

NATIONAL CAREER DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT SYSTEM REVIEW

Armenia
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List of abbreviations

ACTU	Armenian Confederation of Trade Unions
CGCDC	Career Guidance and Capacity Development Centre
ELFDD	Employment and Labour Force Development Department
ETF	European Training Foundation
GoA	Government of Armenia
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations
MoLSA	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs
MoE	Ministry of Economy
MoESCS	Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoTAI	Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
RA	Republic of Armenia
RUEA	Republican Union of Employers of Armenia
SCRA	Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia
SEA	State Employment Agency
SNCO	State non-commercial organisation
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
USS	Unified Social Service
VIAR	Virtual and augmented reality

1. CONTEXT AND SYSTEM OVERVIEW

Background

Education, training and labour market systems are increasingly challenged by global developments such as digital transformation, globalization, demographic change, climate change and global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. All these have a profound impact on the lives of individuals and on society. The development of technology, especially information and communication technology (ICT), has boosted economic globalization and opened new opportunities for people, but also new risks.

Amidst these developments with uncertain outcomes, some things are for sure: firstly, a fast-evolving world and a changing labour market require individuals to become real lifelong learners, to acquire new competences to cope with change and to adapt and further develop existing competences. And, secondly, there is a growing demand for valid information on the changing labour markets and future prospects. This goes along with a growing need for supporting people to manage their more frequent and complex transitions within and between education and work. In this context, there is a greater need than ever for career development support. At the same time, career development support – that is lifelong career guidance, and in particular career education, and career development support for workers – itself faces challenges in adapting to the new circumstances.

Against this background, ETF engaged in reviewing the state of national career development support systems in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine. The objective of the reviews is to describe existing capacities and development potentials of career development support systems, not just services or policies, to inform policy and practice enhancement in a system approach, to support the selection of country priorities for further system development and future planning, and to inform ongoing and future EU and ETF activities, like the EU4Youth. For more information about the conceptual approach to the reviews, please refer to the ETF-ILO publication “Developing National Career Development Systems”.

The review process was led by local experts under the coordination of ETF and included (a) desk research and individual consultation interviews, (b) a national consultation meeting that involved all relevant stakeholders to clarify open questions from desk research, to add details and triangulate desk research findings by listening to different points of views from Ministries of education, labour and youth, social partner representatives, youth organizations, practitioners, employer organizations, sector representatives, researchers, (c) review report finalization, translation and distribution, (d) discussion of findings with national authorities to identify priority areas for further system development, (e) a wide validation event to discuss the review findings and how to move forward in priority areas identified, and (f) last revision of the report that is being published in both English and national language.

1.1. Context

There has never been an active, well-established career development support system in Armenia. Although such a system existed during the Soviet years, it had a largely imitative and figurative character and was primarily cognitive, highly ideologised, not people-centred, and disconnected from the labour market. After the independence of Armenia was restored, the systemic changes that took place in the country as the result of the creation of market relations, the new ideological approaches and practices in the fields of education, social protection, cultural and spiritual development also

significantly changed the former Soviet system of career guidance. The old system ceased to exist, and the new one as such was not created until 2012.

Taking into account the centuries-old traditions of the Armenian family, the quality and peculiarities of familial and interpersonal relationships, the opinions of older family members have been decisive in choosing an occupation, especially the opinions of parents, who are traditionally guided by their personal preferences, the availability of financial resources or the attractiveness of prestigious occupations. The call to continue parental occupations has also played a part. In addition, opinions from the social environment and friends, as well as unexpected opportunities and coincidences, have had an influence. There has been no particular reliance on career guidance or counselling services. The only counsellor has been the school subject teacher, for whom, as a rule, the student's academic progress has been a priority.

Despite reforms, the issue of terminology remains a problem in Armenia. The term 'professional orientation' has been used in Armenia since Soviet times, and is enshrined in documents, programmes and scientific articles. Meanwhile, the term 'career', in accordance with Soviet stereotypes, is understood only as a job promotion. In fact, the term 'professional orientation' used in Armenia is identical to career guidance; therefore, throughout the text of this review, ETF recommendations for key definitions and scope have been used as the basis for term usage.

As of 1 January 2021, the population of Armenia is 2 963 300, according to the State Statistical Committee of Armenia. The proportion of the urban to rural population is 64% to 36% respectively. The gender proportion of the Armenian population is 47.2% men and 52.8% women. As of the beginning of 2021, the average age of the population is 36.9 years, with 34.8 for men and 38.8 for women. Ethnically, 98.1% of the population is Armenian. Yezidis, Russians, Assyrians, Ukrainians, Kurds, Greeks, Jews, Georgians and other nationalities and ethnicities also live in Armenia.

As of the beginning of 2021, 63.8% of the permanent population of Armenia is of working age (16-62¹ years old), 21.5% is under the working age (0-15 years) and 14.7% is over the working age (over 63 years).

According to the data² from the Department of Employment and Labour Force Development of the Unified Social Service (USS) of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia (formerly the State Employment Agency of the Republic of Armenia, reorganised in 2021), as of 1 December 2021, 89 900 jobseekers were registered at regional centres, a decreased of 1.7% compared to the same period the previous year. Rural residents made up 38.7% of jobseekers, or 33 600 people, compared to 33 100 people the previous year.

Among the jobseekers registered with the USS 66.4%, or 57 700 people, have been given the status of unemployed. This figure has decreased by 2.6% compared to the same period the previous year. Women make up 64.1% of unemployed people, or 37 000; young people make up 18.8%, or 10 800; while 4.4% of unemployed people (2 500) people have a disability.

The regional centres have registered 24 900 first-time jobseekers, of whom young people between the ages of 16 and 29 make up 34.6%. Concerning educational background distribution, 13.1% of unemployed people have completed higher or postgraduate education; 17.0% have completed secondary vocational education% at most; 4.9% have completed primary vocational education at most%; 55.5% have completed general secondary education at most; and 9.5% have completed special general, basic general or elementary education %at most.

The proportion of unemployed people holding a higher education diploma in humanities, education and pedagogy, economics and management continues to be high; among those with a secondary vocational education level, unemployment is high in the areas of education, healthcare, economics,

¹ According to RA law of State pension, the retirement age in Armenia is 63 years for those who have work experience.

² <https://employment.am/am/408/LinkPage.html>

management and services; among those who completed no higher than primary vocational education, unemployment is high in the areas of art and design, economics and management, and transportation and light industry.

People with no professions make up 65.0% of all unemployed people.

The number of unemployed people registered with the USS, with 1 to 3 years of unemployment is 27.1% of the total number of unemployed people; those with more than 3 years of unemployment make up 47.1%; and those with less than 1 year of unemployment make up 25.8%.

Regarding the age structure, the number of unemployed people of ages 16 to 29 is 18.4%; of ages 30 to 44 is 42.0%; of ages 45 to 54 is 20.5%; and of people over 55 is 19.1%.

95.2% of unemployed people are uncompetitive in the labour market, meaning that they are facing employment challenges and require upskilling/reskilling.

By economic sector, the largest share of the employment distribution among jobseekers has been 19.0% in the wholesale and retail trade and automobile and motorcycle body-shops; 16.4% in industry; 18.5% in other services; 9.7% in education; and 36.4% in other sectors.

In all the vacancies declared by employers the largest shares were for positions requiring:

- a) high-level qualifications for healthcare positions, educators, to some extent architects and engineers and related professionals;
- b) mid-level qualifications for mid-level medical staff (support staff); specialists in finance, trade, arts, and entertainment;
- c) low-level qualifications for operators, cashiers and related occupations, shop-sales personnel and product exhibitors, workers providing other personal services, and skilled workers in the food-processing industry, civil construction and others.

Vacancies that did not require qualifications accounted for 24.3% of the total.

1.2. System overview

During the last decade, societal attitudes towards career guidance and the position of the state governing bodies with respect to investing in the career development support system have changed. Currently, career guidance services are in demand, especially among school-aged children and young people, and the number of companies and individuals offering services similar to career guidance has increased. NGOs operating through various grant programmes are implementing one-time event-based (not fundamental, not continuous) projects, which are mostly informative regarding different occupations.

The reforms aimed at establishing a national career development support system in post-Soviet Armenia began in 2012 when the GoA approved the Concept for the Development of a Career Guidance System in the RA³. The concept prescribed for the first time that in a free market economy with a rapidly changing labour market, a career development support system should provide services to people throughout their lives, regardless of age or social and employment status. It was determined that the purpose of the system is: 'Creating the opportunity of free, conscious choice of professional activity, which corresponds to the interests, needs, peculiar characteristics of the person, as well as the demand of qualified, competitive human resources in the labour market, throughout their lives.' Based on the model of the career development support system proposed by the Concept, its implementation process continues to this day.

The state bodies responsible for developing and implementing the policy of the career development support system are the MoLSA and the MoESCS. The MoLSA, (through the Methodological Centre for

³ <http://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=68214>

Career Guidance SNCO, 2013-2017, the Career Guidance and Capacity Development Centre branch of the National Institute of the Labor and Social Research SNCO (since 2018)⁴, provides career guidance and career education models, methodologies, the development of technologies and capacity building for service providers, and monitors the establishment of cross-sectoral networking ties. The MoESCS provides the operational and institutional basis for the introduction of career guidance services in the field of education and training.

Since 2013, the CGCD Centre has developed and tested career guidance and career education models, methodologies for implementing the system in general education, VET facilities, regional employment centres, and childcare and child protection facilities. Before the adoption of the Concept, career guidance activities in these institutions were not systematic, instead being carried out on the initiative of individual professionals, and services were often limited merely to providing information or visits to vocational training institutions.

From 2013 to 2020, more than 900 educators were trained by the CGCD Centre, based on the directive of the MoESCS for the introduction of career guidance services in schools. The choice of participants was given to the deputy directors for specialist educational assistance, social educators and school psychologists. The specialists who received training were provided with methodological support. Work with students was carried out mainly in the 8th and 9th grades (13- to 14-year-old students) and in high school (15- to 17-year-old students), although not in a systemically consistent and regular way.

After the evaluation of the results of the pilot programmes, in 2019 and 2020 the MoESCS started the process of a comprehensive institutional introduction of career education in schools. The Educational Methodological Manual for Practitioners Carrying Out Career Guidance in General Education Schools developed by the CGCD Centre was approved by the Academic Council of the Armenian State Pedagogical University after Kh.Abovyan by the order of the Minister for ESCS, and was commissioned to be used in schools. The standards and curricula of the career guidance course for grades 8 to 11 were developed and approved by the order of the Minister for ESCS in 2021⁵. In the 2021-2022 academic year, career guidance clubs were introduced in all 80 middle schools of the Tavush region as a mandatory component of the educational process. The programme of the GoA for 2021 to 2026 plans to introduce the career education component in all 1 345 state schools by 2026. The work on the introduction of career education in regional schools is coordinated by the Education Departments of the regional administrations.

Student career guidance activities in VET institutions have only become systematic since 2013. Before then, a select few VET institutions had organised reciprocal visits to schools on the initiative of the principals, made presentations on specialities taught at VET institutions, and described the conditions for receiving an education there, but the overall investment was made from 2018 to 2020 when funds were allocated from the GoA's state budget for one career guidance and career education position in each VET institution. The CGCD Centre for institutional implementation has developed models of standard operational procedures, regulatory by-laws and job descriptions for career guidance specialists, which have been approved by the VET Management Boards. These specialists are continuously trained and provided with methodologies and tools for conducting individual or group counselling of students. At present, all 96 VET institutions in the country have proper career guidance

⁴ The CGCD Centre was established in 2006 (Government Decision No 1915-N of 14 December 2006) with the support of a WB-funded programme, Social Protection Administration Project (SPAP), as the Youth Professional Orientation Centre SNCO. The centre was renamed the Methodological Centre for Professional Orientation in 2013, and since then it has become responsible for developing policy and methodology in the field of vocational orientation and career guidance. In 2017, in accordance with Government Decision No 1159-N of 22 September 2017, it was reorganised into a national institute of the Labor and Social Research branch as the Career Guidance and Capacity Development Centre. Until 2013, the CGCD Centre had been providing career guidance services directly to the beneficiaries, i.e. general school pupils, VET and university students and graduates, and adults.

