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FINAL REPORT OF AN AUDIT
OF GREECE
CARRIED OUT FROM 01 TO 12 JUNE 2023
IN ORDER TO
EVALUATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLANT PASSPORT SYSTEM

Executive Summary

This report describes the outcome of an audit of Greece, carried out by the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety of the European Commission from 1 to 12 June 2023. It was undertaken as part of the published Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety work programme. The audit was carried out by remote means combined with on-site assessments.

The objective of the audit was to evaluate the implementation of the plant passport system to ensure compliance with requirements of EU law and, in particular under Regulations (EU) 2016/2031 and (EU) 2017/625 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

The competent authority has not embraced the concept of the EU plant passport legislation, which confers responsibility for issuing plant passports to authorised operators. It results in CA staff doing work which could be performed by authorised professional operators. The current approach cannot be considered as an efficient use of the available resources of the CA.

Instead, the national system of issuing plant passports is based on a single visual inspection by the relevant competent authority, complemented by pest monitoring records from operators whose ability to identify relevant pests has not been verified, and laboratory analysis where legally required. This does not comply with the EU legal requirement for meticulous examinations of plants and plants products prior to issuing plant passports. Consequently, the system is insufficient to consistently guarantee the status of plants and plant products bearing plant passports.

There are additional weaknesses, most of which can be attributed to lack of access to the appropriate and properly maintained facilities and equipment to coordinate and supervise the implementation of the official controls on plant passports, including a functional Information Technology infrastructure. The absence of a register of professional operators is a notable non-compliance. Taken together with the absence of centralised databases for plant health controls, these impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the plant passport controls and can pose a systemic risk to maintaining high plant health standards in Greece.

Recommendations to address shortcomings identified during the audit are included in the report.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS USED IN THIS REPORT

Abbreviation	Explanation
Border Control Point	BCP
BPI	Benaki Phytopathological Institute
CA	Competent authority
DG Health and Food Safety	European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety
DPFRE	Directorate for the Protection of Forests and the Rural Environment
DPMCPS&PGR	Directorate of Propagating Material of Cultivated Plant Species and Plant Genetic Resources
DPPP	Directorate of Plant Produce Protection
DRDC	Departments of Rural Development and Controls (Regional services of the MRDF)
DREV	Directorates of Rural Economy and Veterinary
EU	European Union
ISPM	International Standard for Phytosanitary Measures
MEE	Ministry of Environment & Energy
MRDF	Ministry of Rural Development and Food
MS	Member State(s) of the European Union
NPPO	National Plant Protection Organisation
RCPQPC	Regional Centre of Plant Protection, Quality & Phytosanitary Control
RNQP(s)	Regulated Non-quarantine Pest(s)

1 INTRODUCTION

This audit of Greece took place from 1 to 12 June 2023 and was undertaken as part of the planned work programme of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG Health and Food Safety).

The audit team consisted of two auditors from DG Health and Food Safety. The Directorate of Plant Produce Protection (DPPP) under the Ministry of Rural Development and Food (MRDF) is the National Plant Protection Organisation (NPPO). Representatives of the DPPP and the Directorate of Propagating Material of Cultivated Plant Species and Plant Genetic Resources (DPMCPS&PGR) accompanied the audit team during the on-site component of the audit.

This audit was carried out by remote means combined with on-site assessments.

2 OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

The objective of the audit was to evaluate the implementation of the plant passport system and its effectiveness at verifying compliance with the legal requirements set out in the EU legal acts listed in Annex I, and, in particular those of Regulations (EU) 2016/2031 and (EU) 2017/625 of the European Parliament and of the Council. In terms of scope, the audit reviewed organisational aspects of the plant passport controls, registration and authorisation of professional operators, procedures for the issuance of plant passports, as well as their application for the movement of plants, plant products and other objects within the Union territory.

In the course of the audit, the audit team had meetings with the DPPP, the DPMCPS&PGR, the Directorate for the Protection of Forests and the Rural Environment (DPFRE) of the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MEE) and the Benaki Phytopathological Institute (BPI). The audit team also met the Directorates of Rural Economy and Veterinary (DREVs) of Imathia, Magnesia, Corinthia, Argolida and Eastern Attica regions. In addition, the audit team met the Departments of Rural Development and Controls (DRDCs) of these five regions to understand how they issue plant passports at a range of professional operators. Finally, the audit team observed the Regional Centre of Plant Protection, Quality & Phytosanitary Control (RCPPQPC) of Attica region conducting an official control related to issuing a plant passport at the Border Control Point (BCP) at Athens International Airport.

