

# CAREER GUIDANCE IN ETF PARTNER COUNTRIES – A MISSING LINK IN THE TRANSITION FROM EDUCATION TO THE LABOUR MARKET



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Career guidance provides an essential link between education and the labour market. Policy makers and practitioners are encouraged to integrate career guidance into their education, training and labour market reforms. Career guidance should move towards encouraging career management rather than providing one-off testing and advice to students. It should also include opportunities for career 'tasting' and cover cost-effective partnership approaches to the topic.

## CONCEPT AND RATIONALE FOR CAREER GUIDANCE

Career guidance services are referred to as 'vocational guidance', 'professional orientation', 'educational' or 'academic guidance'. A contemporary definition of 'career guidance' or 'lifelong guidance', as agreed by the European Union (EU), OECD and World Bank, encompasses the above terms and introduces a wider notion. It covers career information, guidance and counselling aiming to equip both learners and jobseekers with career management skills to make well informed choices and to manage their careers throughout life ■

## DEFINITION

Career guidance refers to services and activities designed to assist individuals of any age and at any point in their lives to make education, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers.

Such services can be found in schools, universities and colleges, in training institutions, in public employment

services, in the workplace, in the voluntary or community sector and in the private sector. The activities may take place on an individual or group basis and may be face-to-face or at a distance (including helplines and web-based services).

They include career information provision (in print, ICT-based and other forms), assessment and self-assessment tools, counselling

interviews, career education programmes (to help individuals develop their self awareness, opportunity awareness, and career management skills), taster programmes (to sample options before choosing them), work search programmes, and transition services ■

Sources: OECD (2004a and 2004b) and Council of the EU (2008)

# INFORM

In its Resolution on career guidance, the Council of the EU (2008) additionally points out that an integration of lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies would embrace four priority areas. These include:

- (a) encouraging the lifelong acquisition of career management skills;
- (b) facilitating access to guidance services for all citizens;
- (c) developing quality assurance in guidance provision; and,
- (d) encouraging coordination and cooperation among the various national, regional and local stakeholders.

The OECD (2004a and 2004b) argues that career guidance can contribute to the following three broad public policy fields:

- education by improving the efficiency of education systems and as a tool to help improve the fit with the labour market;
- the labour market by helping to prevent or reduce unemployment, to improve both labour mobility and the match between labour supply and demand, also addressing skills shortages;
- equity by supporting disadvantaged and marginalised groups, tackling gender segmentation in the labour market and supporting increased female labour force participation.

Ill-informed educational or occupational choices can result not only in individual dissatisfaction, poor learning results, bleak job prospects and lower income, but also in high public and private costs – in terms of people dropping out from education, changing the field of study or jobs and extended periods of transition from school to work. Career guidance is ultimately aimed at helping individuals to navigate between available opportunities and to use their abilities optimally.

Watts and Fretwell (2004), as well as the ILO (2006) confirmed the validity of these arguments in favour of career guidance also for low and middle-income countries ●



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## CAREER GUIDANCE IN ETF PARTNER COUNTRIES

A recent report (Zelloth, 2009) analysed career guidance issues in selected South Eastern European, Mediterranean and former Soviet Union countries. It shows that career guidance in ETF partner countries has often been a 'forgotten element' in education and labour market reforms. As a result, the availability of career guidance services for young people and adults is still highly restricted and fragmented. Delivery models tend to be rather test-oriented and miss out on some important elements of a modern career guidance system.

On the other hand, the report demonstrated that the demand for career guidance by both young people and adults has been rising especially in contexts of economic and social transition and the diversification of opportunities. At the same time respective policies moved up on the policy agendas of countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, Georgia, Ukraine, Turkey, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania and Kosovo<sup>1</sup>.

Efforts are being made in a number of countries to introduce career guidance into their education and training systems with or without the support of donors. Such initiatives can be grouped into the following three different delivery models.

## Centre model

The centre model is a staffed physical place either inside or outside a school or university, as part of an employment service or in a separate location in towns, where guidance materials or information is made available in different forms. This appears to be the most frequently chosen model in ETF partner countries.

For example, in Serbia, Centres for Information and Professional Counselling have been set up in public employment services. One to four psychologist-counsellors and information specialists are there to support visitors with a variety of materials, occupational profiles and tests. In Jordan, Career Advisory Centres exist at universities and are run by one to several staff, including graduates and students from various backgrounds. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Career Centres have been established at vocational schools, but they are 'unmanned'. There, access to internet and information materials are collected in one room. Students, in cooperation with a teacher or school psychologist, look after the facility and organise career workshops from time to time. In Kosovo, the National Career Guidance Resource Centre is managed by three part-time administrative staff seconded from different ministries which facilitate access to career information.

While such centres have the advantage of providing access to information and, often, guidance services in the form of a one-stop shop, its coverage can be limited as clients have to visit in person. Unemployed people are unlikely to go to schools, while students are often unlikely to approach an employment service for information and counselling. However, occasionally employment service staff pay site visits to schools to hold information sessions or carry out aptitude tests.

## Curriculum model

The curriculum model foresees 'career education' as a compulsory or elective stand-alone subject or part of another subject. Furthermore, respective activities could be integrated into curricular or extracurricular work.

<sup>1</sup> Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244/99, hereinafter 'Kosovo').



However, the curriculum model is not only about receiving information or actually 'tasting' various study or work opportunities. What forms part of the contemporary career guidance definition are so-called career management skills, which include developing a sense of oneself, knowing one's strengths and weaknesses, knowing where to search or whom to approach for information, realistically assessing opportunities and possible risks, managing life efficiently, etc. Such skills can hardly be 'taught' through separate subjects in traditional ways. They tie in with modern types of learning. They are nurtured by student-centred, interactive, project team-work and experience-based teaching and learning approaches, including formative self and group evaluations across different disciplines.