⁵ Order of the Minister of ESCS of 24 September 2021, No 1602-U/2

staff. Twice a year, the MoESCS and the CGCD Centre jointly monitor the career guidance activities to check on student involvement and the level of graduate employment.

Career guidance for people who are not competitive in the labour market is carried out in regional SEA centres. According to the model and methodologies developed by the CGCD Centre, the specialists at the SEA regional centres have mainly disseminated career guidance through group training sessions aimed at improving basic employability skills, compiling a CV and pitching oneself to a potential employer. Since April 2021, after reorganising the SEA and creating the Unified Social Service (USS)⁶ within the MoLSA, the model and methodology for implementing career guidance services have been in the process of being reviewed.

Career centres in universities were already established in the 1990s. However, each university's career centre has its own statutory functions, stipulated by its internal charter, with various differences across institutions. Youth career guidance activities are prescribed in the youth policy pursued by the MoESCS. Similar services can be delegated to different NGOs. Adult career guidance activities are carried out by NGOs, in some cases in close cooperation with public authorities. For example, in the city of Sisian the activities are carried out by the Adult Education Centre of Sisian in cooperation with DVV International in Armenia.

Thus, in recent years the public administration system has been working consistently on creating a career development support system that will provide free, accessible services for the conscious choice, effective planning and lifelong career development of individuals. The MoLSA and MoESCS are actively involved in this process. For the general implementation of the process, funds have been allocated from the GoA state budget, in particular to the MoLSA for providing a methodology and continuous development of the professional capacities of practitioners; and to the MoESCS for implementing the relevant services in VET institutions and creating proper positions in their staff. This process is supported by donor organisations or local companies that have received grants for assisting, among others, with logistics, substantial technical support and the development of visual tools.

2. POLICY FRAMEWORK

The importance of career guidance, career education and career development support services for workers regardless of age is enshrined in a number of laws and legal acts of the GoA. In particular, Article 5 of the Law on General Education⁷ stipulates: 'General education is aimed at the intellectual, mental, physical, and social development of the learner, the formation of their personality as a future citizen, for an independent life, career development and preparation for career education.'

The Law of the RA on Social Assistance⁸ stipulates that social assistance services for individuals are also aimed at 'developing the capacity to use professional skills or acquire new professional skills; career guidance of individuals for creating affordable conditions for working with the previous or new professions, career education, vocational training (raising or upgrading qualifications, training for a new occupation, preliminary vocational training, handcraft training), occupational adaptability, finding a suitable employment, and ensuring self-employment.'

⁶ The main goal of the USS is to install effective mechanisms to implement the government's policy in the field of social security, in particular the system of integrated social services based on a unified system for assessing social needs. The single social security service unites the social service, the system of family benefits, the disability and employment and pensions systems. The main goal is not only to establish the one-stop-shop principle, but also to carry out a comprehensive assessment of the social needs of a family.

⁷ <https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docid=71908>

⁸ <https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docid=94972>

The Law of the RA on Social Protection of Children Left Without Parental Care⁹ stipulates: 'the state employment service shall provide career guidance for children aged 16 with without parental care, who have applied to them.'

The provision of access to career guidance services is enshrined in the European Social Charter (revised)¹⁰, which the RA joined in 2004. The obligations under Article 9 of the charter prescribe: 'In order to ensure the effective exercise of the right to career guidance, the Parties undertake an obligation to provide or if necessary, to promote a service that will assist all persons, including those with disabilities, in making career choices and progress in career development; while taking into account their individual characteristics and relevance to professional opportunities. This support to the young people, including school children and adults should be provided free of charge.' Article 9 has not yet been validated by the GoA.

The reforms of the career development support system were launched in 2012 by the 'development of the career guidance system in the RA' concept and the programme of measures for its implementation over 2013 to 2015 approved by the GoA. In the same year, the GoA adopted the 2013-2018 Employment Strategy of the Republic of Armenia¹¹ and the National Programme for VET Development¹², which include among their priority tasks the introduction of career guidance services.

In all the above-mentioned laws and legal acts, the tasks and problems of career development support services are separated within a specific sector framework. The only cross-sectoral policy paper is the 'Work Armenia' strategy, its 2019-2023 action framework and its financial assessment¹³, developed by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2019 and adopted by the GoA. The document was developed with the participation of all government agencies related to education and labour market, the private sector, non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders. This strategic document outlines the priorities for developing new quality, a competitive labour force and cross-sectoral active cooperation, and for collecting and compiling reliable and comprehensive information in a single database along with structural changes in the economy. The implementation process of priorities has been hindered by COVID-19 and the Artsakh war. Deadlines for the strategy are currently being reviewed.

Within the scope of the 'Work Armenia' strategy, the Edu2Work platform¹⁴ was designed with the aim of analysing the trends of the labour market in Armenia. The platform scrapes and analyses job announcements posted on 10 online job portals in Armenia. The information presented in the platform is being updated daily and a new concept for the platform's development is in process. Currently, work is being done on establishing the e-borsa state platform by MOLSA, which will include the Edu2Work platform as a tool. In this regard, the Edu2Work platform includes a section on labour market information in Armenia.

The introduction of a life-long, universal, integrated system of career development support in Armenia is guaranteed by the Government's 2021-2026 programme⁽¹⁵⁾. A number of measures approved by the programme are aimed at institutionalising career guidance clubs for grades 8 to 11 (13- to 16-years-old schoolchildren) in all schools in the country by 2026 based on the club models that have already been introduced. They will be coordinated and implemented by deputy directors for specialist educational assistance, social pedagogues and/or psychologists. The programme also provides access to career guidance services for non-competitive individuals in the newly established regional Unified Social Service Centres¹⁶, which provide employment services; an introduction to career

⁹ <https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docid=51820>

¹⁰ <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docid=24230>

¹¹ <http://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=68183>

¹² <http://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=66602>

¹³ <http://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=152312>

¹⁴ <https://edu2work.am/>

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.am/am/Five-Year-Action-Program/>

¹⁶ <https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docid=150385>

guidance activities in childcare and child protection institutions; raise the efficiency of career guidance units in professional educational institutions; and an introduction to career education elements in VET and universities, such as the 'Career Management' module for graduating students.

The State Standard for General Education¹⁷ approved by the GoA in 2021, has defined the final results of professional self-determination abilities in elementary, middle and high schools, which should be ensured through career education. The Minister for ESCS issued a decree in 2021 approving the 'Career Guidance' training course standards and curricula stipulated for grades 8 to 11. 34 hours are allocated to the 'Career Guidance' training course per year for grades 8 to 10 and 15 hours for grade 11. The training course is comprised of 26 modules, including 10 modules for each year during grades 8 and 9, 6 modules for grade 10, and career path research for grade 11 (see the thematic plan in the appendix).

The pilot implementation of the 'Career Guidance' training course standards, which was performed by the Ministry of ESCS, is carried out in all 80 middle schools in the Tavush region, where career guidance clubs were created over the course of the 2021-22 academic year. Career guidance clubs are based on the 'Career Guidance' training course that is implemented by pedagogues trained by CGCD centres.

For the joint implementation of career guidance services in the VET system, the MoESCS had already approved in 2013 the model for the statutory by-laws of the career guidance units and had provided the job description of a career guidance practitioner (the regulation of the career guidance units and the job description of career practitioners can be found in the appendix). Since the Unit is mentioned in the regulation, each VET institution has one career guidance practitioner responsible for performing career guidance activities and running an information desk located in a visible place in the college area. The practitioners provide services not only to VET student applicants and their parents, but also to VET students, and they create links with employers and other partners. At present, all 96 VET institutions in the country are guided by the same regulations, which were approved by the management board of the VET institution.

One of the challenges of the career development support system in Armenia is the lack of a qualification system for career guidance practitioners. However, since 2013, training and continuous capacity building of practitioners – who provide career guidance services – and the supervision of trained specialists at their workplaces is carried out by the Career Guidance and Capacity Development Centre within the system of the MoLSA of the RA. The training programmes are designed according to the specifics of the institutions providing career guidance services. Regarding the selection of specialists, preference is given to specialists with basic qualifications in psychology, social pedagogy, human resources management and other related professions.

To sum up, the MoLSA has initiated the development of a strategy for the labour and social protection system, one of the priorities of which is to encourage employment and create a competitive workforce. Mutually beneficial cooperation has been established at national level between the MoLSA and the MoESCS, as well as the structures that are subordinate to them. Based on the clear distribution of functions, the Law of the RA on the State Budget prescribes the distribution of financial resources accordingly. In particular, the funds allocated to the MoLSA are intended for the development of training modules and methodologies for the continuous training of practitioners, and the funds allocated to the MoESCS are for paying the wages for career guidance staff positions.

3. COORDINATION AND COOPERATION

3.1. Promoting coordination, cooperation and good governance

¹⁷ <https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docid=149788>

The main state agencies responsible for implementing the career development support system in Armenia are the MoLSA and the MoESCS. The main player supporting the implementation in the state system is the CGCD Centre, which operates in the system of the MoLSA. The main goals and objectives of the CGCD Centre are to provide career guidance models and career guidance methodologies, practitioner training, and supervision of trained specialists. It performs the following functions:

- 1) develops a methodology for career guidance and career counselling, regardless of age and social status;
- 2) develops the methodology of career guidance and career counselling for students in vocational educational institutions;
- 3) develops curricula aimed at developing the basic set of skills for self-assessment, career management, entrepreneurship, self-employment and entering the labour market for primary, middle, and higher education institutions;
- 4) develops the methodology of career guidance and career development for individuals outside the education system who do not have a clear choice of profession, work or occupation, who are in urgent need of retraining and requalification in order to adapt to the demands of the rapidly changing labour market;
- 5) supports the activities of career centres in vocational educational institutions, for example through the provision of methodologies and capacity development of career guidance practitioners;
- 6) designs training curricula and training plans for the professional development of career guidance practitioners;
- 7) leads training courses for the specialists responsible for career guidance and career counselling who are employed in the career guidance support system;
- 8) monitors the work carried out by the specialists for career guidance, gives them professional and methodological support and provides counselling (supervision);
- 9) assists in the solution of adult career guidance issues by supporting universities, NGOs and adult education centres with methodology provision, organising career and job fairs, and conducting career management skills development training sessions;
- 10) conducts internships and training sessions for university students specialising in social pedagogy, psychology, social work or HR with an aim of working as career guidance practitioners after graduation;
- 11) carries out research and studies on the labour market, occupations, professions, and their qualifications;
- 12) organises regional, national and international workshops, conferences, exhibitions and fairs;
- 13) prepares educational-methodical manuals;
- 14) carries out public awareness raising activities;
- 15) cooperates with public administration bodies, local self-government bodies, general education-vocational education institutions, social partners, other non-governmental organisations, and the mass media;
- 16) makes suggestions for the improvement of career guidance policy, strategy, and forms and methods of implementation in the RA.

With such centralised coordination, all career guidance organisations have begun to think the same way over time. The change in thinking is obvious, because the society and systems connected with the choice of profession of a post-Soviet state were carriers of a different way of thinking; and consequently, the tasks and objectives of career guidance were only considered at public education level, thus concentrating on merely guiding career choice through interdisciplinary connections. It is because of post-Soviet thinking that there is still a problem with understanding 'career guidance' and 'career education' as 'professional orientation' and other related terms, not only in society, but also in

the academic community and public administration system, which results in the continued use of the term 'professional orientation' in scientific articles, research and political concept papers.

The unified methodology developed by the CGCD Centre is currently guaranteed for use in both social services and all levels of formal education. The peculiarity of the proposed and currently implemented model is that it ensures the continuity of career guidance activities, the joint work of the institutions responsible for these services – namely schools, colleges, vocational schools, universities and social services (part of which is also SEA) – as well as the active involvement of community organisations and employers, which may be one of the criteria for assessing the quality of their work. Various inter-sectoral workshops and specific training programmes are frequently organised in this regard.

Within the framework of its statutory functions, based on the identified problems and successful examples, the CGCD Centre makes suggestions regarding the forms and methods to improve career guidance, career development support policy and strategy in the RA.