3 LEGAL BASIS

The audit was carried out under the general provisions of EU legislation and, in particular Articles 116, 117 and 119 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625, and in agreement with the NPPO.

3.1 RELEVANT EU LEGAL ACTS AND INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 provides for protective measures against pests of plants. Uniform conditions for the implementation of that Regulation, including those plants, plant products

and other objects that must be accompanied by a plant passport, are established by Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/2072.

Regulation (EU) 2017/625 provides for harmonised rules for official controls and other official activities to verify compliance with the EU rules on plant health.

Specific requirements for related official controls are established by Implementing Regulations. Full legal references for the relevant EU legal acts are listed in Annex 1. Legal acts quoted in this report refer, where applicable, to the last amended version.

International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs) are issued by the International Plant Protection Convention of which all EU Member States (MS) are members. The references for international standards quoted in the report are listed in Annex 2.

4 BACKGROUND

This audit was carried out as part of a series, aimed at evaluating the correct and consistent application by the MS of the EU legal requirements, and to identify examples of good practice on controls of plants, plant products and other objects at production sites and the internal market, for the purposes of protecting plant health.

Further information on the DG Health and Food Safety's Health and Food Audits and Analysis Directorate, including audit reports and its work programme, are available at: http://ec.europa.eu/food/audits_analysis_en.

4.1 PRODUCTION AND TRADE

The most important categories of goods moved or produced in Greece which require a plant passport are:

- plants for planting of *Vitis spp.*,
- plants for planting of *Olea europaea* and citrus species,
- plants for planting of various fruit trees of *Malus*, *Pyrus* and *Prunus* species,
- various ornamental plants,
- plants for planting of vegetable plants such as tomatoes, eggplants and cucurbits,
- seed production of cotton, alfalfa and rice.

4.2 INTERCEPTION DATA

There are no interceptions reported in TRACES by other MS of consignments originating in Greece during 2021 and 2022 relating to plant passports. TRACES is the European Commission's online platform for sanitary and phytosanitary certification required for *inter alia* the importation of plants into the EU.

5 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 ORGANISATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE CONTROL SYSTEM RELATED TO PLANT PASSPORTS

Legal requirements

Articles 4 to 6, 9 to 14 and 28 to 33 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625

Articles 78 to 94 of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031

Findings

5.1.1 Competent authorities

1. The organisational aspects of plant health controls in Greece are described in sections 1 and 2.11 of the DG Health and Food Safety country profile for Greece <https://ec.europa.eu/food/audits-analysis/country/profile/details/GR>. However, there have been some significant changes since the country profile was last updated as described in paragraph 2. In summary, the DPPP under the MRDF is the central competent authority for plant health in the context of Article 3(3) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625. The DPPP is responsible for issuing relevant guidelines and national legislation, coordinating official controls on plant health and training phytosanitary inspectors.
2. The system for issuing plant passports was re-organised from 1 January 2022 in accordance with Joint Ministerial Decision No. 12681/352685/2021, with DRDCs taking over the bulk of the work previously done by DREVs relating to issuing plant passports.
3. Four CAs issue plant passports:
 - The DRDCs issue plant passports for plants for planting, propagating material and seeds, except in the cases noted below,
 - The RCPPQPCs issue plant passports to replace phytosanitary certificates at BCPs and Control Points in the regional units in which they are based,
 - DREVs issue plant passports for plant products other than wood, and to replace phytosanitary certificates with plant passports at the BCPs in the regions where RCPPQPCs are not present. In practice, RCPPQPCs and DREVs each cover about 50% of BCPs,
 - The DPFRE of the MEE coordinates the Forest Directorates of the Regional Units, who are responsible for issuing plant passports for forest plants for planting and for wood products.
4. DREVs are responsible for registering all relevant professional operators. The DPPP is responsible for administering sanctions on all professional operators, regardless of which CA detects the infringement. The CAs have chosen not to delegate any official control tasks as permitted under Article 28 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625.

