

REVIEW OF NATIONAL CAREER DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT SYSTEMS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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PREFACE

The European Training Foundation (ETF) is the European Union Agency that supports countries outside the EU in improving their human capital development, in the context of European Union (EU) external relations policies. Currently, the ETF cooperates at country and regional level with the countries of the EU Neighbourhood and Enlargement regions, in Central Asia, and contributes to the EU's external policies and programmes at Pan-African level.

In 29 partner countries, the ETF contributes to the development of human capital by providing advice and support to the countries themselves and to the EU Delegations on the reform of education, training and employment policies and systems. This contributes to social well-being, stability and prosperity in the countries surrounding the European Union.

Review of the state of Career Development Support Systems in countries of the Western Balkans (WB)

Education, training and labour market systems are increasingly being challenged by global developments, such as new and rapidly changing technologies, the 4th Industrial Revolution, demographic changes and climate change. 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 globalisation by providing new opportunities, but also new risks, as does the green transition. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated and amplified existing trends and challenges.

Despite these uncertain developments, there is little doubt that a fast-evolving world and a changing labour market will require individuals to become lifelong learners, to acquire new competences to cope with change and to adapt and further develop existing competences. There is also a growing demand for valid information on changing labour markets and future prospects. This goes along with a growing need to support people in managing 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. Changes in delivery and developing the innovation capacity of career development support services are required to achieve deeper impact and empower individuals to manage their own career paths. Technology is already having an impact on traditional services, and the concept of career-management skills is increasingly gaining ground, not only in Europe but also on other continents.

In order to help countries respond to the challenges of the green and digital transition, the COVID-19 recovery and regional specificities such as brain drain, but also to inform national policies, practices and future EU and ETF activities in general, the ETF has reviewed the national career development support systems of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo¹, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. For these six countries, the ETF has also developed a regional synthesis report. The national reports were used as a source for the development of the regional synthesis report, which aims to provide of a clear and concise outline of the state of the national career development support systems in the six Western Balkan countries to allow for peer learning, and summarises key recommendations for further system development.

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The ETF would like to thank Ronald Sultana for this insightful synthesis report, which connects the national reviews with the wider lessons learned from reviews and research internationally. His work allowed this report to become a genuine source of peer learning and inspiration.

Special gratitude also goes to the national stakeholders from the public, private and civil society sectors as well as the donor community, since the national review reports are the foundation of this synthesis report. The national reports were developed through a highly participatory process involving all the relevant stakeholders in the consultation and validation processes.

The ETF therefore would like to express its sincere appreciation for the strong commitment of all country stakeholders in co-developing the national reports. The engagement observed during the national consultations and the degree of cooperation in providing access to information and feedback on draft reports reflect a high level of awareness among all stakeholders on the importance of career guidance.

The national reports are already used to inform the development of the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, as well as other EU and ETF activities. They constitute building blocks for closer cooperation between ETF and partner countries in this area.

The ETF extends its gratitude to Tibor Bors Borbély-Pecze as external peer reviewer, and to ETF internal peer reviewers and colleagues Cristina Mereuta, Outi Kärkkäinen, Ulrike Damyanovic, Simona Rinaldi, Mariavittoria Garlappi, Fabio Nascimbeni, Marie Dorleans, Lida Kita, Maria Rosenstock, Romain Boitard, Anthony Gribben, Evelyn Viertel, and Manuela Prina. The report was coordinated, supervised, and finalised by Florian Kadletz (ETF).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This synthesis draws on the country reports submitted to the European Training Foundation (ETF) by experts from the Western Balkan countries of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. The country papers were developed in a participatory process through desk research, interviews as well as consultation and validation meetings with all relevant national stakeholders, from ministries to civil society, practitioners, social partners and donors. COVID-19 restrictions have limited this interchange to online meetings and interviews or, at most, hybrid meetings. The synthesis report is informed by the outcomes of this process, and aims to support policy developments in the field of lifelong career guidance policies, systems and services at regional, country and sector level. Its findings and recommendations will also inform, inter alia, the implementation of the European Union (EU) Council Recommendation for Vocational Education and Training (VET), the Osnabrück Declaration and the EU Youth Guarantee Scheme in the countries in the region.

All six Western Balkan countries aspire to become members of the European Union, and all are at different stages of their journey towards fulfilling this aspiration. One of the key areas at the heart of the process of adhesion, as much as it is of governance generally, is the development of the conditions necessary for economic well-being, which is largely the outcome of the improved generation and distribution of wealth, in a context where good health, sound education, and responsible freedoms can thrive. Career guidance contributes to all this by providing the required labour market information that is the basis of wise decisions, the education and sometimes personalised advice that is necessary to make sense of the world of work and one's place in it, as well as the skills needed to manage the different transitions that a fast-changing world imposes on one and all alike. Many of these transitions are within and between the spheres of education, training and work, such that career guidance, seen from a life-course perspective, becomes a service offered on a lifelong and life-wide basis.

