

# **Roadmap to introduce a system for the assessment and validation of prior learning in Greece**

## **Activity 8.1**



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# Acronyms

AVPL	Assessment and Validation of Prior Learning
CDVC	Competence Validation Consortium
CEP	Council for Career Development
CVET	Continuing Vocational Education and Training
DYPA	Greek Public Employment Service
EOPPEP	National Organization for Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance
EQF	European Qualification Framework
HQF	Hellenic Qualification Framework
KEE	Central Scientific Committee
KSEEK	Central Council for Vocational Education and Training
MEKY	Employment, Social Security, Welfare and Social Affairs Expert Unit
NCHRS	National Council of Human Resources Skills
NQF	National Qualification Framework
RNCP	French National Framework for Professional Qualifications
SAA	Skills Assessment and Anticipation
SFMQ	French-speaking Professions and Qualifications Service
VAE	Validation of Acquired Experience

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# 1 Introduction

Assessment and Validation of Prior Learning (AVPL) is a key instrument to make knowledge and skills visible, including those acquired outside of formal education or training. By certifying skills, AVPL can improve labour market outcomes, particularly for adults with relevant work experience but without formal qualifications, and can also help adults reengage in education and training.

The Greek government is looking to establish a system for the assessment and validation of prior learning, aiming at reengaging adults in adult learning and improving the employment outcomes of low-educated adults. EOPPEP – the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance – has been tasked with developing such a system.

To be supported in this task, EOPPEP has requested technical support to the European Commission and the OECD through the project 21EL28 "Support to the Design of a National Framework for Quality Assurance of Non-Formal Education and the Assessment and Validation of Prior Learning in Greece" under contract REFORM/IM2021/009. This project is funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument and implemented by the OECD, in cooperation with the European Commission's Directorate General for Structural Reform Support.

This document presents two examples of possible AVPL models in Greece (Chapter 2) and outlines the decisions and steps that Greek authorities will need to take to develop an AVPL system in Greece in Chapter 3, offering guidance for each step based on the Greek context and experience and on European best practices.

The guidance offered relies on the results of an analysis of existing Greek practices and regulations on AVPL or certification of prior learning in Greece, of European best practices in AVPL, on discussions with the Project's Advisory Group and on the OECD recommendations on the introduction of an AVPL system in Greece.

# 2

## Two options to design a system for the Assessment and Validation of Prior Learning in Greece

### Defining the goal of the AVPL system: two possible options

AVPL systems can be classified in two groups depending on the primary goal of the AVPL system: systems that intend to improve AVPL candidates' labour market outcomes and systems that aim at bringing candidates closer to the formal education and training system. Systems that primarily intend to **improve AVPL candidates' labour market outcomes** focus on job-specific skills, and generally rely on occupational standards or industry standards to be used as the benchmark against which to evaluate candidates' skills. These systems normally provide **professional certificates** as an outcome. In contrast, systems that intend to **bring AVPL candidates closer to formal education and training** normally certify general skills, although they can also certify job-specific skills, using qualifications in the National Qualification Framework (NQF) as a benchmark. These systems tend to offer **formal qualifications** as an outcome.

Following this classification, two main options are possible for Greece's new AVPL system, which are described in this section. The choice of one of these options will impact multiple of the decisions needed to design an AVPL system outlined in the following chapter.

#### ***Designing a labour market-based AVPL system***

Systems connected to the labour market, generally use occupational standards to benchmark the performance of AVPL candidates during the assessment, tend to rely on practical assessments to evaluate candidates' skills and generally offer professional certificates to successful candidates, instead of formal qualifications. The value of these professional certificates in the labour market is key for the relevance of the system. For this reason, employers and social partners are usually involved in the design and implementation of the system, through their participation in the creation of occupational profiles, and often in the assessment of AVPL candidates' prior learning.

Greece already has the main input needed to implement a labour market-based AVPL system – i.e., the occupational profiles (*Epaggelmatika Perigrammata*) – as well as experience in implementing professional certification processes. The occupational profiles, which are currently being subject of review by social partners under the supervision of EOPPEP, will include methods to assess relevant learning outcomes, which could be used for AVPL. In addition, the structure of current professional certification processes, including the use of registers of assessors and supervisors, and the requirements and training to become an assessor could be leveraged from existing professional certification processes.

One example of labour market-based system is Wallonia's (Belgium) AVPL system. In Wallonia, AVPL is governed by the Walloon regional government, organised by the Competence Validation Consortium (*Consortium de Validation des Compétences*, CVDC) and implemented by training providers run by

members of the Consortium. The AVPL system is publicly funded and AVPL processes are free for candidates. The government covers part of the cost of AVPL and validation centres, that is, training providers that implement AVPL, cover the remaining expenses using their own funds. European funds are used to compensate AVPL process observers.

The AVPL process is open to any resident in Belgium over 18 years of age who has completed compulsory schooling and, as of 2022, it is possible to carry out AVPL for 153 skill certificates.

AVPL in Wallonia certifies job-specific skills. To do so, it relies on occupational standards developed by the French-speaking Professions and Qualifications Service (*Service Francophone des Métiers et des Qualifications*, SFMQ). Since occupational standards are still being developed, occupations are prioritised based on labour market needs. Thus, occupational standards are first developed for occupations facing shortages of professionals.

Each occupational standard defines:

- 1) The key activities and the required skills that make up an occupation.
- 2) The learning units, which are the different skill certificates for which the candidate can validate their knowledge within that occupation.
- 3) The AVPL standard for each learning unit, which includes the skill assessment details, such as the testing environment, the activities to perform during the assessment, the evaluation criteria and the length of the assessment. The level of proficiency required is that of a competent professional in that occupation.