5. The CAs are clearly designated, with efficient and effective co-operation between and within CAs as required by Articles 4(1), 4(2) and 5(5) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625.

5.1.2 Relevant national and regional legislation

6. Regulation (EU) No 2016/2031 is directly applicable in all MS and the NPPO stated that under relevant national legislation (specifically Presidential Decree 37/2021 and Law 2147/1952), all CAs involved in implementing the system of plant passports in Greece have the necessary legal powers to perform their duties as required by Article 5(1)(g) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625.

5.1.3 Procedures for quality and consistency of official controls

7. The CAs perform official controls in line with documented procedures as required by Article 12(1) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625, except in the case of risk-based controls on professional operators related to the movement of plant and plant products with plant passports (paragraphs 11 and 52). The CAs do not always have access to the appropriate facilities and equipment, including to information technology (IT) infrastructure, which could enable more efficient coordination and supervision of official controls as required by Article 5(1)(f) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625. For example, there is no electronic register of professional operators (paragraph 19). This makes planning controls cumbersome as all information on registered operators is held in their individual hard copy files. The absence of databases to document all plant health related controls means that the DPPP has no real-time oversight over if and how these controls are being performed, e.g. the DPPP cannot easily identify which DRDCs have implemented the control programme related to the movement of plant and plant products with plant passports described in paragraph 11.
8. The DPPP has developed and implemented training programmes for relevant staff in the four CAs so that they are competent and undertake their duties in a consistent manner, as required by Article 5(4) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625.
9. Greece has established a system of control verification procedures under Article 4 of Common Ministerial Decision 12681/352685/2021 as required by Article 12(2) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625. The system covers the DREVs, DRDCs, RCPQPCs and the Forest Directorates of the Regional Units and is based on audit teams which examine aspects of the controls by reviewing files and visiting professional operators. In addition, in the majority of the regions visited by the audit team, the DRDCs reported some elements of control verification practices at local level e.g., supervisors conducting joint inspections or reviewing inspection reports. However, due to deficiencies in facilities and equipment (paragraph 7), the resulting information is not available to the DPPP in real time, which limits the effectiveness of the system.
10. There is a system of internal audits as required by Article 6 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625. The Division of Geotechnical Control and Audit under the MRDF is responsible for conducting these audits.

11. The DPPP acknowledged that at this point in time all DRDCs do not conduct controls on professional operators related to the movement of plant and plant products with plant passports (paragraph 52), with appropriate frequency, taking account of identified risks, operators past record, own controls and any other information as required by Article 9(1), or to identify fraudulent or deceptive practices as required by Article 9(2) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625. This is despite the fact that under Joint Ministerial Decree 12681/352685/2021, which defines the criteria for classifying professional operators into three risk categories, and the resultant frequency of control (every second year, once a year or twice a year), each DRDC is obliged to implement controls in line with these criteria since 2022. Currently, the DRDCs do perform some official controls on registered professional operators. However, there is no consistency to these controls, with DRDCs using a range of different criteria to identify the operators to control and using a range of inspection report templates/checklists in the absence of an inspection report template/checklist provided by the DPPP.
12. The CAs draw up a written record of all official controls as required by Article 13(1) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625.

Conclusions on the organisational aspects of the control system related to plant passports

13. The roles and responsibilities of the different CAs are clearly regulated, and combined with knowledgeable well-trained staff, provides a sound basis for the consistent implementation of the legislation.
14. The absence of appropriate information technology infrastructure/systems to plan and record official controls impacts on the efficiency and effectiveness of these controls.
15. The absence of a harmonised inspection report template/checklist for controls related to the movement of plant and plant products with plant passports impacts negatively on the consistency, and therefore the effectiveness of these official controls.

5.2 REGISTRATION OF PROFESSIONAL OPERATORS

Legal requirements

Articles 65 to 68 of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031

Findings

5.2.1 Official registration

16. The DPPP has published information to inform professional operators of their obligations regarding registration at <http://www.minagric.gr/index.php/el/for-farmer-2/crop-production/fytoprostasiamenu/fytoygeia/14737-epishmo-mhtrwo220323>.

