employment rate of the working age population (15-64 years) was 61.0% and the unemployment rate of 6.8%.

Youth Unemployment Rate in Romania remained unchanged at 23.60 percent in December of 2014 from 23.60 percent in November of 2014. Youth Unemployment Rate in Romania averaged 20.06 percent from 1999 until 2014, reaching an all time high of 24.70 percent in January of 2014 and a record low of 15.80 percent in April of 1999. Youth Unemployment Rate in Romania is reported by the Eurostat.

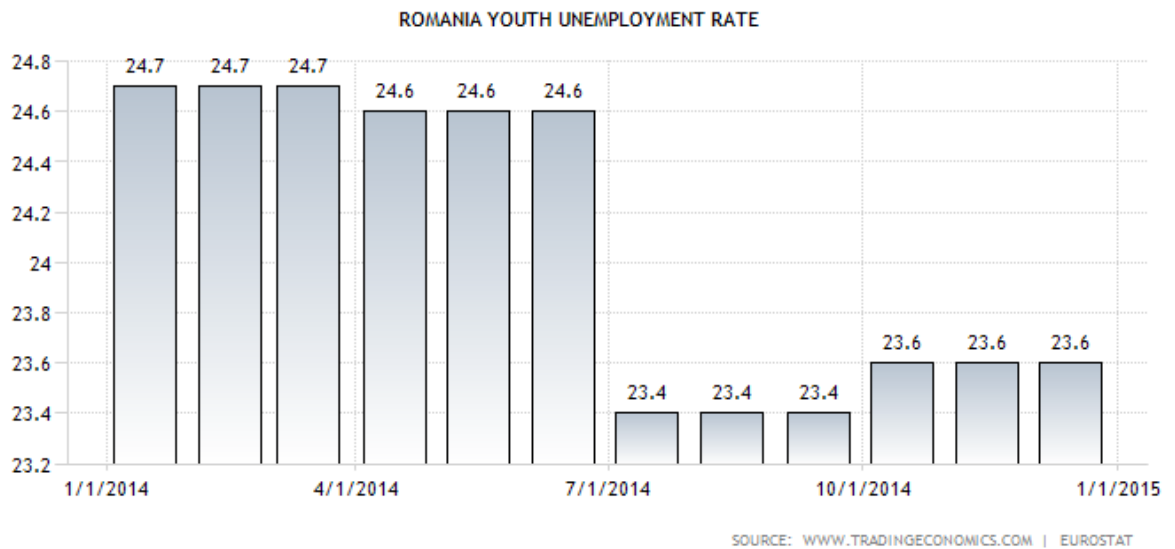


Figure 8 Romania Youth Unemployment Rate

Germany

Of the entire German population, teenagers and young people between 15 and 24 years make currently a proportion of 10.7%.⁶

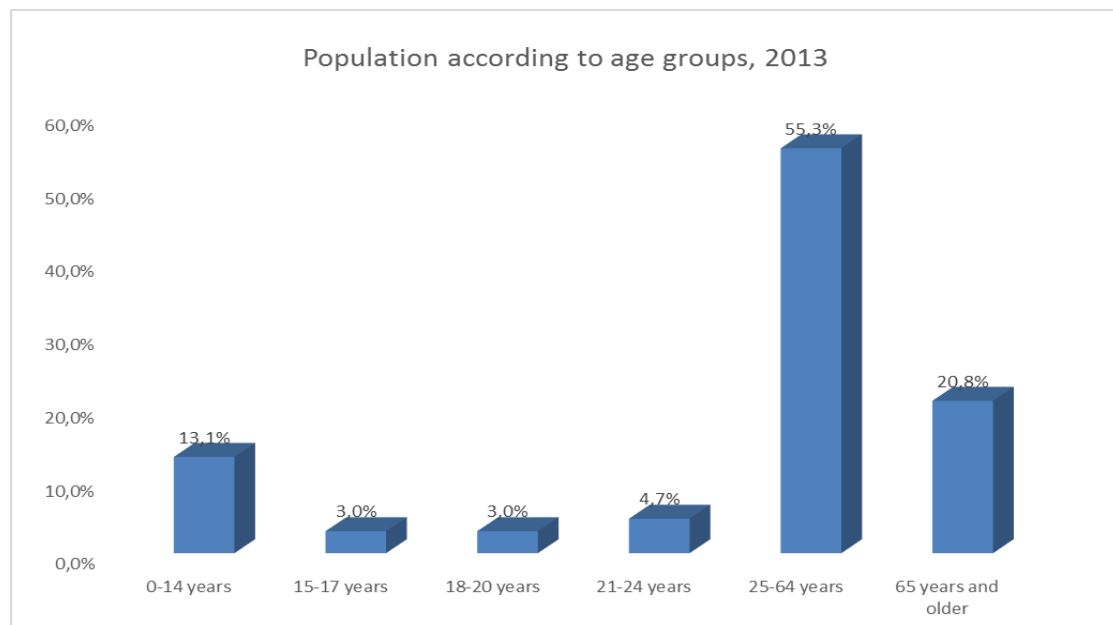


Figure 9: Population in age groups in Germany

⁶ Statista: Bevölkerung – Zahl der Einwohner in Deutschland nach Altersgruppen am 31. Dezember 2013 (in Millionen), online publication <http://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1365/umfrage/bevoelkerung-deutschlands-nach-altersgruppen/>, 20.02.2015

However, the demographic change is leading to serious shifts in the age structure. The population in Germany has been steadily falling since 2004 and will continue to do so. The number of deaths is increasingly exceeding the number of births. The growth in the number of migrants is no longer able to compensate for the low birth rate, which will exert a strong effect on society and the world of work in future Germany.

Due to this development, the age group of those aged between 17 and 25 will shrink significantly by around a fifth by 2030. By 2060, as many as one in three (34%) will be at least 65 and there will be twice as many 70 year-olds than children born.

2.3.2. Levels of Unemployment

Cyprus

The unemployment rate has increased over the last few years due to the economic crisis and the resources have been redirected in order to reduce the unemployment rate.

The table below shows the average percentages for the youth unemployment to the population from the year 2011 to 2014. The year 2014 the youth unemployment ratio in Cyprus is 14.5% compare to the previous years. In the following table it presents an increase of 5.8% of the youth unemployment ratio between the age group of 15 years old to 24 years old, since the year of 2011.

Youth unemployment ratio to the population for the year 2011-2014

Male and female age	Year 2011 Average %	Year 2012 Average %	Year 2013 Average %	Year 2014 Average %
15-24	8.7	10.8	14.9	14.5

In general the unemployment rate in Cyprus had been higher for women than men. However during the last few years there has been a shift and a change for the unemployment rate. The figure below it shows that the unemployment rate for men in 2014 is 17 % whereas for the women is 16.1%. It shows that the unemployment for men is higher than the women over the years 2011-2014.

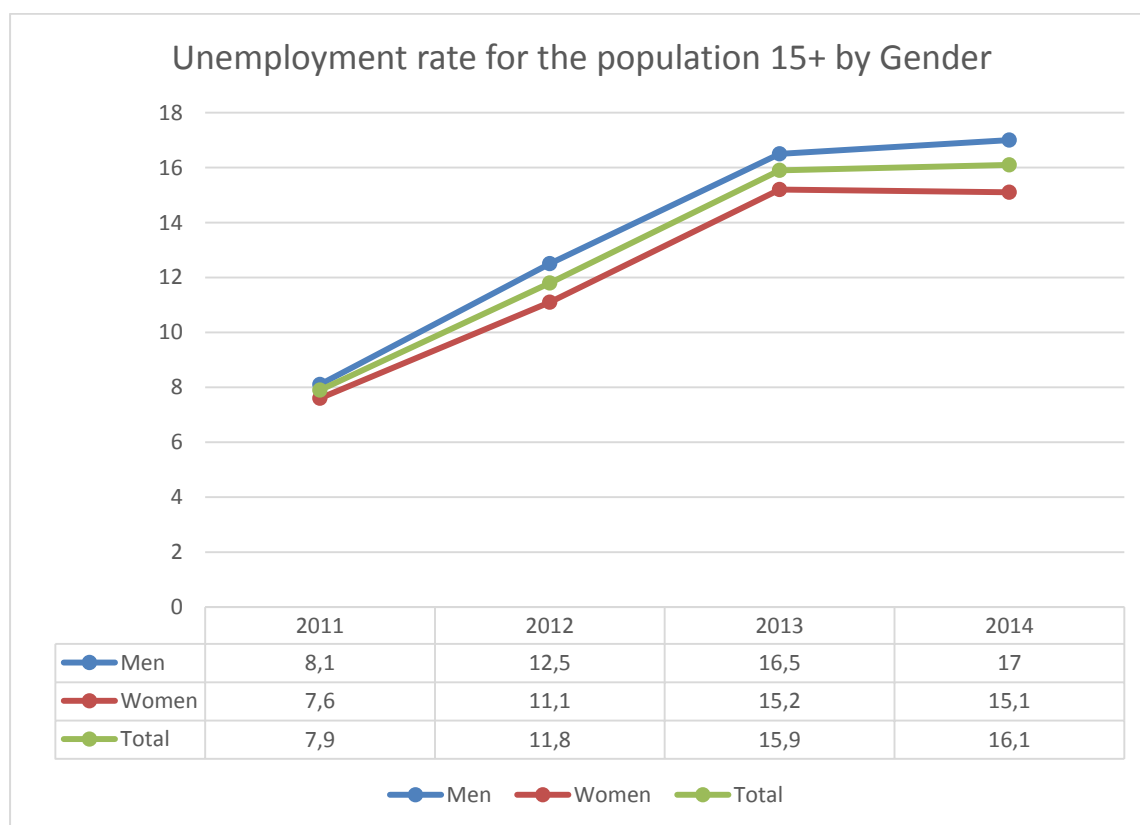


Figure 10: Unemployment Rate for 15+ by Gender

From the table below, it can be seen unemployment rates by different age groups. The table presents the young unemployment for the year 2014 between the ages of 15 -24 the average percentage is 35.9% .However, the last few years as shown on the table below, it presents a high increase of the young unemployed. Additionally, the age of 25-64 is 14.2% but for the last few year it presents a small increase to the unemployment between the ages of 25-64.

Unemployment for the years 2011-2014

Male and female age	Year 2011 Average		Year 2012 Average		Year 2013 Average		Year 2014 Average	
		%		%		%		%
15-24	9,050	22.4	11,465	27.7	15,746	38.9	15,247	35.9
25-64	24,832	6.5	39,935	10.4	52,645	13.7	54,517	14.2

(Statistical service of cyprus, 2015)

Greece

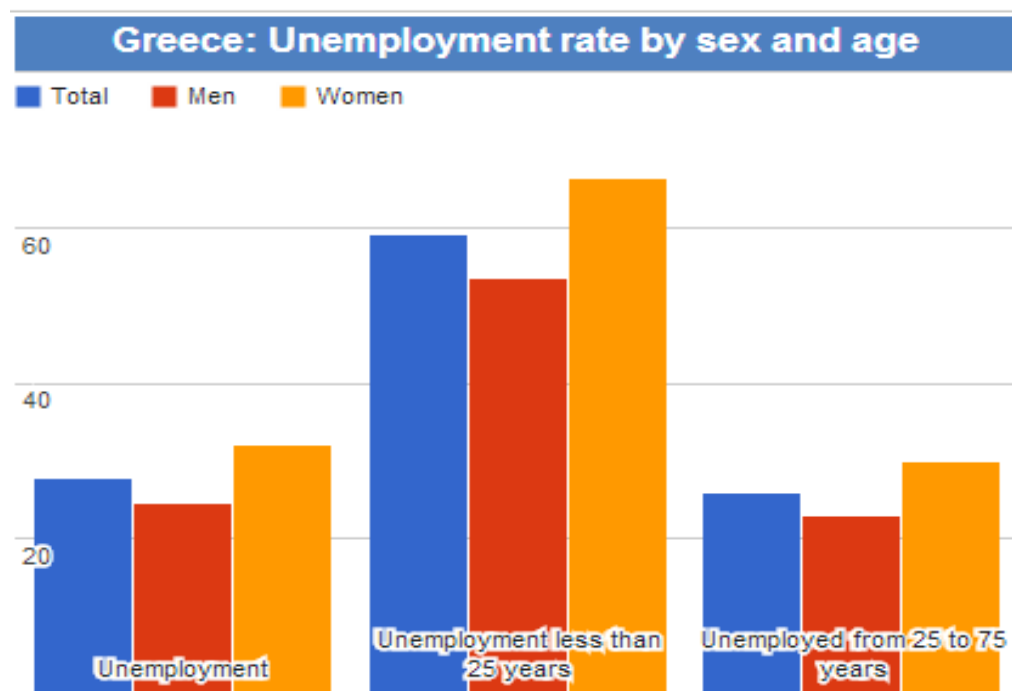
It is widely known that Greece is facing an acute economic crisis, with over 40% of young Greeks currently being unemployed, according to the latest figures from Greece's labour force survey.

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.



Bulgaria

In 2012, youth unemployment among young people is 20.8% in Bulgaria, while economic activities 42.1%. For the period 2010-2012 the increase in the proportion of

unemployed young people is 3.2 percentage points. In 2012, unemployed young people aged 15-29 were 128.5 thousand and this is an increase of 10,000 compared to 2011.

According to Eurostat data for the group 15-24 years old for 2012 the level of youth unemployment in Bulgaria is 28.1%, while the EU average (27) is 22.8%. Increased unemployment in this age group is within 6.3 for the period 2010 -2012. The youth unemployment rate in Bulgaria, however, recorded a decrease from 27% in November 2013 to 21.4% a year later. This amounts to 43 000 people, aged between 15 and 24, who were unemployed in November 2014.

Distribution of unemployed people under 29 in the observed occupational groups shows that the biggest group with the largest share in 2012 is the group of registered youth - 60.8%. By educational criteria youth with primary or lower education have the largest share - 46.7% of the unemployed youth. Young people with special secondary and vocational education are 26% and with general secondary education - 15.4%. The share of graduates is the lowest - 11.9%.

Long duration is characteristic of youth unemployment. Young people of age under 29 who were in the labour market for more than 1 year are 24.4% of the total number of unemployed youths. For young people from 15 to 24 this percentage was higher (49.8%). While at European level the ratio between the overall level of youth unemployment and the share of long-term unemployed young people in 2013 was 3 to 1 (one in three unemployed youth is long-term unemployed), in Bulgaria, the ratio is closer to 2 to 1 (one in two young people is long-term unemployed).

Female unemployment is higher than male unemployment, and this proportion is valid in youth unemployment, too.

Nationally representative longitudinal survey among young people in 2011, shows that the unemployment rate of young people aged under 29 who live in villages and small towns is the highest.

Romania

According to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, Romania has 19.94 million inhabitants.

According to the Labour Ledger as at 1 January 2014, the active civilian population amounted to 9 042 900 persons, representing 42.5 % of the country's total population. Out of the total active population, 53.3 % were men and 46.7 % were women.

The employed civilian population amounted to 8 530 600 people, of whom 4 801 100 were salaried employees. Most of the employees were working in the services sector (2 960 500 people), while 1 732 400 persons were employed in the industrial and construction sectors.

Two different sets of data concerning the unemployment rate are calculated in Romania.

The ILO unemployment rate is calculated by the National Institute of Statistics (INS) using the definition provided by the International Labour Organization. In November 2014, this rate was 6.5 %, according to the INS press release of January 2015.

The rate of registered unemployment, determined by the National Employment Agency (ANOFM), is calculated on the basis of the number of unemployed people registered in the ANOFM database. At the end of December 2014, this rate was 5.3 %, corresponding to 478 300 registered unemployed persons.

Romania is divided into eight administrative regions: North-West, Centre, North-East, South-East, South-Muntenia, Bucharest-Ilfov, South-West Oltenia and West. Each of these has certain specific features in respect of their economic structure, which is why certain sectors play a predominant role in the development of each region.

- In the North-East and South-West regions, a large share of the population is engaged in agricultural activities.
- The civilian population is employed mainly in industry and the construction sector in the West and Centre regions,
- In the services sector in the Centre, West and Bucharest-Ilfov regions.

There are also several areas which have significant tourism potential (Bucovina in the North-East region, the Black Sea coast and the Danube Delta in the South-East region, etc.), and the economic development of these areas is influenced also by the use of this potential.

At the end of December 2014, the highest unemployment rates were recorded in the South-West region (7.9 %) and the South-Muntenia region (7.5 %). The lowest unemployment rates were recorded in Bucharest (1.8 %), the West region (3.8 %) and the North-West region (4.0 %).

The main types of enterprise present on the labour market are:

- companies (limited liability companies (SRL),
- joint-stock companies (SA),
- partnerships (SNC),

- simple partnerships (SCS),
- joint-stock partnerships (SCA)),
- sole traders (PFA) and
- family associations.

The highest number of registered unemployed are in the group 40-49 years meaning 140,262 people, followed by 30-39 years (108,535 people), the fewest unemployed being registered in the age group 25 - 29 years (40 565 people)

However, **the unemployed without education and those with primary education, secondary and vocational education** have the largest share in the total unemployed registered by the County Agencies for Employment (79.53%).

Unemployed persons with upper secondary education level is 15.44% of the total number of unemployed, while that with university education is 5.04%.

Sources: National Employment Agency, Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and the Elderly, National Institute of Statistics.

Sweden

Unemployment youngsters 18-25 year

Year 2014	With Labour support	Total
Sweden	5,3%	9,1 %
Kristianstad	9,0%	13,7 %

Number of young people who are neither working nor studying 2008-2010, reported as percentage of population 16-29 years and as a proportion of those who neither worked nor studied in 2008 (Young in training included)

	Number of young that has not worked or studied for three years	Percentage of the population in each group	Percentage of young who neither worked or studied in 2008
Gender			
Men	39 589	4,5	53
Women	37 704	4,5	43
Age			
16-19	25 402	4,9	53
20-24	29 319	5,1	44

25-29	35 685	6,3	47
Level of education			
Primary and lower secondary school	25 402	4,9	53
Secondary school	21 559	3,0	36
University – college / After upper secondary school	7 270	1,8	37
Region of birth			
Within Sweden	52 622	3,7	49
Born in Europe, not Sweden	10 840	9,8	45
Born outside of Europe	13 812	8,1	44
Total	77 293	4,5	47

What do they do? Young who neither work nor study, with different support systems 2011

Age groups	16-19	20-25	16-25
All who do not work nor study	18 300	93 900	112 100
	%	%	%
Immigrated during the year	11,1	6,4	7,2
Participating in government controlled unemployed program	4,8	23,6	20,5
Municipal support/activity	2,8	7,6	6,8
Parental leave / vacant	1,1	6,3	5,5
Sickness or disability	0,0	13,5	11,3
Combination of supports >7 months	1,7	3,6	3,2
Combination of supports 3-7 months	13,9	7,5	8,5
Combination of supports >3	5,7	5,4	5,4
No known activity	59	26,2	31,5

Many have no activity that we know of. Among young people who neither work nor study in the age group of 16-25 year there is no record of what they do. As in previous years the proportion is higher in the group 16-19 years (about 60 percent). Among those who had no known activity in the 16-19 age groups, 42 per cent were girls and 58 percent guys 2011.

Young people who neither work nor study, and who receive no known support from the community, in some cases, stay at home and be supported by their parents. It is likely that this is more common among young people aged 16-19 than among those who are 20-25.

It is not possible to discern whether the young in the statistic are at a juvenile home, youth custody or in prison. In August 2007, 1105 Young (408 girls and 697 boys) were admitted into special youth homes. The youngest was 11 and the oldest was 21 years. Slightly fewer than half was 16 - 17 year old. In 2007 there were 81 admissions in secure closed youth custody. These were almost exclusively young men. The average time of stay was 10.3 months. Those staying at special youth have access to education. These are counted as NEETs.

Germany

The unemployment rate in Germany is currently 7%, amongst which 4.6% are counted as long-term unemployed which means that the duration of unemployment lasted longer than one year.⁷ Germany's current youth unemployment rate is 8%.

Although Germany's current youth unemployment rate is low compared to other European countries, a significant number of young people are unable to find a job or a training opportunity. In 2014, for instance, more than one in 10 young people seeking a training opportunity were unable to find one and now face very slim chances on the job market.

2.3.3. Youth Employment Statistics

Cyprus

In Cyprus, the labor force participation for the population for the years 15-64 by gender for the years 2011 to 2014 as is presented in the figure below it has been rather stable for men and women as well as a total. The labor force rate for the year 2014 is 74.3% as a total.