The CGCD Centre is also the entity uniting the public sector in this area, avoiding the duplication of various programmes as much as possible, involving the testing of different models and the evaluation of their effectiveness. As a result of such collaborations, a number of career guidance models were tested in schools and VET institutions (World Vision Armenia in various Armenian regions; Save the Children in the framework of the EU programme 'EU for Youth: Skills for the Future' in 10 schools; the Children of Armenia Foundation in the Armavir region; the Strategic Development Agency in Syunik region; the Armenian Red Cross Society in the Tavush and Gegharkunik regions; and GIZ, partnership and NGO training in the Syunik region and others). However, there is not yet any accreditation or regulation for the private sector to stick to the methodology provided by the centre.

A successful example of inter-systemic cooperation at national level is the activities of the Methodological Council from 2013 to 2017, which was established to support the work of the CGCD Centre. The Council, created by order of the MoLSA, consisted of representatives of the Ministries of LSI, ESCS and Economy, a number of research institutions, and the Republican Union of Employers. The main functions of the Council were:

- a) assessing the methodologies and programmes developed;
- b) guaranteeing the publication of the research results, and the developed training methodologies and their practical applicability;
- c) helping to organise conferences and workshops; and
- d) other activities, such as ensuring active involvement, dialogue and awareness raising among the state agencies and stakeholder research institutions.

However, within the framework of optimising the state system, the GoA dismissed staff and cut the budget of the CGCD Centre in 2017, changed its legal status and re-established it as a branch of the National Institute of Labour and Social Research, and the Council was abolished.

Along with its achievements, it is necessary to highlight the issues that hinder the establishment of a career development support system and its effective operation. The involvement of social partners and sector employers is not active at national level. There have been attempts to fill the gap in the field of VET through the National Council for VET Development, which was established in 2008 by decision of the Prime Minister of the RA with the purpose of reforming vocational education and training, and is based on the principle of social partnership. In the sphere of labour and employment, the Republican Tripartite Commission can be considered, which was formed as per the requirement of the Republican Collective Bargaining Agreement¹⁸, and the latter, among other things, is obliged to support the development of an effective career development support system based on the existing analyses and employer demand.

Human and material resources are not sufficient though. After the reorganisation of the CGCD Centre, the staff was reduced to 12 (of whom 10 are specialists). In the last 3 years, the Law of the RA on the

¹⁸ <https://arhmiutyun.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/>

State Budget has cut funds event 'Provision of Career Guidance Methodology and Training of Practitioners'. VET institutions and schools are currently not sufficiently supported with appropriate resources to implement career education. They often lack a separate designated room, logistical facilities, and supplies and other resources. The newly formed regional centres of the Unified Social Service have been provided with resource rooms, which can be used as facilities for career guidance group work, but there are limited opportunities for individual counselling.

The other important issue is the professional qualification of practitioners. The CGCD Centre provides training courses and continuous methodological support to trained specialists and professional counselling in the workplace (educational supervision). The programme of the first training course includes the transfer of basic knowledge and the development of skills for the practical application of both key skills and modules. It lasts 40 academic hours, followed by ongoing discussions and both individual and group meetings. However, the results are moderate given the high turnover of practitioners from the system, low salaries, etc. Therefore, the main proposal to solve the problem is to establish a qualification institute for career counsellors on the basis of the CGCD Centre with the involvement of academic institutions (universities).

3.2. Key civil society stakeholders

Civil society stakeholders have a role to play in career development support services in Armenia. A number of non-governmental organisations are operating in the country. In addition to their main functions, they have developed original programmes aimed at career guidance for teenagers and young people. In particular, the Armenian HR Association has developed an original programme called 'zoom in!'. The organisation Kime has developed its own 'Discovery' programme, Skillford has its 'Professional Compass' programme (which has currently stopped providing services though), and CareerLab has the 'My skills are my future' programme.

The 'zoom in!' programme is designed based on the 'DISC' (dominance, influence, steadiness and conscientiousness) model of personality types and the past-present-future approach in facilitation. It aims to help teenagers explore different opportunities in various fields where they would like to develop further and gain a better understanding of their motivations and aspirations. It is designed for the 14-17 and 18-29 age groups.

The mission of the Kime vocational orientation club is to help 12- to 17-year-olds discover their worth and learn to love themselves, which will have positive results on their professional choices. It is aimed at increasing the level of personal responsibility the young people take over their own future and in general, and at providing an opportunity to discover different professions and occupations. Kime also involves parents in the professional choice process, so that they can guide their children wisely, know their strengths and weakness, understand and respect their choices and believe in them.

Skillford is a centre for vocational orientation and life skills development that targets 14- to 17-year-olds. The Professional Compass training programme gives the teenagers an opportunity to discover their own abilities and ambitions and to choose the right profession that they will find enjoyable as well as being a source of income. It helps the youths to set goals and find paths to reach these goals; it increases their inner motivation and bolsters their beliefs in their own strengths; and it helps them to become independent and responsible. The centre also offers training sessions for parents.

CareerLab provides services for a wide range of beneficiaries: teenagers, parents, people with disabilities, and women who are not competitive in the job market. According to the proposed programme, conscious professional choice is a mix of three factors: discovering personal qualities and preferences, acquiring information on the Armenian job market and acquiring information on education and training opportunities in Armenia. The core of the programme is the development of career management skills.

Career guidance activities carried out by private companies are not certified by the state; there are no mechanisms for assessing their quality. Employee career development issues are part of the functions

of HR managers in companies. However, it is unclear whether companies are providing career development services to their employees. There has been no published research on this topic and there is no legal obligation for companies to provide career development support.

Mainly large employers within the framework of their corporate social responsibility missions develop separate programmes and implement youth career guidance. Such initiatives have been launched, in particular, by employers in the telecommunications sector (VivaCell with the VivaStart programme), the information technology sector (Softconstruct), the production sector (Coca-Cola Hellenic Armenia with the Youth Empowered programme) and employers in the banking sector. On the other hand, employers' motivation to provide career guidance services for young people is conditioned by their own challenge of attracting future human resources, given that, for the time being, the recruitment of adequate staff for existing vacancies has proven problematic.

Parental involvement in career guidance services is often provided in public schools on their individual initiative. Parental councils –of which one of the main goals is to 'involve parents in students' extracurricular activities and to participate in the creation of necessary conditions for students' education and upbringing' – are often actively involved in schoolchildren's career guidance and career awareness raising activities. They present their professions and occupations, acquaint students with the work process, organise masterclasses, etc.

Career guidance services in non-formal adult education institutions are not regulated. They are integrated into professional training courses.

In the last decade, job fairs have been organised more often, both in Yerevan and across the country. Sometimes, they also have a sectoral orientation. They are arranged within the framework of state employment programmes, upon the commission of donor organisations or on the initiative of NGOs. Career guidance services are often offered during previously arranged job fairs, taking demand into account. The services are provided by the HR specialists at employers or by career guidance practitioners.

As the above observations have shown, career guidance activities do not have a legal basis and are not widespread among employers. However, career guidance services are in demand in companies. According to a research report¹⁹ conducted by the Institute of Public Policy in 2020 on the involvement of highly skilled workers in the Armenian labour market, 'The employers are most concerned about the employees' values and attitudes towards the work. They give high importance to the sense of responsibility, dutifulness, willingness to work, honesty and courtesy. In second place are the social communication skills, in particular, teamwork, interpersonal, leadership skills, organisational skills, activities and initiative expressed in the course of their work, as well as the balanced, conflict-averse individual characteristics. In third place are the skills related to the practical application of knowledge, especially the skills of job division, planning, time management, respecting deadlines, personal growth and self-improvement.'

It should be noted that there is no skill validation and recognition system in Armenia.

4. MAIN SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES

The opportunities for career guidance services regardless of age and social or employment status are not yet fully provided in Armenia.

The process of choosing a profession begins at school age when the child tries to familiarise themselves with the world of work and understand the opportunities provided by education and the demands of the labour market. Within the scope of this review report, a survey was conducted in November 2021 to assess the situation in 800 out of 1 400 schools (57% of all schools). As a result, it

¹⁹ <https://edu2work.am/case-studies>

was discovered that 33% of the surveyed general education schools have professionally trained career guidance teachers (the majority had received their training at the CGCD Centre, and 83% of them deliver career education training using the common methodology²⁰ provided by the CGCD Centre. In addition, 66.5% of schools (mostly high schools) that participated in the survey carry out some career guidance work, such as organising visits for schoolchildren to universities or VET institutions, and inviting specialists for career talks, although these teachers have not received any professional training.

Only 21.4% of Armenian schools currently provide career education in grades 8 to 11. It is carried out within the framework of the career guidance clubs in accordance with the prescribed curriculum, 1 academic hour per week, by educators who have been trained by the CGCD Centre and received the appropriate teaching-methodological materials. Career education is carried out according to a standard developed according to the principle of modular education, and by grade in accordance with the grade curricula. The curricula, depending on the topic, include the provision of information, assessment and testing programmes, exercises and practical work; watching films about different professions and discussing them; extracurricular visits to companies and educational institutions; and meetings with highly respected community figures, professionals and school graduates. In addition to group work, individual counselling with the students and their parents is available, as well as conversations with subject teachers.

Access to remotely provided and digital services in Armenia is still limited. Some testing programmes are available on the CGCD Centre's official website. As a result of these services, the educators responsible for career education (deputy principals, social educators, psychologists, class senior teachers or other subject teachers) summarise their opinions and the results of each student at the end of the academic semester in order to perform an impact assessment. Thus, the career practitioner assesses the impact of career guidance services on the teenager's decision.

Before the outbreak of COVID-19, almost no institution had ever conducted distance learning activities and lacked the necessary experience. It became a major problem when the need to transition to a full distance learning format arose. The reasons behind the inability to manage career guidance activities properly during a distance learning period presented by career guidance practitioners included the students' lack of motivation, the unavailability of an internet connection, the absence of necessary materials for distance learning and the lack of ICT equipment.

MoESCS, in cooperation with the CGCD Centre, developed virtual career education lessons, which were broadcast on public television. Online career guidance activities and webinars have been conducted by the career guidance practitioners for TVET students and job seekers.

In schools where career education has not yet been introduced, career guidance activities can be performed on the initiative of the principal or subject teachers. These activities are mostly carried out in high schools (14- to 16-year-olds), and involve organising discussions with specialists and visits to employers or vocational educational institutions. However, they are not consistent and continuous.

The component of career education in middle schools is introduced at national level by the MoESCS of Armenia, in cooperation with the educational department of the Municipality of Yerevan and the regional administrations (the territorial state administrations).

Students at all 96 VET institutions in the country have access to career guidance and career education services. Practitioners of vocational orientation and career guidance (the positions are named in accordance with the official list of jobs) submit their action plan to the management board of the VET institutions at the beginning of each academic year, and work towards these action plans with their students. The services include providing training for the development of career management skills,

²⁰ Career Guidance and Capacity Development Centre, Publications:
<http://www.mycareer.am/arm/resources/>

individual counselling, organising internships, work-based training, creating relations with the regional employment centre, getting involved in volunteering activities, and support for future employment (see the methodological guide developed by CDCC Centre in the appendix).

The practitioners keep an individual case for each student. They present statistics on student career guidance services twice a year. Vocational orientation and career guidance practitioners undergo mandatory training that depends on the number of students, the demand and ongoing counselling. They are supervised by the CGCD Centre, receiving the necessary methodology and toolkits. Practitioners present their annual work plan to the VET management board for approval, which includes career guidance service provision and the mandatory training sessions for the coming academic year. It should be added that the vocational orientation and career guidance practitioners in the VET institutions are actively involved in the quality assessment, job-based training, apprenticeship and internship processes of their institutions, some of whom also teach Communication Skills and General Work Skills modules. In the last 3 years, practitioners have been more actively involved in various training programmes for developing their personal and soft skills: communication, negotiation, networking, presentation, etc.

The career education and career guidance component is introduced in the VET institutions at national level by the MoSECS of the RoA with the participation of the management board of the institutions.

University students should apply to their university career centres (these have different names in different universities) to receive career guidance services. However, as a result of the survey carried out within the scope of this review report, it was discovered that the career centres of the various universities perform different functions, so it is difficult to assess the level of their involvement in the students' career development process. Each university has its own model.