- 17.** Each DREV is responsible for registering relevant professional operators in its region as required by Article 65(1) of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 using a template provided by the DPPP. The DREVs register professional operators upon receipt of a completed application, which is in line with Article 66(3) of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031, which states that the CAs shall register professional operators without delay. The DREVs complete a validation control within 15 days of receipt of the application in line with Article 6(5) of Presidential Decree 37/2021 to verify the data provided by the professional operator during the application process.
- 18.** The DPPP explained that for professional operators with multiple locations, the registration is granted by the DREV in which the business is headquartered. The registration is linked to the operators' unique tax number to ensure that operators are only registered once, in line with Article 65(2) of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031. The DPPP estimates that at the time of the audit about 85-90% of relevant operators, and 100% of larger operators, had submitted an application for registration as required by Article 66(1) of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031.
- 19.** There is no official register of professional operators as required by Article 65(1) of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031. Instead, each DREV maintains a hard-copy file on each registered professional operator containing the details outlined in Article 66(2) of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031.
- 20.** The DPPP explained that registered professional operators are obliged to update their local DREV annually on relevant changes in their activities by 30 April. It interprets this as, for example, providing information by 30 April 2023 for changes that took place between 1 January and 31 December 2022. The audit team noted that the criteria used by the CAs for requiring updates in the register is in line with Article 66(2)(e) of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031, except in the case of ornamental plants, which are not subject to specific plant health measures, in which case the CAs consider that changes in species do not require updates.
- 21.** The DPPP acknowledged that professional operators don't always update the DREVs as required. For example, there are no registered online shops based in Greece. The DPPP suspects that this reflects the failure of professional operators to register, or to update their registration as required. Therefore, it has instructed DREVs to remind professional operators to update their registration details where required. The DREVs met by the audit team stated that they now remind operators of their obligations in this regard more frequently, and that this has helped to improve the accuracy of the information held by the DREVs.
- 22.** The number of registered professional operators as of June 2023 is summarised below.

Category	Number
Vegetable nurseries	283
Ornamental nurseries	389
Fruit plants and Vitis nurseries	529
Seed companies	175
Importers	805
Exporters	1125
Agricultural supply stores	597
Home and garden multi-stores	5
Garden centers	94

5.2.2 Application of exemptions provided for in EU law

23. As permitted under Article 65(3)(a)(b)(c)(d) of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031, Greece does not require specific types of professional operators to register. These exemptions apply to professionals who exclusively supply small quantities of plants, plant products and other items to end-users by means other than distance sales contracts, professionals who exclusively supply end users with small quantities of seeds other than those referred to in Article 72, professionals who transport plants, plant products and other objects and professionals who transport objects using wooden packaging.
24. The CAs have not defined small quantities and have no data on the number of operators falling under this exemption. In practice, operators selling at local markets within the region and other primarily retail operators (e.g. supermarkets) are deemed to be exempt.

Conclusions on the registration of professional operators

25. The failure to establish a register of professional operators, to register, and to maintain up to date information on, all relevant operators means that the CAs do not have up to date, reliable and easily accessible information on professional operators, which is needed to conduct controls efficiently and effectively.

5.3 AUTHORISATION AND SUPERVISION OF PROFESSIONAL OPERATORS FOR ISSUING PLANT PASSPORTS

Legal requirements

Articles 89 to 92 of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031

Articles 1 to 4 of Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/66

Findings

5.3.1 Authorisation procedures

26. There are no professional operators authorised to issue plant passports in Greece. All plant passports are issued by the relevant CAs in line with Presidential Decree 37/2021 and the derogation permitted under Article 84(2) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625. The DPPP explained that this is primarily because in their view, most professional operators in Greece do not possess the necessary knowledge to complete this task to the required standard. The DPPP stated, that there is a long-term plan to develop a system for the authorisation of professional operators to issue plant passports, due to the shortage of staff both at regional and central level, the exact timeline is not defined yet.

Conclusions on authorisation and supervision of professional operators for issuing plant passports

27. The approach taken by Greece does not embrace the concept of the EU plant passport legislation, which confers responsibility for issuing plant passports to authorised operators. Instead, the CAs conduct a single visual inspection prior to issuing a plant passport, which does not guarantee that meticulous examinations are carried out at appropriate times. It results in CA staff doing work which could be performed by authorised professional operators. The current approach cannot be considered as an efficient use of the available resources of the CA.