The AVPL process in Wallonia follows the four phases defined in the European guidelines for AVPL<sup>1</sup> and the European Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.<sup>2</sup> It includes: (1) an identification phase, in which an advisor supports the AVPL candidate to choose the right occupational profile for the AVPL process and to understand their chances of success; (2) a documentation phase, in which the candidate submits relevant information; (3) an assessment phase, in which the assessors evaluate the candidate's performance against the selected occupational standards in the AVPL assessment; and (4) the certification phase, in which successful candidates are awarded a "skills certificate". Given the labour market orientation of the system, generally practical assessments are used in Wallonia. They take place in validation centres and mimic a typical professional situation for the relevant occupation.

Advisors are generally a member of the validation centre, such as a trainer, specialised in the occupation of the selected occupational standard for the AVPL process. The advisor helps the candidate understand if they should take part in the AVPL process and their probability of success. The assessor is also employed by the validation centre and must be a trainer or an experienced professional in the relevant occupation, trained to act as an assessor. If the assessor is an experienced professional, they must have at least five years of experience and have not left the occupation more than five years ago. Finally, an observer, a professional experienced in the relevant occupation, observes the assessment and the candidates' performance, making sure that the assessment is carried out in line with the standards and suggesting changes to the assessment tasks when they do not reflect the tasks that professionals in the relevant occupation perform anymore. Observers are designated by the validation centre, must have at least five years of experience and not have left the occupation more than five years ago and not have any link to the

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<sup>1</sup> Cedefop (2015). *European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop reference series; No 104. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/008370>

<sup>2</sup> Accessible at:

[https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/Council\\_Recommendation\\_on\\_the\\_validation\\_20\\_December\\_2012.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/Council_Recommendation_on_the_validation_20_December_2012.pdf)

candidate. The evaluation panel, who is present during the AVPL candidates' assessment, is formed by the assessor, the observer and the validation centre manager.

The result of a successful AVPL process is a "skills certificate". While this skills certificate is recognised and valued in the labour market, mostly due to the employers' and social partners participation in the AVPL system, it is not officially equivalent to formal VET qualifications. However, since training providers implement AVPL, skills certificates are sometimes also accepted by education or training institutions to grant credit units or waivers when accessing further education or training.

In Wallonia, the quality of AVPL is assured at two levels: at the system level and at the process level. At the system level, validation centres must be accredited to implement AVPL for each occupational standard for which they offer AVPL. In addition, validation centres are externally reviewed annually by audit services contracted by the Consortium. For this audit, centres must submit information on all their processes related to AVPL, submitting the annual activities report, the action plan and the centre's objectives for the following year, AVPL outcomes, and potential complaints received or suggested improvements.

At the AVPL process level, quality assurance relies on two elements: the standardisation of the process, which is described in detail in AVPL standards, and the presence of an observer in the candidate's assessment phase.

Finally, Wallonia uses different mechanisms to raise awareness on the existence of AVPL. For instance, information is distributed through a dedicated website, a newsletter, targeted emails to job seekers and advertising campaigns in the media. Awareness raising is also done via information provided by professionals working in the Public Employment Service and by Consortium members. The Consortium also works with individual employers and their human resources departments to identify workers at risk of unemployment due to restructuring and possible skills validation procedures they can undertake. Employed adults are eligible to use 8 hours of paid education leave on the day of their AVPL assessment.

### ***Linking AVPL to the formal education and training system***

More developed AVPL systems generally encompass AVPL within their formal education and training system, allowing AVPL candidates to obtain parts of or full formal qualifications and to access upskilling opportunities through AVPL. These systems generally use qualifications in the NQF as the benchmark against which AVPL candidates' skills are assessed.

AVPL systems that are linked to formal education and training systems can also offer micro-credentials as an outcome of the process. These could be stacked with other micro-credentials obtained through AVPL or education and training to obtain full formal qualifications, as in Spain.

While employers and social partners also play a key role in these systems, particularly during the development of qualifications, their involvement may be more limited than for labour market-based systems. AVPL processes in these systems are generally implemented by formal education and training providers, although employers or experienced professionals in the relevant occupation may also participate in the assessment of AVPL candidates, as in France.

One example of an AVPL system linked to the formal education and training system is the Validation of Acquired Experience (*Validation des acquis de l'expérience*, VAE) in France, which is institutionally managed by the Ministry of Labour. The implementation of the system, however, is carried out by one of nine parent ministries, depending on the diploma being awarded. In practice, 60% of qualifications awarded through AVPL have been awarded by the Ministry of Education.

The system is funded publicly and privately, and the main source of funding depends on the employment status of the AVPL candidate and on the institution initiating the AVPL process, which can be the employer, the adult or the Public Employment Service. Adults required to cover AVPL expenses can make use of their Individual Learning Account to do so.

All adults with at least one year of professional experience in a relevant field for the targeted qualification are eligible to participate in AVPL, which can be carried out for general and for job-specific skills.

AVPL in France is carried out against the French national framework for professional qualifications (RNCP), which covers levels 2 to 8 of the European Qualifications Framework. By law, an AVPL procedure must be planned for every qualification registered in the RNCP, except for qualifications that are linked to a regulated profession. Qualifications in the RNCP are developed in line with occupational standards and describe the knowledge and skills that a person must have when completing a qualification (learning outcomes).