⁷ Bundesagentur für Arbeit: Arbeitsmarkt in Zahlen, Nürnberg 2015

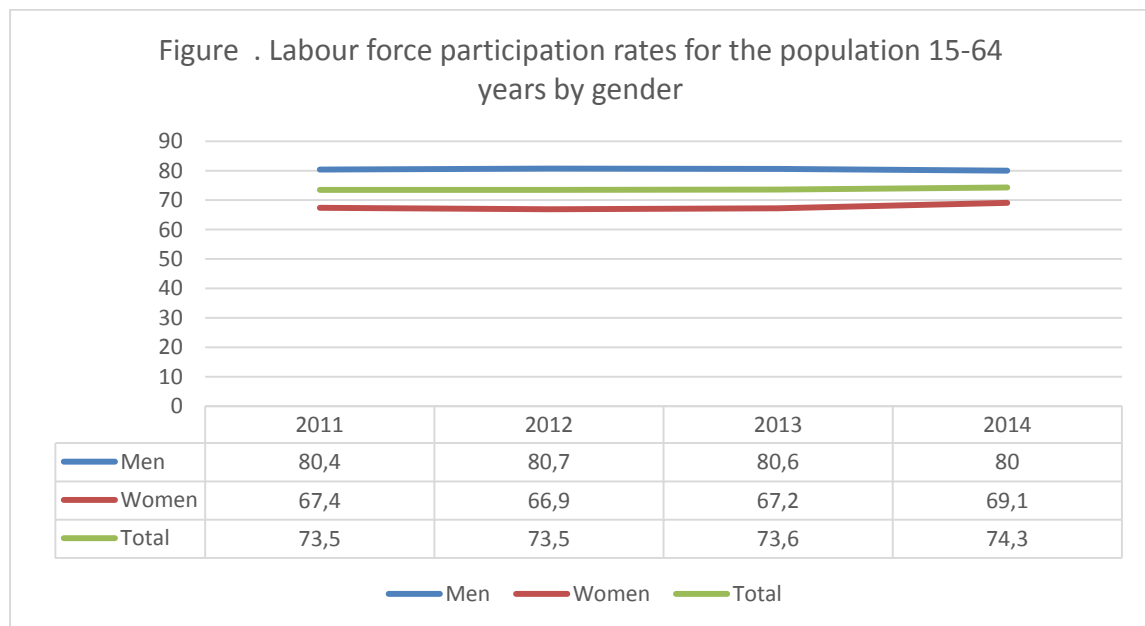


Figure 11: Labour Force by Gender

From the table below it can be seen that the employment rate for the population for the years 2011-2014 for a range of age groups. For the age group 15+ there is a decrease. The average percentage for the year 2014 is 53.5% For the age group 15-24, and 20-24 it can be seen a small increase in the percentage rate between the years 2013-2014. Finally for the age group 25-54 it can be seen a slight increase of 0.7% between the last two years.

Employment for the population by age group for the year 2011-2014

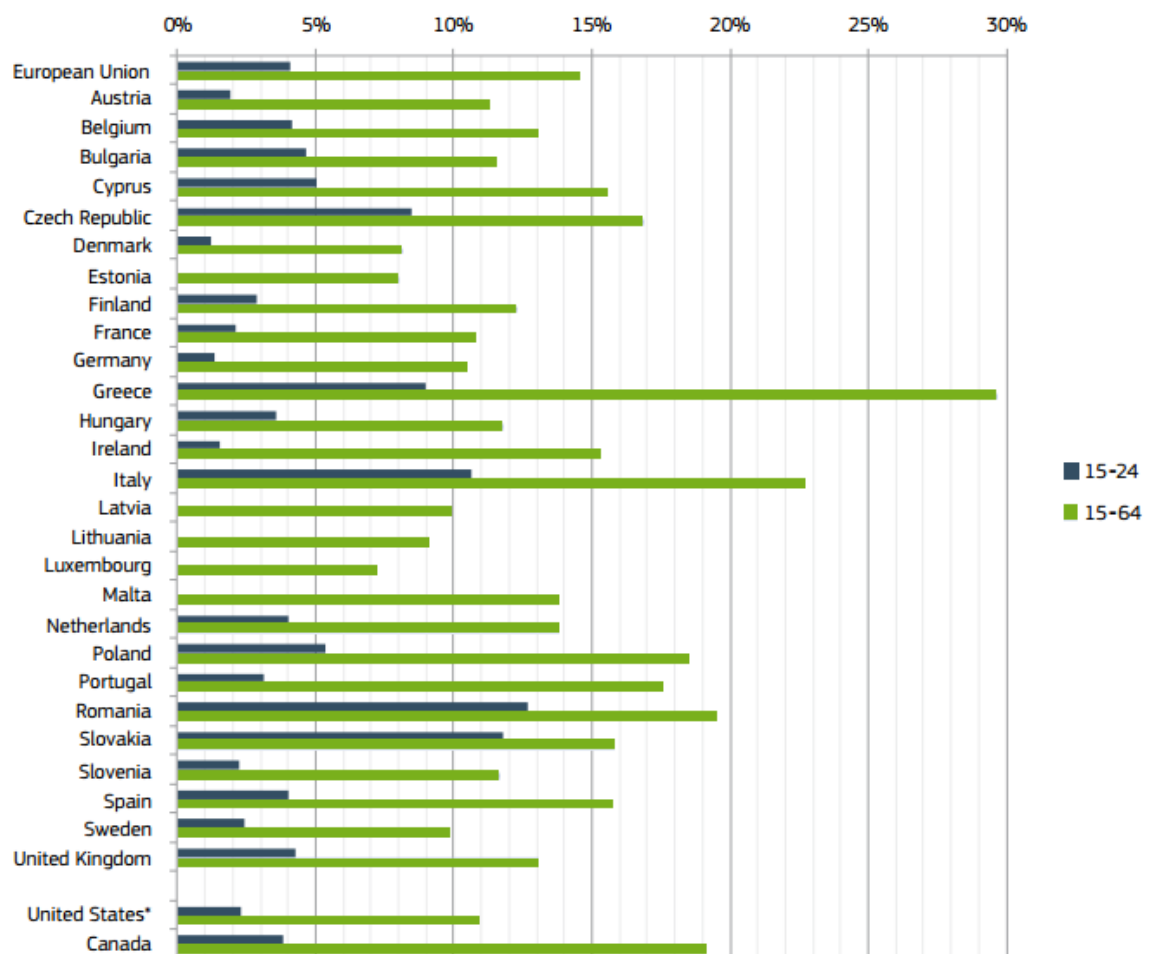
Male and female	Year 2011 Average		Year 2012 Average		Year 2013 Average		Year 2014 Average	
		%		%		%		%
age								
15+	398,214	58.7	385,227	55.9	365,078	53.3	364,582	53.5
15-24	31,395	30.1	29,851	28.1	24,718	23.5	27,171	25.8
20-24	28,775	51.7	27,927	48.8	23,268	41.2	25,462	45.2
25-54	303,266	81.3	296,684	78.4	284,719	75.5	285,371	76.2

(Statistical service of cyprus, 2015)

Greece

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).

Bulgaria

For young people in the country significant differences are reported between the level of employment in different age groups, while the overall trend is negative. In the age group 25 to 29 years old employment was 63.78% in 2012 which is a decrease from 2010 by 3.07%, while the EU average is 71.15% for 2012.

For young people from 15 to 24, the employment rate in Bulgaria is on average 21.4%, while the EU is 33.5%. In 2012, Bulgaria saw an increase in employment in this age group compared to 2011 by 1.8%, but still has not reached the level of 2010 - 22.2%. The low employment rate among young people in this age group is mainly due to their low economic activity, as they are still in the process of obtaining their education and work during their studies. Bulgaria is in the group of countries with less than 50% of young people active in employment.

Data on the educational structure of employees shows reductions in employment in all categories, while retaining correlation between level of education and the magnitude of the employment rate. Amplitude between two extreme values (for young people with higher education and those with primary or lower education) remains significant - 60.7 percentage points, compared to 61.6 percentage points in 2010. In 2011 it is less because employment group of young people with higher education fell by a higher rate than those with primary or lower education. In 2012:

- employment rate of graduates continues to be the highest - 69.1% (70.1 in 2010);
- or young people with secondary education it is 55.7% (57.7% in 2010);
- for young people with primary education it is 19.3% (20.0% in 2010);
- those with primary or lower education have the lowest employment rate- 8.4% (8.5% in 2010).

Nationwide representative survey conducted in 2011, shows high mobility of young people related to employment - especially from villages and small settlements. 44.7% of young working people aged between 18-29 years are fully satisfied with their current work / occupation, 43.8% were satisfied with only half of their work, and 11.5% are not satisfied. Most often satisfied with their profession are university graduates (19.8%) and respondents with secondary education are dissatisfied (12.5%). Most dissatisfied with their professional status and remuneration are people with secondary education. Only a third of them said they did not intend to change jobs. This affects emigration attitudes and labor mobility in this group. 53% of university graduates are satisfied with their work and do not intend to change it, in low-educated groups these are 54%.

Eurostat data presents trends of decline in the share of self-employment among young people in Bulgaria, by age group and in the comparative period 2009/2011. In 2011 only 1.1% of employed young people aged 20 to 24 developed their own business. Their number decreased compared to 2009 by 0.8%. For young people aged 25 to 29, 3.1% are entrepreneurs. A significant reduction is not observed here (only 0.1% compared to 2009).

Young people who have become entrepreneurs, have different levels of education, but those with higher and secondary education prevail (5% had primary or lower education, 42% have secondary education and 53% have higher education (15% bachelors and masters 38%).

Romania

TOP TEN OF THE MOST REQUIRED OCCUPATION IN ROMANIA

1.	Manufacturing labourers not elsewhere classified	(ISCO 9329)
2.	Shop sales assistants	(ISCO 5223)
3.	Shop keepers	(ISCO 5221)
4.	Waiters	(ISCO 5131)
5.	Structural-metal preparers and erectors	(ISCO 7214)
6.	Freight handlers	(ISCO 9333)

7.	Building construction labourers	(ISCO 9313)
8.	Heavy truck and lorry drivers	(ISCO 8332)
9.	Assemblers not elsewhere classified	(ISCO 8219)
10.	Cooks	(ISCO 5120)

Sweden

	Compulsory schooling	Secondary school	Upper secondary school, shorter education after secondary school	Higher education, at least 3 years
Population participating in the work force (percent of population)	28	79	56	71
Employed rate (percent of population)	18	64	48	64
Unemployed (percent of labor force)	38	19	15	10
Unemployed that are studying full time	63	26	59	39

Unemployment was highest among adolescents with lower secondary education, 38 percent. If we reverse the perspective and study how much of the unemployed of their respective training group, we find that unemployment among academically educated young people represented only 2 percent of the total youth unemployment. The largest group unemployed youth had secondary education (48 percent) or lower secondary education (42 percent) while the unemployment rate among young people with shorter post-secondary education equivalent to 8 percent of the total youth unemployment. (Source : <http://www.scb.se>)

Germany

Employment in Germany achieved a new record end of 2014. In December 2014, 42,8 Million were counted; this corresponds with an employment rate of 65%.⁸

⁸ Destatis Statistisches Bundesamt: 42,8 Millionen Erwerbstätige im Dezember 2014, online publication https://www.destatis.de/DE/PresseService/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2015/01/PD15_029_132.html, 20.02.2015

However, more than a third of employees (35%) do not possess a full-time job but work part-time or in mini-job positions (jobs with salaries of max. 400 Euros). The number of part-time jobs has heavily increased in recent years and is expected to further rise.

Naturally, employment rates of young people are lower, since a majority is still in education. The older they are, the more likely they are in employment. In 2013, 29% of people in age group 15-20 years worked at least one hour a week; in age group 20-25 years this applied to 70%.⁹ Employment rates of teenagers and young people have gone slightly down in recent years which reflects that fact that people spend extended time at educational facilities.

⁹ BMBF Datenportal: Erwerbsquoten nach Altersgruppen, online publication, <https://offenedaten.de/dataset/bmbf-db-tab-0-25b/resource/17d13c75-dff2-460b-b998-4572eb5790f6>, 20.02.2015

3. PRIMARY RESEARCH

Primary research was undertaken among the groups of 25 employers and 15 VET trainers/counsellors in all participating countries. For this purpose a structured questionnaire comprising of 15 questions was used for Employers in order to identify the level of cooperation of Employers with VET Schools on the development of soft skills, what can be done in relation to the public policy and the soft skills gap. For VET Trainers /counsellors a structured questionnaire comprising 6 questions was used in order to identify the collaboration of VET providers with Businesses, the level of collaboration for promoting soft skills as well as the soft skills gap, in other words how important are specific soft skills for the labour market and the extent to which young people have these skills. The analysis of the results of the questionnaires is presented in section 3.1 and section 3.2

3.1. Questionnaire for VET Trainers

3.1.1. Cooperation on soft skills

Q1. How are your members working to promote soft skills among VET students?

Cyprus

The participation in the survey provide the following answers summarized:

- Free training on entrepreneurship, technopreneurship collaboration within the Cisco Networking Academy.
- Offer soft skills training such as team working and presentation skills complementary to the technical skills
- Group projects practical projects which promotes the whole aspect of soft skills
- Practical training sessions in real organizations during summer time.
- Language improvement by sending students through the Erasmus+ to work for the practical training and develop those soft skills.
- Discussions interviews and consultation
- Training courses/ Seminars
- Discussions with students concerning soft skills
- Soft skills in curricula of technical programs.
- In class / workshops, team work using questions suggestions and answers.

Romania

- The dominant idea is:

- task oriented activities in teams,
- presentations based on group work,
- project work,
- role-play,
- real-life situations for conflict resolutions,
- creativity driven activities

Sweden

We are trying to have activities to learn them different soft skills, Have discussions with the students concerning the importance of social skills, Encourage the students to be more involved in activities that promote social skills

Greece

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.

Germany

Most respondents expressed some activities to promote soft skills amongst their VET students. The majority has integrated such activities in their regular teaching programs, some respondents rather implement additional projects and seminars or use special events like Open Days. The addressed soft skills are varied and range from team work, communication skills, ability to deal with conflicts and preventing violence, social learning, dealing with customers or methodological skills how to learn.

Bulgaria

The participants in the survey provide quite comprehensive answers to this question and indicate their experience in the encouragement and development of soft skills. Two main themes can be distinguished from the feedback provided by the 15 trainers:

- Large part of the respondents share that soft skills are mainly being developed in extracurricular forms of education and extracurricular classes *"through programs, activities and events, organized by different institutions and foundations, (Youth Center, Preventive Information Center for Drugs, Local committee for combating juvenile delinquency of minors, career centers)"...*, *"as part of different European projects"*, *"soft skills are being discussed and practiced only in extracurricular classes – these are the trainings I conduct with students, based on their wishes and requests or in activities planned by me as part of my field of work as a school psychologist and career consultant"*, *"...through school-based projects – celebrations, campaigns, competitions, discussions, etc."*;

- Another part of the respondents think that soft skills are being developed most of all through the personal example from the teachers: *"the teachers of the general and specialized subjects, through their personal behaviour, teach their students soft skills"* – as well as through the personal initiative of the teachers to include in their classes activities like case studies, role plays, interactions, discussions, which support the development of soft skills (*"through interactive methods I use in my work, which encourage them to work in a team, take decisions, be active during discussions and when presenting, as well as to focus their attention on their strengths, through the feedback that I give them."*).

The answers of the participants in the survey clearly indicate that the education/school system in Bulgaria *"does not imply a targeted training on social skills"*, social skills just develop as an accompanying element, depending on the commitment, awareness and personal self-initiative of the Headmasters, teachers and career consultants. It is yet important to note that all participants share that special attention is being paid to the development of soft skills in the schools they work in, in the form of additional extracurricular initiatives. Trainers share their observations that *"the need to include the development of soft skills in the curricula is becoming more topical, so it does not only remain as a good practice in separate schools."*

Q2. Are you aware of good examples of how VET providers and enterprises collaborate on promoting soft skills and competences?

Cyprus

The majority of the respondents are not aware of good examples of VET providers and enterprise collaborations. Very few expressed examples of collaboration such as

- "Working in professional areas as a part of their training, those organizations use tutors for students working alongside each another. Some organizations also rotate working tasks and at some stages role play takes place such as dealing with difficult customers within workplace requirements. The VET trainer visits and assesses the student practical training with the tutor and how the student performance reflects on these skills."
- "Collaborate in the design of courses"
- "Team problem solving"
- "Games , Lectures"
- "In company training programs promoting soft skills organized by enterprises with facilitators from VET providers."

Romania

Some of the respondents highlights the mock interviews which are performed during the training sessions of Entrepreneurship course. Practice training and activities such as

'Mock Company' (Firma de exercitiu) develop students' soft skills mentioned previously, such as:

- The ability to cope with uncertainty;
- The ability to work under pressure;
- The ability to plan and think strategically;
- The capability to communicate and interact with others, either in teams or through networking;
- Good written and verbal communication skills;
- Information and Communication Technology skills;
- Creativity and self-confidence;
- Good self-management and time-management skills;
- A willingness to learn and accept responsibility

Sweden

Yes have different activities that promoting social skills - such as role play and Communication activities, More and more important to learn social skills so we need to implement more tools for this.

Greece

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

Germany

The vast majority of respondents is not aware of good examples as to collaborations between VET providers and enterprises regarding the promotion of soft skills. Very few expressed to collaborate in this context with enterprises themselves. According to one exception, the respondent reported on a practice week for students of a nursing school who manage a hospital ward and thereby, amongst others develop soft skills.

Bulgaria

Some respondents in the survey reply that they are not familiar with good examples of cooperation between VET providers and enterprises on promoting soft skills and competences. Other respondents share that there is lack of sufficient examples or that the attempts for such cooperation are *"feeble"*. Among all answers what stands out is the opinion that both VET providers and enterprises *"are focused exclusively on the development of hard skills"* as well as the opinion that *"Bulgarian employers do not yet give credit to transferable skills"*. Of course, part of the respondents share that *"in the*

different fields of production and industry the level of involvement of the business with the education institutions is different”, but that “the policies of the vocational schools are directed towards cooperation and encouragement of the business to invest in the education of students.”

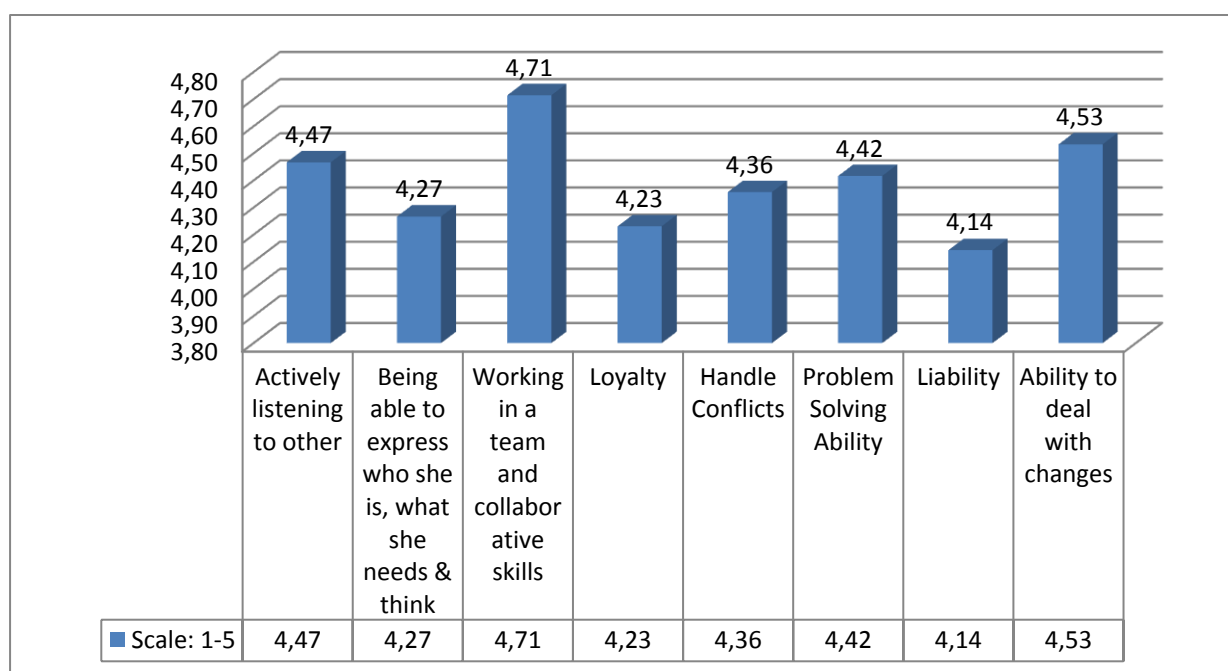
The answers to this question also reveal that whether there are good practices or not is entirely dependent on separate people and their attitude towards the development of soft skills (*“whether such activities are implemented or not, depends to a great extent on the management of the respective education institution and on the local authorities – the extent to which they realize the necessity and encourage active work with the youth to promote, form and develop transferable skills”*), but that it is necessary to increase this awareness and such practices and examples to become more regulated and structured (*“A more structured and deep work is required with specialized trainings in real-time conditions and mentor programs”*).

3.1.2. The Soft Skills Gap

Q3. How important are the following soft skills for your company?

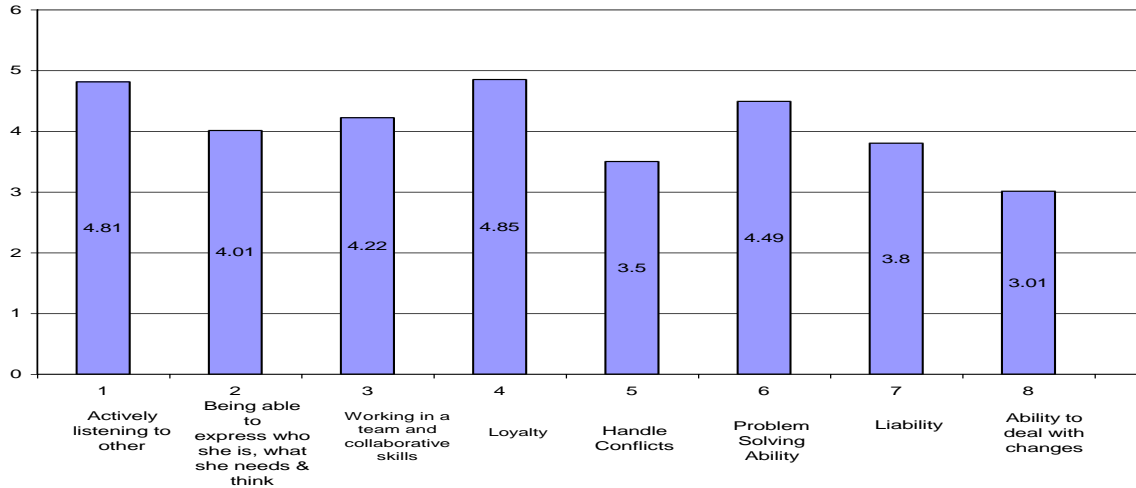
Cyprus

The chart below presents the results for the assessment of the soft skills. The scale ranges for 1 which is Not at all Important to 5 which is Very important. It can be seen that the trainers considers the following soft skills very important. All soft skills qualities are consider to be important for this reason they are rated above number 4.