People not in formal education, NEETs, adults and people who are not competitive in the labour market can receive career guidance services in the regional centres of the Unified Social Service, which operate in the capital city and in all regions of the country (49 centres). Following the reorganisation of the regional State Employment Centres, a new career guidance model is currently being developed, based not only on the career guidance services provided on the wish of the visitors (jobseekers and unemployed people), but also whenever social workers identify the need for career guidance as a result of needs assessments. However, the model is not yet fully implemented at national level, and there is no designated and trained professional staff.

A number of private companies provide career guidance to teenagers, young people and their parents; their services are mainly available in the capital city.

In terms of the state employment policy, the work in the regional centres of the USS is organised and coordinated by the Employment and Labour Force Development Department, which is a professional structural subdivision in the USS system. The main goals and objectives of the ELFD Department are:

- 1) ensuring competitiveness in the labour market by creating the conditions for inclusion, meeting the demand for the labour force, and ensuring effective realisation of the existing labour supply for permanent or temporary employment;
- 2) ensuring systematic access to data on newly created jobs and vacancies for both employers and jobseekers;
- 3) ensuring and supporting the services leading to the conscious choice of a profession and effective career management in education and social systems, aimed at building a competitive labour force potential.

There are 4 divisions in the Department:

- 1) Division of Coordination of Employment Programmes;
- 2) Division of Cooperation with Employers and Migration;
- 3) Division of Development of Labour Force and Career Guidance;

4) Division of Planning and Developing Applications for Projects.

4.1. Education, training and work-based learning for young people

I. General education

The content of general education in Armenia is regulated by the state standard of general education. After reviewing the document, which had been active since 2010-2011, the Government of the Republic of Armenia approved the new state standard for general education in 2021. It has been developed according to a new principle, which defines the expected skills and abilities (competencies) of the graduates of the main programme of middle education. The main curricula of secondary education aim to build the expected learning outcomes of the graduates of elementary, basic and secondary education programmes, the minimum and maximum learning loads according to the levels of education, and the principles of the academic progress assessment system. The definitions of the competences are based on the Council of Europe's Competences for Democratic Culture (CDC) competencies. This document also defines the career education outcomes for the graduates of elementary, basic and secondary programmes in three levels of education, which are:

The graduates of the elementary programme will be able to...



The graduates of the basic programme will be able to...



The graduates of a secondary programme will be able to...



- identify the importance of the job, recognise different professions and occupations, and identify them by their working tools, instruments and functions

- discover and develop their interests and preferences and exercise preliminary self-determination based on the possibilities or opportunities suggested by the vocational education

- have career preferences based on the supply of the labour market and self-identification, and be able to present the professions of their choice

While the component of career education is introduced in grades 8 to 11 as a compulsory club, at elementary and basic education levels, career learning is integrated in existing subjects, namely 'Myself and the world around me' in elementary school and 'Social science' in middle school. According to the pilot standard of the 'Career Guidance' training course and its curricula approved by order of the Minister for ESCS in 2021, it is determined that: 'according to the proposed methodology, the career guidance services in schools are an important component of the educational process'.

Firstly, the methodology of work carried out in the educational process should be emphasised and prioritised; then, it should be developed and supplemented by disciplinary or interdisciplinary connections. The methodology is based on identifying the student's personal qualities, preferences and interests; developing their key competencies; transferring information; providing knowledge on professions; and identifying the significance of various subjects from the point of view of the occupations. The recommended time dedicated to the career guidance programme is 34 hours per year (one meeting per week), and in grade 11, 15 hours for the addition of individual career path research. The research is considered the final assignment for students. The student presents the chosen profession, the reason for their choice, the education opportunities for the chosen profession, their own vision of the occupation and the factors that led to their choice.

According to the curriculum, extracurricular visits (at employers' workplaces, educational institutions, USS, etc.), meetings with parents and personal counselling, the organisation of career and profession exhibitions, and participation in career fairs are mandatory. The course can only be conducted by a

trained and qualified specialist (currently the only state body conducting professional training is the CGCD Centre operating in the system of the MoLSA, and preference is given to the school social pedagogue, psychologist and deputy principal for professional educational assistance), who must be selected by the school beforehand, taking into account the professional and personal qualities necessary for teaching the 'Vocational Guidance' course.

In 2019 and 2020, Save the Children Armenia, within the framework of the programme 'EU for Youth: Skills for the Future', provided support for the interior decoration of the vocational/career guidance clubs in 10 schools in the country, and the means for purchasing office supplies and furniture (tables and chairs for group and individual interactive training, computers, projectors and other equipment).

Thus, in 90 out of 1 400 public schools of the country, career education is carried out in the format of clubs, with the standard career guidance (extra-curricular) and educational curricula. Two teachers are engaged from each school. In 240 schools they provide unregulated career guidance services; therefore, no other information is available.

II. Vocational education and training (VET)

According to the by-laws of the career guidance departments in VET institutions, the main goal of career guidance is to increase the competitiveness of students and graduates in the labour market and develop career management skills through the provision of career information, counselling, career education and guidance services. The description of the position of career guidance and career development practitioners clearly defines their functions, which are divided into three branches: provision of career guidance information and counselling; support in obtaining employment; and performance of administrative tasks, such as keeping statistics and data on students' pathways, and developing and monitoring reports (see the job profile of the VET career practitioners in the appendix).

VET is a unique system where the career development support processes are fully integrated and coordinated at national level, and the career education and guidance services are provided at local level based on the defined functions and monitoring requirements. As a result of the evaluation of the successful pilot projects implemented with the consultative support of the European Training Foundation (ETF) since 2013 and the implementation and impact assessment of preconditions defined by the EU budget support 'Better Qualifications for Better Jobs', the RA state budget allocated funds for creating one specialist position in all 96 VET institutions in the country between 2018 and 2020. Since 2018, around AMD 49 million (approximately EUR 88 300) has been projected annually for the salaries of those career practitioners.

The work of vocational education and career guidance practitioners begins before admission, when, in cooperation with public schools, they raise student awareness, organise visits to VET schools, and arrange masterclasses and individual counselling with parents and prospective applicants. In the learning process, they are guided by the methodology provided by the CGCD Centre for individual and group work. They also conduct non-formal training courses for students to develop career management skills. The CGCD Centre has designed and provided 10 modules for career guidance to practitioners: Career Management, Self-Assessment, Communication Skills, Entrepreneurship Skills, Leadership and Management, Lifelong Learning in Career Development, How to Write a Successful CV, Self-Presentation, and Job Interviews. They actively cooperate with community employers, Unified Social Service specialists and NGOs, involving them in work with students. A specific time or duration is set for the provision of services; the minimum requirement for the function of career guidance is defined as the requirement to provide the 10 modules, organise personal consultations with each student, define the number of cooperating employers, referral to the USS, etc.

The practitioners build a database of career guidance and employment support activities with the students (in MS Excel format), whose summary data is submitted to the VET Department of the MoESCS twice a year. After a student turns to the career centre, the practitioner registers them for different events and informs them about new opportunities periodically.

An assessment conducted by the CGCD Centre in 2020 found that the total number of students applying to career guidance departments in VET institutions was 2 477. Psychological pedagogical testing and individual counselling was conducted with 475 students who had applied to the career

guidance practitioners. A total of 2 197 students participated in the courses, of whom 1 565 or 71% were graduate students.

Overall, according to the CGCD Centre, 97.34% of all VET graduates from 2018 to 2020 were involved in various career guidance services throughout their studies. In 2018, about 154 000 people applied and received consultations and referrals through SEA regional centres. Of them, more than 20 000 benefitted from career guidance (vocational orientation) services. Job placements were promoted for 11 996 jobseekers, of whom 8 159 (68%) were women and 3 894 (33%) were aged between 16 and 29 years). 83% (or 9 932 individuals) who were supported with job placements were uncompetitive in the labour market. The level of **VET graduates' job placements** remains relatively low (73-74% of those who sought jobs and around 40% relating to the qualification received). The main factors, according to the stakeholders' assessments, are an unfavourable situation with the opening of new jobs, low salaries and unattractive working conditions, and the existence of a considerable shadow economy. Another factor is that for most of the occupations, there is no regulation in terms of education level or even the profile. This results in a situation where many jobs relevant to VET are occupied by people with higher education or without any professional education²¹.

In conclusion, over the past 5 years, EU-supported NGOs (People in Need, Education and Business Partnership Foundation, World Vision Armenia, Strategic Development Agency, etc.) have provided significant support to VET institutions, including for improving the career guidance process, creating new opportunities, establishing connections, and developing the capacity of professionals. The VET sector has also caught the attention of other donors, such as GIZ, UNDP, USAID, etc. Career guidance practitioners are actively involved in the implementation of a work-based learning system and the organisation of short-term (up to 3 months) training programmes for adults. Career and job fairs organised in Yerevan and its surrounding regions have become tradition, with the active participation of career guidance practitioners from VET institutions, who ensure the participation of student volunteers and organise masterclasses for school students, etc. The students of VET institutions have many success stories to share, such as when after job fairs they receive offers of internships, jobs and study opportunities abroad from employers and organisers.

III. Higher education

Career guidance services for students studying in universities are provided by career centres (the subdivisions performing these functions are named differently at each university). In order to get an accurate picture of the current situation, within the scope of this review report, a survey of 27 universities around the country was conducted, 21 of which responded. According to the results, at 12 universities the legal basis for operating career guidance units is their charter. However, the study has shown that even the functions of these centres are different at each university. Each university has its own regulations and services. Most universities do not provide personal consultations, instead primarily organising training sessions. At 19 of the universities that participated in the survey, the career guidance centres offer career guidance and employment support for students and graduates. A staff position for a career guidance practitioner is available at 20 educational institutions. There are student and alumni career guidance databases at 17 universities.

Universities mainly play an active role in the job fairs organised in Yerevan and the surrounding regions. For some universities (National Agrarian University of Armenia, French University, Armenian State University of Economics, Brusov State University of Foreign Languages, Eurasia International University, etc.) it has already become a tradition to organise internal job and/or career fairs at the end of every academic year. Many events in the sphere of school to university communication or networking and student career guidance have become traditional. In particular, the Brusov State University and the Eurasia International University career centres hold such events with long-term student career management skills development programmes in regional schools. The CGCD Centre provides methodologies for the training sessions while the programmes are designed by the universities.

²¹ Torino Process 2018-2020 in Armenia: <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/news-and-events/events/torino-process-2018-2020-armenia-preparing-tomorrows-skills>

A good example comes from Brusov State University which, on the basis of the career guidance centre, created the Smart Entrepreneurship Centre to encourage the development of students' career management and entrepreneurial and networking skills with employers. The Department of Development and Corporate Relations Service of the French Armenian University, which carries out career education and career guidance activities at the University, has successfully implemented the PPP ("Projet personnel et professionnel") course for all students. It promotes the development of students' career management skills and increases the competitiveness of graduates in the labour market.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to form an unequivocal opinion on the effectiveness of the universities' career centres. This is stated in the 'Work, Armenia' strategy task²² approved by the GoA: 'Although the universities have career guidance centres, their functions, methodology and results are not clear. In addition, working closely with career centres can provide useful information on alumni career development trends that can be used to develop policies. To solve this problem, Action 3.1 requires the "Review of the principles of operation of the career guidance centres of universities" (2020-2023)'.

In addition, the regional centres of the Unified Social Service work with VET institutions and career centres of higher educational establishments to support youth employment. They hold state employment programmes, awareness-raising meetings on the labour market demand with students, jointly organise job fairs, etc. Cooperation with schools is currently not very active.

4.2. Support for unemployed people and NEETs

Career guidance services for jobseekers who are unemployed and uncompetitive in the labour market (including young people) are provided in the regional centres of the Unified Social Service (formerly the SEA) within the MoLSA, which operate in 49 communities around the country. However, due to the ongoing reform process, it is difficult to tell how the career guidance services will be provided.

Services include career guidance needs assessments for jobseekers, career development information, and counselling for involvement in the employment support state programmes. All jobseekers have the right to use career guidance services. Before the reforms, the regional centres of the SEA were also carrying out group work with their customers and delivering training sessions. In some centres there were job clubs, whose purpose was to promote the employment of young people and women through continuous meetings and training. Currently, in the regional centres the citizen is provided with a complex social service: a social needs assessment, the provision of a pension, a functional assessment of the pension, the granting of a disability status, and employment services. As a result of the reforms, the staff providing employment services in the regional centres have been optimised. According to data of the Statistical Services of the RA, as of October 2021, the Unified Service centres have provided career guidance services to 12 710 visitors (22.7% of the jobseekers who have received counselling) since the beginning of 2021.