As in Wallonia (Belgium), the AVPL process in France is comprised by four phases: identification, documentation, assessment and certification. The assessment phase follows a two-step procedure which usually consists of a portfolio and an interview or practical assessment. Depending on the qualification selected for the AVPL process, the importance of each of the steps in the AVPL process varies. While for more advanced qualifications a portfolio including a description of the skills and knowledge that the candidate has acquired and evidence of past professional achievements is a key component of the assessment, lower-level qualifications tend to rely more on practical assessments.

The role of advisor is performed by different stakeholders, depending on the employment status of the candidate. If the candidate is employed, then support is provided by information and guidance centres under the Council for Career Development (*Conseil en Evolution Professionnelle*, CEP). If the candidate is instead unemployed, then support is provided by the Public Employment Service, *Pôle Emploi*. With regard to assessors, AVPL candidates are assessed by an evaluation jury, from which 25% of its assessors must be qualified professionals (half of them employers and half of them employees). The rest of jury members are teachers or trainers. In the case of qualifications awarded by the Ministry of Labour and professional sectors, all assessors must be professionals. There are some qualification requirements for assessors, who may also participate in training to prepare them to conduct the assessment. Successful AVPL candidates are awarded a formal qualification or a block of competences, which is part of a formal qualification.

To assure the quality of AVPL, the relevant Ministries conduct regular evaluations of how AVPL is being implemented for their corresponding qualifications and make improvements when necessary. In addition, the AVPL process is highly standardised. Professionals carrying out different roles in the AVPL process must meet some professional standards and potentially participate in training. In addition, jury members are provided with guidelines for conducting their assessment.

Finally, awareness raising activities in France take place through different stakeholders and at different levels (national, both inter-ministry and ministry levels, regional level, provider level, sectoral social partners level and company level). Information on AVPL is distributed through a general information portal dedicated to VAE managed by the Ministry of Labour. In addition, the Public Employment Service, other career counsellors and sectoral social partners may also refer adults to AVPL. Every region has a “VAE Counselling Centre” that provides a local contact point for individuals to obtain information on how to start and proceed with an AVPL process. Employers may also inform their employees about AVPL, as they are required to carry out interviews every two years with their employees to review their professional development and to inform them about AVPL. Similar to Wallonia (Belgium), AVPL candidates in France may take up to 24 hours of training leave throughout the AVPL process to carry out AVPL-related activities.

### **Selecting an option for Greece**

Considering the existing inputs in Greece and its experience with professional certification processes, it is **recommended that Greece opts to initially develop and implement a labour market based AVPL system**. Such a system could rely on the updated occupational profiles as a benchmark for AVPL assessments and leverage Greece’s inputs and processes from existing professional certification

processes, such as assessor registers or requirements and training needed to become an assessor. Following this recommendation, the rest of the document will focus on describing the steps required to develop and implement a labour market based AVPL system.

Once such a system is in place, the Greek authorities could work towards modularising the qualifications in the NQF, breaking existing qualifications into small, self-contained, stackable units of training or education. These modules could be linked to micro-credentials and include assessment information so they can also be obtained through AVPL. This way AVPL candidates could obtain formal qualifications, potentially up to level 5 of the Hellenic Qualification Framework (HQF), by stacking micro-credentials obtained through AVPL and/or education or training. AVPL processes to obtain these new micro-credentials could build on the existing AVPL system, leveraging its structure and processes.

# 3 A step-by-step guide to developing an AVPL system in Greece

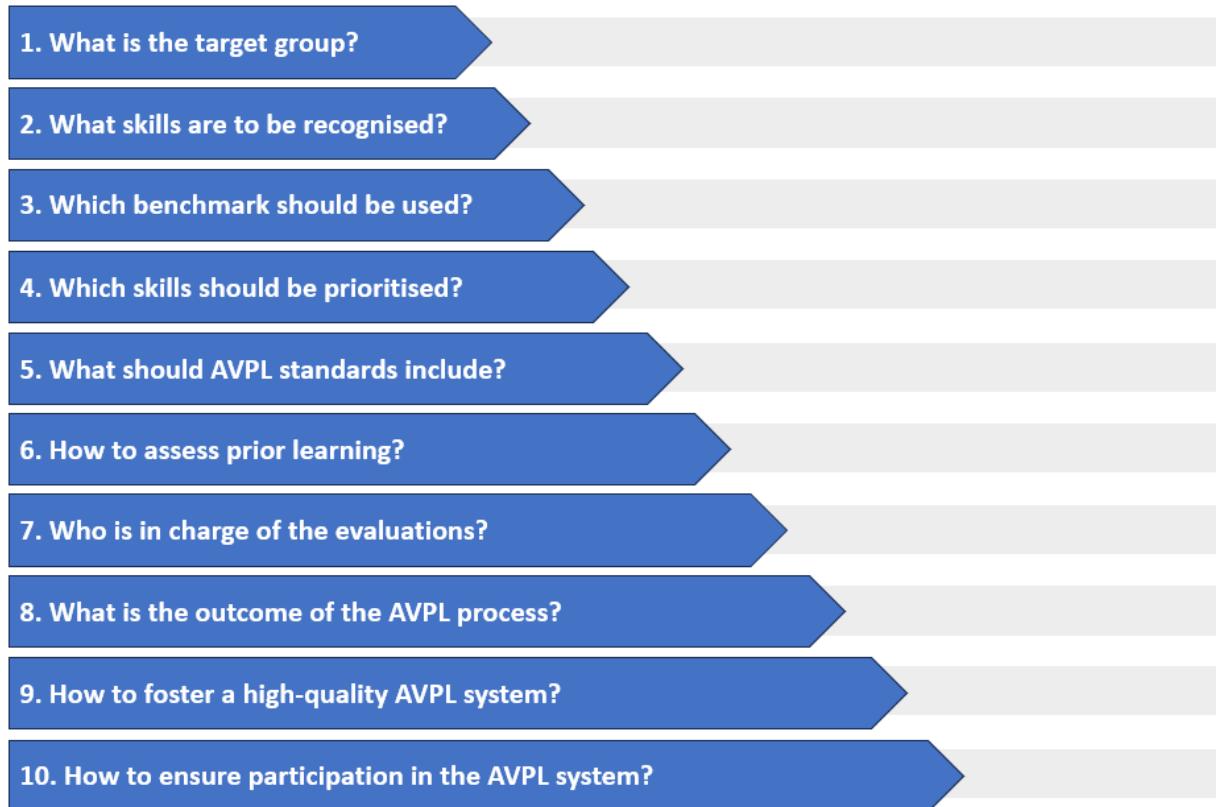
Based on an international review of best practices on AVPL, the OECD developed a step-by-step guide of the main decisions that institutions intending to develop a validation system must take, summarised in Figure 3.1 (OECD, 2023).<sup>3</sup> Following this guide and building on the OECD recommendations on the introduction of an AVPL system and on the recommended AVPL option in Chapter 1, this chapter provides options for each step and specific recommendations tailored to the Greek context. Additional decisions are added when needed.