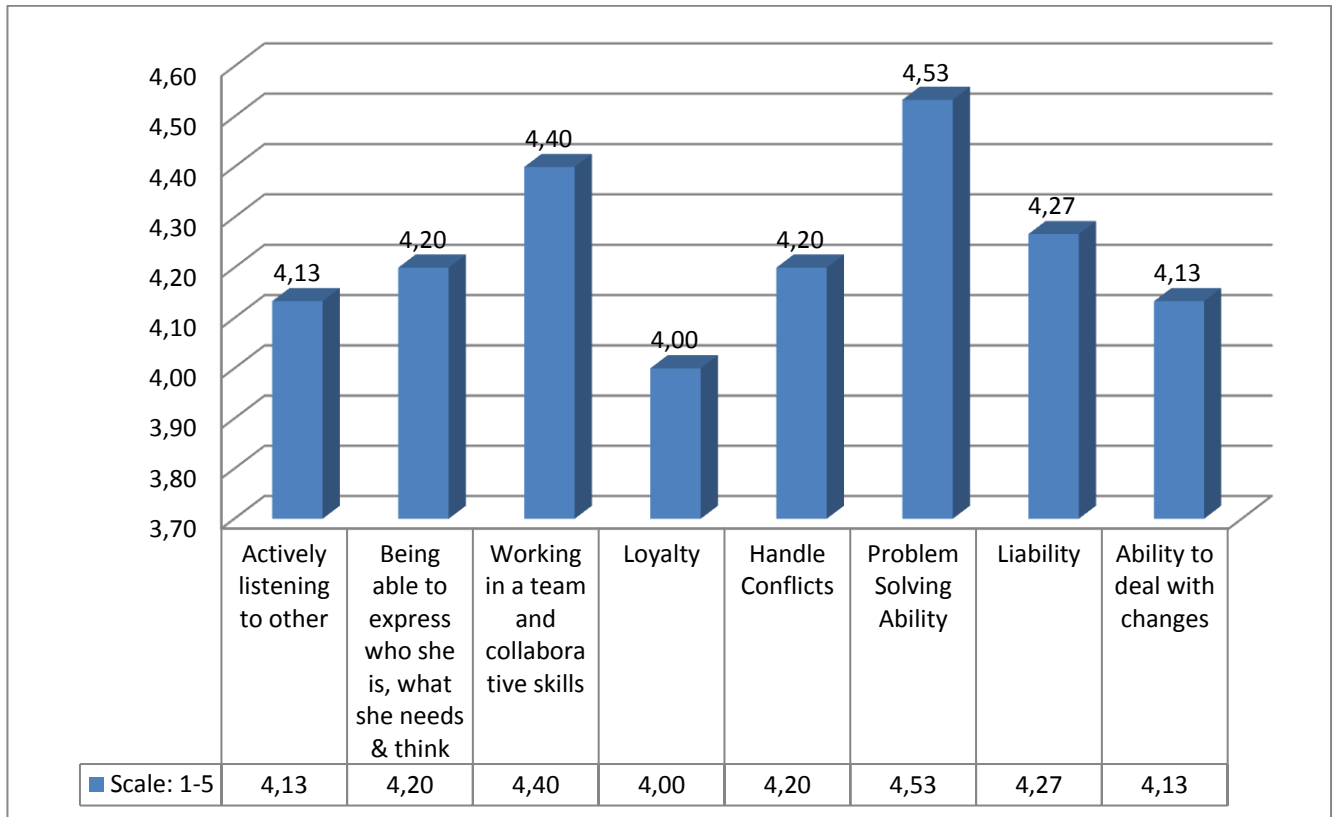


Romania

Trainers are aware of the importance of the mentioned soft skills in the survey. The first and most important one is "Loyalty" which might be a response to the corruption campaign against politicians by our judicial system. Also 'Active listening to others' and 'Problem Solving Ability' were rated as very important.

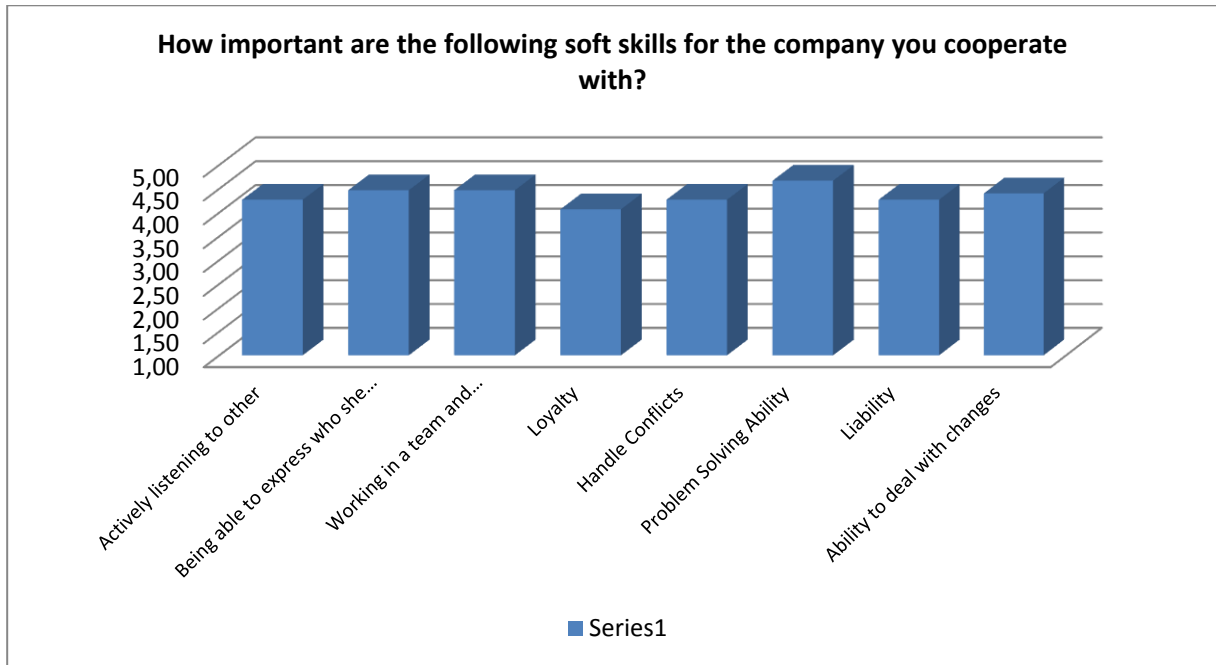


Sweden



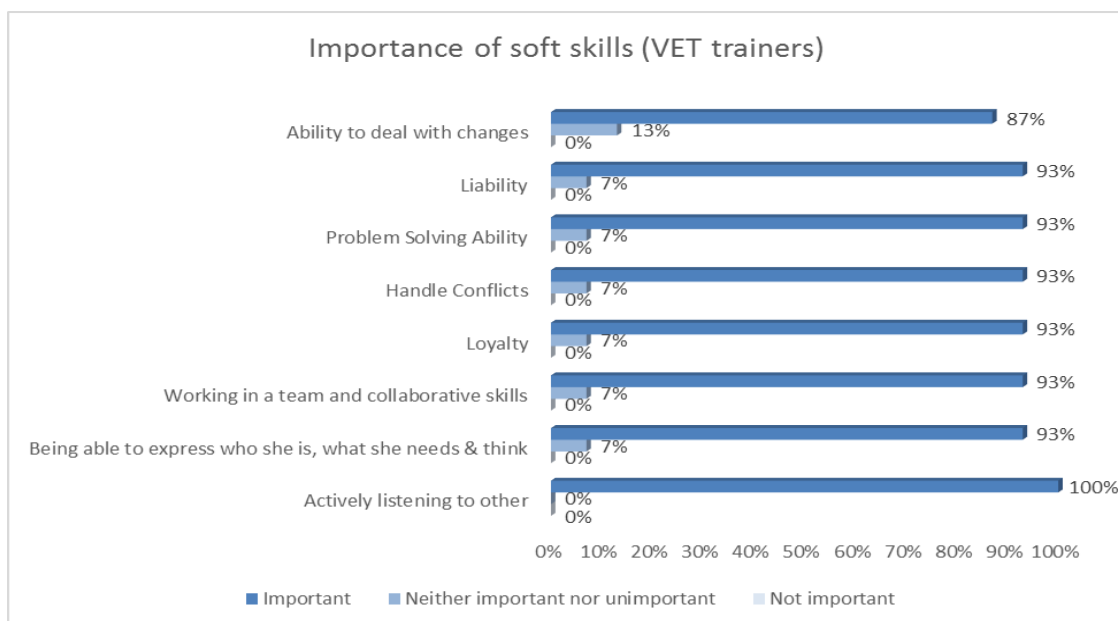
Greece

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.

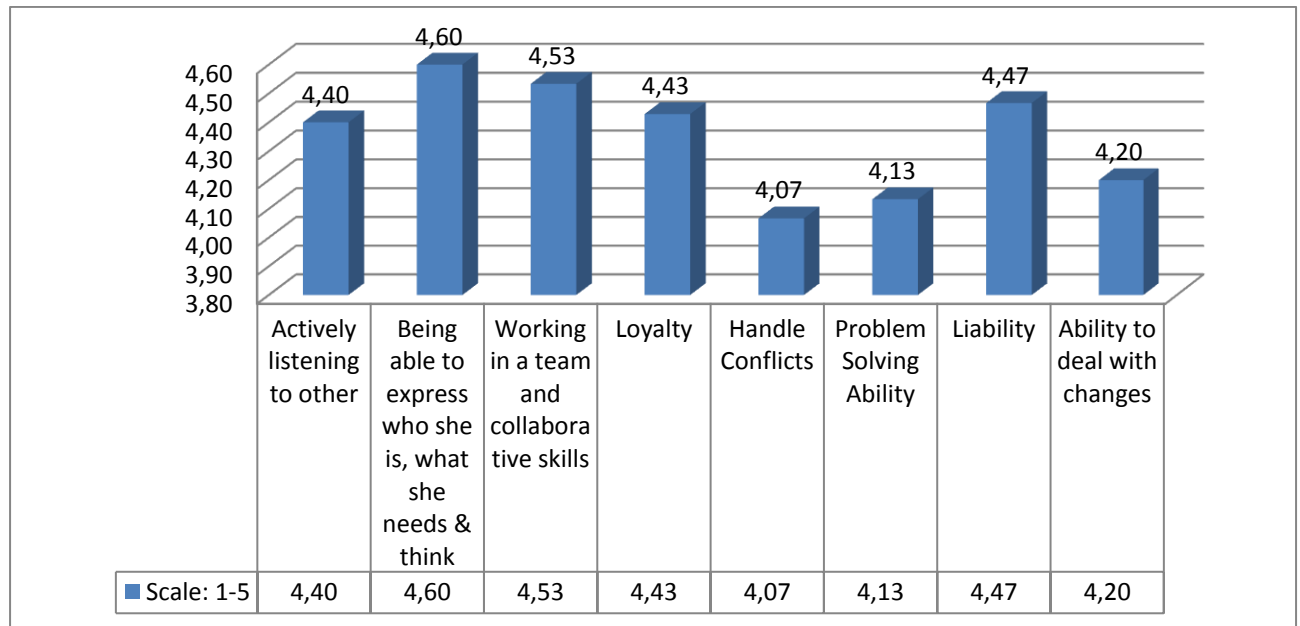


Germany

All soft skills respondents have been asked about in the questionnaire are considered to be important:



Bulgaria



The results clearly indicate that participants evaluate the given soft skills mainly with the highest possible mark – 5. Except for “Problem Solving Ability”, where most of the respondents have chosen mark 4, to evaluate the level of importance of this skill; the majority of marks for the rest of the soft skills is 5. Participants define as most important skill “Being able to express who she is, what she needs & thinks”, where 80 % of the trainers have chosen the maximum mark 5, and “Liability”, where the maximum mark is 5 and is being preferred by 74% participants in the survey.

Two participants have marked the skills for “Handling Conflicts” and “Ability to deal with changes” as being not very important at the work place – mark 2, and one participant has given the lowest possible mark – 1 or not at all important for the work place, to the skills “Liability” and “Problem Solving Ability”.

Some of the participants have added more skills to the list of soft skills. According to some of the respondents there are other soft skills which are also important for the work place, in particular:

- Reliability
- Positive attitude
- Self motivation
- The organization and prioritization of tasks
- Ability to work under pressure
- Flexibility
- Confidence

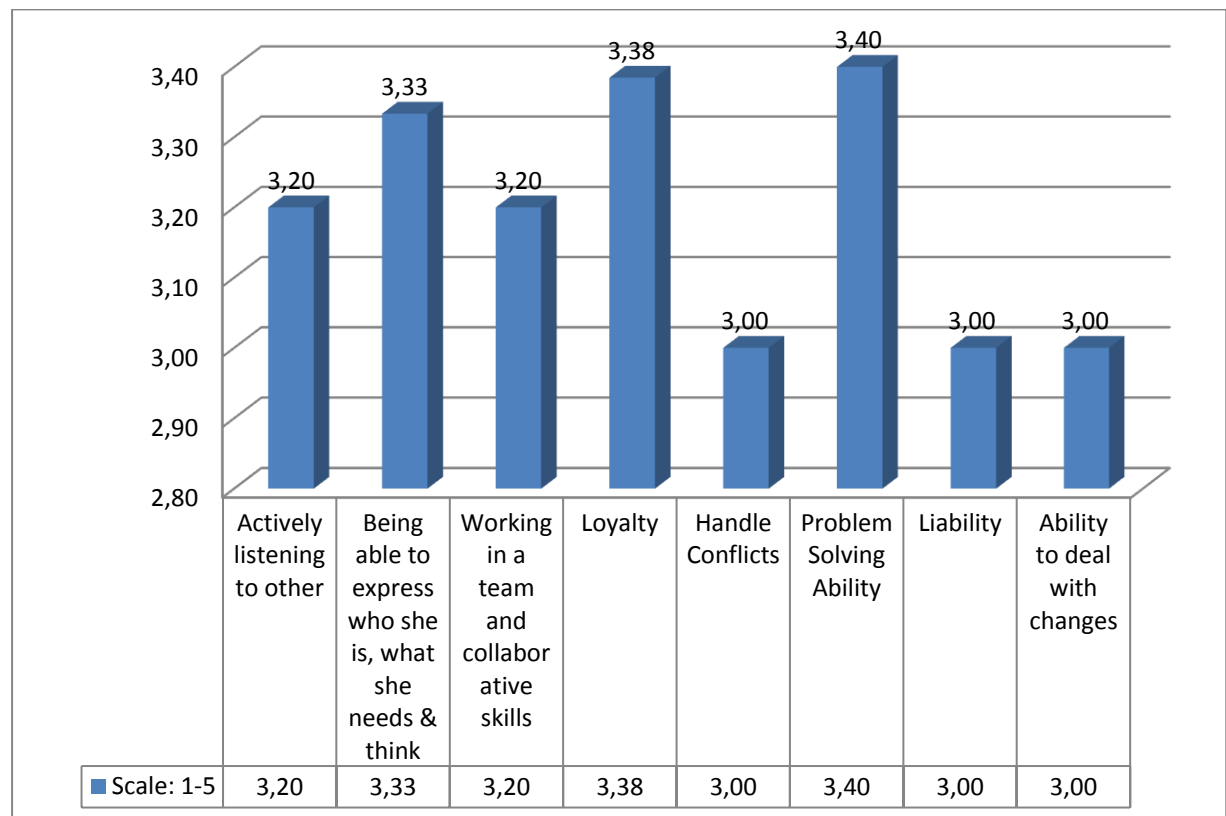
- Time management
- Desire to learn
- Project planning, writing and fulfilment
- Stress management
- Self-appreciation and self-worth

The importance of these additional soft skills has been marked with the maximum mark of 5.

Q4. Based on your personal experience, to what extent do you consider that your employees have the following soft skills?

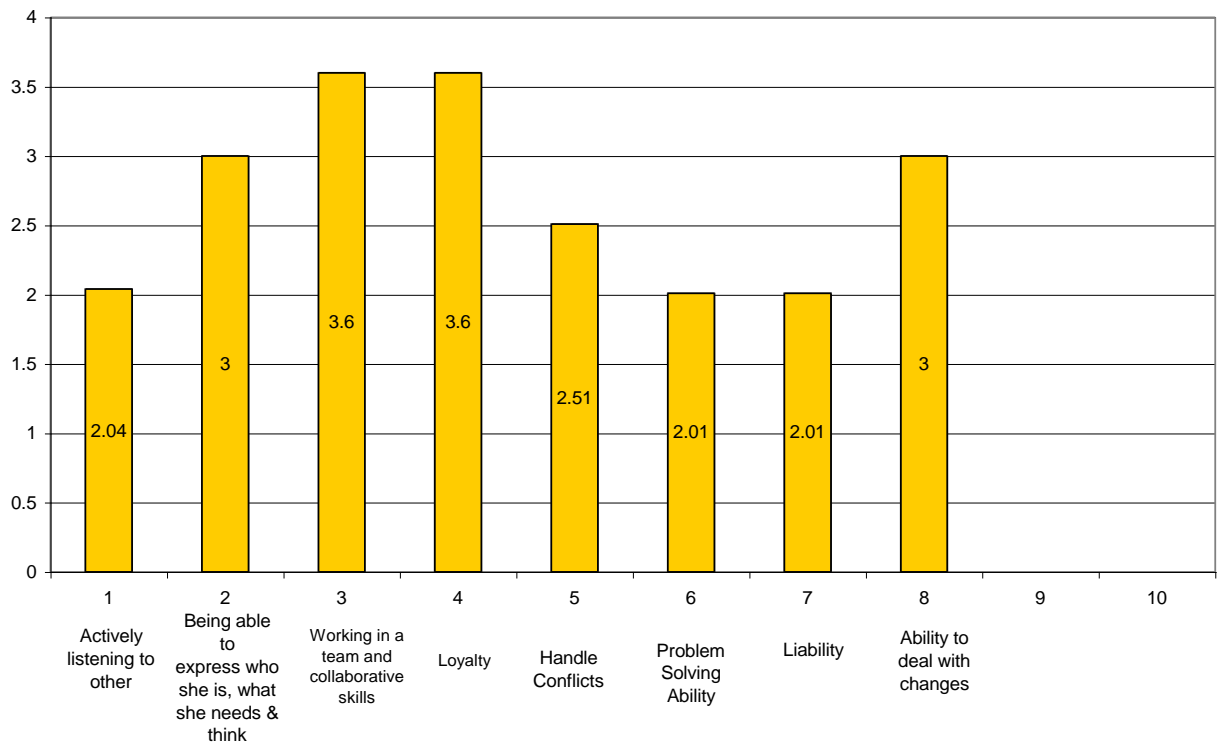
Cyprus

The following chart shows what skills the trainers consider that their trainees have in a scale ranges from 1 to 5.

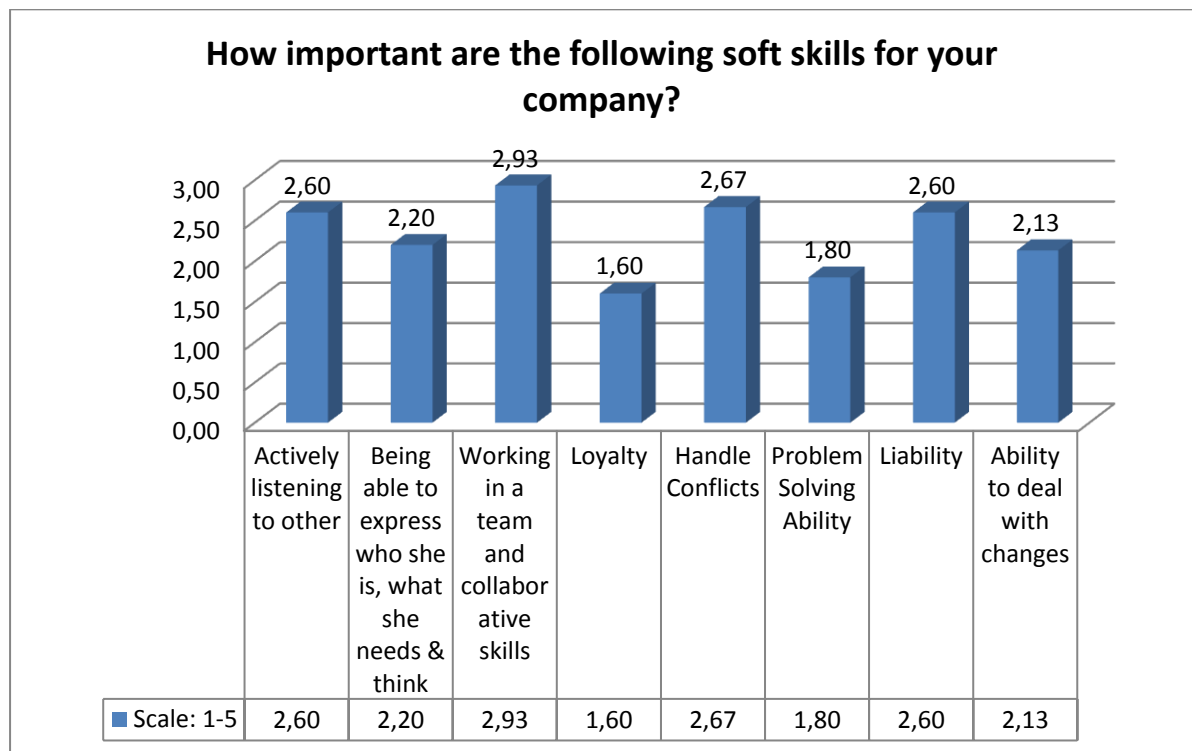


Romania

All respondents do not think that employees have the soft skills mentioned at a level expressed by 4 or 5 which results in a real gap between what the trainers think about the importance of soft skills and their opinion about their trainees' ability to have them.

