

CAREER GUIDANCE IN NORTH MACEDONIA in support of wider employment, social, youth, education and training policy goals

Legislative and strategic documents interchangeably use the terms professional orientation, career counselling, career development and career orientation. The terms are not defined as they are considered self-explanatory. However, some details about the substance of these concepts can be found in legal and strategic texts.

Institutional capacity

In the education sector, the Law on Primary Education (2019) refers to the professional orientation of students (Article 47). Professional orientation involves helping students and their parents to choose a secondary education programme according to the student's aptitudes. The Law on Secondary Education (2003) does not refer to career orientation. The Law on Vocational Education (2019) refers to it once in Article 32, which defines the Centre for Vocational Education's competences as facilitating 'the career development and professional orientation of students in vocational training'.

The Law on Higher Education (2018) includes a single provision on career orientation (Article 86), which requires each university to establish at least one career centre. The work of the career centre is regulated by the university senate. The Law on Adult Education (2016) refers once to career orientation. In Article 36, it lists the competences of the Centre for Adult Education, which include facilitation of the 'career development and professional orientation of participants in adult education'.

The Strategy for education 2018–2025 refers to 'strengthening the system for career orientation and counselling' as a general priority (p. 23). It defines the lack of career orientation as a challenge in primary education (p. 37) and states that 'promoting career counselling of students [in high schools] by opening career centres staffed by trained career counsellors who are part of the teaching body in schools' is among the priorities for secondary education (p. 43). It also affirms that 'for the purpose of career orientation of students, career centres have been established in [secondary] schools staffed by trained career counsellors selected from among teaching staff', whose work is supported by a mobile app called the Battery of instruments for professional orientation (BIPO). Career centres and career counsellors are not established in all vocational schools. The teachers who work as career counsellors are from schools involved in a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) project (p. 47). The strategy further notes the lack of career counsellors as a challenge for vocational schools (p. 48) and lists as a priority (no. III) for vocational education that graduated students should be skilled at making informed career choices (p. 50). It also lists this as a priority (no. III) for university education (p. 56). Another priority is 'introducing professional orientation and career counselling and guidance in all secondary vocational schools' (Measure 3.1, Priority 3: vocational education) to be completed in 2020 (p. 139) and 'introducing orientation and career counselling at all universities' (Measure 1.7, Priority 1: higher education) to be completed in 2020 (pp. 139 and 146).

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) is responsible for primary and secondary schools (general and vocational). At school level, the school principal is in charge of day-to-day operation.

Teachers and psychologists are responsible for career guidance in schools when such work takes place.

Universities are autonomous. Their senates are responsible for career guidance.

Adult education has a variety of actors (many private) who are in charge of their own programmes, including career guidance work.

Regional employment agency offices provide professional orientation, individual and group career counselling, job search assistance, motivational training and job search training.

The Strategy for vocational education and training in the context of lifelong learning 2013–2020, prepared in 2013 with support from the European Training Foundation, includes several specific measures related to career orientation in vocational education. Measure 3 under Goal B2 requires a review of the work of existing career centres in secondary vocational schools (to be completed in 2014). Measure 4 under the same goal B2 requires the establishment of 51 career orientation centres in vocational schools (p. 64). Measure 2 under goal B3 requires the review of curricula and inclusion of courses to build competences for lifelong learning and career management. In the employment sector, the National employment strategy of the Republic of North Macedonia 2016–2020 includes a few references to career orientation. Most are related to the need to improve labour market information ‘with a focus on young people and strengthening career guidance and counselling’ (Measure 1.7 on the responsibilities of the Employment Agency; p. 75). The revised Operational plan for active programmes and measures for employment and services on the labour market for 2020, includes ‘professional orientation and career counselling’ among the services provided regularly by Employment Agency offices. The short description indicates that career orientation can include individual and group counselling. An identical description is found in the operational plan for 2018 and 2019.

The Action plan for youth employment 2016–2020 (APYE 2016–2020) is strongly focused on career orientation. It relates career orientation to one of its three strategic goals: improving the match of skills supply with labour market demand. Career counselling is listed as Outcome 1.3 of this goal:

Outcome 1.3. Young people have access to quality education and services for career orientation: by 2020 all students in North Macedonia will receive career orientation education in the final year of primary education and during their entire secondary and university education. All young persons registered with the Employment Agency will have access to quality information on the labour market. All young people who register for the first time with the Employment Agency will receive group career orientation and counselling for employment (short employment preparation training).