5.4 EXAMINATIONS FOR THE ISSUANCE OF PLANT PASSPORTS

Legal requirements

Articles 85 to 87 of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031

Articles 2 to 6, 8(2), 9, 10, 13, 14 and 17 of Regulation (EU) 2019/2072

Articles 1 and 2 of Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/827

Findings

5.4.1 Examinations for the issuance of plant passports

28. While there are no professional operators authorised to issue plant passports in Greece, under Presidential Decree 37/2021, registered professional operators are required to undertake many of the tasks of authorised operators. These include *inter alia* taking actions to prevent quarantine pests and Regulated Non-quarantine Pests (RNQPs), monitoring for the presence of quarantine pests, RNQPs and pests under EU emergency measures and recording these activities and any pest control measures applied. Starting from March 2023, all CAs are obliged to seek evidence of these actions prior to issuing plant passports in line with a checklist provided by the DPPP.

29. The CAs use these monitoring records as complementary evidence prior to issuing plant passports. However, there are two important factors to consider regarding the reliability of these records. Firstly, the DPPP explained that Greece has not authorised operators to issue plant passports as it believes that most professional operators in Greece do not possess the necessary knowledge to monitor their plants for the presence of quarantine pests and RNQPs. Secondly, the CAs do not verify that professional operators have the necessary knowledge of quarantine pests, RNQPs and pests under EU emergency measures to conduct these examinations.
30. The process to issue a plant passport begins with an application from the professional operator to the relevant CA. There is one common application form developed by DPPP and used by all CAs. The operator provides details on the botanical name of the species, the quantity, the traceability code and whether the plant/plant product will be moved into a protected zone.
31. In order to minimise the burden on smaller professional operators, and in line with guidance from DPPP, operators can make a single application to their respective DRDC (but not to other CAs) for the entire growing season, or per growing cycle for plants for planting species with very short growth cycles e.g. lettuce, and for up to ten botanical species, provided that they are all grown in similar conditions (e.g. within the same greenhouse complex). This approach is only permitted in cases where none of the species require certification for the absence of quarantine pests, RNQPs or for compliance with specific requirements for pests included in EU emergency measures.
32. The relevant CA carries out a documentary check using the information provided in the application form, an identity check, and one visual examination in line with International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPM) 31 (and sampling for analysis if legally required, or in case of suspicion) per lot.
33. Typically, the decision to issue the plant passport is based on three factors – the outcome of the single visual examination by the relevant CA, complementary evidence that the professional operator conducted pest monitoring, as described in paragraph 28, and a negative analytical result, in cases where this is legally required. In the case of group applications, the decision to issue the plant passport is based on two factors – a general visual inspection of the plants (as distinct from a meticulous visual examination) by the DRDC inspector and complementary evidence that the professional operator conducted pest monitoring. In addition, in the case of products falling under marketing directives established under Article 83(5) of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031, the DRDCs also control any specific requirements for certified material.
34. The DPPP has published general information about plant passports and more detailed guidance to assist inspectors e.g. guidelines for conducting visual examinations on plants for planting of *Solanum lycopersicum* and *Capsicum spp.*, and seeds of *Gossypium spp.*, *Oryza sativa* and *Medicago sativa* at <http://www.minagric.gr/index.php/el/for-farmer->

[2/crop-production/fytoprostasi/menu/fytoygeia/14647-fitoigeionomikon-diavatiria-new100323](https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/crop-production/fytoprostasi/menu/fytoygeia/14647-fitoigeionomikon-diavatiria-new100323).

35. The CAs issued a total of 7396 approvals for new and replacement plant passports in 2022. The numbers issued doubled compared to 2021, which the DPPP explained was due to a low level of implementation of the plant passport requirements by professional operators in 2021.
36. Assuming the absence of all relevant pests, the process concludes with the relevant CA signing and stamping the application, keeping a copy, and giving the original to the professional operator, which gives them permission to print the relevant plant passports.
37. In all cases reviewed by the audit team, the application for the plant passport was lodged with the relevant CA shortly before the expected date of sale. Consequently, the CAs have a window of a few weeks at most to conduct their visual examination compared to the professional operator who has the opportunity to observe the plants on a daily basis throughout the entire growing season. The single visual examination conducted by the CAs prior to issuing plant passports is not sufficient to fully comply with Article 87(3)(a) of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031, which requires that these examinations are carried out at appropriate times and taking relevant risks into account.
38. The results of examinations by the CAs are recorded and stored for three years as required by Article 87(3)(d) of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031.