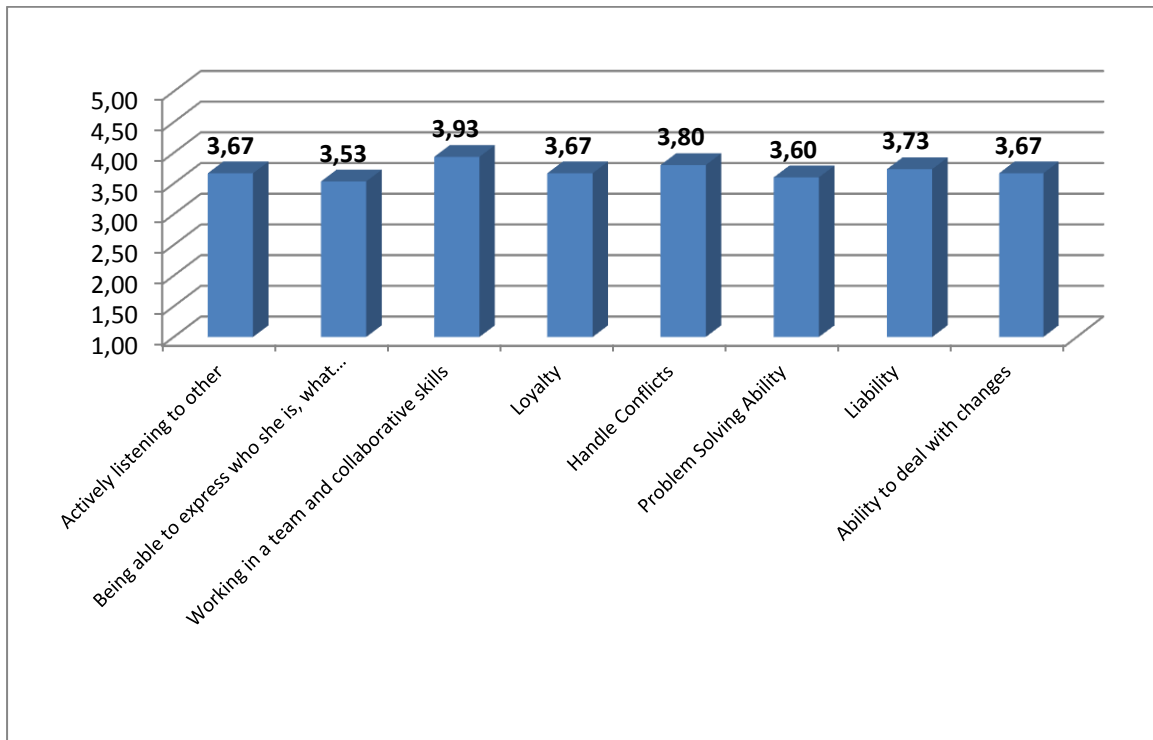


Sweden



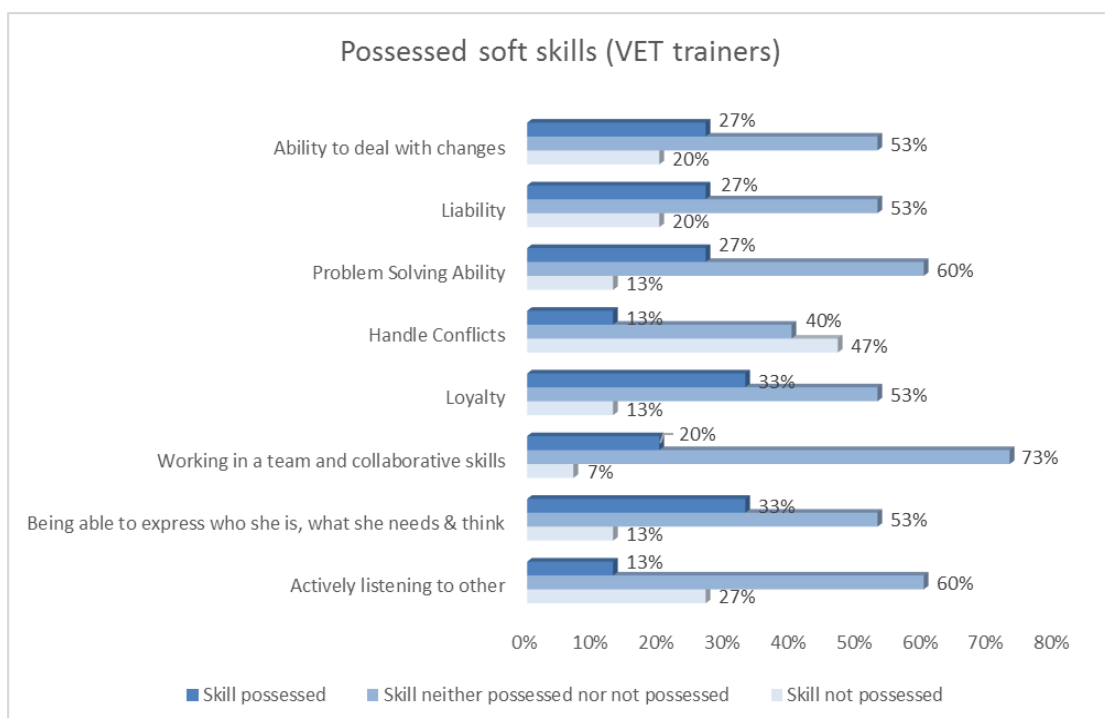
Greece

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).

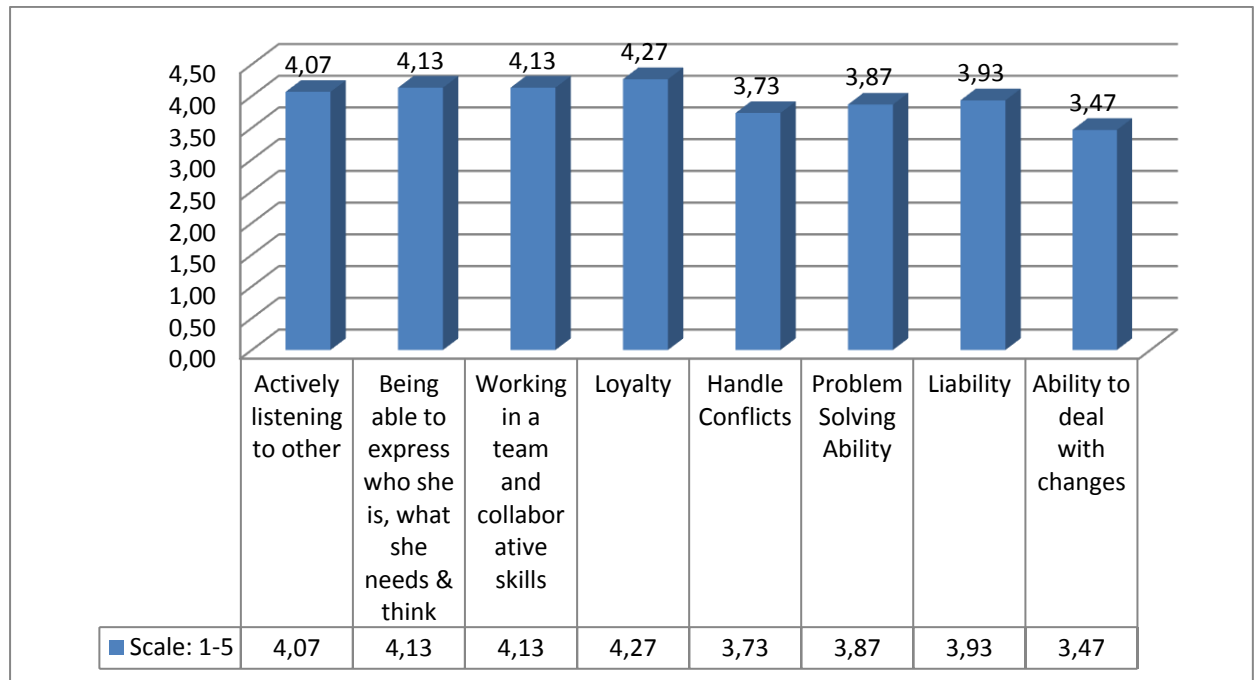


Germany

Despite all soft skills regarded as being important, the degree of which people actually possess these skills is considered to be rather limited. None of the skills respondents have been asked about in the questionnaire is sufficiently possessed in more than a third of responding VET schools. Only about every tenth school declares important competencies such as handling conflicts and listening to others as possessed.



Bulgaria



By observing the results, we could summarize that according to the participants in the survey, all evaluated soft skills are being possessed to a very high extent by the participants themselves, by their colleagues and/or employees – the marks for each one are predominantly 4 or 5 and in total these marks have always been chosen by more than half of the participants. This does not apply only for “ability to deal with changes” skill, where the biggest number of participants, 5 respondents, have given an average mark 3 for the level of possessing this skills (three respondents have given mark 4 and four – mark 5).

The largest number of participants have given a maximum mark to the skills of “Working in a team and collaborative skills” and “Loyalty” (8 participants for each), and 7 participants have preferred the maximum mark for both skills “Being able to express who she is, what she needs & thinks” and “Liability”.

One, two or three participants think that each of the given skills are not at all possessed or are possessed in a lower degree (marks 1 and 2 have been chosen).

New soft skills have also been added to this list. One of the participants has indicated that his colleagues also possess the following skills:

- Professional ethics
- Reliability
- Positive attitude

- Self motivation
- The organization and prioritization of tasks
- Ability to work under pressure
- Flexibility
- Confidence

He has given a maximum mark to the extent to which these skills are possessed by his colleagues.

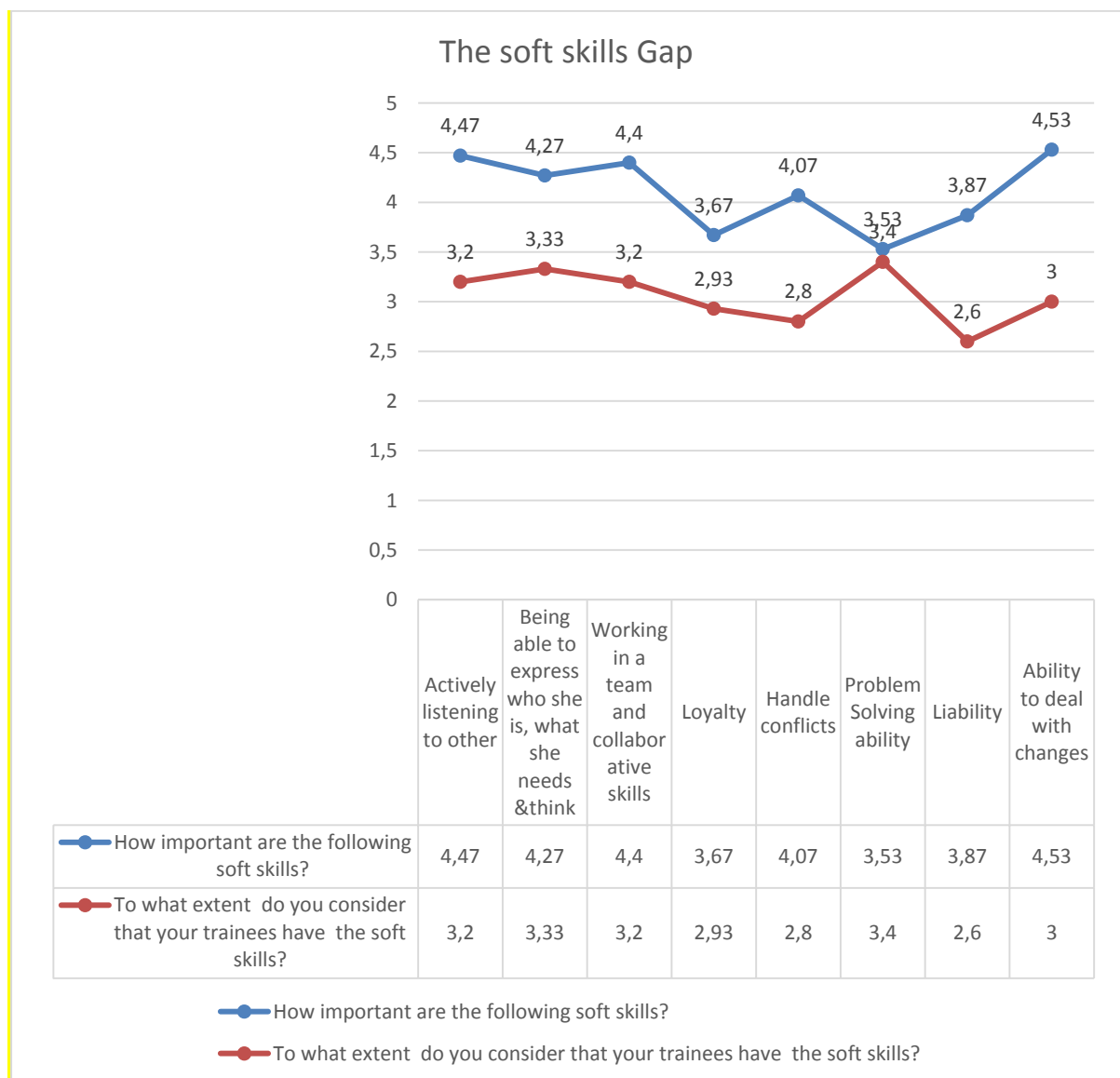
Another participant complements the list of skills:

- Time management
- Desire to learn
- Project planning, writing and fulfilment
- Stress management
- But he thinks that these skills are not developed in his colleagues.

Cyprus

In the following chart it demonstrates the soft skills gap. It presents the gap of significance of soft skills, how the VET trainers rate the significance of soft skills and to what extent that the trainees actual see these skills. The major gap form the chart below reveals the following soft skills:

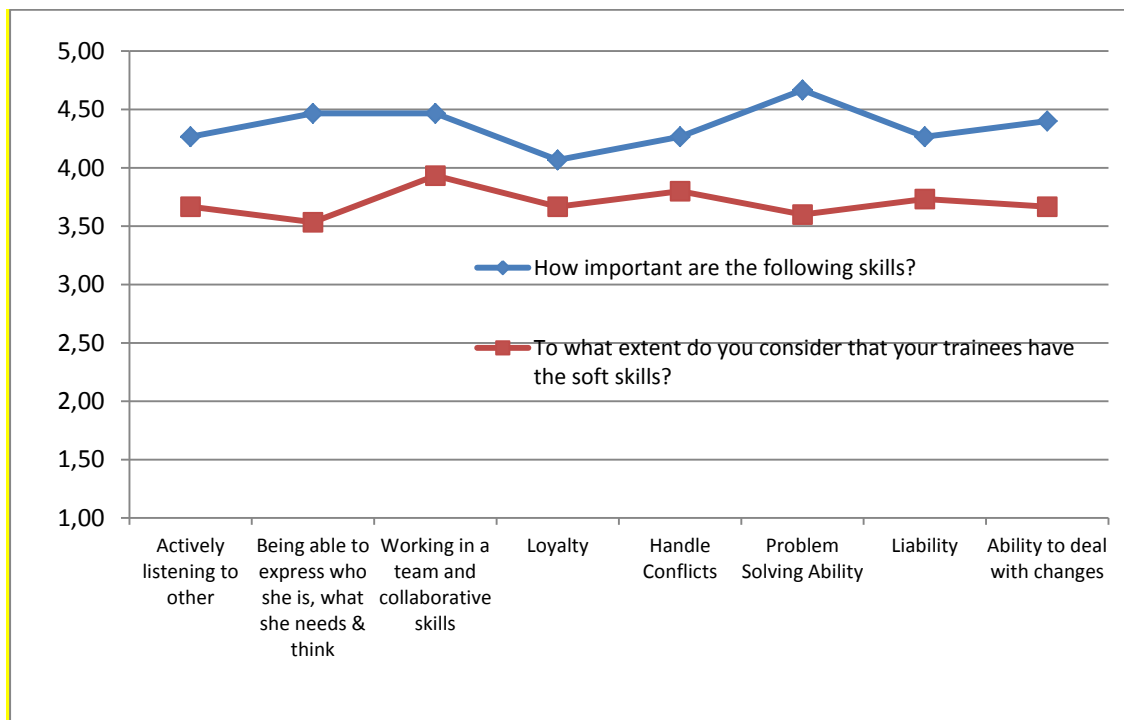
- Ability to deal with changes
- Liability
- Handle conflicts
- Actively listen to others
- Working in a team and collaborative skills



Greece

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
- Ability to deal with changes
- Actively listen to others



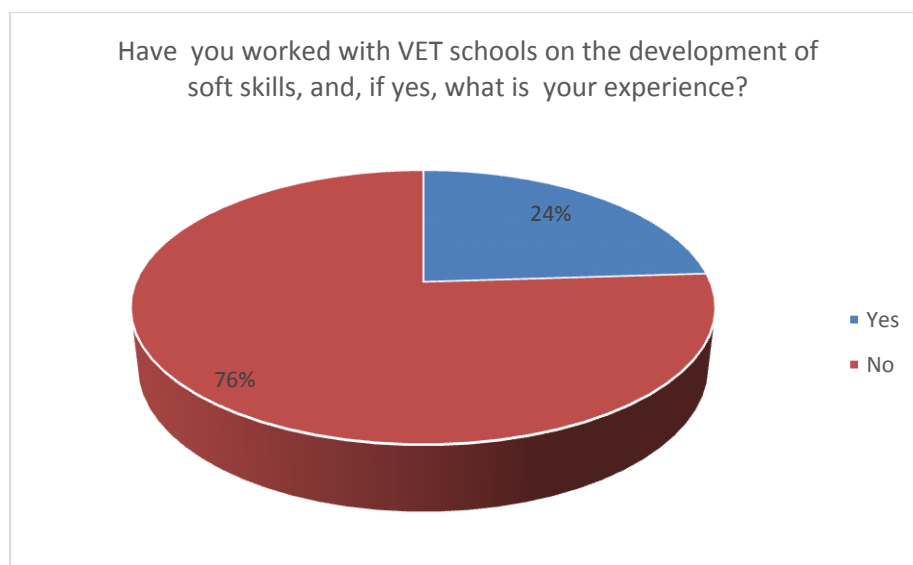
3.2. Questionnaire for EMPLOYERS

3.2.1. Cooperation on soft skills

Q1. Have you worked with VET schools on the development of soft skills, and, if yes, what is your experience?

Cyprus

- From respondents only 6 people have worked on the development of soft skills with VET schools. Its 76% of the respondents have not worked on the development of soft skills. Although the sample cannot be taken as a representative sample, it's a hypothetical result of the degree of cooperation of businesses and VET schools. One of the participants share a very extensive experience of 25 years.



Romania

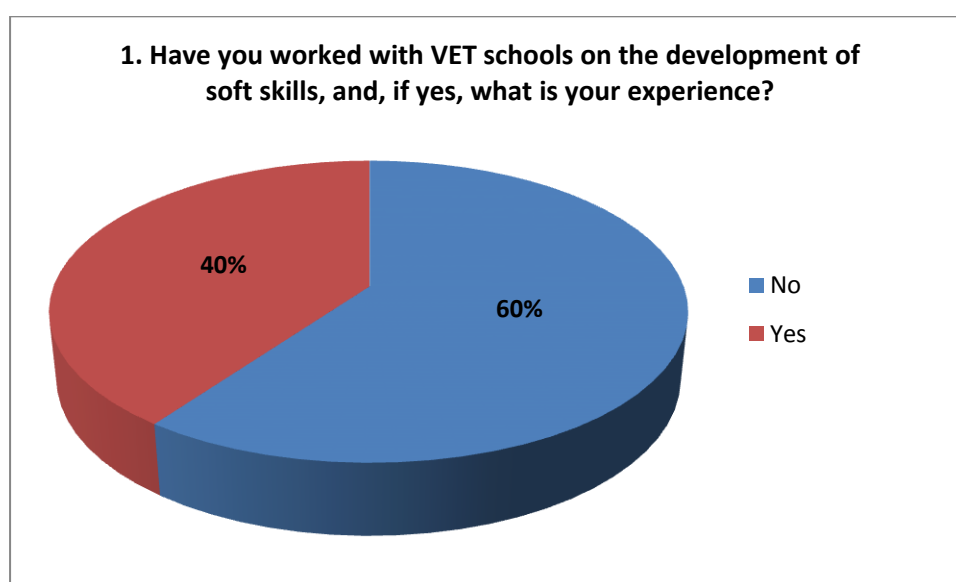
As the respondents are mainly belonging to Human Resources Departments of the Companies or to some private companies specialized in Human Resources they say they did not work with schools at all. A part of the companies offered Counseling sessions to the applicants looking for a job. Others have been involved in EU funded projects targeting various categories of unemployed young people and tried to identify and orientate them towards the proper form of training that will result in a successful integration on the labour market.

Sweden

No one of the employers had worked with the VET school for development of soft skills.