Armenia ranks 13th in the region for the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). The proportion of young people who have not completed upper secondary education and are NEETs is high, although the overall rate fell from 27.5% in 2015 to 23.9% in 2019 (Armstat, 2021). The female NEET rate remains higher, at 30.7% in 2019.

Over the last year, young people who took part in the 44-day war in 2020, including those with disabilities, were singled out as separate targets, also due to their large number, taking into account their age group (during the war the conscripts were aged 18 to 20). The majority of these young people do not have a profession, or after demobilisation still continue vocational education in VET institutions or universities. The Government of the Republic of Armenia has prioritised meeting the need for career guidance services, training and employment support. For this purpose, active

²² <http://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=152312>

cooperation has been established between different spheres such as healthcare, education and social protection.

Due to the introduction of the USS system in April 2021, the model for identifying the need for career guidance and providing adequate services is currently under review. According to the model, career guidance services can be provided not only to jobseekers who have applied to the USS centres, but also to citizens whose career guidance needs were identified by the social workers through the analysis of their personal circumstances. As a result, it is expected that through career guidance services, steps will be taken to motivate individuals from families that are registered in the social protection system as insecure and are receiving social support benefits to become economically active again. In order to implement the model, human resources capacities must be developed and supplied with the necessary information and tools.

4.3. Workers/employees

There are no separate studies on career development support and career guidance programmes and initiatives for private-sector workers in Armenia, so it is difficult to analyse the overall situation. From random interviews with human resource management specialists, it can be concluded that systematic career development support and career guidance activities are typically carried out at large and medium-sized enterprises. There is no information about such practices at SMEs and microenterprises.

According to the state statistical service's data on vocational training of employees collected from large and medium-sized organisations involved in monitoring the vocational training of employees at the expense of the employers, 29% of the selected cluster of employees were trained in educational institutions in 2019, 67% directly in the employing organisation, and 3% abroad. The training was conducted for the purpose of vocational upgrading, retraining or raising qualifications, or they had been in the form of internships. It is evident that the development of career management skills is not singled out in the main areas of skills development.

There are 184 800 economic entities in the informal sector in Armenia. Their employment rate is 354 000 (an average of 1.9 people per entity). According to various methodological calculations, the number of unregistered employees in Armenia ranges from 300 000 to 700 000. According to the results of a survey 'The needs of unregistered employees and problems in Armenia' conducted by the Open Society Foundation in 2020, the main areas of informal, unregistered work in Armenia are:

- services;
- seasonal work;
- agriculture;
- private in-house services: construction, repair and renovation services at individual level, babysitting, house cleaning;
- blue-labour work;
- mass media;
- activities of individual creators in the fields of entertainment, art and culture.

From the point of view of state support, one of the tasks of the Unified Social Service centres is to support the employment of people without disabilities who are part of welfare-receiving households registered in the social protection system as economically insecure, by involving them in the employment-supporting programmes. However, directing people who are informally employed or in unregistered work to the formal field and creating opportunities for them to receive formal support is not singled out as a task.

There is a need for separate research in this area.

A system for recognising the results of non-formal education has not been introduced in Armenia yet.

5. FUNDING

The state bodies responsible for financing and managing career development support services are the MoLSA and MoESCS, each within its own competence. According to the 2021-2026 programme of the GoA, the MoLSA is responsible for providing methodologies and developing the capacities of specialists for implementing career development support system services in formal education and social services. Therefore, according to the Law of the RA on the State Budget, since 2013, the MoLSA has been receiving funds within the framework of the programme 'Provision of Career Guidance Methodology and Human Resource Training'. With these funds, the MoLSA has been delegating relevant services to the CGCD Centre operating in its system. Between 2013 and 2021, in parallel with the expansion of the implementation of the career development support system, the allocated funds were reduced, and the staff of specialists at the CGCD Centre was optimised. The budget allocated to the CGCD Centre in the last 3 years is about AMD 24 million (about EUR 43 400).

According to the Law of the RA on the State Budget, since 2018, funds have been allocated to the MoESCS to create one full-time position of career guidance practitioner in each VET institution in the country. In general education institutions, the career education services are provided within the framework of funding stipulated for the activities of the school clubs. If the school has the necessary resources, it can open a career guidance club. In general, for it to be mandatory in all schools, the assignment of the MoESCS is necessary to provide appropriate measures.

Within the framework of the project 'Programs and Measures for the State Youth Policy' under the Law of the RA on the State Budget, for the 2021-2026, period funds have also been allocated to increasing the awareness and involvement of young people in the career guidance services through non-formal training courses.

In April 2021, the Department of Employment and Labour Force Development was created in the USS system, singling out the importance of introducing and developing career guidance services. The functions of this department, while not implemented yet, include providing career guidance and career development support services to the population, regardless of age and social status (jobseekers, workers, adolescents in day care facilities, youths, migrants, conscripts and other individuals); designing methodologies and planning the work with visitors of the resource rooms of regional centres on an individual and group basis to promote self-sustenance; assessing the need for training specialists who provide career guidance services, implementing capacity building, and monitoring and supervising their activities; and creating information databases necessary for career guidance, career management, etc. The staff members of this department are civil servants.

In the formal education system and social services, career guidance is provided free of charge.

The implementation of the career development support is assisted by donor organisations, which support the implementation of initiatives or arrangements that have not been implemented due to a lack of state funding. This includes creating conditions for the activities of vocational guidance clubs in middle schools, logistical support to VET institutions, additional training for career guidance specialists, publishing of teaching manuals, etc.

At present, not all schools and VET facilities are sufficiently equipped to provide career education and career guidance services, and the VET regional centres are being renovated and refurbished. However, they still do not have a separate space for individual career guidance services.

While juxtaposing the problems of the introduction of a career development support system and the amount of state funds allocated for their solution, it should be stated that they are not comparable. With the funds allocated to the CGCD Centre annually, it is planned to train only 140 career guidance practitioners per year and to provide continuous counselling to 300 practitioners who have already been trained, whereas in 2022 more than 1 000 practitioners will need training. At the same time, the CGCD Centre does not have sufficient human resources.

The active involvement of employers and their unions and the raising of supporting funds could be seen as an opportunity to add to the state budget funds, as well as contributions from donor organisations.

6. ACCESS

The reforms on the introduction of the career development support system in Armenia in post-Soviet times started in 2012. When the Government approved the concept for the development of the career guidance system in Armenia, the programme of measures for its implementation for 2012 to 2015 followed. It was the first concept paper to introduce the principle that career guidance services should be available to all, regardless of age and social or employment status. According to the concept, the main structures for providing career guidance services were public schools, VET institutions, universities, and employment and integrated social centres.

However, the provision of lifelong career guidance services in Armenia, regardless of the person's age and social status, is not yet fully implemented. Pupils do not have access to career education in all schools, not all universities provide career guidance services to students, and the newly formed USS, which includes the State Employment Agency, does not have a solid basis for providing career guidance quality services for jobseekers, unemployed people and NEETs.

However, the legal and operational basis is set for investing in this direction in the coming years. According to the Work Armenia strategy approved by the Government of Armenia as a sectorial document, and the 2021-2026 Government Programme of the Republic of Armenia, measures have been allocated to ensure access to career guidance services in formal education systems and social services.

The Law of the RA on Employment defines the criteria for determining the competitiveness of unemployed people in the labour market and ensuring the employment of a people who are not competitive in the labour market.

Career guidance services are in principle available to individuals who are not competitive in the labour market, such as the long-term unemployed, economically inactive youths, NEETs, migrants and refugees, women, people with disabilities, people living in border regions or in the highlands, former prisoners released on parole and under probation, victims of trafficking, and others, at regional Unified Social Service centres.

If a person who is not competitive in the labour market gains employment, the employer is given a one-time payment within the framework of the state employment programme. The programme stipulates two sub-programmes, which can be implemented jointly or separately. The first sub-programme suggests a one-time payment to the employer for training the uncompetitive person, providing monetary compensation. The other programme suggests a one-time payment to the employer for the reasonable adjustment of the workplace for a person with a disability.

The programme 'Support to small business activities of people who are not competitive in the labour market', implemented by the USS Centre in the framework of the state employment regulation programmes, can be considered a form of State aid intended to motivate people to leave the informal economy. The programme may include people who are not competitive in the labour market. Within the framework of the programme, uncompetitive persons are provided with the necessary support for starting a business: consulting, training, developing an business plan and guiding its implementation. On the basis of a positively assessed business plan, an uncompetitive person is given financial support to start a small business. The assistance includes a one-time reimbursement of 75% of the value of fixed assets (with a limited amount of funds), the reimbursement of 25% of the salary of one hired employee (not more than 50% of the minimum monthly salary), a 1-year reimbursement of 50% of the rental value, the income tax of the person generated by the entrepreneurial activity, as defined by law, and assistance for paying the designated social payments (not more than in the amount of the minimum monthly salary) for 1 year.

The services are available in all communities across the country through 49 regional USS centres. Digital service tools are not yet in use.

At present, career guidance services in the regional USS centres are still in the process of being introduced. In the newly created system, there is an issue of involving career guidance specialists, training, the continuous development of skills and providing a methodology in close cooperation with CGCD Centre. The peculiarity of the new model of the Unified Social Service from the point of view of the career development support system is that while the career guidance service could previously be accessed by visitors to the regional centres, the social worker can now identify the need for career guidance or refer a person to an employment specialist.

7. USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Digital technologies are not yet widely embedded in career development support services and processes in Armenia. Digital career guidance testing tools developed by the CGCD Centre are available on the Centre's website at www.mycareer.am. Video material with innovative VIAR technology has been developed with the support of GIZ to present careers in the hotel industry within the framework of career education. However, full career guidance services are not yet available to the general public.

The lack of complete information on labour supply and demand hinders the development of sound economic, social and educational policies.

Currently, within the framework of the employment services provided by the state, which are to be launched in February 2022, the system of digital and remote services is being developed, which is part of the electronic information platform providing information on the employment and labour market operated by the MoLSA. The above-mentioned services are included in the actions of the 'Work Armenia' strategy. The purpose of the Electronic Labour Exchange (e-borsa) information system is to reduce the inconsistency of provided information by automating the business processes in the field of employment services, thus promoting employment. The system aims at the following:

- collecting comprehensive data on labour supply and demand;
- automatically matching labour supply and demand, i.e. creating a jobseeker and employer relationship;
- increasing the effectiveness of active employment policy;
- ensuring the factual basis of economic, social and educational programmes in the medium term.

The system, among other processes, will also provide online career guidance services for young people and jobseekers, with tools developed using innovative technologies.

The Edu2Work platform was created in 2019 within the framework of the 'From Education to Work' programme implemented by the National Innovation Centre for Sustainable Development Goals in cooperation with the Public Policy Institute. The programme is part of the 'Work Armenia' initiative of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of the RA. The results of the project will serve as proposals to support the development and implementation of the Government's policy.

The purpose of the Edu2Work platform is to assess the dynamics of the rapidly changing labour market and labour supply and demand in Armenia. It analyses thousands of vacancy announcements published on 10 online platforms in Armenia, giving the user an opportunity to get acquainted with the currently projected demand of the Armenian labour market and make more informed career decisions. The platform uses innovative technologies, from automated online job posting to machine learning analysis to capture the full picture of the job market. The full potential of big data science and behaviour has been used to develop a platform for fact-based policy development.

The Edu2Work platform is a result of public and private sector collaboration. It is made for three main groups of users:

1. Students and career centre professionals can use the Edu2Work platform to understand labour market trends, find the career that best suits them, and identify the most in-demand professions and skills.
2. Policymakers and researchers can use this AI-based platform to see in real time the overall picture of the labour market segment reflected in online announcements, track labour market changes over time across regions, identify the most sought-after occupations and skills by employers, develop policies, and target investment opportunities in different areas.
3. Universities and other educational institutions can use the platform to identify the most demanding jobs, track changes in the labour market at all skill levels, assess the relevance of their curricula, adapt them to labour market requirements, develop curricula based on data provided by employers, and guide students.

