

CAREER GUIDANCE IN SERBIA in support of wider employment, employability and education policy goals

In Serbia, the Strategy for career guidance and counselling (Action plan 2010–2014) was developed by ministries, universities, and the private and civic sector. It introduced career guidance and counselling as services and activities to support individuals of any age, at any point in their lives, to make meaningful educational, training and occupational decisions and manage their career. This concept is built into many strategic and legal documents. In addition, professional orientation is used to refer to activities of (self) assessment and counselling to support individuals in their career planning, primarily when they first choose an occupation.

Institutional capacity

At the time of preparing this brief¹, the strategic framework for career guidance and counselling (CGC) in Serbia included the National employment strategy 2011–2020 with annual national employment action plans, the Strategy of education development (action plan 2014–2020) and the National youth strategy 2015–2025 (action plan 2018–2020).

Numerous laws in the field of education recognise professional orientation and career guidance. The Law on the Foundations of the Education System mentions CGC as one of its key principles for personal, educational and professional development. The Law on Primary Education mandates schools to develop programmes and create teams for professional orientation. The Law on Secondary Education refers to CGC to empower mature, responsible career decisions among students with the support of schools' CGC teams. The Law on Dual Education has an accompanying bylaw that expands the composition of CGC teams to include representatives of businesses and local self-government units. The Law on Adult Education describes CGC as support for personal and professional development and employment. The Law on the National Qualifications Framework recognises that the qualifications system should contribute to CGC and stipulates standards for career guidance. The Law on Higher Education and the Law on the Dual Model of Studies oblige universities and academies of professional studies to support students in their academic and career development and to finance the foundation of career development centres.

Professional orientation and CGC are also stipulated in the Law on Employment and Unemployment Insurance for people looking for employment or in need of planning their career, choosing an occupation or changing occupation. Annual national employment action plans, which will become triennial after 2021, describe these services within the active labour market measures to be implemented by the National Employment Service (NES). Regional and local employment policies detail specific measures.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development is responsible for career guidance in the entire education system. It regulates professional orientation teams in elementary schools, career guidance teams in secondary schools and career centres in universities and adult education institutions.

It is supported by the Council for Vocational and Adult Education and the Council for the National Qualifications Framework in certain aspects of CGC policy development. The Agency for Qualifications supports development of the national qualifications framework and official recognition of adult education providers that offer CGC services.

The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs regulates professional orientation and career guidance in the employment sector. The National Employment Service is a key service provider for unemployed people and all other citizens.

¹ Preparation of the new strategy for education development 2030 and the National

The Law on Youth requires financing of programmes and projects to encourage CGC service provision among youth. Under the National youth strategy, one specific aim is to develop the CGC system to support the wider goal of increasing youth employment. At local level, cities or municipalities prepare policies like local action plans for youth, which in many cases envisage specific measures for CGC services based on local needs.

Cooperation and coordination

The CGC strategy was developed and successfully implemented by a multisectoral working group coordinated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. It included the ministries in charge of education, employment, NES, the Chamber of Commerce, universities, local self-government and civil society (Belgrade Open School (BOS)). Actively coordinated strategy implementation was in place from 2010 to 2014. In 2016 to 2017, cooperation was renewed through the working group mandated to develop the Rulebook on standards for career guidance and counselling services (standards). Since 2018, cooperation has been developed through the Council for the National Qualifications Framework that brings together representatives of education, employment, youth, economy, local self-governments, health, private sector, NES, trade unions, secondary schools, higher education institutions and civil society (BOS).

At regional level, the project Education2Employment, supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), was in place in nine districts, with career centres in five cities. In the project, CGC is considered a bridge-builder between sectors. Local non-governmental organisations are given a central role to mediate between market players (NES, schools, employers and families). At local level, cooperation is often established between schools and local NES branch offices so that pupils can access psychological testing and counselling. Schools, local youth offices and non-governmental organisations also cooperate, as indicated in schools' CGC programmes and plans, NES annual programmes or local action plans for youth or employment. In some cities, local cooperation mechanisms are established. For example, Krusevac signed a Protocol on partners' cooperation for implementation of the strategy for CGC in 2011, which led to formation of the Council of Partners for Career Guidance and Counselling. This council is comprised of 24 local institutions from various sectors. Chaired by NES Krusevac, it has met quarterly every year since its foundation to coordinate members' efforts on local career guidance policies and practices.