Greece

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



Germany

Few respondents report of cooperation with VET schools, however, not concerning particularly soft skills. There is no exchange on the issue between VET enterprises and VET schools.

Bulgaria

16 people from the participants have not worked with VET schools on the development of soft skills, which is 2/3 of all participants. Although the number of participants cannot be taken as a representative sample, despite this, the result points to the hypothesis,

that there is no permanent cooperation established between the business and the education for the development of soft skills among the youth.

Part of the other 9 participants declare they have “some experience” – “through a project”, “...in working with students at VET schools for the development of their soft skills in the context of preparing them for their first internships or jobs”, “with disadvantaged youth, who have graduated VET schools for the development of their soft skills, in order to start a job”, “...to develop employability skills, communication, team work, presentation skills”, “I have worked within the National Management School, as well as on a project for preparing students for the labour market”, etc.

One of the participants shares about a very extensive experience – “10 years experience in teaching and developing soft skills for the unemployed and youth”.

Q2. Do you have any thoughts on how a closer cooperation between VET schools and companies could contribute to the development of soft skills?

Cyprus

The majority of the participants in the survey have a lack of experience in cooperating with the VET schools. Their thoughts about closer cooperation between VET schools and companies that could contribute to the development of soft skills are summarize as follows:

- Cooperate closely in the design of course based on the needs of the labor market
- Soft skills training from high school
- Identify the needs and design the courses
- VET schools know first hand the needs of companies regarding soft skills
- Closer cooperation and involvement with the major stakeholders is always beneficial.
- Evaluate the market needs.

Romania

These are the responses of the employers:

‘Not just VET schools, but schools in general should offer some form of realistic citizenship and employability training as part of the 'normal' curriculum’.

‘We believe that the formal VET network of schools should be much more developed, targeting a very large number of secondary school graduates who would benefit, on short and medium term, from a vocational education, allowing them to find a job.

As employers and HR companies they responded that there is a general gap between the needs and requests of the employers, both in terms of knowledge and in terms of soft skills, and the educational system. The VET schools could be an answer to this gap.

In conclusion they agreed that soft skills are a very important aspect in a long lasting integration on the labour market and a close cooperation with the companies could result in an up to date curricula and teaching instruments.

Sweden

- Yes through more cooperation can we see what soft skills companies need and then the schools can proceed from this and develop tools, activities for Soft Skills
- Would be great with a working group with representatives from companies and schools who looks at the situation and together develop a process of learning soft skills

Greece

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.

Germany

Many of the respondents do not express any thoughts on the issue. Of those who do, most respondents demand generally more communication and information between VET schools and training companies, especially in case of problematic apprentices. One respondent expects from improvements in the exchange between both parties that soft skills gained in VET schools could be better applied in enterprises. Another respondent suggests the implementation of so-called 'head-notes' – comments regarding behavior and attitude of students – expressed by VET schools and shared with training companies. This way, trainers in companies were informed on weaknesses of apprentices and could systematically work on this.

Bulgaria

Although the majority of the participants in the survey share the lack of experience in cooperating with VET schools for development of soft skills, they have and share various and interesting suggestions to this question and reveal their active position. There is a repeating opinion that the best way for cooperation is through „*internship/ apprenticeship programs*” or said in other words „*through practically-oriented trainings or events in a real working environment*”. Some of the participants think that cooperation can happen in the form of „*presentations in front of the students*” or „*By having people from the business world (experts, managers, professionals) deliver talks, lectures, workshops, case studies at VET schools on different topics related to "after graduation real world practices" and focus on soft skills development*”.

Some of the respondents offer more general changes: “the implementation of a dual education or at least summer traineeships for students in companies”; the companies “to define part of the school curriculum” or „implement soft skills in the school agenda for at least the last 2 years of school”.

There are also interesting suggestions for „organizing visits and “open doors” days, „competitions or complicated projects for the students, which give them opportunity to work in a team, to deal with a real case, to find a creative solution and so on”, „meetings with famous people from the real business”; “organizing career events for VET schools”, “flexibility of the curricula”, etc.

In most of the answers there is the opinion that it is important for both VET schools and companies to actively participate and to realize the benefits of mutual cooperation and the development of soft skills: “*It is important to realize the role of each of the parties – the business and the education in this cooperation, in order to have good relationship and an opportunity for the development of soft skills*”; “*I think it is important for the school management to realize the importance of soft skills, as well as the companies to clearly declare the need for the development of such specific skills*”.

3.2.2. Public policy

Q3. 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?

Cyprus

The responses of the responders to this question were as follows:

- “Soft skills training from high school.”

- "Carry out research on necessary soft skills and those valued most by employers."
- "Involvement of employer associations and organizations in the development of the soft skills."
- "Offer incentives to young people to go into alternative higher education not just Universities for academic knowledge and qualifications."
- "Create an official body to make sure this happens through continuous market surveys."
- "Include soft skills in Academic Programs."
- "Carry out surveys."
- "Need Analysis"
- "Involve KEBE."
- "Assess the soft skills."
- "Part of the school curriculum."

Romania

Teaching soft skills to the future employees was not, so far, a priority for the educational system, both academic and VET.

In order to properly approach this area, the respondents believe that the business environment should be constantly involved in a close cooperation with the educational system since the employers' expectations and demands constantly change in a dynamic and very unstable economy.

The internships and practice stages should be much more encouraged, together with extra curricular activities that enable the students to be constantly in touch with the real structure of the labour market and of the society.

Sweden

Many answered – I don't know on this question

Some answers:

- They need to develop the education system concerning soft skills
- More information and raise awareness in the topic
- Should offer more free courses
- They need to have reduced prices on soft skills courses for companies

Greece

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.

Germany

The respondents suggest the following measures:

- Improvement and modernization of the general education system, including:
 - Implementation of all-day schools as to promote social competences which often are not sufficiently conveyed by parents,
 - Promotion of team work, acting on own responsibility and empowerment of students,
 - Enhancing the quality of teaching,
 - Modernization of teaching contents
- Improvement and modernization of the VET school system, including:
 - Strengthen the qualification of teachers in VET schools
- Enhancing vocational orientation, including:
 - Strengthening cooperation between schools and enterprises
 - Implementation of traineeships and trial periods of work for students in enterprises, including respective law regulations
- Activities to promote young people
- Promotion of further education

Bulgaria

Although not all respondents have answered this question, the majority of participants have given quite exhaustive answers.

The prevailing opinion is that it is necessary to change the contents of the VET school curriculum: "The education system in the VET schools and universities requires

significant “refreshing” and update”; “The content of the school program should be revised, should be more experiential and more flexible”; “A complete change of the educational system, based on long-term vision, several decades ahead”; „More flexibility towards the educational content. Frequent revisions of the learning materials”.

As part of this change in the contents of the curricula can also be viewed the opinion of many participants to include trainings for soft skills development: *„...educational school programs should include the development of soft skills”; „I believe that the only way to ensure that people have the right soft skills for the workplace is to have soft skills trainings in high schools”.*

Another often repeated opinion is that it is important to “increase the awareness of teachers about the benefits and the need for soft skills at the work place”, as well as develop their competence.

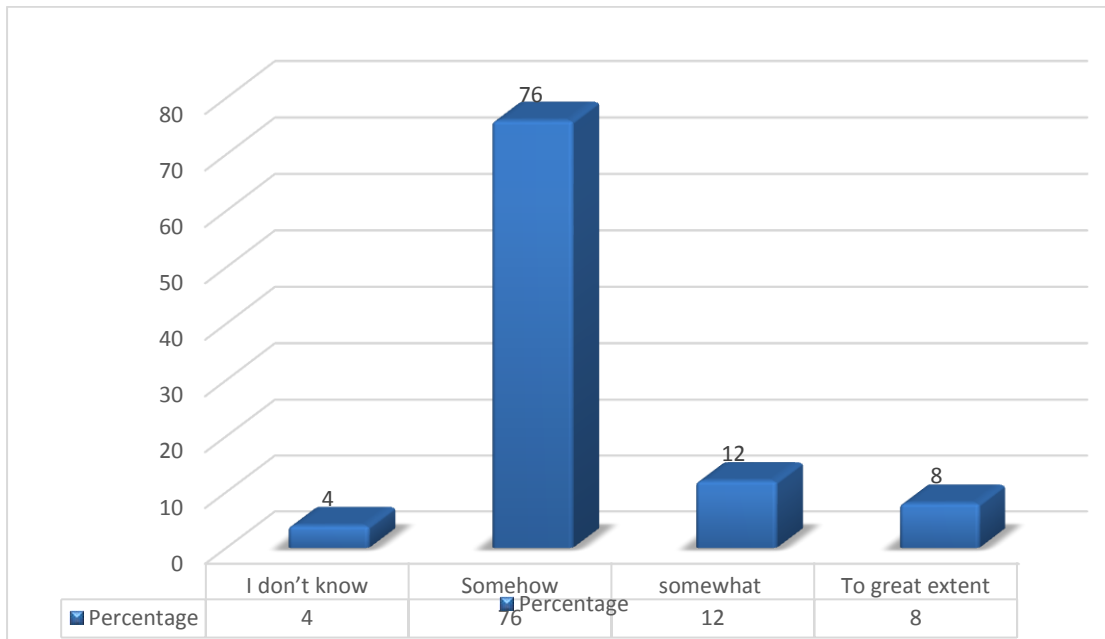
Among all suggestions, such opinions can be distinguished: „Regular research of the needs and demands of the business organizations”; „Extra study hours can be included in the educational plan for meeting employers or developing soft skills”; „Adequate assessment of students’ soft skills – through practical tasks and competitions (for example, working in teams, students can research some topic, elaborate on an idea, suggest a solution and present it in front of a jury, etc.”)

3.2.3. The Soft Skills Gap

Q4. In your experience, to what extent delivers the VET system in your country graduates with the right soft skills for your sector/industry?

Cyprus

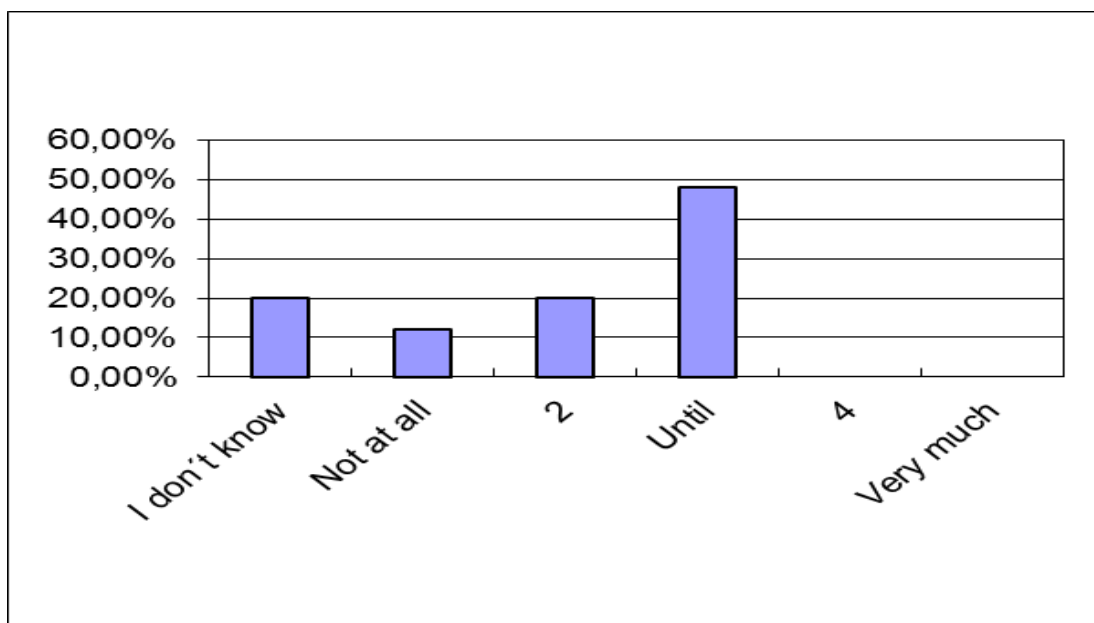
The 76% of the participants’ respondent that the VET System in Cyprus deliver somehow to the graduates with the right soft skills. 12% responder to somewhat delivery , 8% respond to a great extent delivery and finally 4 % respond that they don’t know.



Their sector is HR management. They mentioned that their employees: They do not have a homogenous educational background. This element is widely spread throughout the economy. Not a very large number of persons are employed in the economic area they were prepared for in school.

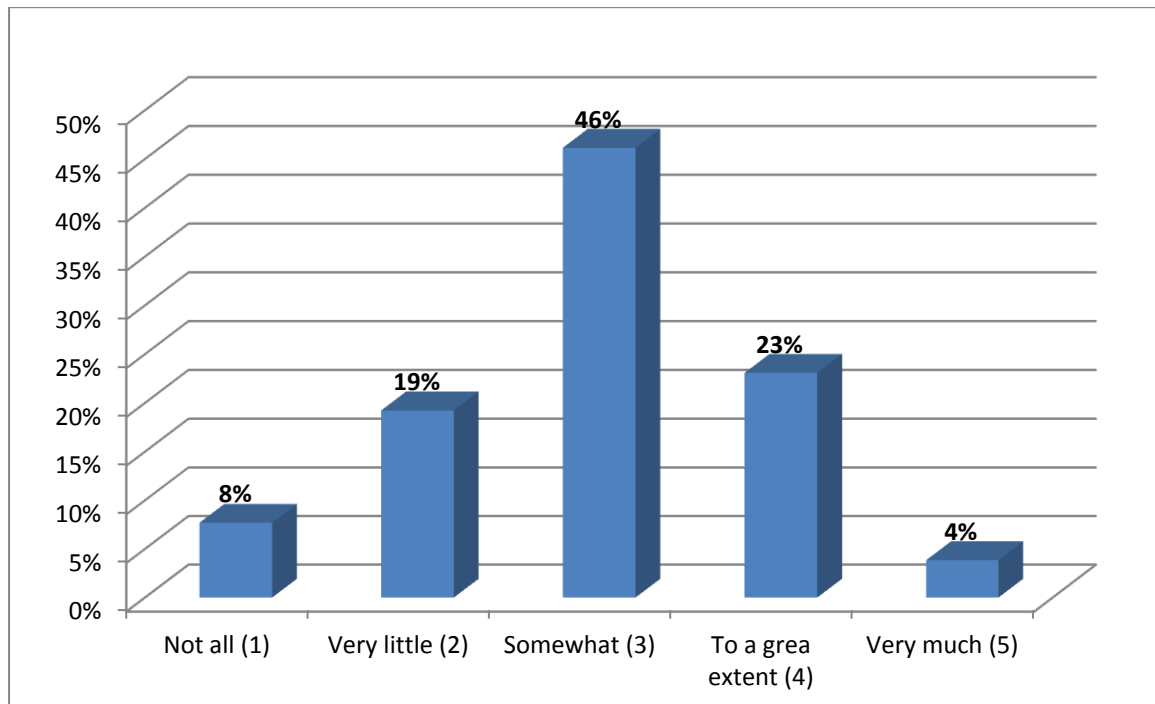
This aspect is generated both by a highly unstable economy, with very low possibilities of long terms forecasts and by the lack of vocational counselling. Large number of students do not have any idea about their employment plans when they enrol in a form of education and some of them are in the same position even after graduating.

Sweden



Greece

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.



Germany

Nearly three quarters (72%) of respondents believe that the VET system delivers graduates with the right soft skills; only one enterprise believes that this is not the case.

Bulgaria

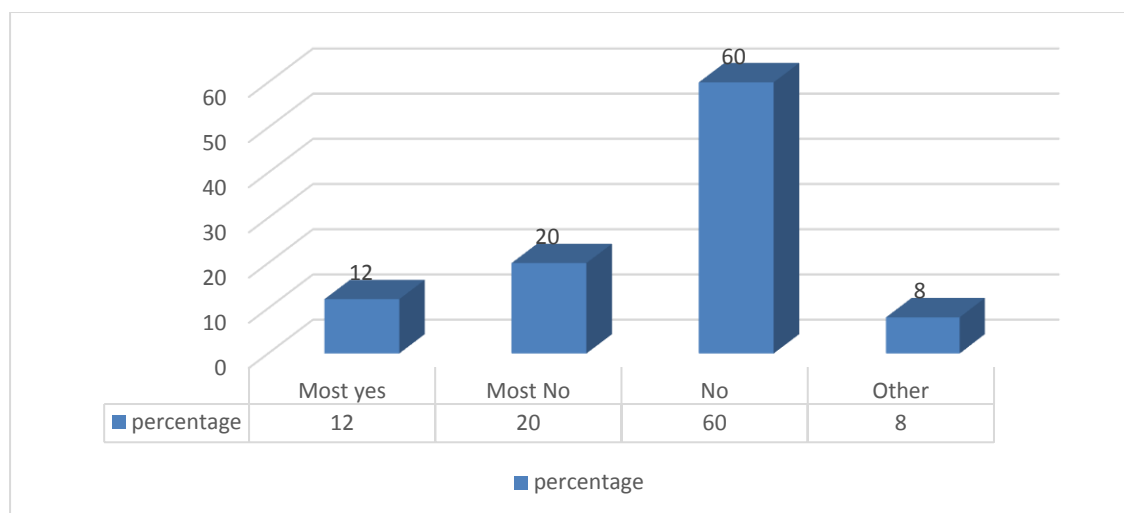
Not at all until			Very Much	I don't know
1	2	3	4	5	0
	10	12			3

To summarize there is of attention to soft skills in VET schools has led to poor soft skills development. The entire focus is on professional/work-required skills. However, sometimes skills like team work, meeting deadlines, communication skills can be acquired even informally in the VET system.

Q5. What is your experience when recruiting VET graduates? Do they have the relevant soft skill sets?

Cyprus

From the chart below it presents that 88% have a negative opinion. Employers they don't consider that the VET graduates have the relevant soft skills.



Romania

Almost all the respondents are of the opinion that graduates are, generally, not familiar with the necessary organizational soft skills and behaviour. Some of the VET graduates have technical knowledge and could perform the technical tasks required by the job they have prepared for.

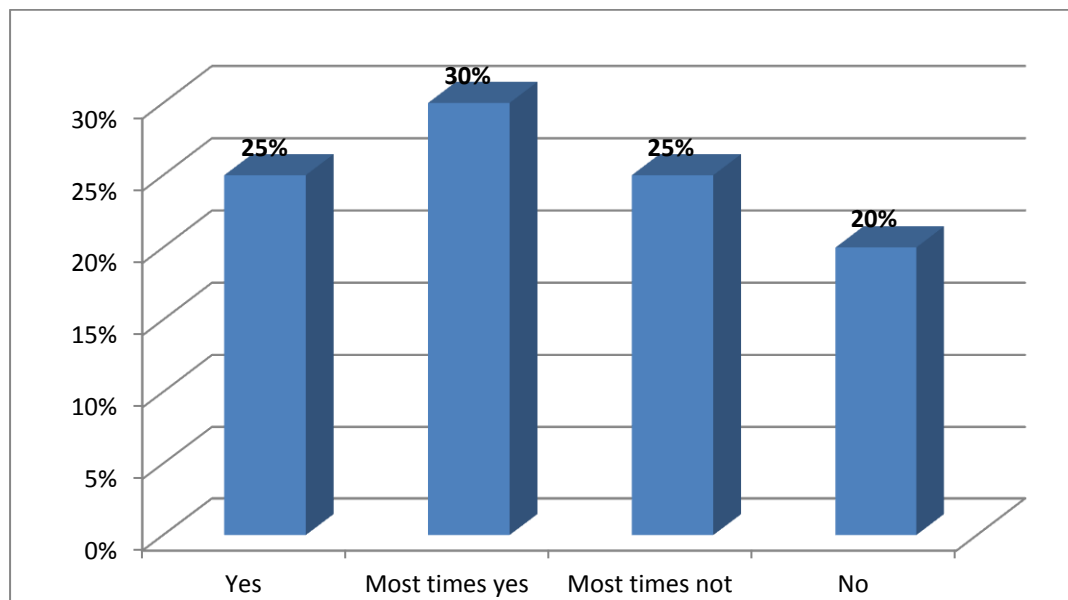
As for the soft skills the responses sounded like this: "Most of them do not know what soft skills they would need in order to meet the employers' expectations".

Sweden

Most often the people employed have the sufficient soft skills relevant for the position and organization.

Greece

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.



Germany

The majority of respondents confirms that VET graduates possess at least partially relevant soft skills. However, only a minority of enterprises expresses largely positive experience – while most respondents seem to miss certain skills or they find the full set of required skills only in a part of graduates. A few respondents highlight that such skills get fully developed only in course of time with graduates gaining more work experience – and that enterprises need to play an active role in this process.

Bulgaria

Among participants who are experienced in the recruiting of VET graduates the prevailing opinion is that in general these young people do not have the relevant set of soft skills because in the Bulgarian school the focus is placed rather on fundamental scientific notions, than on practical social skills.

Some of the participants also share that the graduating students not only lack basic soft skills, but also have unrealistic expectations about the labour market, in terms of salary and the skills and knowledge expected of them. There is a serious deficiency of skills such as communication and presentation skills, lack of self-awareness, motivation for a lifelong learning and development (they think once they have graduated, learning is over), curiosity and basic business conduct and etiquette, as well as listening skills and understanding, emotional intelligence, managing one's own behaviour. They don't have vision for their career development.