The report considers the situation of career guidance in the Western Balkans, focusing on some of the major themes that have emerged from the international reviews of the field in over 60 low-, middle- or high-income countries (e.g. OECD, 2004a; Sultana, 2004; Watts & Fretwell 2004; Sultana & Watts, 2007; Zelloth, 2009). These surveys, which constitute the largest database of knowledge about career guidance across the world, serve as a backdrop to reflect on the achievements of the six Western Balkan countries under review here, as well as on the remaining challenges.

Two chapters focus on current thinking regarding career development in response to COVID-19, on the ingredients required to cultivate progress in the design of guidance systems, policies and services, and on the contexts in which such progress can be attained. Following up on these are eight substantive chapters. Each starts with a summary of the main conclusions and insights emerging from the international reviews, followed by an account of the state of play in the Western Balkans. Each highlights policies and policy frameworks, as well as examples of initiatives and practices that others may be inspired by and perhaps emulate.

A central concern for the reviews is the extent to which a clear understanding and mindset exists as to how career education and guidance can contribute to the private and public good. It is on the basis of that understanding that countries and regions will have the motivation to review their policies and to update and renew them to respond to the present developments. This will serve to revisit goals, help the field strengthen its sense of direction, further specifying the responsibilities that the different sectors of public service are expected to fulfil. While some of the Western Balkan countries have developed policy instruments acknowledging the role of career guidance – instruments that include legal provisions as well as national strategies – many of these remain at the level of aspiration rather than implementation.

Policy frameworks that have been developed internationally have defined career guidance as a service that is provided on a lifelong basis, whenever and wherever it is required. Such lifelong provision requires different partners to work together, whether at intra- and inter-ministerial levels,

as well as between the public and the private sectors, and with and between community-based organisations. **Coordination and cooperation mechanisms** are therefore crucial in order to develop a systemic approach that ensures that the different elements and providers of the service are well integrated together, with the whole being greater than the sum of the parts. This has proved especially challenging not just for WB countries, but elsewhere too, with some efforts to set up stakeholder assemblies, such as National Guidance Forums, starting off well but losing steam soon thereafter. This results in fragmentation, ad hoc initiatives, costly overlaps and significant service gaps.

Even though users are not always aware of the services on offer, or experience those as being seamless, they nevertheless receive career guidance support, often at key transition points in their life. Some of the **main services and activities** that are to be found in the Western Balkans as elsewhere include career education and guidance at the different levels of the education sector (compulsory schooling, VET, and higher and further education), in the labour market sector (public and private employment services, enterprises), and in civil society (non-governmental organisations). A range of providers operate in these sub-systems, including educators, career and employment advisers, and human resource development specialists. Other categories of people are also drawn in to contribute to guidance-related activities and to share their knowledge and experience of work. These include parents, peers, alumni, as well as representatives from industry and trade unions. Most of these activities and providers were referred to in the WB reports, though in many cases the efforts and initiatives are either emergent or tied too closely to donor funding to ensure sustainability and scaling up. Some interesting new partnerships in the delivery of guidance services were also reported, chief among them being collaborative ventures with the media in order to promote awareness of the benefits of career planning and development.

Guidance services the world over rely mostly on the state for their **funding** streams. This is no less true in the Western Balkans, though here the allocation tends to be to sectors of which guidance is a part, rather than specifically to career guidance services. The lack of a dedicated budget line leaves the service starved of the required resources when authorities, priorities or circumstances change. Unlike some of the high-income countries internationally, there is neither the culture nor the economic base for private investment in guidance, whether by diversifying the offer through the market, or by having users pay for the service. Alternative sources of funding are the several donors and aid agencies that operate in the region, many of whom finance career guidance projects and initiatives.

Ensuring **access** to services has been another preoccupation in the international reviews. In most cases, and at best, those who benefit from career guidance are students at key transition points in their educational journey, as well as registered job seekers. Concerns have been expressed in many countries regarding the lack of opportunities for career guidance available to other groups of people, including those living in rural/remote areas, for instance, as well as to adults who, while being in employment, nevertheless wish to change their jobs in response to aspirations for career development. In the Western Balkans, challenges to access are mostly met by community-based organisations, who are often nimbler in identifying and responding to the needs of particular groups, many of which experience vulnerability in their daily lives. Efforts to make career guidance services ubiquitous and part of the woof and warp of daily life are still incipient in most Western Balkan countries, though a number of promising initiatives are also reported.