Reporting on the baseline and the results achieved under the previous action document, APYE 2016–2020, indicates that:

In 2014 approximately 50 general high schools offered career orientation as an elective course (an estimated 4 000 students took the course), whereas 36 000 students in vocational high schools had access to the services of the centres for career development. Career orientation education is however still provided on a project basis in high schools and it is not integrated with the school curriculum. In addition, these services do not involve students in the final year of primary school [...].

APYE 2016–2020 states that achievement of Outcome 1.3 requires two million euros from 2016 to 2020. Of this amount, 500,000 euros should be allocated by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) to integrate career orientation in school curricula, and 1.5 million euros should be allocated by the Employment Agency to provide labour market information and career counselling. APYE 2016–2020 was revised in 2019. The revised document confirms the relevance of Outcome 1.3. It notes that the number of high schools that offer career orientation has increased to 53, but the number of students who benefit is still limited. It asserts that all unemployed young people who register with the Employment Agency can receive labour market information, and 23% of young unemployed people can receive specialised career orientation services. This percentage is due to the lack of skilled staff in Employment Agency offices. The revised APYA 2016–2020 proposes that Outcome 1.3 should be amended to include the statements: ‘At least 30% of students in secondary and university education have access to career orientation services’ and ‘At least 30% of the young people registered with the Employment Agency receive career orientation services.’

The National youth strategy 2016–2025 includes one key reference to career orientation. Measure 4 under Goal 2 (promoting a long-term, multisectoral approach to youth employment) envisages supporting municipalities and higher education institutions to establish career centres (p. 27).

Organisational capacity

Educational institutions

Occasional, often ad-hoc and usually donor-funded initiatives exist that have a main or secondary focus on career counselling. Career counselling is provided for and planned in a number of laws and strategic documents. However, there is no evidence of implementation of such provisions, particularly the provisions in strategic documents. Provisions in laws, such as the laws on primary and higher education, have only been implemented recently.

A number of written documents and web pages refer to career orientation work in secondary schools conducted by trained teachers and describe related information and communication technology applications. However, most of these are remnants of a USAID-funded project that was implemented five years ago. A number of secondary schools in the country have sections of their web pages on career counselling and on their career centre. Usually, the web pages seem to be rather out of date and have little general information. The web page zanimanja.mk (which translates as occupations.mk) has been set up by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy with support from the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, USAID, the national Fund for Innovations and Technological Development and the government. The web page provides professional orientation information on a broad range of vocational occupations (how to qualify, labour demand, possible income, etc.). The purpose of the web page is to promote interest in vocational education. It also helps professional orientation and includes a professional orientation self-assessment quiz. However, it has not been updated recently.

Employment Agency's regional offices

The Employment Agency's regional offices prepare individual employment plans for new registrants. The plan is based on a personal interview with the unemployed person. After the interview, the person is categorised (for example, as easily employable or not easily employable), offered advice and, if necessary, referred to another institution or a training course. Employment Agency practitioners do not generally consider that this is career orientation work. They tend to describe individual tasks as 'individual plans', 'interviews' and 'referrals', rather than related to the concept of career orientation.

Projects

Various project-based efforts have been made that include career orientation work. These range from small projects run by local civil society organisations to large projects in the field of education that include career orientation in addition to their key focus (which could be vocational education or adult education). Large-scale donor funding for education reform, particularly from the EU, may focus on vocational training and develops expertise. It can be allocated to critical areas of need. Information on several projects is provided in the Annex.

Career orientation will be a relevant topic in two EU-funded projects (service contracts) that are currently in procedure and are expected to start soon. The first is "Increasing attractiveness, inclusiveness and relevance of VET and adult education" (Europe (non-EU)/Republic of North Macedonia, EuropeAid/140265/IH/SER/MK). With a budget of 2.3 million euros, this project focuses on: the development, upgrading and implementation of procedures to validate non-formal and informal learning as an important path towards the quality of adult education; the development and implementation of programmes for post-secondary education; and the alignment of national systems of VET and adult education with European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET). The process of validation includes career orientation work to be conducted by counsellors.