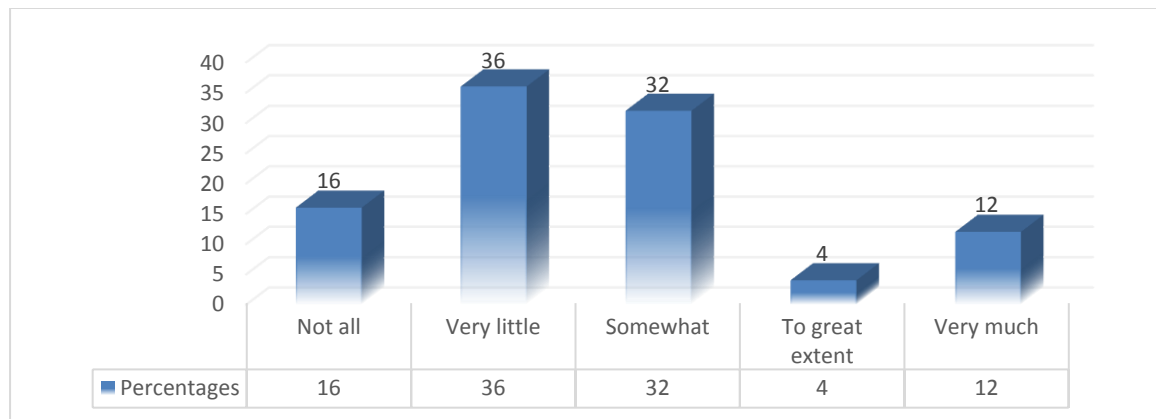
Other respondents stated that usually graduates lack or struggle with communication skills, team work/collaboration and healthy amount of assertiveness (this rather goes to

the extreme – arrogant or shrinking). They also have difficulties with analyzing and resolving problems and lack of self-awareness.

Q6. To what extent the company suffers from shortages?

Cyprus

According to the answers of the respondents the chart below presents that 52% of the employers does not have or has a very little shortages. Only 16% believe that the company has significant shortages.

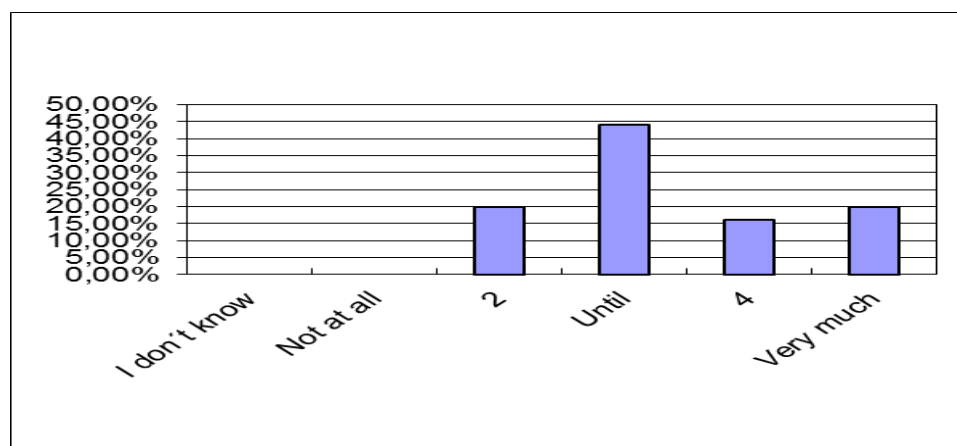


Romania

They are HR management companies and personnel recruitment is one of the activities they perform on daily basis for their clients. Therefore, they have numerous recruitment methodologies.

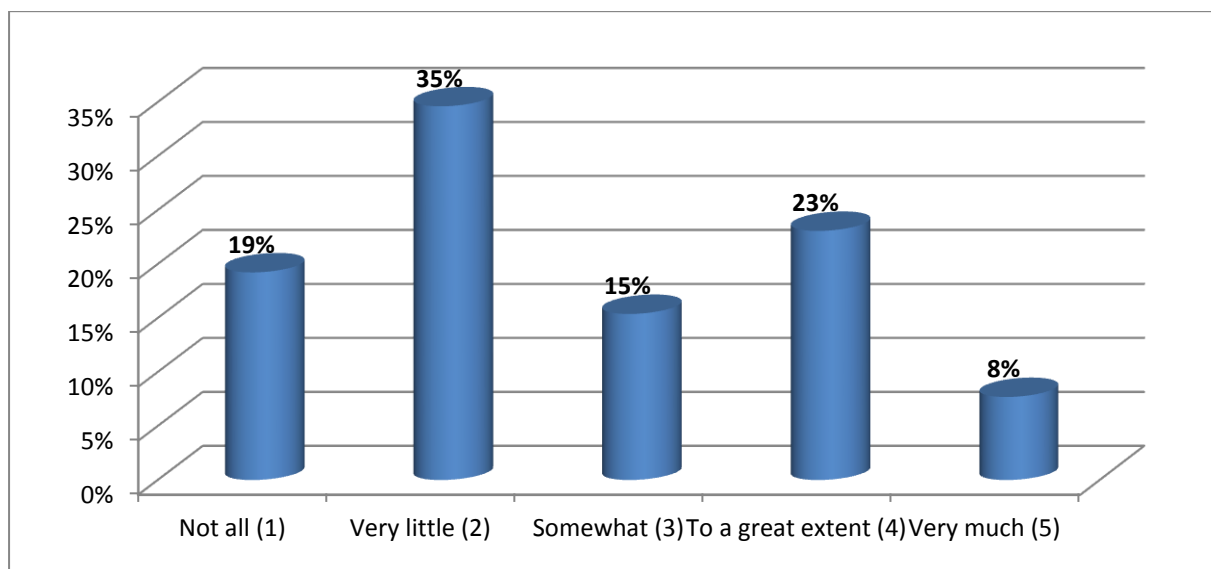
Half of the respondents said that from their experience, the most difficult positions to fill are the highly technical ones, mainly in niche areas and the ones requesting a certain type of experience and expertise.

Sweden



Greece

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.



Germany

More than half (56%) of responding companies indicate that they suffer from skills shortages, amongst which about every tenth (12%) is affected strongly. Only 16% of respondents are not confronted with this issue.

Bulgaria

Not at all until				Very Much	I don't know
1	2	3	4	5	0	
3	4	2	9	6	1	

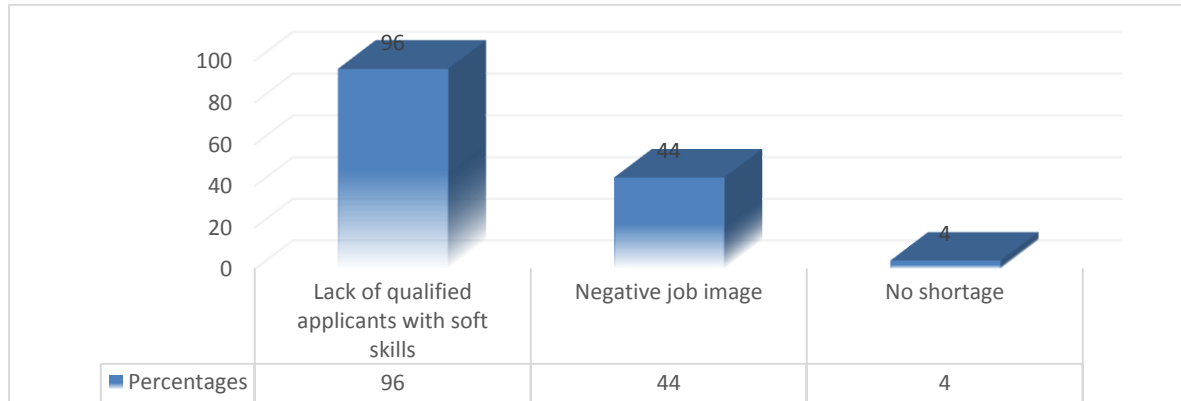
Although each answer has been chosen at least by one participant, yet the predominant answers are those about the high level of shortages in the companies: 9 participants have indicated answer 4, and other 6 – the maximum possible answer 5. Only one of the participants does not have an opinion about this question.

Q7. What are the main reasons for these shortages in your company?

Cyprus

The main reasons for these shortages are the following:

- Lack of qualified applicants with soft skills , 96%
- Negative job image, 44%
- There are no shortage, 4%



Romania

On the one hand less people are trained in highly technical jobs and on the other hand their lack of practice or internship during or after their graduation.

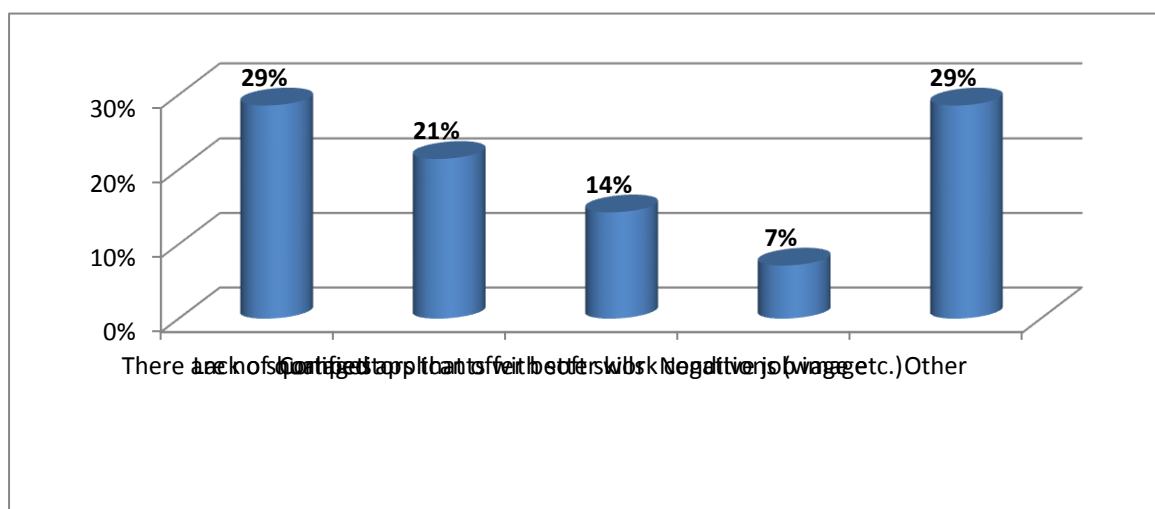
Sweden

The answers of the respondent were the following : 10-Lack o f qualified applicants with softskills, 4 -Negative job image, 6 -Competitors that offer better work conditions, 5 -There are no shortages.

Greece

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

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



Germany

Lacking hard skills along with strong competitors that offer better work conditions are stated to be the main reasons for skills shortages. However, lacking soft skills are also an important factor here; nearly one third (30%) of respondents believe that lacking soft skills lead to difficulties in filling vacant positions.

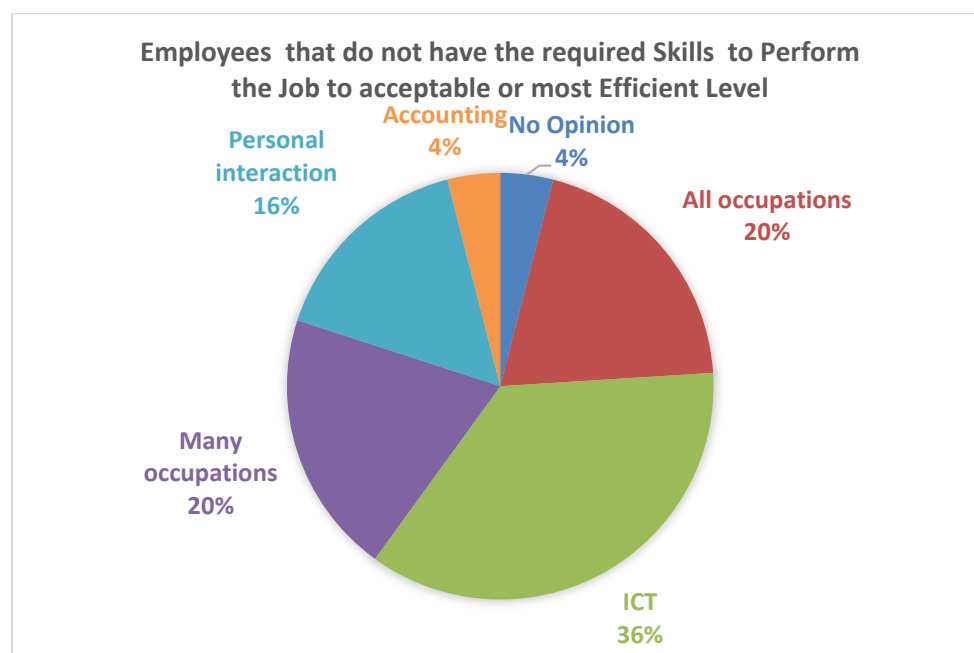
Bulgaria

As a main reason for the shortages in the companies of the respondents is indicated the "Lack of qualified applicants with soft skills" (18 respondents). According to 10 respondents the reason for this is: "*competitors that offer better work conditions (wage, etc.)*"; another 7 respondents think that this is due to the "*negative job image*". Only 4 people think "*there are no shortages*".

Two of the participants stated that the shortages in their companies are due to company's values – company focuses on development of technological skills, rather than soft skills";The company hires candidates who aren't willing to develop in the field and are seeking a temporary job until they graduate or find a better one, the company doesn't offer enough training support and the employees find the job hard to do.

Q8. 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?

Cyprus



Romania

Customer service, direct sales are some mentioned by the employers.

Sweden

Employees needs to have a "lowest level" of soft skills to be employed as long as they have to deal with colleagues and costumers. A way to solve this if there is shortage is to internally promote suitable staff for a certain position and then employ for a lower position and hopefully stand a better chance to find the right soft skills together with the hard skills.

Greece

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

Germany

The majority of respondents feel that their employees possess the required soft skills. Again, occasionally it is highlighted that enterprises needed to play an active role in developing such skills during the first time of employment. A few enterprises, however, express less positive experience: Amongst their employees, they miss skills such as ability to communicate, sense of responsibility, ability to work independently, ability to work under pressure, willingness to learn, loyalty, respect, empathy, leadership qualities – or generally social competences.

Bulgaria

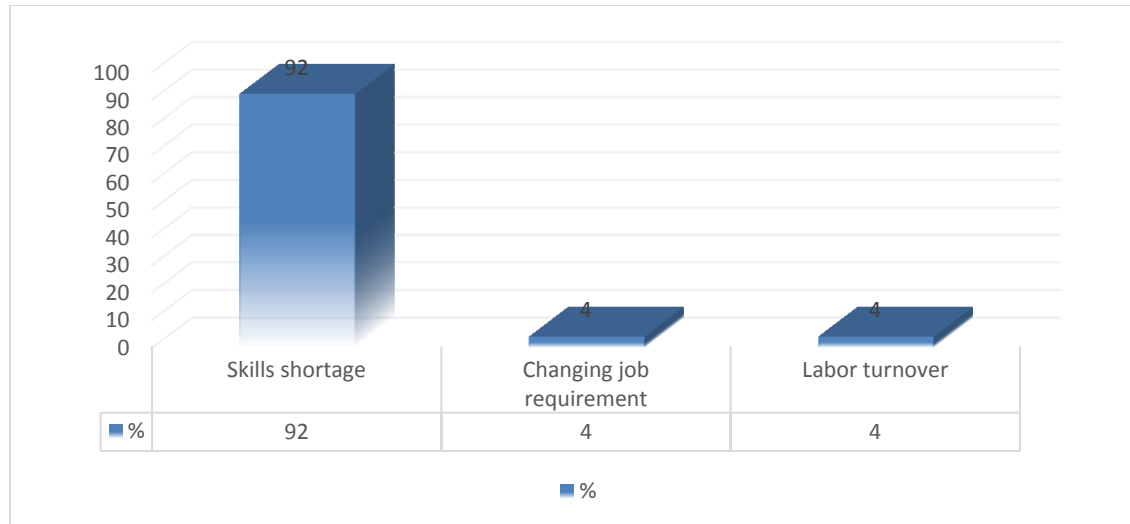
The most frequently mentioned occupations in the answers of participants are professions in the services sector – hotels, restaurants, shop assistants, waiters, cashiers, taxi drivers, IT specialists, people with engineer and technical positions, teachers and all management positions. Only three of the participants stated that based on their experience there are no specific occupations in which the existing employees do not have the required soft skills to perform the job at an acceptable level.

It is also stated that in management positions – people have a huge lack of soft skills such as listening, delegating responsibilities, being able to handle conflicts, leadership skills, working with people. People who are good experts in their field of work, have been promoted to managerial positions without having the necessary skills for managing people and creating the right environment in the team.

Q9. What are the main reasons for these soft skill deficiencies in your company?

Cyprus

The chart below presents the main reasons for soft skills deficiencies. 92% is a skill shortage and for 4% labor turnover and changing job requirements.



Romania

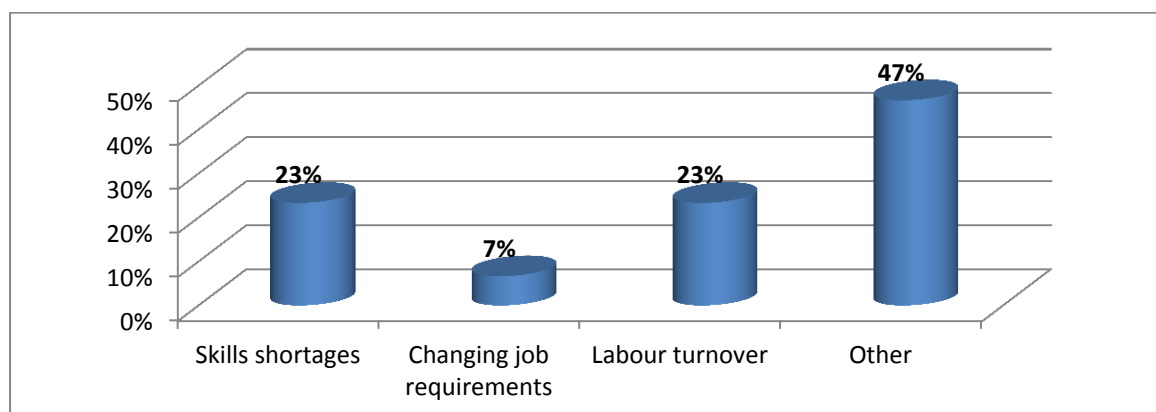
- skill shortages;
- labour turnover;

Sweden

Respondents refer as the main reasons for these soft skill deficiencies in your company the following: 5 -Skill shortages, 9 -Changing job requirements,11 -Labour turnover

Greece

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.



Germany

44% of responding enterprises state that they do not suffer from soft skill deficiencies in their company. Amongst the affected enterprises, changing job requirements have been identified as main reason for the issue. More than half of affected enterprises (57%) consider this factor as a reason for soft skill deficiencies. Skills shortages and labour turnover play a rather subordinate role.

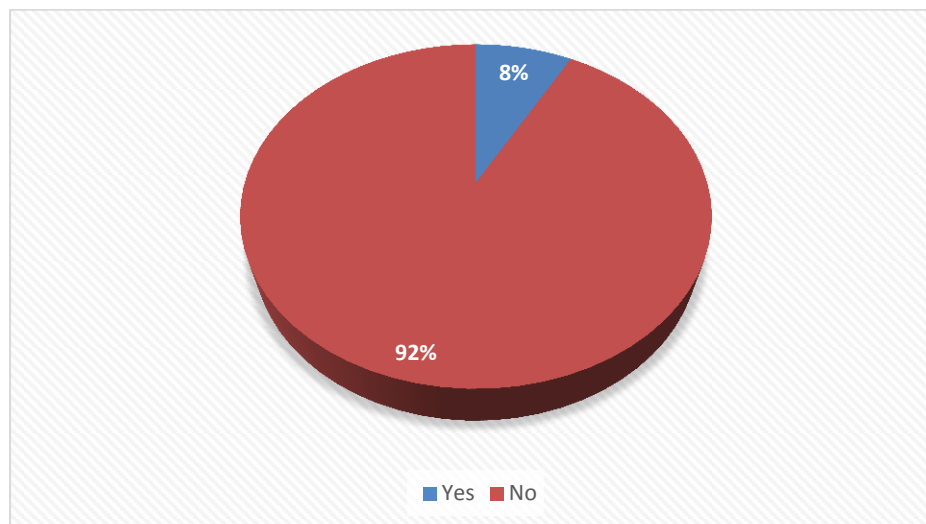
Bulgaria

The participants have indicated skills shortage as the main reason for soft skill deficiencies in the companies – 19 respondents have chosen this possible answer. 13 participants think that the reason for this is the labour turnover. Only one participant has indicated as a reason the changing job requirements, another participant has shared an additional reason – the lower focus on soft skills when recruiting IT specialists, as there is a shortage of such specialists in the field.

Q10. Does your company provide off-the-job training to remedy the lack of soft skills?

Cyprus

According to our responders a 92% does not provide off the job training. Only 8% provide off the job training.



Romania

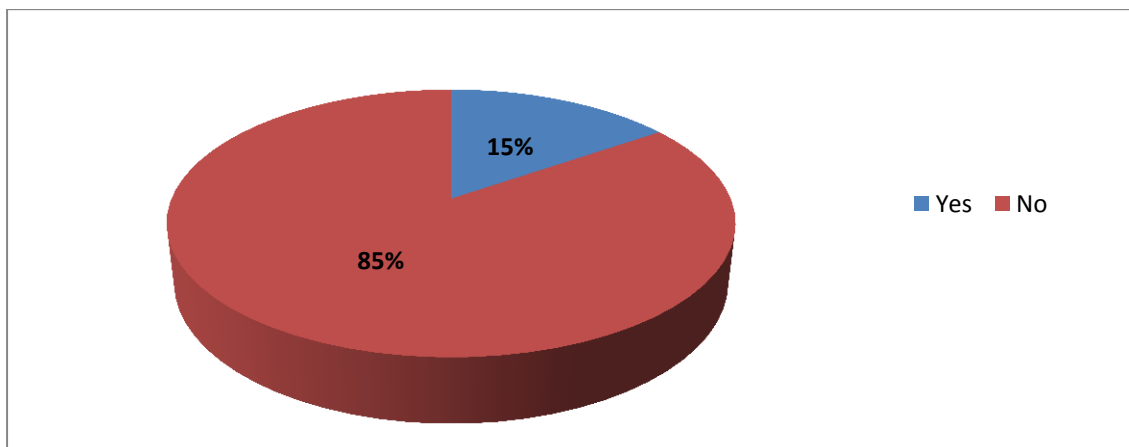
No, it doesn't.