The first decision to be discussed is not included in Figure 3.1, and refers to the governance and the funding of the AVPL system. These decisions are taken as given in OECD (2023), since they are prerequisites to the development of an AVPL system. Given that Greece is just starting discussions on the introduction of a validation system, these areas must be addressed and are thus discussed as **Decision 0: Governance and funding**.

**Decision 1: Selecting target beneficiaries** and **Decision 2: Skills to be recognised by the AVPL system** are at the basis of the system. These decisions affect upcoming decisions, such as the benchmark used or awareness raising activities, as well as the institutions involved in the AVPL system and the HQF level of the related AVPL outcome. Once the type of skills that the system will certify are defined, the benchmark used to assess and validate skills must be chosen (**Decision 3: AVPL standards**, the benchmark against which candidates' skills are assessed). In addition, institutions may need to decide what occupations/qualifications to prioritise to implement AVPL or to develop further benchmarks, this choice is discussed in **Decision 4: Prioritising occupations/qualifications for AVPL**. In the case that AVPL benchmarks need to be developed, **Decision 5: AVPL standards' content** centres on the information that the benchmark, also called AVPL standards, should include. Once the benchmark for the AVPL process has been determined and developed, the structure of the AVPL process as well as the assessment methods used must be selected in **Decision 6: The AVPL process and the assessment phase**, along with the professionals that advise and assess AVPL candidates during the process (**Decision 7: Who is in charge of AVPL?**). Furthermore, the institution developing the AVPL system must choose what kind of certificate will be given to successful AVPL candidates and determine any post-validation support offered in **Decision 8: What is the outcome?**. The last two decisions intend to safeguard the high quality of the validation system (**Decision 9: Fostering high quality in AVPL**) and to encourage the use of the system by potential beneficiaries, through awareness raising activities and other supporting policies (**Decision 10: Encouraging participation**). Finally, a last step was added. This step provides guidance on how Greek authorities could officially establish the system once all decisions have been addressed.

<sup>3</sup> OECD (2023), "Recognition of prior learning: A practical guide for policymakers". Accessible at: <https://www.oecd.org/els/emp/skills-and-work/adult-learning/booklet-rpl-2023.pdf>

Figure 3.1. A 10-step process to set up Assessment and Validation of Prior Learning system



Source: OECD (2023)

## Decision 0: Governance and funding

Before starting the development of an AVPL system, two key points must be addressed: what institution/s will govern the system and how will the system be funded.

In multiple countries, one Ministry is primarily responsible for the system, which can be the Ministry of Education, as in Spain, or the Ministry of Labour, as in Wallonia (Belgium). The choice of the Ministry that governs the system can have an impact, for example, on the outcome that can be provided in the AVPL process, as the Ministry of Education generally needs to be involved for the system to be able to award formal qualifications. In other countries, such as in Portugal or in France, multiple ministries are responsible for the system. In Portugal, both the Ministry of Education and of Labour govern the system, while in France multiple ministries are involved in the AVPL process depending on the relevant qualifications.

While the governance of the system should be decided by Greek authorities, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports is involved in the governance of the validation system, particularly to facilitate the potential future link of the AVPL system with formal qualifications, as described in Chapter 1. In fact, if the current professional certification legislative framework was extended to include AVPL, EOPPEP would be the implementing institution and the system would be governed by the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports (article 14, law 4115/2013).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Article 14 of Law 4115/2013 (FEKA) 24/30.1.2013 on 'The organisation and operation of a youth and lifelong learning foundation and a national organisation for the certification of qualifications and vocational guidance and other provisions'.

With regard to funding, AVPL systems are costly. Individual AVPL processes include multiple phases, which can have high operational costs due to their tailored nature and the equipment and inputs needed. To reduce costs of implementation, some countries opt for written exams; however, these cheaper alternatives are not always recommended, as they may not reflect accurately the level of skill of AVPL candidates, particularly for candidates that have been disengaged from the formal education and training system for a while. For this reason, it is recommended that a thorough evaluation of the system's operational costs is carried out and that sufficient sustainable funding is identified and allocated.

Multiple European countries initially rely on the European Social Fund (ESF) to sustain their AVPL systems (e.g., Portugal). However, while European funds can contribute to initiating relevant skills policies, other national sustainable funding should be identified as the system matures. In addition, some systems rely on candidate fees to partly cover AVPL system costs (e.g., France, the Netherlands). To avoid imposing barriers to the participation of potential beneficiaries of AVPL, candidates' fees should be avoided whenever possible or set as low as possible.