The platform compares the data taken from the online Armenian labour market and presents the most in-demand professions, skills and the required qualification level and work experience. However, the information included in the platform does not fully reflect the Armenian labour market, as the information system does not integrate information on vacancies advertised by the public administration and local self-government bodies, or the demand for low-skilled labour.

8. QUALITY OF PROVISION OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT SERVICES WITHIN A CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

8.1. Standards

There is no standard for the qualification and formal skills and knowledge assessment of career guidance practitioners in Armenia. There is neither a qualification recognition nor a certification system. However, for the implementation of the career education and career guidance services in basic, middle and high schools, VET institutions and Unified Social Service regional centres, there is an important precondition that these specialists must be trained by the CGCD Centre, with an appropriate methodology and programme. The training programmes of the CGCD Centre have been developed based on two components: the development of competencies of a career guidance specialist and the development of knowledge and skills with the application of the proper methodology for the specific targets of these services (school, young people, jobseekers, uncompetitive persons). The methodologies to develop the competencies of the career guidance professionals are based on the framework of International Competencies for Educational and Vocational Guidance Practitioners, approved by the General Assembly in Berne in 2003²³. However, this document has neither been adopted nor ratified in Armenia.

The duration of the training programme is 40 hours, after which the specialists at the CGCD Centre continue to provide professional advice and methodological support. It can be done at the workplace of an individual or at the office of the career guidance specialist, using counselling or coaching techniques. The need for additional training of practitioners is assessed in the process, according to which further training is planned.

There are no universal mechanisms for evaluating the quality of career education and career guidance practitioners in Armenia. However, in order to monitor the work in VET facilities, the CGCD Centre,

²³ <https://iaevg.com/Framework>

with the expert support of the ETF, developed and introduced monitoring and evaluation criteria in 2015, according to which specialists from the relevant department of the MoESCS, together with the CGCD Centre, regularly visit VET facilities and monitor the services provided. Monitoring is also based on the regulations developed by the CGCD Centre, which are adhered to by all VET institutions. The Methodological Guide developed by the CGCD Centre provides the content and methodology for career advice, career education, career information and other career guidance activities. It also includes career guidance service modules for individuals and groups.

For career guidance services, preference is given to professionals with a bachelor's degree in social pedagogy, psychology or social work, or with HR qualifications. However, this requirement is not prescribed in any document. The CGCD Centre works closely with higher education institutions that train specialists with the mentioned qualifications, to review the curricula, include and regularly update a separate career management module, organise student internships and prepare students for future employment.

In this context, one of the primary tasks is the creation of a national system of training, qualification and skills recognition for career guidance specialists for the purpose of including the occupation of career guidance specialist in the register of occupations of the RA.

8.2. Staffing

Career support services are provided as a separate staff position under the same job title only in VET institutions and universities. The job profile of a VET institution's career guidance specialist is attached (see appendix). According to the job profile, the practitioner ensures the productive career guidance service provision to the students. These services include three main scopes: providing accurate and up-to-date information to students on career opportunities (professions, vocational training institutions, occupations, workplaces, etc.), progression routes, choices, where to find help and how to access it; providing advice through activities that help young people to gather, understand and interpret information and apply it to their own situation; and providing impartial guidance and professional support to help young people acquire a better understanding of themselves and their needs, overcome barriers, resolve conflicts, develop new perspectives and make progress.

As for the professional competence of VET career guidance practitioners, this was surveyed by the CGCD Centre in 2020. 34% of the respondents have a professional qualification, 9% have been psychologists, and the rest have other qualifications. 60% of the survey participants have been or will be combining the responsibilities of a career manager with other functions, 34% will only be performing career services, and 6% are still non-staff employees. 100% of the survey participants can use MS Word, 84% MS Excel and 62% MS PowerPoint. The vast majority of practitioners – 87% - rate their communication skills as 'good', and 12% as 'excellent'. The average rating was 4.11 on a scale of 1 to 5. A high rate of creative thinking was revealed among 36% of practitioners, and the majority (64%) show an average level of creative thinking.

Career education in general education schools is carried out by the school's deputy principal, the organiser of the school educational activities, the social pedagogue or the psychologist, whose job descriptions have a separate career guidance function.

In particular, this function entails 'participating together with the teacher in identifying students' career guidance needs, discovering talent, and developing and preparing students for work activities, taking into account their abilities and preferences', 'performing psychological-pedagogical study and observation in the course of learning and in each age group, helping to develop proper behaviour, promoting the development of their knowledge, abilities, skills and performing career guidance'. If any of the above-mentioned positions are absent in a particular school, the career education is provided by the subject teacher.

Within the framework of employment services, there is no separate staff unit or position in the regional USS centres, based on the regular list of position titles in the civil service system. In April 2021, a separate subdivision of Labour Force Development and Career Guidance was established at the USS

head office. The main functions of this subdivision are directly related to the introduction of career guidance services in the USS system and the formation and development of links with the formal education system. Nine employees work in this subdivision.

In the formal education and social service systems of Armenia, the initial and continuous training of career guidance specialists is carried out by the CGCD Centre. It has a systemic nature and is based on prevailing national conditions and the assessed needs. At the end of the training, the participants only receive a certificate of participation.

Following optimisation of 2018, professional staff of the Centre consists of 10 specialists out of a total of 12 staff). The tasks are carried out by two divisions: methodological and training, and information-analytical. The methodological and training division is responsible for methodology, developing training programmes and training supervision; and the information-analytical division is responsible for gathering information about the labour market, education, professions and occupations, establishing relations with partner employers, and raising public awareness. Before then (from 2013 to 2017), more than 20 specialists worked in the CGCD Centre, with experts from the scientific field regularly involved in the work.

The training programmes implemented by the CGCD Centre are based on the characteristics of the target groups by age and social status. The training programmes have different contents for school teachers, employment specialists and career guidance specialists working with young people. At the same time, the description of the career management support system in Armenia, best international practices, and the main theories and professional requirements for career guidance specialists are mandatory components of all programmes.

Generally, there are no organisations providing career guidance training in the private sector. Within the framework of various grants, NGOs provide training on specific topics, such as new emerging needs for capacity building of career guidance professionals in the face of new global and local challenges, mastering the technologies of remote services, using digitised tools, competing in the labour market, and applying new technologies for working with workers in non-standardised forms of employment.

The quality of career development support services largely depends on the qualifications and skills of specialists. Therefore, the introduction of the qualification system of career guidance specialists, the creation of wider opportunities for education and training, and the creation of mechanisms for the recognition of skills are a priority. For that purpose, it is necessary to consolidate the private sector around the state system, to attract additional funds.

8.3. Quality of data and information

As already mentioned, formal education and social services use a career guidance and career education methodology designed by the CGCD Centre. It includes models and techniques of service provision, theory, educational programmes, curricula and modules. The suggested methodology is developed according to the age group (schoolchildren, youth, adults), social status (jobseekers, long-term unemployed and others) and functional assessment (people with disabilities).

Information on forecasted demand for occupations, professions, labour market and skills remains a problem for career guidance professionals. There is no unified information platform from which this information is available in a verified and constantly updated manner.

There is information on vacancies on more than 10 online platforms. The most viewed platform for vacancies is www.staff.am, which can also be accessed from all social networks. It is an AI-powered online recruitment platform with 100 000+ registered jobseekers and 4 000+ registered companies. They provide quality recruitment services to companies of all sizes. Staff.am is Armenia's most popular job and recruitment marketplace and is already changing how people search for jobs and how local and international companies recruit talent in Armenia.

Jobseekers view job listings and apply directly via staff.am, getting access to a fully transparent and informed recruitment process throughout the job application lifecycle. Registered jobseekers get noticed by companies and can be invited to apply for a vacant position that has been declared. Jobseekers are provided with a number of online tools such as job alerts, verified skills and badges, etc. Registration for jobseekers is free of charge.

For employers, staff.am offers a full-scale recruitment solution to help attract high-quality candidates at a fraction of the price and time of other channels. It offers the ability to search the database of potential jobseekers who are registered on staff.am. The fully accessible database of jobseekers is growing over time. The number of jobseekers who have joined is increasing, providing the opportunity for employers to consider them for other positions. A number of other tools, such as employee reviews, a company management dashboard, an application form builder and more, make the whole recruitment process much more productive. It has commercial purposes: employers pay a set fee to publish ads. Besides, according to the co-founder, the platform is intended for medium and highly qualified specialists entering the labour market for the first time. Therefore, no vacancy notices are published for craftspeople with low qualifications.

Information on vacancies in the public administration and local self-government system is published on the official website of the RA at www.azdarar.am.

Career guidance professionals receive information on the labour market, the demand and forecasts of skills from the recently launched platform edu2work.am.

The Nork Technology Centre of the MoLSA operates a joint search engine called 'Work without Borders – Armenia' at www.workforall.am, which was created to provide universal access to the labour market of the Eurasian Economic Union member states. It allows jobseekers to search for vacancies in the five EEU countries: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia.

Information on the demand for non-high-quality or low-skilled specialists is available at www.list.am, where, however, the information is neither protected nor verified, unlike the previously described platforms.

Thus, access to accurate, reliable, up-to-date general information necessary for career guidance is limited. By order of the Minister for Economy of the RA, an interdepartmental working group was set up to work on the issue. The members of this working group are the officials of the Ministries of Economy, MoLSA and MoESCS, and the representatives of the private sector and employers.

8.4. Monitoring, evaluation and policy feedback

Full and comprehensive information is available only on career services in VET institutions. All VET institutions in Armenia have a separate position for practitioners, and career guidance services are monitored and evaluated twice a year according to two main criteria that are set beforehand. The work carried out with students and the provision of employment for graduates is being monitored. Unlike other systems, VET institutions have a separate toolkit for monitoring career guidance (presented in the appendix), which requires following the set indicators. Accordingly, a career guidance database of students has been established for tracing graduates. The most recent career guidance monitoring indicators for alumni, provided by the CGCD Centre of the MoLSA and corresponding departments of the MoESCS, are presented in this table.

	2018-2019	2019-2020	Total
2019 number of VET graduates	7 418	11 000	18 418
Of whom: received career guidance services in 2019	7 218	10 711	17 929
Total (%)	97.30%	97.37%	97.34%

The data is provided by the relevant departments of the MoESCS and CGCD Centre of MoLSA for the purpose of evaluating and monitoring the career development support services.

The general investment in elementary, basic, middle and high schools is still in progress, thus the monitoring data is not complete. The information on the activities of the career centres in higher education institutions has been collected in the framework of this review report from each institution and university and the picture is not complete, as not all HEIs have responded to the survey. As for the career guidance in the field of employment services, the processes triggered by the creation of the USS centres are just beginning, the work done in the past is generally not being continued, and there is a need to introduce a new model of services and provide training to specialists.

There are 41 state universities in Armenia (including their regional branches), 26 private universities and 3 interstate universities. A survey has been conducted of universities within the framework of this review report to monitor the activities of career centres, and according to the results there is at least one position in 20 universities (including state, private and interstate) that provide career guidance services. There is no unified approach to the implementation of career guidance services. Data on expenditures and investments is not available either. Therefore, an evaluation is impossible.

Career guidance specialists in the USS regional centres have not been assigned yet. However, as one of the important functions of the centre is to provide career guidance services to jobseekers, according to the Statistical Service of the RA, as of October 2021, 22.7% of jobseekers have received career guidance services in the regional USS centres since the beginning of 2021.

It should be noted that there are no separate mechanisms for calculating budget expenditures for the implementation of a career development support system based on service efficiency. Budget allocations for methodology, staff training and supervision are given to the MoLSA. The calculation is based on a non-financial indicator, the number of trainees (300 specialists between 2014 and 2017, 140 specialists between 2018 and 2021) and the number of training manuals or guidelines (two per year: service delivery models and methodology, criteria, curricula, modules, tools, etc). These services are provided by the staff of the CGCD Centre, as needed, together with invited lecturers and experts. From 2013 to 2017 the Centre had 20 staff members, but from 2018 to 2021 only 12 (the reductions were made to optimise the public administration system). In order to provide career guidance services in the VET system, the budget allocations have been entrusted to the Ministry of Education and Science to ensure the provision of full-time career guidance specialists. A non-financial indicator of the assessment is the number of students served by each specialist.