Sweden

In the question of their company provide off-the-job training to remedy the lack of soft skills 2 respondents answer yes and 23 answered NO.

Greece

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



Germany

40% of respondents provide such training while 60% don't.

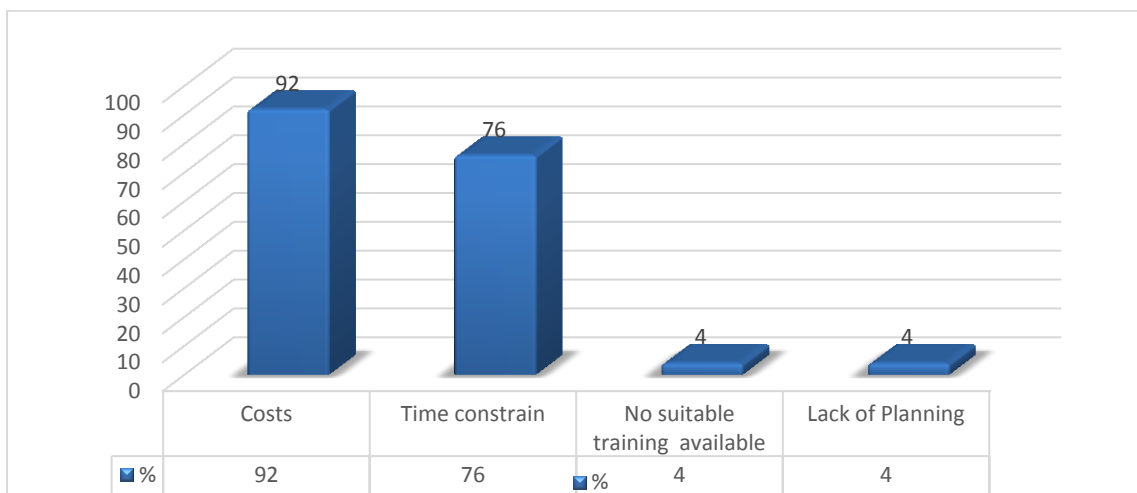
Bulgaria

The answers to this question are divided almost in equal. Yet more participants – 13, have answered negatively to this question and the rest of the participants – 12, have answered positively.

Q11. In case you have answered NO to the previous question, why does the company not provide off-the-job training?

Cyprus

This is due to 92% of training costs and 76% of time constraints and 4% of lack of planning and no suitable training available.



Romania

Because of:

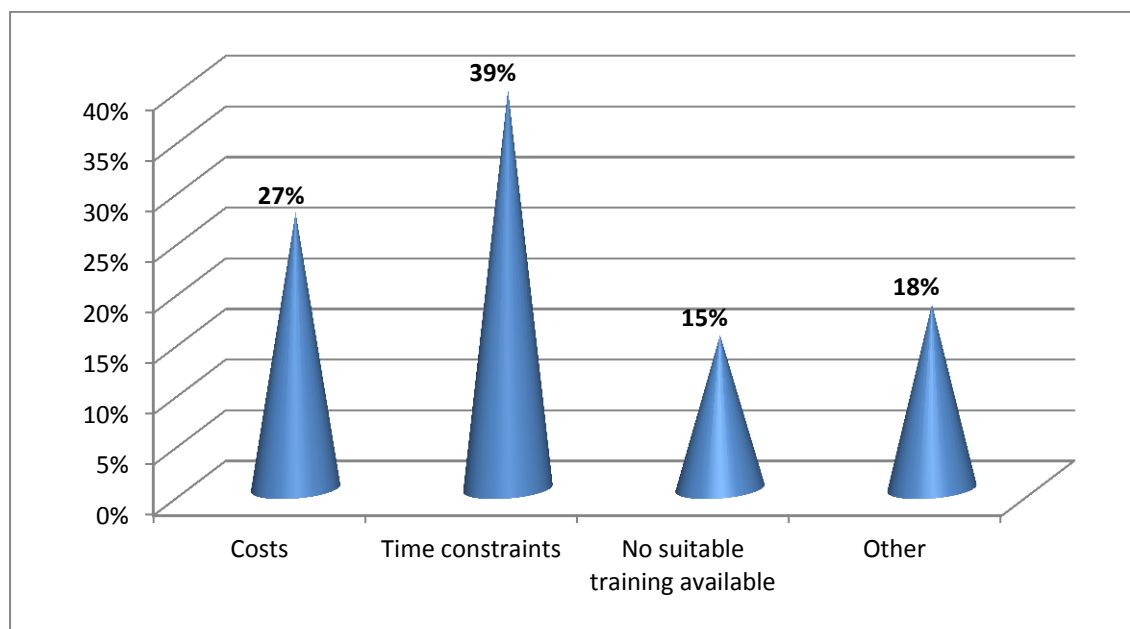
- the costs and
- time constraints.

Sweden

Respondents answered as follows 11 –Costs, 10 -Time constraints, 4 -No suitable training available.

Greece

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



Germany

Time constraints and lacking availability of suitable training have been identified as main factors that prevent companies from providing training; around one third of companies not providing such training considers either or both of them as reasons. Only 16% of respondents think that lack of costs prevents them from providing training.

Bulgaria

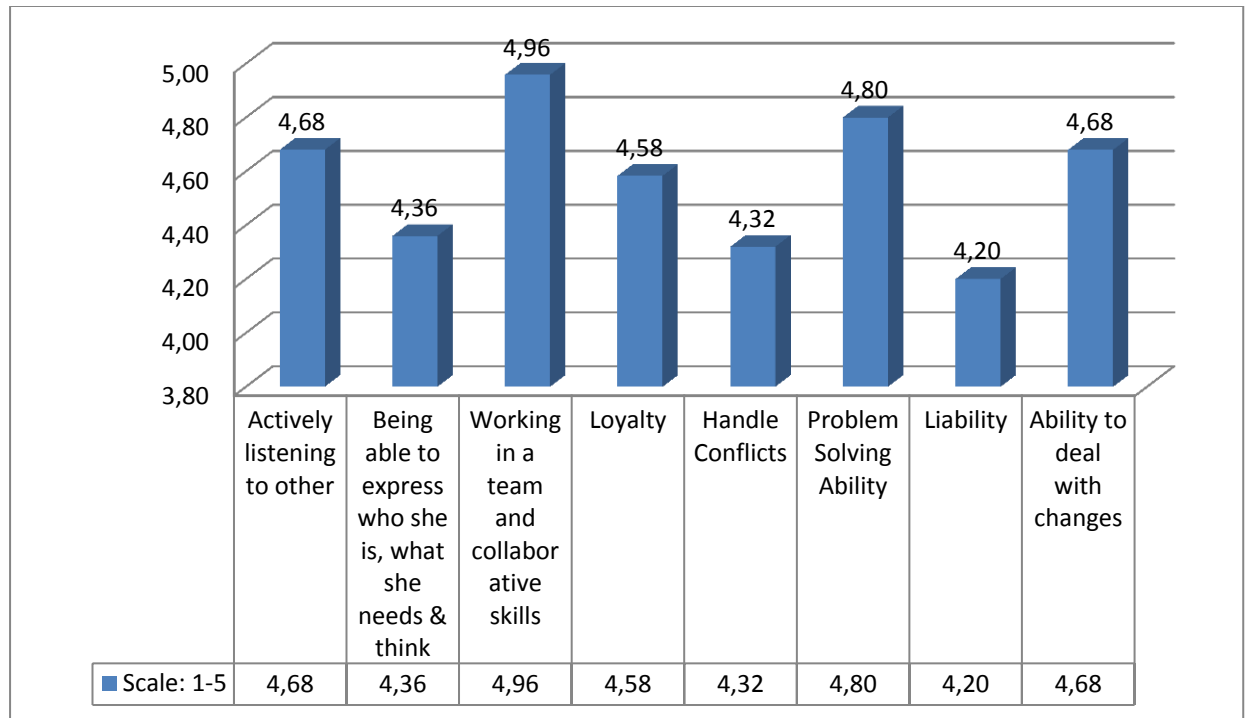
Costs and time constraints are the main reasons for the lack of trainings in the companies, for part of the participants: both possible answers ("costs" and "time constraints") have been chosen by 7 respondents. However, some respondents stated

that the company does not see necessary to invest in soft skills development, it focuses on job-related/professional trainings (for example technical/technology trainings).

Q12. How important are the following soft skills for your company?

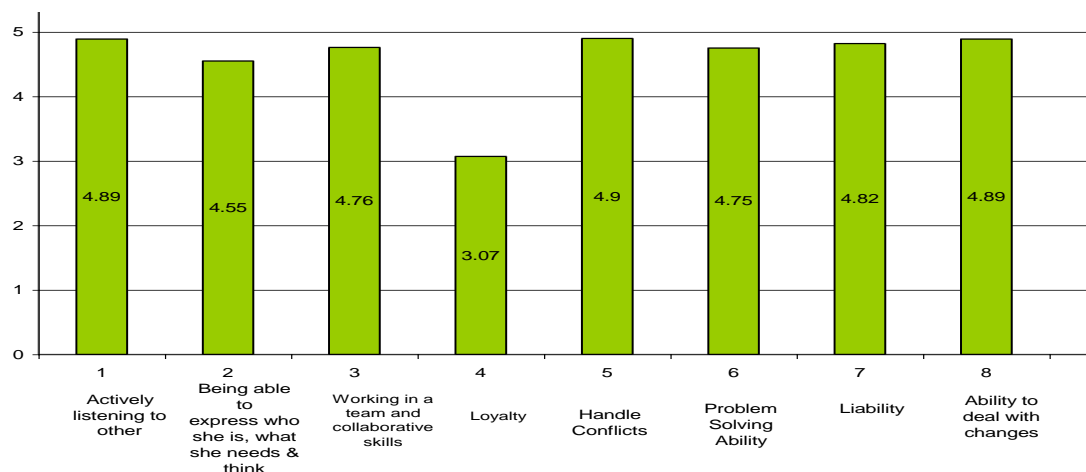
Cyprus

In the following chart, it presents the results for all the soft skills. The scale ranges from 1 which is Not at all to 5 which is very important. The employers consider all the following soft skills important. They were rated all above average.

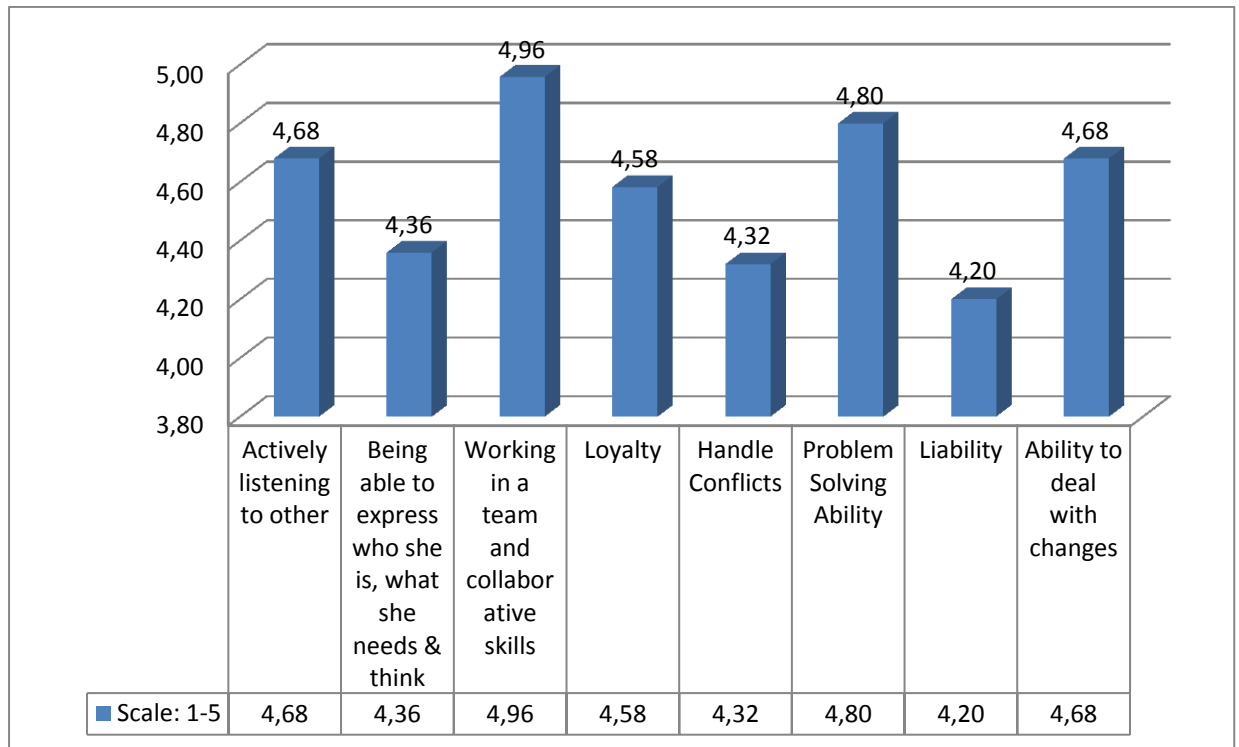


Romania

The respondents consider all the listed soft skills on a scale starting with 'not at all'(1) to very important (5) in the following way: six skills are marked with 5 (very Important) one with 4 and one with 3.

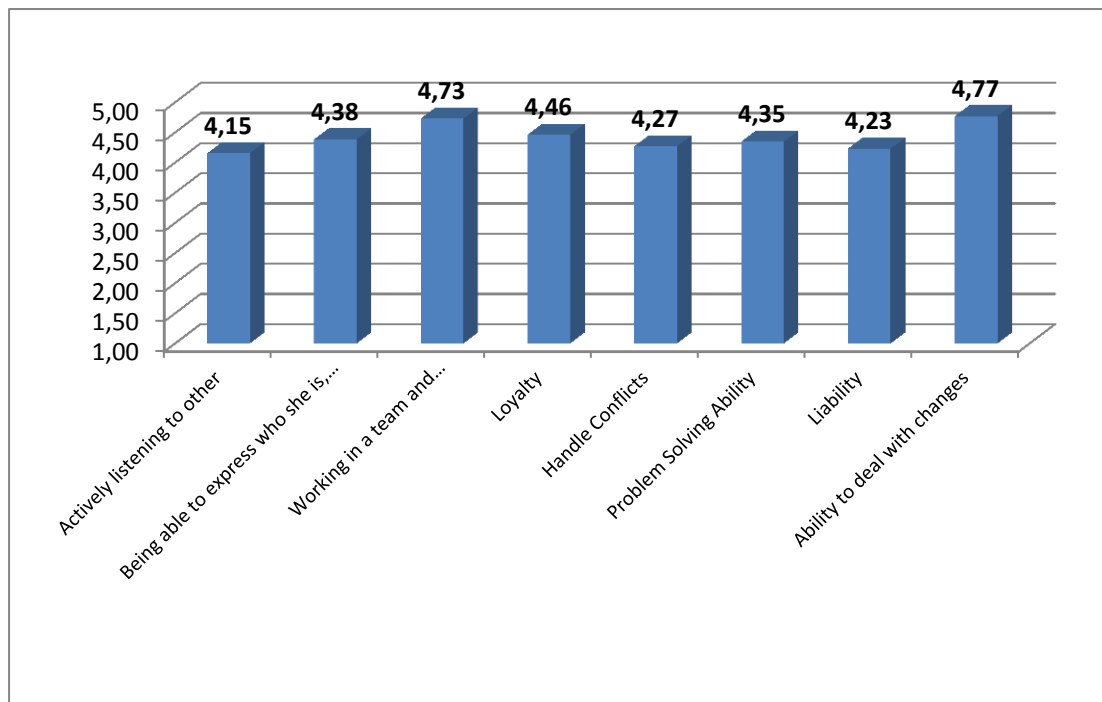


Sweden



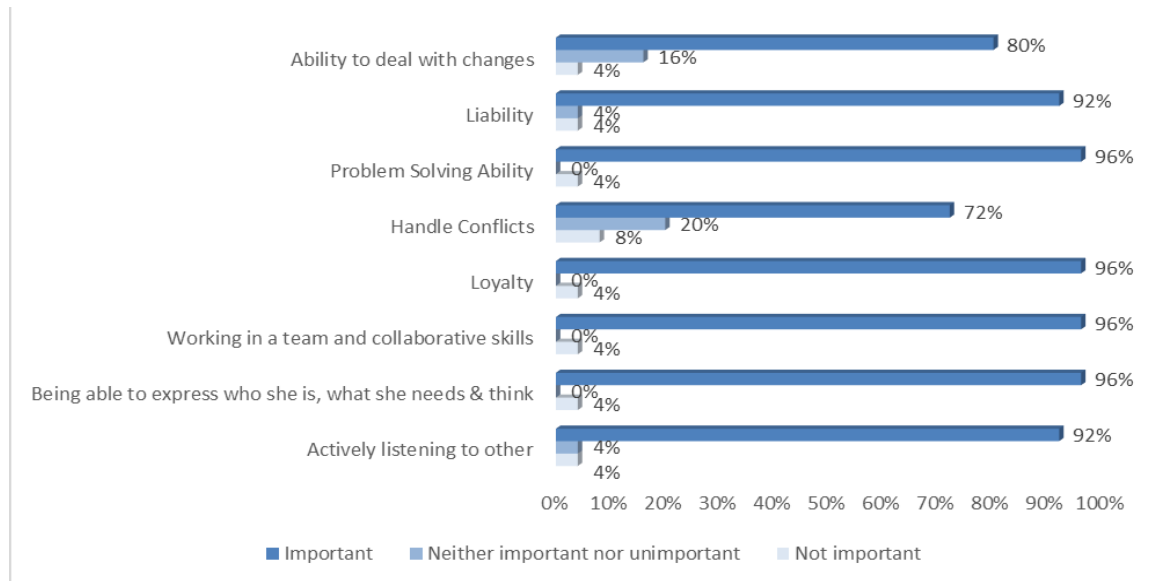
Greece

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.



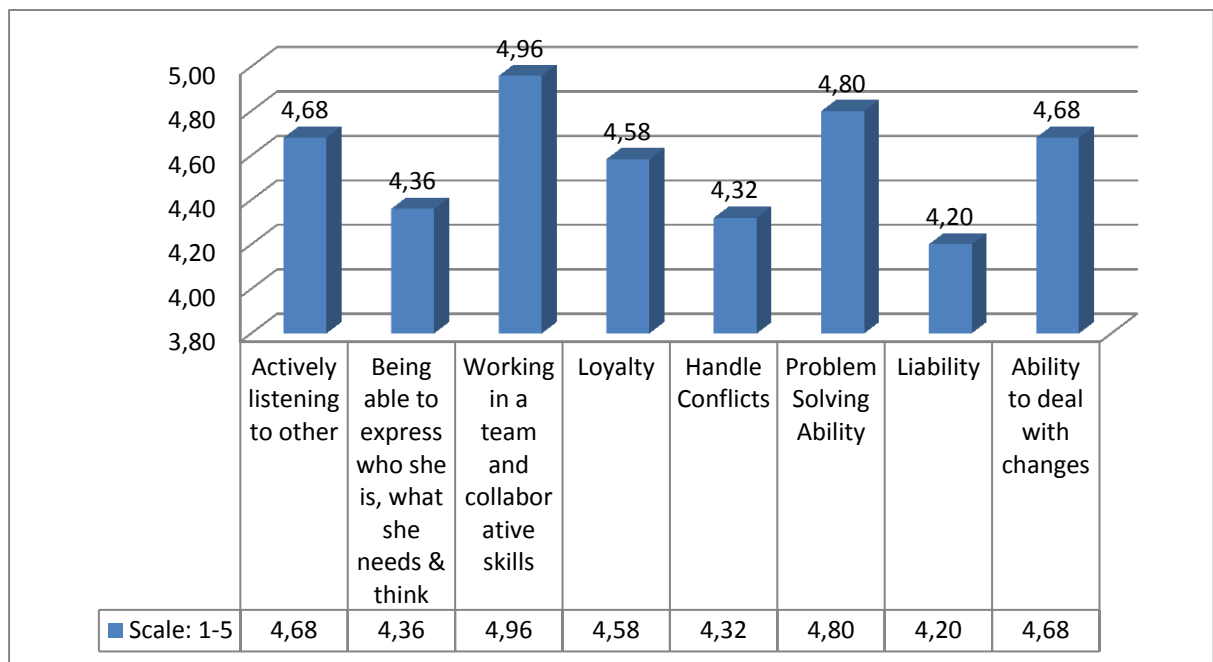
Germany

Just as VET schools, nearly all responding enterprises consider the soft skills stated above to be important:



Somewhat surprising, however, is the fact that the ability to manage conflicts ranges lowest with more than a quarter (28%) of respondents not attaching importance to it. This is in contrast to representative studies that highlight the ability to manage conflicts as a top competence that employers look for.¹⁰

Bulgaria



¹⁰ See also chapter 2.2.3.