## Decision 1: Selecting target beneficiaries

Depending on the population that the AVPL system is open to, validation systems can be classified into universal – i.e., open to all adults in the country – or targeted – that is, intending to support specific population groups, such as refugees or unemployed. This decision is at the basis of the system, as it impacts the institutions that should be involved in the governance of the system and the design and implementation of assessments or awareness raising initiatives, among other things.

When possible, it is recommended to design a **universal AVPL system**. A single national AVPL system avoids the need to create multiple parallel AVPL systems intended for different population groups, which could negatively impact trust in AVPL certificates and hinder the participation of potential beneficiaries. A universal AVPL system would also be aligned with Greece's purpose for the new AVPL system: to reengage adults in adult education and improve the employment outcomes of low-educated adults.

Despite being open to all adults in the country, universal systems may require adults to comply with some eligibility conditions, such as requirements on previous work experience, as in France or Germany, on minimum education or training level, as in Finland or in Wallonia (Belgium), or on residence status. These eligibility conditions should be clearly defined and communicated to potential AVPL candidates. Since the Greek system would target low-qualified adults, eligibility conditions regarding education should not be stringent, however, some professional experience could be required to pursue AVPL.

## Decision 2: Skills to be recognised by the AVPL system

AVPL systems can certify general skills, i.e. cross-field skills required for personal development, such as literacy, numeracy, language proficiency or geography, among others, or job-specific skills, skills required to work effectively in an occupation. As discussed in Chapter 1, the type of skills that can be certified through AVPL is closely linked to the goal of the AVPL system. While labour market-based systems generally certify job-specific skills, as in Wallonia (Belgium), systems linked to the formal education and training system normally focus on general skills, but can certify both depending on the qualification, as in France.

As discussed in Chapter 1, given the existing inputs for the AVPL system, as the occupational profiles, and Greece's experience with professional certification processes, Greece should, at least initially, develop a labour market-based AVPL system, **focusing on job-specific skills**. Alternatively, Greece could decide to certify general skills through AVPL. This would be feasible by developing AVPL processes against qualifications in the Hellenic Qualification Framework (HQF).

## Decision 3: AVPL standards, the benchmark against which candidates' skills are assessed

Once the type of skills certified by the AVPL system has been decided, institutions developing an AVPL system must choose or develop the benchmark that will be used to assess candidates' skills and knowledge. This benchmark is typically called AVPL standards and generally uses as a basis either qualifications in the National Qualification Framework (NQF), occupational standards or industry standards.

Using qualifications in the NQF as AVPL standards, either directly or through developing validation standards from formal qualifications, has some advantages. First of all, formal qualifications are already well accepted by education, training institutions and employers, easing the access to upskilling opportunities as well as to the labour market. In addition, they provide a high level of comparability to adults who have completed the qualification through formal education or training. This comparability also extends to other European countries when the NQF is referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), which could increase worker international mobility. Finally, qualifications already include learning outcomes, i.e. the set of skills, abilities and knowledge that individuals who complete the qualification must have acquired, which can be used as the benchmark to compare AVPL candidates' prior learning. For this reason, numerous European countries choose to use qualifications in the NQF as AVPL standards (e.g., Denmark, Estonia, France, Latvia and Portugal). Despite these advantages, qualifications in the NQF may not be the most appropriate to measure learning acquired informally, as they were conceived to implement formal education and training. This must be kept in mind when assessing candidates using formal qualifications as a benchmark. If Greek authorities decided to develop an AVPL system to certify general skills, the Hellenic Qualification Framework should be used as the AVPL standards of the system.

For systems that focus on job-specific skills, occupational standards or AVPL standards based on occupational standards are more appropriate to measure learning acquired informally. These standards are closer to the AVPL candidate's experience, and they include, at a minimum, a list of activities and tasks that the candidate should be able to complete together with the related competences.

In Greece, the updated version of the occupational profiles, which should be available in the second trimester of 2024, will include a description of the tasks and activities carried out by professionals in the relevant occupation, the related knowledge, competences and skills expressed as learning outcomes, potential training pathways to obtain needed qualifications to work in an occupation and guidance on how to evaluate if an individual possesses the relevant learning outcomes. Given the recommendation to focus on job-specific skills, at least initially, occupational profiles could be used as the benchmark of the AVPL system in Greece. Additionally, since social partners develop occupational profiles, which are later certified by EOPPEP, the skills and knowledge included in the occupational profiles are relevant for the labour market, at least at the time of development of the occupational profile, potentially increasing the value of AVPL certificates in the labour market.

Finally, in some countries, social partners or sectoral organisations may develop industry standards that can be used for AVPL. This is, for example, the case in the Netherlands or Sweden. Industry standards present how an industry operates and require fewer formal steps to update, making them the most responsive standards to rapidly evolving labour market needs and to changes in occupations. However, they are generally not approved by any public authorities, which can narrow the value of the linked AVPL certificate to the corresponding sector.

Regardless of which AVPL standards are adopted, to ensure the relevance of AVPL standards over time, they must be updated and reviewed often. For example, in France, qualifications and occupational profiles are reviewed at least once every five years. Alternatively, Spain and France have labour market observatories to identify changes in occupations.

In contrast, the Greek occupational profiles are currently going through their first update since their development in 2010. To avoid relying on obsolete occupational profiles for AVPL, frequent and regular updates of Greek occupational profiles should be planned. One option to shorten the occupational profile updating process is to review occupational profiles and allow for the update of solely the components that need modifications.