The Sector reform performance contract EU for youth (SRPC EU for Youth) has a budget of 16.5 million euros and is expected to start at the end of 2020. The sector budget support programme (the first of its kind in the country) reforms VET and implements the youth guarantee with a particular focus on young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs). Career guidance is included as a relevant issue and receives attention under this programme.

CAREER GUIDANCE CULTURE

Career guidance in schools tends to focus on psychological aspects of work, testing, etc.

In terms of cooperation and coordination, close inter-institutional, informal communication often takes place on a personal level.

The dominant career guidance mindset at organisational level is matching skills needs with skilled human resources.

Individual capacity

Practitioners in education

Past project-based efforts to promote career orientation in schools tended to focus on psychological aspects of the work. In many schools, the designated career counsellor was the school psychologist, possibly also for operational reasons.

Practitioners emphasise mainly psychosocial aspects relating to the psycho-emotional preparedness of individuals (such as jobseekers and workers) and individual preparation for the job search process, including writing CVs, cover letters and behaviour during interviews. Testing of individual skills and aptitudes is also indicated as a relevant part of career orientation.

Practitioners in the Employment Agency's regional offices

Practitioners do not refer to work that involves career guidance elements as career orientation. This is a strong indicator of the low level of awareness of the concept.

Potential areas for strengthening career guidance include: implementing the commitments to career orientation made in strategic documents; increasing the professionalisation of career guidance practitioners by building on smaller scale, project-based training efforts; and integrating quality assurance, so that data can be accessed on how individuals of various ages make career decisions or what the overall need of career guidance services is.

CAREER GUIDANCE CULTURE

Informal networks exist that are conducive to effective information flows, particularly in smaller, tightly knit communities.

ANNEX I: GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES

TITLE: NASOCI.ME (GUIDE ME)

A project run by start-up Social Innovation Lab (<https://www.innovationlab.mk>) focuses on career orientation (nasoci.me, which means 'guide me'; It has produced short videos featuring public personalities such as actors who provide advice on career orientation. This is a small project funded by the City of Skopje.

The web page states that career counselling in high schools is conducted by 180 trained teachers. It includes a list of teacher-career counsellors in high schools countrywide (<https://nasoci.me/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/bipo-career-counselors.pdf>). The web page also provides instructions on how to use the mobile app BIPO, which is described in several official documents (high school students should request a code from their teacher-career counsellors and log in). However, the link to the service leads to the web page of the MES (<http://www.bipo.mon.gov.mk/>) and was not active at the time of this assessment on 23 October 2020. It is not clear how much career counselling is provided by the trainer teachers in the schools. The data on trained teachers refers to a previous USAID-funded project.

TITLE: CAREER GUIDANCE CURRICULA AND WEBINARS: PROMOTING WEBINAR-BASED YOUTH NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE (FUNDED BY ERASMUS+)

The project (2015-current) Promoting webinar-based youth non-formal education in southeast Europe is implemented by Development Solutions (DeSo) and funded by the European Commission's Erasmus+ programme. The project, which has been running for over six years, promoted the benefits of webinar-based education long before it became a necessity. The work includes production of curricula on relevant issues for young people and delivery of training webinars for youth. Some sections of the curricula focus on career guidance for young people. The curricula cover topics such as areas of labour markets, job searches, personal skills and aptitudes, CV writing and job interviews. Additional information is available at www.prowebsee.org.

ANNEX II: LIST OF REFERENCES

New Law on Primary Education: Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 161/2019

Law on Secondary Education: Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 44/1995, 24/1996, 34/1996, 35/1997, 82/1999, 29/2002, 40/2003

Law on Vocational Education: Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 71/06, 117/08, 148/09, 17/11, 24/13, 137/13, 41/14, 145/15, 55/16 и 64/18, 275/19

New Law on Higher Education: Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 82/2018

Law on Adult Education: Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 07/2008, 17/2011, 51/2011, 74/2012, 41/2014, 144/2014, 146/2015, 30/2016