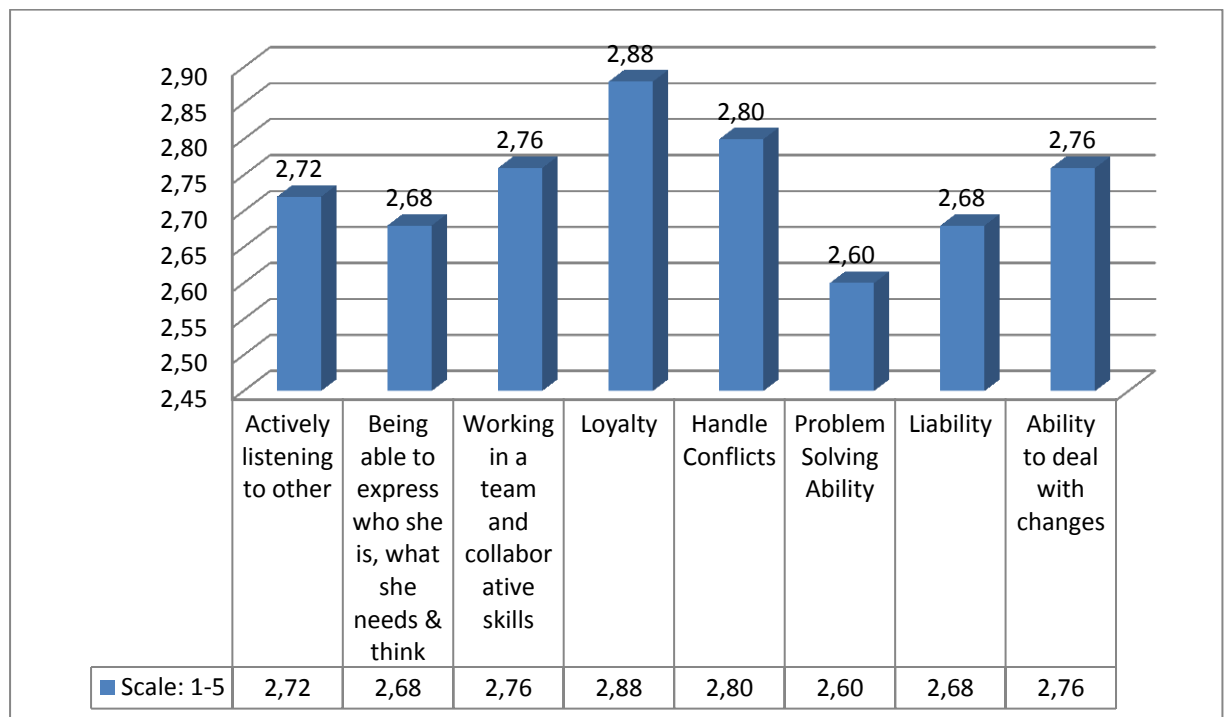
The results clearly indicate that the evaluated soft skills are very important for the companies in which the participants of the survey work. Only the skills "Being able to express who she is, what she needs & thinks" has accumulated an equal number of votes for marks 4 and 5 (8 participants have voted for each mark). For all the other skills, the maximum mark 5 is prevailing.

The participants are adamant about the level of importance of the skill "Working in a team and collaborative skills", where 76 % of the participants have chosen answer 5, and the other 24 % – answer 4. "Active listening to others" has been indicated as very significant for the work place – 68 % of the participants have again marked it with the maximum mark of 5.

Q13. Based on your personal experience, to what extent do you consider that your employees have the following soft skills?

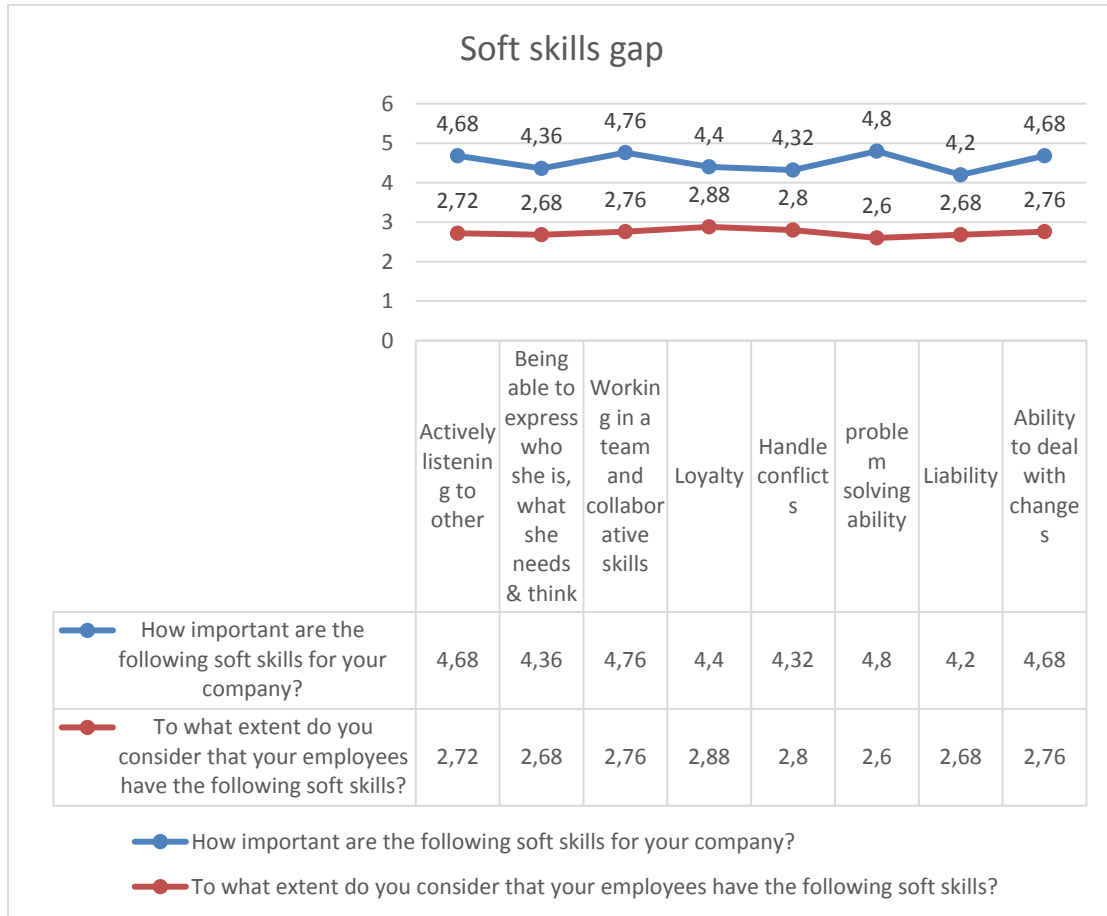
Cyprus

In the following chart, it presents the results for all the soft skills. The scale range from 1 which is Not at all to 5 which is very important. The employers consider that their employees have the following soft skills. They were rated all above average.

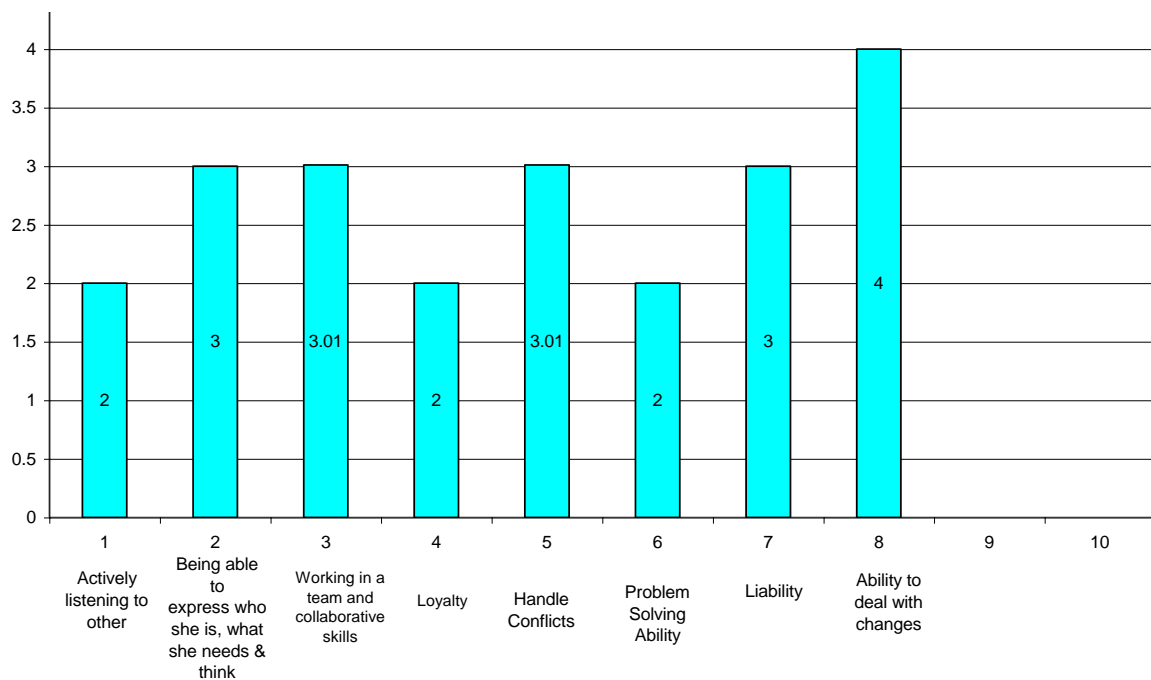


In conclusion, the following chart demonstrates gap between how the employers rate the importance of soft skills and the extent that they consider that their employees actually have them. The major gap appears at the following skills:

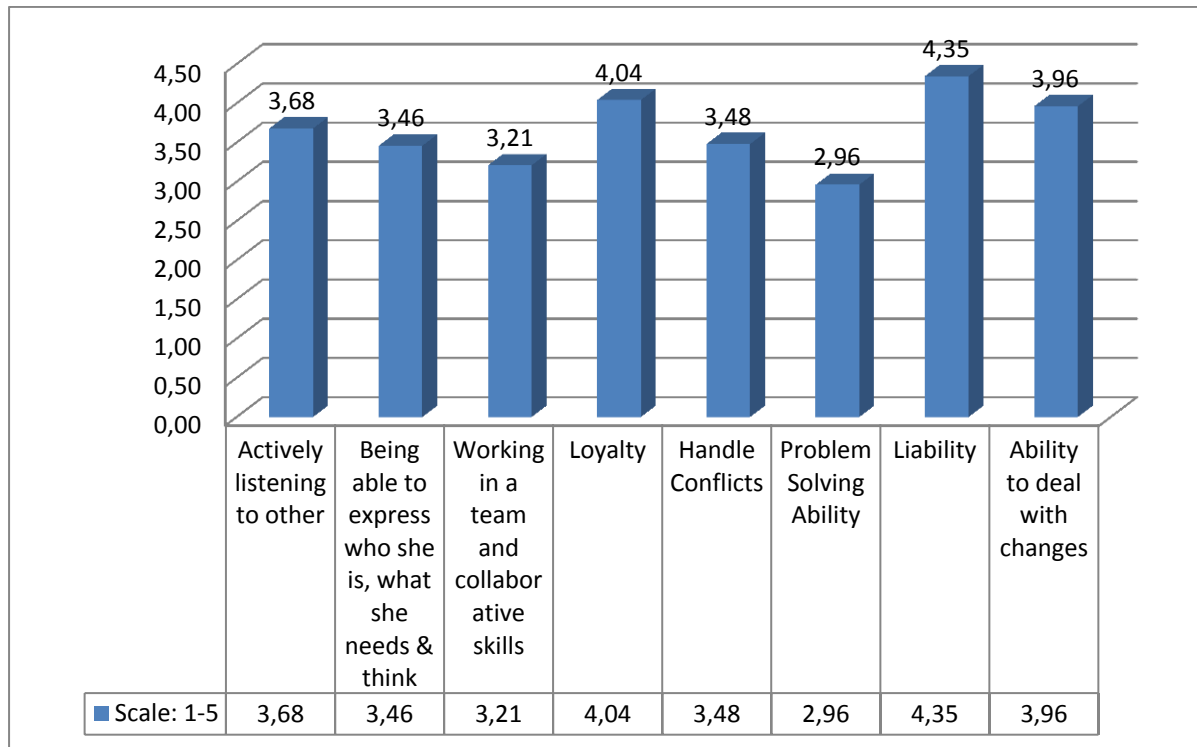
- Liability (2.2 difference)
- Loyalty (2.0 difference)
- Actively listening to other (1.96 difference)



Romania

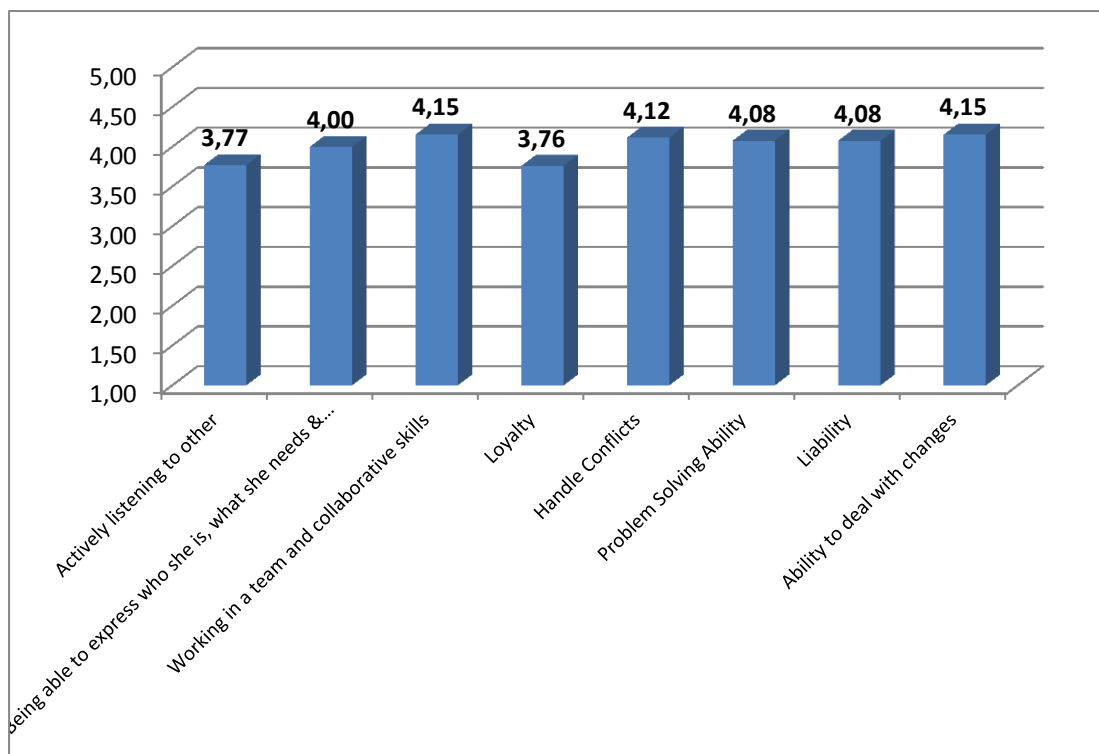


Sweden



Greece

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).



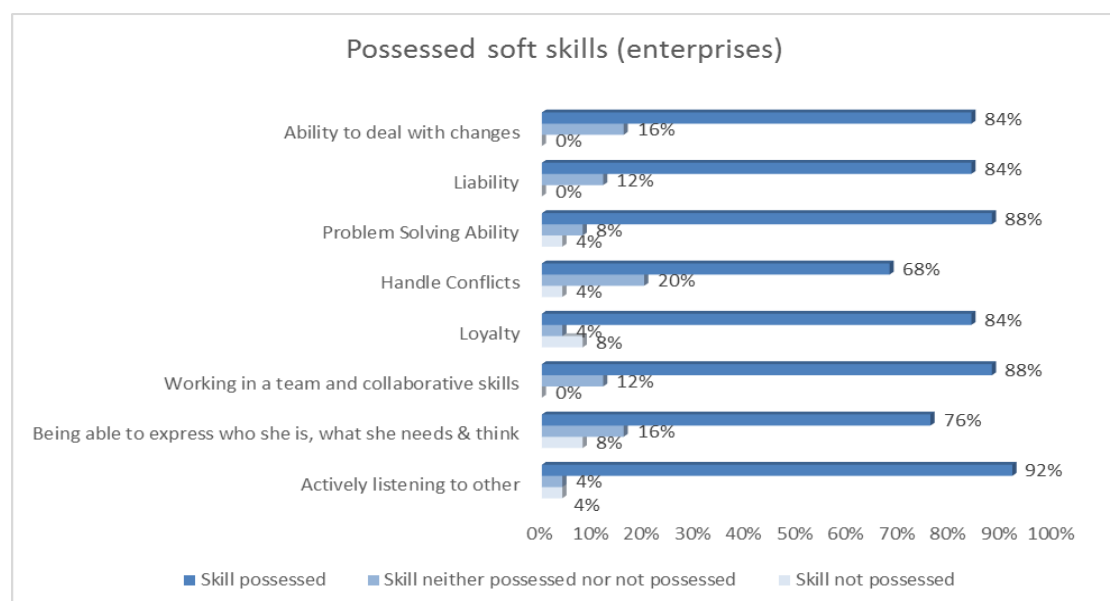
In conclusion, you can see the chart below which depicts the soft skills gap between how the employers rate the importance of the soft skills and the extent that they consider that their employees actually have them. The major gaps appear at the following skills:

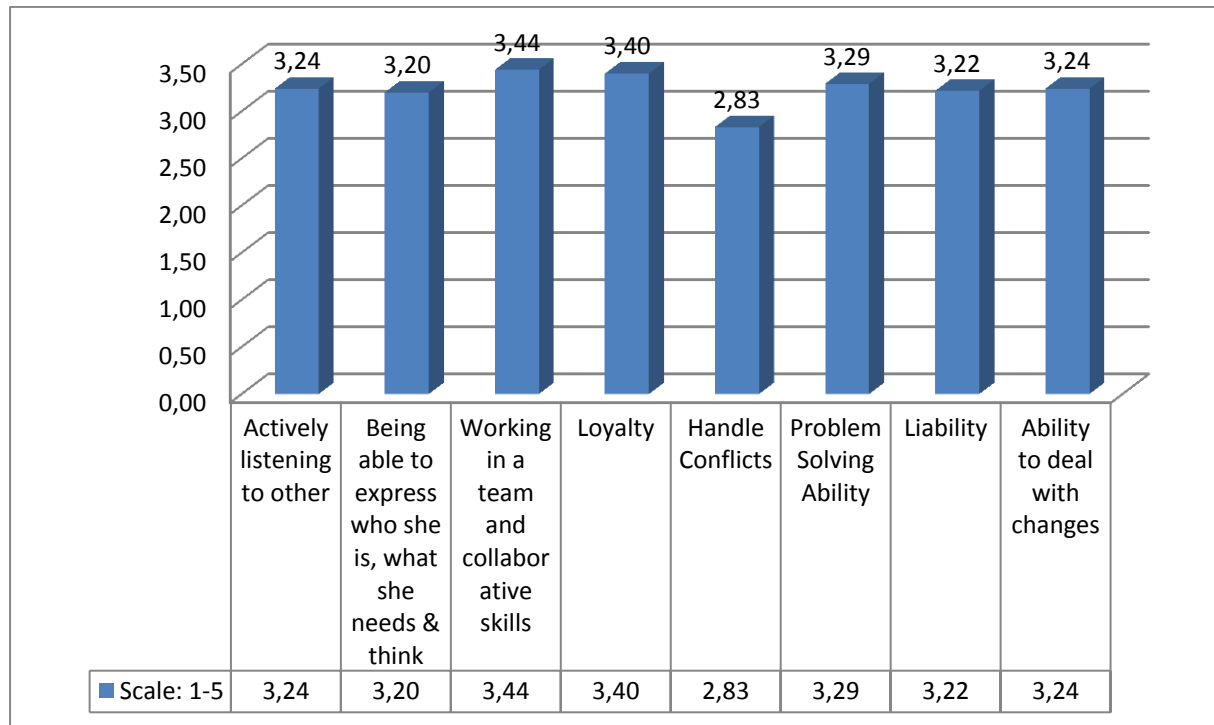
- Loyalty (0,70 difference).
- Ability to deal with changes (0,62 difference).
- Working in a team and collaborative skills (0,58 difference).



Germany

In contrast to VET schools, the responding enterprises think that their employees largely possess the soft skills they have been asked about in the questionnaire. Only the ability to manage conflicts doesn't entirely fit in this picture with more than a quarter (28%) of enterprises stating that their employees do not sufficiently possess this ability.



Bulgaria

The answers to these questions are very different. If all soft skills are evaluated as being very important and necessary for the work place, then the level in which the participants themselves, their colleagues and/or employees possess them is quite different. Most often the level of possessing for the majority of soft skills is evaluated by mark 3. The most preferable mark is 2 for the skills "Handling conflicts", "Being able to express who she is, what she needs & thinks" and "Ability to deal with change". "Handling conflicts" is the soft skill least possessed according to the respondents (12 respondents have chosen mark 2).

These results indicate that according to the participants in the survey, the evaluated soft skills need serious additional development and are not present to the level required by companies and/or the respective field of work.

4. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, there is a consensus about the importance of soft skills among VET providers and the representatives from companies. 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.
- 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.
- Soft skills need serious development and are not to the level required by companies and/or the respective field of work

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.
- Liability
- Handle conflicts

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
- Actively listening to other

What we can conclude from this research is that soft skills are considered important feature for the labour market. It appears that soft skills are not covered enough in the formal educational system. Hence there is a need on the development of soft skills

through the educational system and the lifelong learning paths so that young people will have more opportunities for employment.

I