#### Decision 4: Prioritising occupations/qualifications for AVPL

Even though the latest review of occupational profiles will be ready in mid-2024, AVPL may not be implemented all at once for all occupations. It is possible, for example, that further work needs to be done to define AVPL assessments for individual occupations, or that assessors need to be identified to carry out AVPL for different occupations. Thus, there will be a need to prioritise occupations.

To choose the occupations to prioritise, one option is to follow Germany's example, where the Valikom Transfer system prioritises occupations in which many experienced but low-qualified workers are employed. Another approach is the one used in Wallonia (Belgium), in which occupations are prioritised if they face important skill shortages.

If Greek authorities decide to prioritise occupations or qualifications for AVPL based on labour market needs, information from the Greek Skills Assessment and Anticipation (SAA) mechanism, known as the labour market diagnosis mechanism, could be used. Consequently, it is recommended that the functioning of the system and the coordination of all participating institutions (KSEEK, KEE, DYPA, NCHRS, Production-Labour Market Liaison Councils, MEKY) is reviewed, to ensure that it gathers the most accurate information possible.

#### Decision 5: AVPL standards' content

Despite the benchmark used (qualification, occupation or industry standard), AVPL standards generally contain similar information. All validation standards must include the name of the relevant qualification, occupation, block of competences or competence. Then, they must present the main activities linked to it, and break these into knowledge and competences, which must be linked to learning outcomes, as in France and Spain, or to tasks, as in Wallonia (Belgium) and the Netherlands. Furthermore, if the benchmark used is referenced to the NQF, standards must contain the NQF level of the standard, or place the standard within the labour market, including information on the level of responsibility and sector of the linked occupation, as in Wallonia (Belgium).

This basic information should be already included in the updated version of the Greek occupational profiles (available in mid-2024). As mentioned above, these standards will include a thorough description of the tasks performed by professionals in the relevant occupation, as well as the related knowledge, skills, and competences as learning outcomes and guidance on how to evaluate if an individual has achieved the relevant learning outcomes.

In addition, AVPL standards may also include other information such as assessment information (e.g., specific tasks to be performed during the assessment, performance criteria or level of importance of each task), training information (e.g., training programmes linked to the competences in the standard or to further develop related competences), and information on complementary skills and competences (e.g., language, digital or transversal skills linked to the standard).

## Decision 6: The AVPL process and the assessment phase

Once the AVPL standards are decided, the AVPL process must be defined. Existing certification processes in Greece include three phases: documentation, assessment, and certification. Current certification candidates must apply to be certified, submitting the relevant supporting documentation, then prove their skills and knowledge in an assessment and finally successful candidates are certified.

Following the European guidelines for AVPL and the European Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, a fourth initial phase should be added to this structure: the identification phase. During this phase, AVPL candidates decide the most suitable standard (occupational profile) to validate their skills and knowledge jointly with an **advisor** – a professional with a background in the relevant sector and a good knowledge of the potential occupational standards. In addition, during this phase, advisors often assess the chances that the candidate succeeds the AVPL process, suggesting relevant training or obtaining further experience for candidates who may have critical skill or knowledge gaps.

After the identification phase, the current three phases would take place, with some modifications. In the documentation phase, candidates would submit documentation and evidence proving their compliance with the requirements to participate in the AVPL process and their relevant knowledge and skills. AVPL candidates would be guided by an advisor or a professional at the validation centre during this phase.

Then, the assessment phase would take place. This phase is at the core of the AVPL system, as it is the moment in which candidates prove their prior learning. During this phase, the assessor/s evaluate the candidates' skills and knowledge in comparison with the relevant benchmark. While multiple assessment methods exist (e.g., written exams, portfolios, technical interviews or practical assessments, among others), it is recommended that AVPL evaluations rely as much as possible on **practical assessments, such as work simulations or workplace observation**, particularly considering the target beneficiaries of the Greek AVPL system: low-qualified adults. Practical assessments are the most expensive assessment method, due to the cost of the necessary equipment and materials, and because they cannot be always conducted for multiple candidates at the same time (unlike written tests, which can be submitted to dozens of candidates simultaneously). However, they are also the most appropriate assessment method to validate informal and non-formal learning related to low-skilled occupations, as they avoid potential biases linked to the use of formal education settings to evaluate learning acquired informally, which could be particularly damaging for low-educated adults.

Alternatively, if the new Greek AVPL system focused on general skills and relied on qualifications from the Hellenic Qualification Framework as AVPL standards, other assessment methods more appropriate for the evaluated learning outcomes would be required. For example, in France, while AVPL for job-specific skills makes use of practical assessments, AVPL for academic qualifications makes use of portfolios and oral interviews.

At the end of the process, the certifying body awards the relevant AVPL certificate to successful candidates in the certification phase. The potential outcomes and their acceptance by education and training institutions and their value in the labour market are discussed in 'Decision 8: What is the outcome?' below. In some European countries, such as in Denmark, Portugal or Spain, the AVPL certificate comes accompanied by relevant career guidance information, such as potential learning pathways based on the certified skills and knowledge.

## Decision 7: Who is in charge of AVPL?

Given its experience in coordinating, implementing and supervising professional certification processes, EOPPEP is the most appropriate existing institution in Greece to coordinate AVPL processes. EOPPEP is

additionally highly trusted by stakeholders and manages registers of assessors, inspectors, auditors, supervisors and experts, which could potentially be used to identify suitable assessors for AVPL and to ensure the quality of AVPL.