Standards for career guidance and counselling services

The Working Group for Development of Standards formed in 2017 by the Institute for the Improvement of Education and Upbringing (VET and adult education centre) was comprised of the ministries of education, youth and employment, the Council for Vocational and Adult Education, the Institute for Evaluation of Education, NES, the private sector, schools, universities, Euroguidance, international organisations (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ)) and civil society. The standards were adopted by the Ministry of Education in June 2019 and have served as the recommended framework for quality assurance in CGC. They establish the basis for planning, development and evaluation of career guidance services in education, employment, social protection and youth sectors. The standards define four complementary areas that rely on EU guidelines (such as the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network tools): standards of career management skills as the core conceptual framework, organisational standards, standards of career guidance programmes and standards for practitioners' competences (see the Annex). When the standards were adopted, efforts were made to promote their implementation in a coordinated manner through the Council for the National Qualifications Framework. The council adopted Recommendations for implementation of the plan for application of the standards in December 2019. The plan includes measures, activities, responsible institutions (such as ministries, NES, the Chamber of Commerce, universities, schools, youth offices and the Agency for Qualifications), a time frame, estimated resources and monitoring mechanisms. The measures that are envisaged include promotion of the standards, application of the standards through the development of tools and instruments (for example, self-assessment checklists)

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Ministry of Youth and Sports supports CGC for young people through offices at city or municipality level. The ministry also supports youth-focused or youth-led civil society organisations that implement CGC projects to increase employability, employment and entrepreneurship.

The Euroguidance centre Serbia operates within the Foundation Tempus Erasmus+. It promotes the European dimension of career guidance, career information and mobility, and builds the capacities of career guidance practitioners with a focus on teachers and professional associates.

and expert support (e.g. training programmes), initiation of changes in procedures among different sectors (accreditation of continuous education programmes for teachers, social workers and youth workers, accreditation of higher education institutions, and development of NES yearly programmes). The Agency for Qualifications, supported by the BOS, is responsible for monitoring the plan.

Facts and statistics

The unemployment rate for the working age population in Serbia is 10.9%. For young people aged 15 to 25 it is 27.5%, with the inactivity rate at 70.4%, the rate of people not in education, employment or training (NEET) at 15.3% and the dropout rate at 6.6% (Labour Force Survey/Statistical Office, 2019). Despite the improvements, the youth unemployment rate is still double the EU-28 average. The transition from school to work takes over two years in Serbia (ILO, 2016), compared to the EU average of 6.5 months. Recent studies showed a mismatch between educational qualifications and labour market requirements. One in three young university graduates could not find employment in 2018, 39% of young people aged 20 to 29 with a tertiary education were overqualified (worked in occupations that did not require tertiary education), and 42% of those aged 15 to 34 with a secondary education qualification worked in occupations unrelated to their qualifications. High outflows from unemployment to inactivity and 60% of young people who had a NEET status for the entire year also illustrate the labour market position for youth in Serbia (ETF/FREN, 2020). An analysis of a random sample of secondary schools indicated that almost 64% had CGC programmes (BOS, 2016). Around 49% of young people did not participate in any CGC activity (2% less than a year before). Those who did, mostly took part in professional orientation and activities offering information on educational opportunities. Schools or faculties were perceived as CGC providers by 48% of young people, while 34% identified NES in this role (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2019).