5.4.2 Examinations in relation to the protected zones

39. Greece is a protected zone under Annex III of Regulation (EU) 2019/2072 for *inter alia* *Colletotrichum gossypii* (seedling blight) of cotton.
40. The audit team reviewed a file relating to issuing a plant passport for cotton seed. The process to issue the plant passport begins with an application from the business that delints the seed to the local DRDC. This DRDC seeks information from the DRDC in the region in which ginning took place to verify the quantities involved and traceability information. The DRDC also seeks information from the DREV(s) in the region(s) in which the crop(s) were grown to verify the absence of *Colletotrichum gossypii* in those areas. The respective DREV(s) provide this information based on the results of the annual surveys which they conduct. The DRDC then verifies if delinting took place as required and takes a sample for analysis by the BPI. The DRDC only issues the plant passport upon receipt of the necessary information from the other DRDC, the DREV(s) and the BPI, and after checking the delinting process.

Conclusions on examinations for the issuance of plant passports

41. The system of issuing plant passports, based on a single visual inspection by the relevant CA, complemented by operators' pest monitoring records (even though the CAs have not verified their competence to conduct this monitoring), and laboratory analysis where legally required, is insufficient to consistently guarantee the status of plants and plant products bearing plant passports.
42. The system for issuing plant passports for protected zones complies with the legislation and provides a satisfactory level of confidence that plants moved into protected zones do not contain the relevant pests.

5.5 ISSUANCE OF PLANT PASSPORTS, INCLUDING RECORD KEEPING

Legal requirements

Articles 69, 70 and 87 to 95 of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031

Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2017/2313 in its entirety

Articles 2 to 6, 8(2), 9, 10, 13, 14 and 17 of Regulation (EU) 2019/2072

Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/1770 in its entirety

Findings

5.5.1 Issuance of plant passports by competent authorities

43. Plant passports are issued by the four relevant CAs. Professional operators print and attach the plant passports, with the exception of where plant passports are combined with certification labels, in which case the DRDC prints the combined labels.
44. Greece replaces phytosanitary certificates with plant passports at the BCP regardless of the final destination of the commodity within the EU which is in line with Article 94 of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031.

5.5.2 Plant passports combined with certification labels

45. The DPPP stated that its clear policy is that plant passports and certification labels should be combined in line with Article 83(5) of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 and the DRDCs confirmed that they implement this policy.

5.5.3 Attaching, replacing and invalidation of plant passports

46. Greece has no specific national requirements in this area. Professional operators are responsible for printing plant passports in all cases except where combined with certification labels and are responsible for attaching plant passports in all cases. The audit team observed that the professional operators visited attach plant passports in line with the requirements of Article 88 of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031.

5.5.4 Application of the exemptions provided for in EU law

47. Greece does not require plant passports for plants, plant products and other objects sold directly to the end-user, including amateur gardening, except in cases where the sale is through distance contracts or for protected zones. This is in line with Article 81 of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031.
48. Greece does not require plant passports for plants, plant products and other objects which are moved within and between the premises of the same registered professional operator which are in close proximity to each other. This is in line with Article 82 of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031. The DPPP explained that close proximity is defined as within the same regional unit, of which Greece has 53.
49. No professional operator in Greece avails of the derogation provided for in Article 83(2) of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031, with the result that a traceability code is required on all plant passports issued for plants for planting.

Conclusions on issuance of plant passports, including record keeping

50. The issuing and attaching of plant passports is in line with the requirements of the legislation.

5.6 OFFICIAL CONTROLS ON MOVEMENT OF PLANTS AND PLANT PRODUCTS WITH PLANT PASSPORTS

Legal requirements

Articles 69, 79 to 83, 88 and 93 to 95 of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031

Articles 2 to 6, 8(2), 9, 10, 13, 14 and 17 of Regulation (EU) 2019/2072

Articles 1 to 4 of Regulation (EU) 2019/66

Regulation (EU) 2020/1770 in its entirety

Findings

5.6.1 Official controls on traceability

51. All CAs complete the same checklist, which includes a question regarding traceability, before granting approval to issue a plant passport. The audit team examined a number of completed plant passport applications and spoke to a number of inspectors in the course of the audit. In all cases, the inspectors had confirmed on the inspection checklist that traceability was examined and was satisfactory. However, upon examination by the audit team, it was clear that none of the inspections had actually verified that the professional operator complied with the traceability requirements of Articles 69 and 70 of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031, i.e. that they could trace the consignment based on the traceability code printed on the plant passport.