**EOPPEP could implement AVPL** by itself, as in the case of the certification processes for hairdressers, nail care technicians, trainers of adults in non-formal learning (hereinafter CVET trainers) and IVET trainees, **or another institution accredited and supervised by EOPPEP or in collaboration with EOPPEP, in the case of public authorities**, could implement AVPL, as for the security guard or port loader professional certifications. For example, AVPL could be implemented by social partners through their scientific institutions, which already have a national network present throughout the country, as in Germany, or through training providers, as in Spain. To choose between the two implementation models, the cost of each option, the credibility of the implementing institution/s, the objectivity of its actors, the frequency with which AVPL could be implemented and the length to complete individual AVPL processes should be considered. If it was decided that an alternative institution/s collaborating with EOPPEP implemented AVPL, these institution/s should be accredited and supervised by EOPPEP, particularly in the context of the quality assurance of the AVPL process.

In addition, the profile of the advisor, the assessor/s and the moderator must be defined. The advisor supports the AVPL candidate throughout the AVPL process, the assessor/s evaluate(s) the candidate during the assessment phase, and the moderator ensures that the AVPL process and particularly the assessment is carried out objectively and that the outcome of the process is fair. The individuals fulfilling these roles would be selected by the AVPL implementing institution from a pool of eligible candidates.

The advisor must be highly knowledgeable of the existing AVPL standards (the different occupational profiles), as advisors support AVPL candidates in selecting the right occupational profile, and of the AVPL process and the different assessment methods used. Thus, **advisors might be certified career counsellors employed by the validation centre, or, social partner members**, as in Germany, with proven experience in providing career guidance, given the strong role of social partners in the development of the potential AVPL standards in Greece (the occupational profiles).

However, the AVPL advisor can be different from the **career guidance counsellor that offers career guidance to the candidate at the end of the AVPL process**. Given the goal of this guidance, that is, to point AVPL candidates towards potential upskilling pathways or offering professional advice, this career guidance should be provided by a career counsellor from DYPA or from EOPPEP's register of certified career counsellors.

Selecting the right **profile for the assessor/s** is pivotal for stakeholders to trust the system. Multiple AVPL systems rely on experienced professionals in the relevant occupation to assess AVPL candidates (e.g., France). This increases the connection of AVPL with the labour market and allows potential employers to see by themselves how AVPL works, potentially increasing the value of the AVPL outcome in the labour market. In addition, most systems involve at least two assessors to evaluate the candidate's performance during the assessment phase, fostering objectivity (e.g., Spain; Wallonia, Belgium).

Following the example of the certification of CVET trainers, two assessors could be in charge of the AVPL assessment in Greece. These assessors could be selected from EOPPEP's registers of assessors, if they already include assessors with experience in the relevant AVPL standards, or new registers of assessors could be put together leveraging the structure, requirements and training for assessors of the existing registers. Social partners' representatives or potential employers could also take part in the AVPL process as assessors (e.g., Germany), increasing their trust in the system. To do so, they should apply to be included in EOPPEP's assessor register. The involvement of social partner representatives or employers would further guarantee the relevance of the skills and knowledge assessed in AVPL for the labour market. Training provider representatives could also be involved to ease the access of AVPL candidates to further training opportunities as well, as in Wallonia (Belgium).

If, alternatively, the AVPL system developed focused on general skills, trainers and teachers should be involved in the evaluation as assessors. In this case, following the French example, experienced professionals or social partners could also act as assessors as part of a jury, but have a lower representation.

Finally, following the example of the existing CVET trainer certification process, **an observer (i.e., the moderator)** should supervise the assessment and assure its quality and objectivity. This moderator could either be an EOPPEP official or an expert from the register of assessors, as in the case of the CVET trainer certification process, a social partner representative or an experienced professional in the relevant occupation, as in Wallonia (Belgium). Social partner representatives and experienced professionals would need to enrol in EOPPEP's assessor register to participate in the AVPL process as an observer.

### Decision 8: What is the outcome?

After the completion of the AVPL process, beneficiaries may receive a **formal qualification or an AVPL certificate**. Formal qualifications are already accepted by education and training institutions and in the labour market, opening new opportunities to successful AVPL candidates, and allow to compare the level of knowledge and skills to adults who obtained their qualification through formal education or training. If the new Greek AVPL system used qualifications in the Hellenic Qualification Framework as the AVPL standards, the AVPL outcome could be the same formal qualification, or part of it, as the one obtained through education or training. However, if the Greek occupational profiles are used as AVPL standards in Greece, the completion of AVPL would most likely lead to an AVPL certificate.

This AVPL certificate must open new opportunities for potential beneficiaries to want to participate in AVPL. For this reason, stakeholders should be heavily involved in the system, supporting the value of the AVPL certificate in the labour market, as in Wallonia (Belgium). In addition, as discussed in Decision 3: AVPL standards, the benchmark against which candidates' skills are assessed, it is essential that AVPL standards are regularly reviewed and updated, so that AVPL is continuously valued in the labour market.

Alternatively, links between AVPL and formal education and training could be created, for example through linking AVPL certificates to micro-credentials accepted by the labour market and the state authorities. These micro-credentials could be stacked with other micro-credentials obtained through AVPL or even through education or training to build higher level certifications and potentially, once the NQF has been modularised, formal qualifications.

Finally, regardless of the form of the specific AVPL outcome, the outcome should be **accompanied by relevant career guidance**, as in Spain. For example, information on potential upskilling pathways or on professional opportunities based on the individual's certified skills and knowledge could be provided to AVPL candidates.