Reform objectives for CGC

The new Strategy for education development 2030 prepared by the Ministry of Education with the support of the EU-funded project REdiS 2030² (2019–2022) has been announced by ministry representatives. It should outline the path for further education system development, include CGC and professional orientation, and contribute to reaffirmation of the role of schools. The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Social and Veteran Affairs has also prepared an employment strategy (2021–2026), in which quality assurance of CGC is envisaged in line with the standards. The traditional concept of professional orientation is still used by decision-makers in programmes for teachers' education and among teachers, professional associates and counsellors, even though the adoption of the standards is based more on career management skills. The current level of change readiness and adaptability allows the concepts of professional orientation and CGC to coexist in the strategic and legal framework, and in-service providing organisations.

Organisational capacity

NES and employment agencies provide professional orientation and counselling, namely career information about employment opportunities and conditions; counselling on career development, recruitment and selection; employability assessment; the development of individual employment plans; and self-efficiency workshops. The NES network consists of 30 regional and local branches. Most employ at least one career guidance counsellor (a trained psychologist), while 13 additionally offer career information services. The NES annual report states that in 2019, 7 605 clients used the career information service and 10 692 attended counselling sessions on career development. The capacity to cater for the range of clients' needs is demonstrated by services tailored for vulnerable groups, people with disabilities, Roma, redundant workers, beneficiaries of social assistance, and unemployed people in rural areas (who are sometimes reached through project-supported caravans). An interactive online guide was developed for students transitioning to secondary schools. NES surveys employers' needs to anticipate annual trends and further builds labour market information, which is used to some extent by NES counsellors. NES actively cooperates at all levels with stakeholders from the public, private and civil society sector on CGC policy and practice development. In 2019, NES participated in 35 projects, supported by the EU, GIZ, the Council of Europe and the United Nations Development Programme, among others. Some of the project-based initiatives within NES are the development of mechanisms for coordinating with social services through an integrated case management approach (ILO/UNDP-

² See: <https://capacity-building-education-reform.euzatebe.rs/en/about-project>

ADA, 2020) and the design of workshops for potential entrepreneurs to develop social and emotional skills, as in the entrepreneurship key competence framework (Competitiveness and jobs project, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2016–2021).

Career development centres are established at **public and private universities and faculties**. The number and quality of career guidance services offered to students varies depending on the number of staff employed (from one to seven per centre), as well as the competences and material resources available. Universities' career centres have successfully built long-standing relations with businesses. Consequently, they can provide labour market information on industries, trends and occupations, and students can experience the world of work and gain skills and practical experience through programmes like project-based learning (as a pedagogical approach) and internships or joint lectures. The project Careers³ financed by EU Tempus (2011–2015) to improve CGC in higher education was led by the University of Belgrade Centre for Career Development, in partnership with other career centres (Nis, Novi Sad, Kragujevac and Singidunum), ministries, companies and BOS. One of the achievements was the career management skills framework, which was used as a basis for the elective extracurricular course Career Management Skills, introduced in 2015 at the University of Belgrade. Several other higher education institutions started to introduce career management skills as a curricular topic or extracurricular activity. The use of online tools for information, counselling or courses is in place, but has become more prevalent during the pandemic.

The model of **career centres in youth offices** was developed and piloted in several cities. Youth offices are mostly staffed by a limited number of temporary employees. However, when they are trained in professional orientation or career guidance they cooperate with stakeholders at local level and serve as a point for career information for young people. Many **non-governmental organisations** at local level have proven efficient in providing career guidance to NEETs, school dropouts, Roma or the migrant population. They are supported by ministries, the EU and bilateral donors (SDC and GIZ). The non-governmental organisation BOS goes beyond service provision (online career counselling, an interactive online guide for young people transitioning to higher education and career information for migrants). It also carries out CGC-related research, issues policy recommendations and undertakes advocacy initiatives to improve the CGC system.

Teams for professional orientation in **elementary schools** use a five-step model (self-discovery, discovering occupations, discovering education paths, real encounters with the world of work and decision-making) developed by GIZ. The model was introduced through a large-scale professional orientation project⁴ (2011–2016) involving 1 100 elementary schools and defining a set of activities for final grade students to explore personal characteristics and the world of work.