The curriculum model seems to be the one that is the least recognised and, hence, implemented in ETF partner countries, where teaching and learning are often still organised in teacher-centred ways. Opportunities for experimentation and for exploring various career options are rare – in most countries they do not exist at all.

In Ukraine, 'work studies' include some elements of career guidance. In Egypt's basic education, a subject called 'practical work' exists, which in theory aims to help students assess their own interests and capabilities and learn about possible work opportunities. In practice, however, these teaching hours are often used for other purposes. Perhaps one of the best examples can be found in Turkey, where career guidance is included as part of class guidance programmes in all types of school,

integrated with personal and social education. Furthermore, a guidance class is included in the 8th-grade curriculum. In Kosovo, career education has been introduced as a pilot elective subject during the 9th grade ('orientation year') in 34 schools all over the country in 2007/08. From the academic year 2010/11 onwards in Albania, two subjects into secondary education – 'skills for life' in the 10th grade and 'career education' in the 11th grade were introduced (Zelloth, 2009).

The curriculum model can potentially have a positive impact on a large group of people (i.e. an entire student generation). It can help individuals to orient themselves in their future lives and, hence, be cost-efficient. The drawback is that in ETF partner countries curriculum approaches and frameworks might not be easy and quick to change, allowing for more freedom for schools and teachers. In addition, a major school development and teacher training effort appears necessary to develop respective competences. Also, delivering career education as a subject or other guidance-related activities requires both specialised staff (e.g. subject teachers who receive some training, school psychologists, social workers, specialised counsellors) and some extra resources. Another drawback of this model is that it is geared towards young people or future generations and does not help those who are out of school.

### Virtual model

The virtual or web-based model is also not well used in ETF partner countries, although its potential for self-help and cost-efficiency are undeniable. This model typically includes centralised databases that inform users about occupational or study profiles, course offers and/or job opportunities. The system may contain standardized self-assessments using web-based questionnaires to analyse interests, abilities and occupational preferences.

From among the countries analysed in the ETF report (Zelloth, 2009), only Turkey has started recently to develop and pilot a national and comprehensive web-based career information system aiming to serve all target groups, i.e. young or adult learners, unemployed and employed people.

A virtual or web-based model has the advantage of a large coverage. In addition, people in remote areas can be reached. Drawbacks include the start-up investment and the fact that clients need to have access to and be able to use a computer. Moreover, this model focuses on providing information but lacks personal guidance. A challenge is also to maintain and constantly update the information system.

Combining these different models could result in effective career guidance provision. Before choosing a model national agreement on a common conceptual framework for the overall service delivery should be reached ●



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## CONCLUSIONS

Following the demand for career guidance from both young people and adults, five issues could be of particular importance to policy makers and practitioners who are trying to develop career guidance policies and systems:

- To **raise awareness among stakeholders** of the importance and benefits of career guidance services for both individuals and public policy. Subsequently to build capacities to better meet the demand for access to career guidance of a diverse range of clients, bearing in mind that career guidance is impartial and independent from institutional interests and opportunity providers.
- There is an issue of **integrating career guidance development within wider reforms in education, training and labour market** as it can make these reforms more effective. Experience in some countries suggests that guidance can act as a change agent in education



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reform (i.e. through integration in the curricula). For example, a VET or education reform project could include the development of a career information system or the training of teachers to become career counsellors in schools (as is being done in Turkey). Curriculum reform could go hand in hand with the piloting or introduction of career education or career management skills (as is the case in Kosovo). A labour market project could contain a component to build up or improve career guidance centres in public employment services (as in Montenegro).

■ A more decisive **shift** could be encouraged **from the traditional services** based on psychological tests ('test and tell') **towards modern approaches** (from 'testing' to 'tasting') combining pedagogical processes and methods **to develop career self management skills** with those that emphasise the exploration of the world of work and further studies. In terms of delivery, the latter suggests that not only psychologists should be career counselling and guidance specialists, but also a range of other actors including teachers, social pedagogues, information specialists or, in fact, any type of person introducing their profession could be of interest.

■ **Resource-efficient approaches** are an issue particularly in countries that face the double challenge of expanding their guidance systems and at the same time changing the mode of delivery, but

have very limited resources. Career information and guidance could be fairly cost-efficient, if self-help skills and facilities were fostered – complementary to guidance specialists, rather than to replace them for people who need them. Such means would include career education or a curriculum change focusing on self-empowerment and career management skills of learners, as well as web-based career information systems. Software is readily available for building a comprehensive national career information system that could include study or self-assessment tests, education and job profiles, course offers, as well as job offers. Computer-based self-help facilities may be provided by public employment services (as offered for example in Ukraine). Telephone help lines or other centralised counselling facilities could be other cost-efficient options. ICT in guidance could also play an integrative role in modelling the services and could help to document effectiveness and evidence for policy development.

■ Given the breadth of the topic and the many actors (potentially) involved in career guidance, there is an issue of **fostering national dialogue and cooperation to develop a shared vision, strategy and action plan**. Key actors include ministries and agencies in charge of education, VET, young people, labour, but also social partner organisations, professional associations, student and parent organisations, and civil society actors. Such an alliance of



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actors could also help to sustain donor-supported innovations in career guidance systems, once projects expire. Viable platforms for dialogue, such as a cross-sector National Guidance Forum, could fulfil not only a function of knowledge sharing and reflection on current practice but could take on an important advisory function for policy makers and practitioners (i.e. the design and follow-up of a common conceptual framework), thus having a pivotal role in fostering 'home-grown' career guidance development ●

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