### Decision 9: Fostering high quality in AVPL

Assuring the quality of the AVPL system is crucial to encourage stakeholders' trust in the system and the value of the AVPL outcome in the labour market. Many systems (1) standardise AVPL processes; (2) take measures to ensure the objectivity of the AVPL assessment; and/or (3) implement quality assurance to their AVPL systems to ensure the high quality of their AVPL systems.

**Standardising the AVPL process** is one of the most common measures used by countries to ensure a minimum level of quality in AVPL. This standardisation usually takes place through the development of detailed guidelines to guide all actors in their tasks within the AVPL process (e.g., Spain), providing detailed information to assessors on how to evaluate candidates (e.g., Germany and Wallonia, Belgium), clearly defining the advisor and/or assessor profiles (e.g., Estonia) and/or implementing capacity building for

assessors and advisors (e.g., Denmark). In fact, existing certification processes in Greece already rely on standardising the certification process and the selection of assessors to guarantee their quality.

To increase the objectivity of the assessment of the candidate's performance during the AVPL evaluation, systems typically rely on avoiding the participation of advisors in the assessment phase, as they may have developed a personal relationship with the candidate. Additionally, generally AVPL systems use multiple assessors, ranging from two in Germany to five in Spain. In Greece, CVET trainer certification processes already involve two assessors in the assessment phase.

Some systems also rely on the role of the moderator to assure the quality of individual AVPL processes, as in Wallonia (Belgium). This actor observes individual AVPL assessments assuring the **objectivity** and fairness of the assessors' evaluation of the AVPL candidate's performance and the homogeneity of the assessment's tasks. This quality assurance mechanism is already adopted in Greece, as it also relies on a similar figure, the observer, to assure the quality of individual CVET trainer certification processes.

Finally, AVPL systems are also often subject to **quality assurance** systems. This quality assurance can take place within the quality assurance system of the corresponding education or training system (e.g., Denmark and Latvia) or through dedicated quality assurance systems, as in Portugal and the Netherlands. These quality assurance systems may include the accreditation of validation centres, as in Portugal, or its audit, as in the Netherlands. Given EOPPEP's experience in guaranteeing the quality of existing professional certification processes, in Greece, such a quality assurance system could be implemented by EOPPEP.

## Decision 10: Encouraging participation in AVPL

Once the AVPL system is fully set up, institutions must ensure that potential beneficiaries use it. To that end, possible obstacles, such as lack of awareness about AVPL, financial restrictions, or lack of time to participate, must be addressed.

When it comes to the lack of awareness, career guidance is a crucial instrument to make AVPL known to potential beneficiaries, as in Wallonia (Belgium) or Germany. Career guidance counsellors could refer experienced adults without formal qualifications to AVPL. This referral could also come from social partners, such as trade unions and employer associations.

In addition, marketing campaigns can also be used to **increase awareness** of the existence of AVPL, as in Estonia or Portugal. These campaigns can rely on targeted emails, events such as information sessions, social media, media campaigns and targeted activities. For marketing campaigns to be effective, they must be carefully planned, taking into consideration the habits and characteristics of the potential beneficiaries. The platform used to broadcast the campaign, the message or the language used in the campaign are key areas that could impact the campaign's effectiveness.

With adults being aware of the AVPL process, other barriers may emerge. For example, AVPL processes tend to be long and take time, which could complicate the participation of employed adults. To overcome this obstacle, in Wallonia (Belgium) and in France, AVPL candidates are entitled to training leave to fulfil their AVPL-related tasks.

For systems that charge a fee to candidates to participate in AVPL, financial barriers may also arise. Thus, it is recommended that participation in AVPL in Greece is free for candidates or, if it has a cost, that it is very low. If there was a fee, **financial support** should be offered, particularly to low-income candidates. This support could be offered through waiving the fees to candidates belonging to vulnerable or specific groups, such as unemployed or low-income candidates, as in Spain, and/or through letting candidates use their Individual Learning Accounts to cover AVPL costs, as in France and the Netherlands.

Finally, potential beneficiaries may still hesitate to participate in AVPL, which could be caused by a feeling of insecurity of starting something new. Focusing on transparency and providing clear and detailed information on the AVPL process (e.g., in Spain) or on the AVPL assessment activities (e.g., Wallonia, Belgium) can help candidates overcome this barrier. Additionally, the dissemination of individual success stories and the use of potential “role models” could also incentivise hesitant candidates to participate in AVPL.

## End step: Establishing the system

With the AVPL system fully designed, two last steps are needed: **testing** and then **formally establishing the AVPL system**. Given the uncertainty regarding the implementing institution, it is recommended that, before the formal establishment of the system, the AVPL system is tested as part of a pilot so that adjustments to implementation can be made.

After this pilot, the system could be formally established through a Ministerial Decision, which would support the longevity of the system. While some countries regulate their AVPL systems in conjunction with the education or training level they refer to (e.g., Denmark or Finland), it is recommended that the system is regulated in a single, stand-alone legislation, as in France or Spain, so it is easier to update and to apply.

Based on European experiences, this legislation should include, at a minimum, the following information:

- The institutions involved in the AVPL process, including the governance of the system and the institutions that provide AVPL.
- The eligibility criteria for candidates to participate in AVPL.
- The standards used as a reference for the AVPL process.
- The actors involved in the AVPL process, the requirements they must fulfil and their responsibilities. These refer to the advisor, assessor and moderator roles, as discussed in Decision 7: Who is in charge of AVPL?.
- The phases of the AVPL process.
- The possible assessment methods used within the AVPL process.
- The outcome of the AVPL process and how it relates to and interacts with the formal education and training system.
- The quality assurance of the AVPL process and system.
- The distribution of information on AVPL.