Career guidance teams in (dual) VET, comprised of school psychologists, educators and teachers, consider that one of their roles is informing elementary school pupils about educational profiles and occupational options. The aim is to encourage students to consider VET as an educational option. In secondary school curricula, some aspects of career guidance are covered in subjects such as entrepreneurship (obligatory in the final year of some VET schools) and the elective subject civic education. **Secondary schools' CGC teams** (composed as above) offer a wide variety of services that combine curricular and extracurricular activities, some of which are online. As obliged by the Law on Secondary Education, in most cases they have CGC programmes and work plans to structure their efforts in monitoring students' individual preferences; helping students and parents to identify and use information on education opportunities, occupations and jobs; job shadowing and testing; and individual or group counselling. Some teams also organise career management skills workshops. They also prepare students for the context of work-based learning in dual education. Teachers often establish

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The National Employment Service is trusted among parents and teachers for psychological assessment at career transition points, as it is a well-established institution. Specialised NES counsellors impartially present training and retraining options, including VET programmes offered by NES. The dominant career guidance mindset is matching or adjusting skills supply to business needs in the market. Civil society organisations are flexible in the approaches used to reach vulnerable groups, such as those not in education or employment. The focus is more on supporting individuals' careers and life decisions.

³ See: www.careers.ac.rs

⁴ See: <http://profesionalnaorijentacija.org/>

fruitful cooperation with local service providers from employment offices (mostly NES), youth offices, non-governmental organisations, parents and businesses. In some schools, students also support CGC activities as peer educators.

Individual capacity

The qualifications of practitioners who provide CGC vary, since there are no master's or bachelor's degree programmes offered in this field. Subjects related to career development, counselling or coaching can be found in psychology, adult education or human resources management curricula. All counsellors who work in the National Employment Service have qualifications in psychology and counselling. In other organisations, CGC is usually provided by psychologists, educators, adult educators, trained teachers of different subjects and youth workers. The competences of career guidance practitioners are strengthened through training programmes offered by the Euroguidance centre, the non-governmental organisation Inventiva and BOS, among others. Currently, 10 continual professional development programmes have been accredited and offered to interested practitioners in schools. Training programmes for CGC of vulnerable persons are also available. The general framework for the self-assessment of guidance competences and the development of training programmes lies in the standards for career practitioners' competences (see the Annex). Most of the accredited programmes are in line with the standards, focus on career management skills and offer models and specific methods for career information, education and counselling. The plan for application of the standards mentioned above envisages that in the future all continuing professional development programmes related to career guidance will have to be aligned to become accredited. The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social affairs recently initiated training sessions in CGC standards for counsellors from NES and private employment agencies, in cooperation with Education2Employment and BOS. Recently, the first Euroguidance CGC programme for social workers has been accredited by the Institute for Social Protection. This institute is responsible for official accreditation of training programmes for social workers in different areas, in addition to its duties related to social care.

CAREER GUIDANCE CULTURE

Outdoor treasure hunts, online escape games, online simulations with classic literature characters and virtual companies to experience the world of work are some examples of the creativity, innovativeness and enthusiasm of career practitioners from secondary schools.

School-based practitioners can cater for a range of clients' needs. This capacity is demonstrated through career guidance programmes tailored to address with individual learning plans the needs of students at risk of dropping out, students with disabilities, etc. Teachers and professional associates in schools are continuously developing new career guidance activities and programmes. This is shown by the increasing number and quality of examples of good practice recognised in national initiatives, such as BOS's Fair of school teams for career guidance and counselling where schools present the best examples of their yearly activities. The National Euroguidance Career Guidance Awards offers prizes and recognition of providers of innovative career guidance and counselling activities for all sectors. Since 2017, both organisations have incorporated the career guidance standards into the assessment criteria used by the evaluation committees.

ANNEX I: CAREER GUIDANCE DURING THE PANDEMIC

Institutional level

The Ministry of Education adapted educational activities during the Covid-19 pandemic to fully online or blended models. Teachers were engaged to prepare video lessons published via the national broadcasting service and the web platform My School – RTS Planet. Some of the lessons related to VET and dual VET programmes attracted elementary school pupils and parents interested in learning more about VET programmes and occupations (<https://rtsplaneta.rs/video/list/category/516/>).