At present, the GoA continues to prioritise the measures aimed at balancing the education and labour market, at human capital formation, and at envisaging the final investment of the career development support system in the 2021-2026 Action Plan of the Government of the Republic of Armenia. It also stipulates the introduction of a monitoring and evaluation system.

9. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

Career Development Support System reforms in Armenia were undertaken in 2012, when "The development concept of professional orientation system in the RA" and its implementation plan were approved by the Government of the RA. The system is defined by the concept which includes general education, vocational and higher educational institutions and Social support institutions, especially Unified Social Services and Childcare and Child Protection Institutions. The MoLSA and MoESCS are actively involved in the process of establishing and developing the system.

The main player supporting the implementation in the state system is the CGCD Centre, which operates in the system of the MoLSA. The main goals and objectives of the CGCD Centre are to provide career guidance models and career guidance methodologies, practitioner training, and supervision of trained specialists. Within the framework of its statutory functions, based on the identified problems and successful examples, the CGCD Centre makes suggestions regarding the forms and methods to improve career guidance, career development support policy and strategy in the RA.

Only 21.4% of Armenian schools currently provide career education in grades 8 to 11. It is carried out within the framework of the career guidance clubs in accordance with the prescribed curriculum. Students at all 96 VET institutions in the country have access to career guidance and career education services. University students should apply to their university career centres (these have different names in different universities) to receive career guidance services. People not in formal education, NEETs, adults and people who are not competitive in the labour market can receive career guidance services in the regional centres of the Unified Social Service, which operate in the capital city and in all regions of the country (49 centres). Following the reorganisation of the regional State Employment Centres, a new career guidance model should be developed.

Career development support system in Armenia however lacks a qualification system for career guidance practitioners. There is no standard for the qualification, and for formal skills and knowledge assessment of career guidance practitioners in Armenia. There is neither a qualification recognition nor a certification system.

Based on the distribution of functions, funding is carried out accordingly. In particular, the funds allocated to the MoLSA are intended for the development of training modules and methodologies for the continuous training of practitioners, and the funds allocated to the MoESCS are for paying the wages for career guidance staff positions. Also, funds have also been allocated to increasing the awareness and involvement of young people in the career guidance services through non-formal training courses.

Access to remotely provided and digital services in Armenia is still limited. In this regard, there are a lot of initiatives to be realized.

The introduction of a life-long Career Development Support System in Armenia continues to be a priority for the Government of Armenia and is guaranteed by the Government's 2021-2026 programme. But still there are many issues that hinder the consolidation of the system. A lot of initiatives are to be realized, achievements should be continuous, challenges to be accepted and overall, career guidance services should be accessible for everyone regardless of age, social and working status.

Three priority areas had been identified for further system enhancement:

- Integration of career guidance services into the USS system
- Professionalization of Career Guidance practitioners (development of qualification system)
- Access to quality information for all groups of users

Detailed recommendations

Recommendations do not represent final solutions but are aimed at guiding policy and practice discussions. They follow the key pillars of this report and cover system, provider and practitioner levels:

Policy framework

Short-term

- Establish an inter-ministerial working group with a clear operational mandate and participation by ministries (education, labour, youth, economy, social policy, agriculture, finance, territorial administration), employers, employee organisations, research and NGOs, in order to build trust and a common understanding/terminology and engage in a joint process of discussing the outcomes of the review of the national career development support system aimed at:

- (1) developing a national theory of change (ToC)²⁴, as a long-term vision guiding the development of a national career development support system, and action plan(s) to prioritise certain reform initiatives;
- (2) developing a joint understanding of the desired outcomes of career guidance for individuals, organisations and society across ministries, sectors and education levels.

Medium- to long-term

- Develop a cross-sectoral career guidance strategy bringing the education and employment sides under one roof with participation by stakeholders across ministries (education, labour, youth, economy, social policy, agriculture, finance, territorial administration), employers, employee organisations, research and NGOs.

Coordination and cooperation

Short-term

- Develop an annual action plan of the inter-ministerial working group, starting already with 2022, that ensures the significant involvement of social partners and employers at national level.
- Build on the strong mandate/role given to the CGCD Centre to not only maintain but expand the strong integrative power of its work and enhance the building of a national career development support system across sectors and client groups; however, this requires providing more resources to the Centre (see more recommendations below). Related to coordination and cooperation, the Centre's resources can be increased through a partnership between the CGCD Centre and universities, where universities, through their research staff, could in particular take over the education, training and mentoring/monitoring role. In addition, teacher training institutions could be active partners in education and training; it should be considered whether the CGCD could be the body to practically coordinate a national inter-ministerial working group (as recommended above).
- Maintain the lead role of the CGCD Centre to define and develop methodologies, train CG practitioners, monitor and provide support and let the Department on Labour Force Development and Career Guidance be the implementer in the USS centres to establish CG – avoid adding a new player in this role of methodology development as it would lead to renewed fragmentation.
- Require private and civil-society career guidance providers to comply with the standards developed by the CGCD Centre to ensure the quality of the emerging private practice (accreditation, etc.).

Medium- to long-term

- Review the legal status of the CGCD Centre (now a branch of a state non-profit organisation within the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs) by establishing a Career Development Support System Foundation that will operate not only with state funds, but also with private investments, actively involving sector employers.

Services

Short-term

²⁴ See p. 17: <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/developing-national-career-development-support-systems>

- Give high priority to shaping and implementing the career development support services within the USS through which services get 'universalised' and are provided to every person.
- Integrate into the new USS career guidance model (services within employment centres) particular (outreach) activities for different groups like NEETs, or directing people in the informal economy to the formal economy, or work with people with disabilities.
- Review and revise the career learning programmes for primary, basic, middle and secondary school levels: extending the learning outcomes along the concept of developing career management skills towards 'learning about myself', 'learning about the world of learning', alongside 'learning about the world of work' (also going beyond learning about professions) to facilitate first and foremost personal development and the development of a mindset that is entrepreneurial, critical, self-directed and showing agency, next to the more straightforward learning of CV writing, identifying job vacancies, etc., which helps to address high unemployment amongst youth with general and middle education and to prepare all learners for their future.
- Add work-based learning opportunities, job shadowing, school companies, mock interviews, etc. to general education, career education and career guidance work, as real experience in a professional environment creates different learning opportunities and helps develop interests and future professional identities.
- Ensure that career guidance services provided by VET and higher education career guidance practitioners to schools follow the approach of providing solid evidence on the value of an education programme for future employability and possible career pathways based on LMI, tracer study results, etc. and clearly refrain from marketing for a VET centre and its programmes, which does not help at all in making a well-informed decision.
- Ensure that career guidance services by VET and higher education career guidance practitioners to schools are provided in close partnership with other education and training providers, the public employment service, employers, parents and unions to inform potential future students and not just act as school in silo – obviously, the existing cooperation within a national inter-ministerial working group builds strong grounds for regional and local partnerships.
- Cooperate with adult learning institutions (public, NGOs, private) that provide soft entries into the world of learning through life skills training and career education programmes for adults to reengage unemployed or marginalised groups that are not competitive into further learning; these motivational activities can lead to personal development plans that may include short vocational training, etc.
- Make parental involvement an official part of the CGCD Centre's methodology to leverage on the individual initiative of individual schools that already do so.

Medium-term to long-term

- Integrate the approach applied in VET colleges around career guidance centres into general education institutions to accompany career education for all (CG clubs), with career guidance offers for those who want or need more support. This could also be realised through cooperation with the regional USS centres that visit schools regularly to provide services.
- Diversify methodologies for career guidance to meet the needs of various client groups and go beyond career guidance based on personality traits.
- Develop key skills from primary onwards, together with career management skills, as these transversal skills cannot be learned in a couple of hours as per the current CG learning programme, but are developed over a long time and become part of a person's behaviour.

Funding

Short-term

- Identify high-priority funding sources to increase sustained funding for the work of the CGCD Centre as a key player to build a unified and coherent national career development support system.
- Identify funding sources for supporting career development support for MSME workers in light of the digital and green transition in particular.

Medium- to long-term

- Ensure sustained funding through the RA state budget of at least one career guidance practitioner in all 96 VET institutions and all general education institutions (primary, basic, upper, middle, secondary and high).

Access

Short-term

- Research the need for career development support for workers in MSMEs, review existing and identify possible measures to provide career development support to workers in MSMEs, in close cooperation with employer organisations and trade unions, reflecting also on their role.
- Identify how the use of ICT can help enhance access to services.

Medium- to long-term

- Propose state employment support for a new project to assist workers in the informal economy.

Use of technology

Short-term

- Identify how the career development support system can be effectively and efficiently enhanced through the use of ICT to support traditional services (e.g. harnessing the potential for connecting stakeholders: individuals-employers, schools-employers, practitioners-individuals, etc.; facilitating self/career/opportunity exploration and acquiring skills for deciding and acting; increasing accessibility: offering one-stop-shop information points, providing LMI, etc.), thereby ensuring the interoperability of ICT services from different players and to use the potential of ICT to bring together the different elements of the career development support system in education, employment, youth, etc. areas as an integrative factor to improve effectiveness and efficiency.
- Select existing media also used during the pandemic (radio, TV, etc.) and build on successful use for career guidance service provision.
- Ensure that the e-borsa platform designed by MoLSA meets the needs of various user groups.
- Ensure that the Edu2Work Platform also integrates information on vacancies advertised by public administrations and local self-government bodies, and the demand for low-skilled labour.

Medium- to long-term

- Invest in ICT infrastructure e.g. create WLAN access points in public places, such as village squares, to also provide internet access in remote areas.
- Ensure the availability of regularly updated LMI for the use of various user groups (clients, CG practitioners, policy makers, etc.) – ideally on a unified information platform from which this information would be available in a verified and constantly updated manner.

Quality, professionalisation and continuous improvement

Short-term

- As a high priority, develop, under the leadership of the CGCD Centre, qualification/occupation standards of career guidance practitioners for all practitioners across policy areas (education, employment, youth, private sector, etc.), which should also build the basis for recognising prior/non-/informal learning to recognise skills developed by practitioners in the form of official qualifications.
- Ensure that teacher training institutions are also providing training and continuous capacity building for career guidance practitioners, in close coordination with the Career Guidance and Capacity Development Centre, based on general qualification/occupational standards. This way, all subject teachers can receive training and more people can be trained in parallel.
- Use a training of trainers (ToT) approach in the training of career guidance practitioners to increase the amount of training and support provision, e.g. by identifying highly motivated specialists in municipalities and regions who train others, thus increasing the impact of the CGCD Centre's training activities.
- Include the occupation of career guidance practitioner in the register of occupations of the RA.
- Extend the function of career guidance and career development specialists in VET (and later general education) by adding the key task of a coordination role to ensure involvement and cooperation with internal (subject teachers, etc.) and external (employers, public institutions providing LMI, parents, etc.) stakeholders in career education and career guidance.
- Involve all universities in jointly reviewing the mandates and activities of career guidance centres and practitioners in universities as per the 'Work, Armenia' strategy task 3, Action 3.1: 'Review of the principles of operation the career guidance centres of universities' (2020-2023), and develop a coordinated approach to professionalising services: general qualification/occupational standards should apply to all practitioners; functions should be aligned according to the overall objective to support individuals in the development of career management skills, coordinate internal and external stakeholders for the provision of career guidance and career education, etc.

Medium- to long-term

- Develop assessment methods and tools (e.g. portfolios) to assess the achievement of learning outcomes related to career management skills learning programmes.
- Officially recognise the initial and continuous training of career guidance specialists carried out by the CGCD centre in the NQF as e.g. micro-credentials (avoid merely handing out a certificate of participation).
- Make tracer studies mandatory for all education institutions as a tool to inform career guidance work.
- Revise and validate the terminology of career development support policy and services, considering international standards and terms.
- Introduce monitoring and evaluation of career education and career guidance in general education to assess the effectiveness of career guidance and career education in schools looking at (a) data on inputs, including expenditure, number of practitioners, number of primary, middle and secondary institutions providing career guidance and career education and in which form services are provided (cross-curricular, extra-curricular, as a stand-alone subject, career centres per school), number of online services and their form (one-stop website entry point, several different offers on websites of different stakeholders, various apps; what is offered

online, e.g. self-learning, LMI, job offers, international job offers etc.); (b) data on service outputs, such as number and type of interventions, number and type of clients (for schools and PES etc.); and (c) data on outcomes, including learning outcomes, changes in employment status, transitions in training and education, transitions in employment status; learn from M&E practices in VET.