52. As described in paragraph 11, the CAs have not implemented a comprehensive risk-based control programme related to the movement of plant and plant products with plant passports, and in cases where controls take place, there is no standard inspection report template/checklist used (paragraph 7). Nonetheless, the DPPP provided information that the DRDCs conducted over 1000 controls in 2022 during which traceability was checked, even if the scope of these controls is not clear.
53. In cases where the CAs in another MS detect non-compliances related to plant passports originating in Greece, the DPPP coordinates an investigation and reports the outcome to the relevant MS.

Conclusions on official controls on movement of plants and plant products with plant passports

54. The failure by inspectors to verify traceability prior to issuing plant passports, coupled with the limited nature of the risk-based official control programme on the movement of plants and plant products with plant passports, increases the risk of having non-compliant products being placed on the market, and poses a risk to the integrity of the plant passport system in Greece.

5.7 ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS

Legal requirements

Articles 138 and 139 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625

Findings

55. The CAs take appropriate enforcement actions in cases where non-compliances are detected in line with Article 138 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625. The relevant financial and legal sanctions are defined in Articles 34a and 35 of Law 2147/1952 and Article 10 of Presidential Decree 37/2021. In 2021, five professional operators were sanctioned, while 14 were sanctioned in 2022. Annex VI of Common Ministerial Decision 12681/352685/2021 defines how to categorise non-compliances into either critical, significant and minor. The sanction for failure to seek registration, or to update registration details, is €1,500 for a first offence, with the sanction doubling for any subsequent repeat offence. The audit team saw three examples of such sanctions administered by the DPPP. These sanctions appear to be effective, proportionate and dissuasive, as required by Article 139 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625.

Conclusions on enforcement actions

56. Sanctions are effective, proportionate and dissuasive thereby helping to ensure that professional operators comply with their legal obligations.

6 OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

The competent authority has not embraced the concept of the EU plant passport legislation, which confers responsibility for issuing plant passports to authorised operators. It results in CA staff doing work which could be performed by authorised professional operators. The current approach cannot be considered as an efficient use of the available resources of the CA.

Instead, the national system of issuing plant passports is based on a single visual inspection by the relevant competent authority, complemented by pest monitoring records from operators whose ability to identify relevant pests has not been verified, and laboratory analysis where legally required. This does not comply with the EU legal requirement for meticulous examinations of plants and plants products prior to issuing plant passports. Consequently, the system is insufficient to consistently guarantee the status of plants and plant products bearing plant passports.

There are additional weaknesses, most of which can be attributed to lack of access to the appropriate and properly maintained facilities and equipment to coordinate and supervise the implementation of the official controls on plant passports, including a functional Information Technology infrastructure. The absence of a register of professional operators is a notable non-compliance. Taken together with the absence of centralised databases for plant health controls, these impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the plant passport controls and can pose a systemic risk to maintaining high plant health standards in Greece.

7 CLOSING MEETING

A closing meeting was held on 12 June 2023 in the form of a videoconference between the audit team and representatives of the NPPO, during which the main findings and preliminary conclusions of the audit team were presented. The NPPO offered initial comments on the findings and conclusions presented by the audit team.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

The NPPO is requested to provide details of any actions taken or planned, including deadlines for their completion, aimed at addressing the recommendation set out below, within 25 working days of receipt of this report.