Organisational level

The National Employment Service started to adapt to online format certain segments of the training programmes to support unemployed users in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic. eForms will be created to digitalise services for registering unemployed people. Moreover, certain online solutions are planned for employers who want to register job openings with NES.

Euroguidance Serbia organised the Eighth National Competition of Good Practices in the Field of CGC and the online conference 'Career guidance and counselling in the Republic of Serbia and Europe' to announce the winners and present CGC trends. The conference was held on 22 to 23 October 2020 (<https://euroguidance.rs/aktivnosti/egkonferencija/osma-nacionalna-euroguidance-konferencija/>).

An online training course called Introduction to CGC in Secondary Schools, accredited by the Institute for the Improvement of Education and Upbringing, is available for teachers in Serbia (https://euroguidance.rs/aktivnosti/obuke/online_kurs_uvod_u_kvvis/).

Euroguidance enables teachers to schedule individual consultations if they need support in planning their activities and to download self-assessment checklists. It provides a handbook for practitioners, a yearly career bulletin and other resources. This year, webinars are available for elementary and secondary school students to support their career choices and for teachers and parents. Individual online consultations are also offered (<https://www.obrazovanje.rs/upis>).

BOS, supported by the Solidar Suisse office in Serbia, organised the sixth Fair of school teams for career guidance and counselling on 29 October 2020, for the first time in online format. At this year's fair, 16 high school teams were presented. The fair received over 100 virtual visitors and 4 prizes were awarded (<http://www.bos.rs/en/news/215/2020/10/30/the-sixth-fair-of-schools-teams-for-career-guidance-and-counseling.html>). BOS continued to provide online career information and online (via email) career counselling through the BOS career interactive web system (www.karijera.bos.rs). Since BOS counsellors received an increasing number of visitors searching for information or advice, they conducted a study 'Analysis of the questions received through the BOS online career advisory with recommendations for online services'.

With the support of the German Cooperation GIZ project, DECIDE organised Girls Day online for the first time. This is as an international event to overcome gender-specific stereotypes in the field of occupation and work. Hosted by a technology company that develops software and hardware, in cooperation with the Association of Business Women in Serbia, the event aimed to inspire girls from elementary and secondary schools about diverse career opportunities, presented by successful women (<http://www.kooperativnoobrazovanje.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Girls-Day-in-Serbia-2020.pdf>).

The German Information Centre for Migration, Training and Employment (DIMAK) that operates within NES and helps returnees to reintegrate socially and economically into life in Serbia adapted its professional orientation services to social media channels and web platforms (<https://www.startfinder.de/en/advisory-centre/advisory-centre-serbia>).

The Career Development Centre of the University in Kragujevac organised traditional April workshops for students, but this year the activities were online. More than 1 300 students attended the e-workshops that covered soft and technical skills and career development-related topics and were held via web platforms and social media streaming

(<http://razvojkarijere.kg.ac.rs/article/radionice-i-prezentacije/onlajn-aprilske-radionice-2020.html>).

This year, Technical School Bor has developed an innovative online computer game to approach career decision-making in a fun way that is attractive to students. The game is called Escape Game – Career Journey Exploration. It is available for other students at:

<https://view.genial.ly/5eb3faf54a7fce0d5029f9ea/game-breakout-misteriozna-soba>

ANNEX II: GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES

STANDARDS FOR CAREER GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SERVICES

The Standards for Career Guidance and Counselling Services developed through intersectoral cooperation and adopted by the Ministry of Education provide a recommended framework for quality assurance of CGC in education, employment, youth and social protection. They were designed to promote the accessibility of CGC services and career management skills, and to ensure quality. The standards introduce four complementary areas. Standards for career management skills are the conceptual core, as they define three key areas of personal and professional development: self-discovery and self-understanding, gaining insight into opportunities in educational and occupational spheres, and career creation. Within these areas, individuals' competences are defined as:

- self-examination ability and the ability to create a picture of oneself in relation to educational and career opportunities;
- the ability to select relevant sources of information about educational and career opportunities, actively and continuously seek information, and use relevant information to make decisions;
- the ability to carry out career development planning and career development management in transitional periods or changes.