- Extend the VET indicators by also adding output and outcome indicators.
- Ensure to pool all monitoring data from VET, higher education and general education for analysis by the inter-ministerial working group.

APPENDIX

EXAMPLE REGULATION OF THE VET INSTITUTION'S CAREER UNIT

I. GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. The VET institution's career unit (hereinafter the 'Unit') is established by the order of the educational institution's director and is responsible for the efficient career guidance service provision to students.
2. Within the framework of career guidance functions, the Unit cooperates with the RA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the Methodological Centre for Professional Orientation SNCO (hereinafter the 'Centre'), regional and local centres of the State Employment Service Agency (hereinafter the 'SESA'), relevant state and other private organisations.
3. The training of the Unit's specialists (career consultant) and methodological support to service delivery are carried out by the Centre.
4. The Unit's tasks are planned and implemented by the career consultant and, in the case of their absence, they are planned by the substituting specialist assigned under the director's order or by the job profile.
5. The Unit's regulation is approved by the VET institution's board.
6. The Unit organises and implements its activities within the annual work plans approved by the director.

II. MAIN GOAL AND FUNCTIONS OF THE UNIT

7. The main goal of the Unit is to promote the enhancement of students' and graduates' competitiveness on the labour market and to develop their career-planning skills by providing career information, advice, career education and guidance services.
8. The Unit implements the following functions:
 - a. providing career information, advice and guidance services to students on an individual basis;
 - b. if necessary, identifying visitors' personal qualities, hobbies and skills by using psychometric methods such as testing, communication and observation (developing an individual programme aimed at the final result);
 - c. gathering information on education and training, economic priorities, and local, regional, national and international labour market analyses and forecasts, and disseminating them among students in print and online formats;
 - d. providing – through non-formal training programmes – group and individual services directed at the development of skills for initial access to the labour market;
 - e. creating and maintaining a career resource library (data on students, graduates, educational establishments, partners and employers);
 - f. notifying of, and creating, opportunities for searching for vacancies, voluntary and public work, in a self-service manner;
 - g. organising and notifying of active events such as seminars, workshops, round-table discussions, lectures, open classes, non-formal training sessions, fairs and exhibitions;
 - h. directing job-seeking students to SESA regional and local centres to get involved in state employment programmes;
 - i. involving social partners, employers and trade unions in the organisation of students' career counselling activities;
 - j. implementing administrative activities:
 - 1) planning and managing the Unit's activities;

- 2) maintaining permanent communication with other units, lecturers and other relevant employees of the institution;
- 3) running the administration, making reports, compiling data, etc.;
- 4) providing internal and external communication, including publishing the Unit's works for a wider range of students and the community.

III. THE METHODOLOGICAL AND MATERIAL PROVISION

9. The Unit:

- a. has a separate area (a room, hall, etc.) for organising its activities and for providing individual services to students;
- b. has a regularly updated information board in a visible place in one of the halls of the institution;
- c. is furnished with property and equipment for both the implementation of administrative activities and the provision of students' career education and information service;
- d. has a relevant methodology to work with students.

JOB PROFILE

OF THE VET INSTITUTION'S CAREER UNIT'S COORDINATOR (CAREER CONSULTANT)

POSITION TITLE: Career Consultant

I. GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. The career unit's coordinator of the VET Institution under the RA Ministry of Education and Science (hereinafter the 'Consultant') is appointed and dismissed by the Institution's Director.
2. A capable adult who meets the requirements prescribed under points 6 to 9 of this profile may be assigned the position of Coordinator.

II. LABOUR MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITY

3. The consultant is directly subordinate and accountable to the Institution's Director.

III. JOB PROFILE

4. The Consultant ensures the provision of a productive career guidance service to students. These services include three main scopes:
 - a. **Information:** providing accurate and up-to-date information to the students on their career opportunities (on professions, vocational training institutions, occupations, workplaces, etc.), progression routes, choices, and where to find help and how to access it;
 - b. **Advice:** providing advice through activities that help young people to gather, understand and interpret information and apply it to their own situation;
 - c. **Guidance:** providing impartial guidance and professional support to help young people understand themselves and their needs, overcome barriers, resolve conflicts, develop new perspectives and make progress.

IV. MAIN FUNCTIONS

5. The Consultant's functions are:
 - a. implementing information and consulting work, within the framework of which the Consultant:
 - 1) conducts information and counselling activities with students to ascertain their personal and working preferences and interests/inclinations,
 - 2) applies methods to identify students' personal and professional competences and skills,
 - 3) guides students in career choices and planning,
 - 4) provides information on available and predictable vacancies on the labour market,
 - 5) provides information on employers' requirements,
 - 6) provides information on learning opportunities and conditions, training terms and regulation in the VET institutions and other educational establishments,
 - 7) promotes the development of skills for participating in job interviews, developing a competitive CV, finding a job, developing working and professional skills, making progress, etc., through group training courses,
 - 8) provides feedback to students and alumni;
 - b. supporting employment provision, within the framework of which the Consultant:
 - 1) cooperates with employers to get information on available and predictable vacancies and provides this information to students,
 - 2) enables students and graduates to strengthen the knowledge acquired in the VET institutions through volunteer work with the support of employers,

- 3) supports employers in hiring students by disseminating vacancy announcements, gathering CVs and guiding willing students to employers;
- 4) organises the process of participating in job interviews with employers;
- c. performing administrative activities, within the framework of which the Consultant:
 - 1) keeps statistics and data on students' educational and work pathways,
 - 2) duly develops monitoring reports,
 - 3) duly carries out other relevant functions.

V. REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS, KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

6. The Consultant must have a higher education qualification, preferably as a psychologist, psychologist-pedagogue or social worker, and have excellent command of the Armenian language.
7. The Consultant must have knowledge of the following:
 - a. legal acts regulating the VET sphere, especially RA laws, RA Government decisions, orders of RA the Minister for Education and Science, etc.;
 - b. current and predicted developments on local, regional, national and international labour markets;
 - c. the requirements for accessing specific occupations;
 - d. career guidance theory and practice;
 - e. state employment guarantees for young people;
 - f. the principles and psychological-pedagogical methods of social work;
 - g. staff and administrative work management.
8. The Consultant must have the following professional and key skills:
 - a. organisational skills and the ability to work individually and as part of a group;
 - b. coaching and facilitation;
 - c. interpersonal communication;
 - d. oral and written communication;
 - e. work planning and organisation;
 - f. time management;
 - g. reasoning and orientation in different situations;
 - h. coordination, analysis, processing of information;
 - i. computer skills.
9. The Consultant must possess the following personal characteristics:
 - a. aspiration towards continuous development;
 - b. initiative;
 - c. being honest, caring and reliable;
 - d. social sensitivity;
 - e. flexibility and attention.

The Consultant must maintain the standards of professional and moral ethics.

KEY TASKS AND METHODS OF CAREER UNIT OF THE VET INSTITUTIONS

(Review from the Methodological Guide developed by CGCD centre)

1. **Career advice** – information, advice and guidance to individuals and groups on career choices.

Methodology:

- face-to-face interviews with knowledgeable staff;
- group discussions led by knowledgeable staff, non-formal training;
- psychometric testing and identification of needs.

2. **Career education** – learning activities for students to develop and assess the skills and knowledge required for their choice of career, including:

- interview preparation;
- constructing a CV;
- cover letters and application forms;
- time management skills;
- understanding personal skills and qualities;
- job search techniques.

Methodology: work at home using the materials provided; focussed lessons in groups; visits to employers; inputs from past students and employers; career fairs and exhibitions; sessions on other parts of the curriculum.

3. **Career information** – access to local, national and international information on vacancies, the labour market, separate occupations, education and training, and human resource development.

Methodology: career fairs and exhibitions; visits to employers and SESA territorial centres; input from employers and past students; internet research; displaying vacancy notices from newspapers; information library; job study research, publication, etc.

4. **Additional tasks**

- Organising job, career and profession fairs.
- Establishing links with employers, SESA and other organisations.
- Administrative work, providing feedback, etc.

NOTE. The CGCD Centre (formerly Methodological Centre for Professional Orientation SNCO) of the RA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, within the framework of its functions, renders continuous support to the establishment of career units and staff retraining in the VET institutions in cooperation with the RA Ministry of Education and Science and its relevant units.

The individual and group career guidance modules of the VET institutions are the following:

The aim, mechanisms and appropriate methodology of providing individual consultancy:

- a) the student's initial individual interview questionnaire;
- b) identifying personality types according to the Holland Code.

Module 1. Personal self-assessment and SWOT analysis

Module 2. Critical and creative thinking

Module 3. Communication

Module 4. Game-debate (conducting technique)

Module 5. 8 key European competences

Module 6. Adult learning

Module 7. How to look for a job

Module 8. How to develop a competitive CV

Module 9. How to write a cover letter

Module 10. How to participate in a job interview

'CAREER GUIDANCE' THEMATIC PLAN OF A TRAINING COURSE IN GENERAL EDUCATION SCHOOLS

#	NAMES OF MODULES AND THEMES	NUMBER OF HOURS
	<u>8th grade</u>	<u>34</u>
	THE WORLD OF WORK AND THE BASIC CONCEPTS OF CAREER GUIDANCE	
	The importance of choosing a profession	1
	The main concepts of career guidance	1
	The factors of career choice	2
	SELF-ASSESSMENT	
	Level of ambition: setting objectives	2
	My self-portrait	1
	THE INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A PERSON AND THE CHOICE OF PROFESSION	
	Types of individual temperaments and the choice of profession	4
	The place and role of the preferable profession in the 'world of work'	2
	PLANNING THE ACTIONS	
	The ways of choosing a profession	1
	Efficient and reasonable time management	2
	Integrating individual and social environment anticipations / public opinion	2
	PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AND THE LABOUR MARKET	
	Description of a typical working day in different professions	3
6.	VIDEOS AND DISCUSSION	6
7.	MEETING WITH PROFESSIONALS	2
8.	VISITING COMPANIES AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS	2
9.	INDIVIDUAL COUNSELLING	2
10.	MEETING WITH PARENTS	1
	<u>9th grade</u>	<u>34</u>
1.	SELF-ASSESSMENT	
1.1.	The interests and preferences of an individual in the process of choosing a profession	1
1.2.	The self-discovery and self-identification of an individual	2
1.3.	The characteristics and behavioural patterns of a successful person	2
2.	THE INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A PERSON AND THE CHOICE OF PROFESSION	
2.1.	The characteristics of professional types	3
3.	PLANNING THE ACTIONS	
3.1.	The descriptors of the preferable profession and individual characteristics	3
4.	PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AND THE LABOUR MARKET	
4.1.	The vocational educational system of the RA; the vocational educational institutions in the RA	2
4.2.	Juxtaposition of the demand and supply in the labour market	2
4.3.	The skills of making effective decisions	2
5.	PERSONAL GROWTH AND CAREER PLANNING	
5.1.	Career planning	2
5.2.	The eight key/universal European skills (competencies)	2
5.3.	Communication skills	2
6.	VIDEOS AND DISCUSSION	2
7.	MEETING WITH SPECIALISTS	3
8.	VISITING COMPANIES AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS	3

9.	INDIVIDUAL COUNSELLING	2
10.	MEETING WITH PARENTS	1
	<u>10th grade</u>	<u>34</u>
1.	PERSONAL GROWTH AND CAREER PLANNING	
1.1.	Career planning	1
1.2.	Motivation/reasons: training characteristics and methods	2
1.3.	Presentation skills	2
1.4.	The art of convincing	2
1.5.	Critical and analytical thinking	3
1.6.	Entrepreneurial skills	2
1.7.	Leadership, main characteristics, types and forms of expression	3
1.8.	Self-sustenance; self-regulation	2
1.9.	A productive team in the process of operating	3
1.10.	Conflict resolution skills	3
1.11.	Writing a CV and searching for a job	2
2.	VIDEOS AND DISCUSSION	1
3.	MEETING WITH SPECIALISTS	3
4.	VISITING COMPANIES AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS	3
5.	INDIVIDUAL COUNSELLING	1
6.	MEETING WITH PARENTS	1
	<u>11th grade</u>	<u>15</u>
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