The NPPO of Greece is recommended to:

No.	Recommendation
1.	<p>Ensure that official controls are performed in line with documented procedures as required by Article 12(1) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625</p> <p><i>The recommendation is based on conclusion No. 15</i></p> <p><i>Associated finding No. 7</i></p>
2.	<p>Ensure that the CAs have access to the appropriate facilities and equipment as required by Article 5(1)(f) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625</p> <p><i>The recommendation is based on conclusion No. 14</i></p> <p><i>Associated finding No. 7</i></p>
3.	<p>Ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An official register of professional operators is established as required by Article 65(1) of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 to contain all details outlined in Article 66(2) of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 • All relevant professional operators submit an application for registration as required by Article 66(1) of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 • Registered professional operators provide updates where relevant as required by Article 66(5) of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 <p><i>The recommendation is based on conclusion No. 25</i></p> <p><i>Associated findings Nos. 18, 19, 20</i></p>
4.	<p>Ensure that the meticulous examinations conducted prior to issuing plant passports comply with Article 87(3)(a) of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031, which requires that these examinations are carried out at appropriate times and taking relevant risks into account.</p> <p><i>The recommendation is based on conclusion No. 41</i></p> <p><i>Associated finding No. 37</i></p>
5.	<p>Ensure that both controls prior to issuing plant passports and controls related to the movement of plant and plant products with plant passports verify if the professional operator has functional traceability systems as required by Articles 69 and 70 of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031.</p> <p><i>The recommendation is based on conclusion No. 54</i></p> <p><i>Associated findings Nos. 51, 52</i></p>
6.	<p>Ensure that the CAs conduct controls on professional operators related to the movement of plant and plant products with plant passports with appropriate frequency, taking account of identified risks, operators past record, own controls and any other information as required by Article 9(1), and to identify fraudulent or deceptive practices as required by Article 9(2) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625.</p> <p><i>The recommendation is based on conclusion No. 54</i></p> <p><i>Associated findings Nos. 11, 52</i></p>

The competent authority's response to the recommendations can be found at:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/audits-analysis/rep_details_en.cfm?rep_inspection_ref=2023-7672

ANNEX 1 – LEGAL REFERENCES

Legal Reference	Official Journal	Title
Reg. 2017/625	OJ L 95, 7.4.2017, p. 1–142	Regulation (EU) 2017/625 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on official controls and other official activities performed to ensure the application of food and feed law, rules on animal health and welfare, plant health and plant protection products, amending Regulations (EC) No 999/2001, (EC) No 396/2005, (EC) No 1069/2009, (EC) No 1107/2009, (EU) No 1151/2012, (EU) No 652/2014, (EU) 2016/429 and (EU) 2016/2031 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Regulations (EC) No 1/2005 and (EC) No 1099/2009 and Council Directives 98/58/EC, 1999/74/EC, 2007/43/EC, 2008/119/EC and 2008/120/EC, and repealing Regulations (EC) No 854/2004 and (EC) No 882/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Directives 89/608/EEC, 89/662/EEC, 90/425/EEC, 91/496/EEC, 96/23/EC, 96/93/EC and 97/78/EC and Council Decision 92/438/EEC (Official Controls Regulation)
Reg. 2016/2031	OJ L 317, 23.11.2016, p. 4–104	Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 October 2016 on protective measures against pests of plants, amending Regulations (EU) No 228/2013, (EU) No 652/2014 and (EU) No 1143/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Council Directives 69/464/EEC, 74/647/EEC, 93/85/EEC, 98/57/EC, 2000/29/EC, 2006/91/EC and 2007/33/EC
Reg. 2019/66	OJ L 15, 17.1.2019, p. 1–4	Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/66 of 16 January 2019 on rules on uniform practical arrangements for the performance of official controls on plants, plant products and other objects in order to verify compliance with Union rules on protective measures against pests of plants applicable to those goods

Reg. 2019/2072	OJ L 319, 10.12.2019	Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/2072 of 28 November 2019 establishing uniform conditions for the implementation of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 of the European Parliament and the Council, as regards protective measures against pests of plants, and repealing Commission Regulation (EC) No 690/2008 and amending Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2018/2019
Reg. 2019/827	OJ L 137, 23.5.2019, p. 10–11	Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/827 of 13 March 2019 on criteria to be fulfilled by the professional operators in order to comply with the conditions set out in Article 89(1) point (a) of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 of the European Parliament and of the Council and procedures to ensure that those criteria are met
Reg. 2020/1770	OJ L 398, 27.11.2020, p. 6–8	Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/1770 of 26 November 2020 on types and species of plants for planting not exempted from the traceability code requirement for plant passports under Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Commission Directive 92/105/EEC
Reg. 2017/2313	OJ L 331, 14.12.2017, p. 44–52	Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2017/2313 of 13 December 2017 setting out the format specifications of the plant passport for movement within the Union territory and the plant passport for introduction into, and movement within, a protected zone