The expected outcomes are defined for each of these competences. Organisational standards define the conditions, requirements, procedures and principles on which the quality of services is based, for example, planning, communication, cooperation, monitoring and evaluation. The standards of career guidance programmes offer a structural framework, instructing programme creators to base their goals and outcomes on career management skills. Standards for practitioners' competences promote quality and professionalism among practitioners and outline ethical principles such as working in the clients' best interest and respecting privacy. Three specific areas (counselling, informing and training in career management skills) describe the competences and outcomes. For instance, under the counselling area one of the competences 'Providing support to users in planning and setting their career development goals' relates to outcomes such as 'Understands main concepts of different personality, competences, and motivation development theories' and 'Understands cultural and socioeconomic context, personal and family factors in users' development and behaviour'. The purpose of these standards is to provide guidelines on how to develop CGC services and programmes so that the goals and outcomes are focused on the development of career management skills, and to evaluate, self-evaluate, and enhance existing programmes and services

https://euroguidance.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/standardsofcareerguidancecounseling_eng.pdf.

Education2Employment PROJECT (2015–2023)

The project is a partnership between the Swiss and Serbian governments designed to create local models of youth employment and employability through the promotion of occupations with a shortage of workers, career guidance and counselling, skills development training courses, job mediation, and work-based learning. CGC is established by training practitioners to improve the effectiveness of active labour market measures and enhance the employability of NEETs. Education2Employment capacitates brokers (non-governmental organisations) in the regional centres of five cities to mediate between market players and provide quality assured and standardised CGC services, to complement other providers. The project supports institutions at national level, including ministries in charge of education and employment, NES and the Chamber of Commerce. In the course of the project, 9 000 young people benefited from CGC services. Results from a survey of 950 people imply that 86% were satisfied with CGC services, while 84% were satisfied with career practitioners. The most useful benefit recognised so far was identifying sources of information on occupations and opportunities for further education and career development. A total of 14% of young people that used the project's services became employed (www.znanjemdoposla.rs).

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROMOTION (2015–2019) PROJECT

The project was implemented by GIZ and the Ministry of Youth and Sports as part of German development cooperation. To increase youth employment and activity in the labour market and skills match, the project focused on young NEETs, young Roma people and young people returning from abroad and facing the challenge of labour market integration. The project combined tailored professional orientation and career guidance interventions with vocational training courses, social enterprise development and support for young farmers, involving youth offices and non-governmental organisations, to instil local ownership. A five-step professional orientation model combined with virtual enterprise exposure and field research on invisible job opportunities proved very successful in

motivating young people from the Roma community to re-join education programmes or enter the labour market. Almost 1 500 young people and around 200 young Roma were employed. Around 10 000 people participated in training courses on active job searches and career planning (<http://odskoledoposla.org/karijerno-vodenje-i-savetovanje/>).

CAREER GUIDANCE PROGRAMME FOR DROPOUT PREVENTION

In 2017, the Career Guidance and Counselling Team of the Secondary Agricultural School Bač developed a career guidance programme for dropout prevention through early intervention among students from vulnerable groups, especially young Roma female students. Supported by the BOS's project, the team designed simulation workshops on diversity, tailored to the students' needs. They individualised the counselling approach to address challenges among students who were using information and communication technology tools for the first time. Career management skills were set as the learning outcomes of literature classes where excerpts from classical literature were used to spark discussion on career decisions and paths. This activity was transferred to e-learning during the pandemic. Young Roma students were encouraged to participate in education through involvement in the students' virtual company, where they used their baking skills and learnt about entrepreneurship. The programme resulted in a lower dropout rate among young Roma students than in previous years. The contact person is professor Zorica Subotić (prof.zoricasubotic@gmail.com).

ANNEX III: LIST OF REFERENCES

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