Among these initiatives are those that make effective use of information **technology** to bring career-related information to the public and private space. When this technology is well-designed and facilitates interactivity, then the opportunities for access to a broad range of career-related services – from self-assessment to career learning and exploration – are at the fingertips of most users, especially where, as in the Western Balkans, broadband coverage is extensive, and many have the digital skills required.

Proliferation of services and increasing access to them does not automatically result in improved **quality**. The latter can be attained by having well-trained, reflective practitioners, by establishing a set of standards and procedures to ensure that benchmarks and ethical conduct are respected, and by embedding a monitoring and evaluation function across the whole range of services offered. Reasonable staff-to-client ratios are also necessary if a quality service is to be provided. Few of these

criteria are currently met in the Western Balkan countries under review, although all of them feature promising initiatives that are harbingers of what may come about if sufficient attention and investment is directed towards the field.

Despite differences in the quality of provision across countries worldwide, it is unlikely that any can claim that they do not have **service gaps**, or that they have tapped into all **potentials and opportunities**. This is also certainly true of the Western Balkans, where some groups benefit from a service that is presently denied to others, where guidance, at best, is provided at key transition points rather than in a lifelong manner, and where some truly promising initiatives are dissipated rather than generalised when donor funding dries up.

It needs to be acknowledged that the topic of career guidance has been on the radar in the region for the past two decades or so, thanks partly to EU funds, as an integral part of education and labour market reform programmes. The synthesis, and the country reviews on which it is based, therefore provide an insight into what is still an emergent field in the Western Balkans, where sophisticated approaches using some of the most up-to-date strategies and resources can be found alongside more basic services, where these exist at all. That the former has taken root is an indication that there is a readiness and capacity to make progress and to search for **the way forward**. Here the Western Balkan countries, individually and perhaps as a region as well, need to set clear **priorities** for action and system development in the short-, medium-, and long-term. Chief among these priorities is the establishment of a clear, overarching set of goals and strategies for the field, governed by an action plan whose implementation is carefully monitored and adequately resourced. Strategic leadership is however required to steer this process, and for that more investment in capacity building needs to be made. Most importantly, career learning needs to be firmly embedded in schools at all levels, as this is one of the best ways to reach a whole generation, and to promote reflexivity about oneself in relation to work, to explore options and opportunities and to develop the skills required to plan and make wise and informed decisions, choices, and transitions.

None of the country reports, and consequently neither the synthesis presented herewith, claim to be comprehensive or grounded in methodologically rigorously collected data. Nevertheless, the wide consultation engaged in by the surveys suggests that the thematic presentations as well as the conclusions reached are robust enough to serve as a basis for important conversations between policy makers, providers, citizens and stakeholders at all levels of society. It is thanks to such conversations that the way forward can be charted in a world where change is the order of the day.

1. INTRODUCTION

The growth of new forms of work, such as ‘platform economy’ has created flexible relationships between employers and employees, and between service providers and users. At the same time, technological developments, digitalisation and artificial intelligence force people to change jobs more frequently. This implies new types of non-standard forms of work and non-linear careers for people in the labour market. As work has become increasingly intense, more flexible education and training systems for upskilling and reskilling will be needed to meet the evolving skills needs (e.g. Payton, 2017; Kato, Galán-Muros & Weko, 2020). The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020) recommends that targeted labour market interventions and broader access to PES are critical to maintain the employability and job-readiness of vulnerable groups. Labour market participation can also be encouraged with inclusive and gender-sensitive approaches.

Many countries are currently working intensively to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic and developing programmes and policies towards recovery with the support of international institutions and organisations. Within the recovery, career guidance and career development can enhance re-employment and longer-term labour market engagement, such as by supporting individuals in their efforts to retrain, find new jobs or develop new businesses (ILO/ETF, 2021). In these circumstances, career development support systems must look beyond providing information about existing job opportunities or choosing an education or career. It is necessary to employ a stronger systemic approach in transforming the career development support systems and connect them with lifelong learning and skills strategies in accordance with ongoing changes in society.

A key success factor in defining relevant priorities in the recovery strategies is accurate knowledge about career development support and solid evidence on its impact and outcomes for wider community development. Partnerships with providers, employers and key stakeholders are crucial in achieving the necessary political support, wide participation, and engagement in the recovery process. A structured rationale and framework for national system development has emerged from a series of international reviews on career development support systems (e.g. OECD, 2004a; Sultana, 2004; Watts & Fretwell 2004; Sultana & Watts, 2007; Zelloth, 2009). These reviews examined national career development support policies, systems, delivery modes and mechanisms.

Building on experience from previous international reviews, this report introduces a process in six Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Serbia) showing how national reviews can be used in identifying priorities for the continuous improvement of national career development support systems and in engaging key stakeholders for further cooperation. In documenting the review process, countries were already applying the new ILO/ETF review model for career development support services based on a ‘Theory of Change for Systems and Policy’. This report presents findings from the six national review reports as well as parallel evidence from previous international evaluations of national career development support systems in a range of countries.

This report presents the rationale for the country reviews, the features of the Theory of Change (ToC) review model, examples of national career development support practices and policies in accordance with the review model key features, remaining challenges and recommendations for further actions. The report illustrates the added value of ongoing national review processes and how they are already contributing to system and policy development.

2. RETHINKING CAREER DEVELOPMENT²

Demographic change, new ways of working, internationalisation and the reconfiguration of work have profound implications for society and the skills that the labour market needs. These changes have also impacted on the concept of 'career'. Instead of a 'job for life', a career can be defined as an individual life path with multiple transitions in learning, work and in other settings where individual capacities and competences are learned and/or used. This implies that education and learning are no longer simply about the transition to adulthood, but increasingly involve lifelong learning, which implies that career guidance needs to innovate to remain effective (ETF, 2020).

The ILO's Commission for the Future of Work calls for the use of technology in support of decent work through an agenda which puts workers' rights and the needs and aspirations of all people at the heart of economic, social and environmental policies (ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, 2019). The Commission also recognises that employment is key to social integration, while at the same time providing individuals with dignity and purpose. Although technology provides considerable employment opportunities to youth worldwide, many young people are starting their careers in a less secure employment environment than the previous generation (Global Commission on the Future of Work, 2018; ETF, 2021a, b). In some cases, this is being regarded as a disruption caused by technological change.

The increasing complexity in the world of work has implications for how individuals experience transitions (Cedefop, 2016) and for the level of support they need in entering and re-entering the labour market. The lockdown measures during the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted on business activities in different sectors, widened inequalities, disrupted education and undermined confidence in the future (OECD, 2020; UNICEF & ETF, 2020; ILO, 2020). On the skills supply side, those who lost their jobs need to upskill or retrain to find work. On the demand side, in addition to the adoption of digital technologies, there is an increasing demand for high-level skills. Within the recovery, career guidance can enhance re-employment and longer-term labour market engagement, by supporting individuals in their efforts to retrain, find new jobs or develop new businesses (ILO/ETF, 2021). From the migration angle, career guidance is called upon to play a role by the UN Global Compact for Orderly and Safe Migration (2018), which clearly addresses skills and employability of migrants as a central area of concern. Objectives 1 and 18 specifically point out the need to 'Invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences', and to include the criterion of skills in the context of data collection.

Wider policy interest for career development has emerged from a series of international reviews on the organisation, management and delivery of career services and how career development contributes to wider policy goals in education and in the labour market. The first global OECD 14-country career guidance review in 2000 (OECD, 2004) was followed by parallel reviews using the same or slightly modified instruments (Sultana, 2004; Watts & Fretwell 2004; Zelloth, 2009). The reviews and subsequent recommendations have acted as a catalyst for structured collaborative initiatives between international organisations. The OECD and the European Commission produced a handbook (OECD 2004b) for policy makers, while a similar handbook addressed low and middle-income countries (ILO, 2006). The recommendations have been further elaborated within eight International Symposia on Career Development and Public Policy (Watts, Bezanson & McCarthy, 2014). The Symposia communiqués have summarised the progress made in participating countries with subsequent recommendations for further national initiatives. The international reviews have also generated a comprehensive methodology and criteria for benchmarking and assessing career development policy implementation (McCarthy & Borbely-Pecze, 2021).

² This chapter draws from the ILO synthesis report based on the joint ETF-ILO approach to system reviews: https://www.ilo.org/skills/areas/skills-policies-and-systems/WCMS_834868/lang--en/index.htm

In July 2021, the Inter-Agency Working Group on Career Guidance (WGCG), with members from six international organisations – namely CEDEFOP, ETF, EC, ILO, OECD, and UNESCO) – published a joint statement on the importance of investing in career guidance. According to the WGCG, career guidance plays an essential part in helping people of all ages and backgrounds to navigate future working life. Investments in career guidance can be expected to provide positive economic, educational and social returns both to individuals and society (Cedefop et al., 2021).

3. CONTEXT FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT SERVICES AND LINKS WITH LIFELONG LEARNING

Context matters when considering career development support services, as it does for much else (Herr, 2008). As several researchers have noted, **demography** is an important factor that shapes career services: it makes a difference whether the population of a particular country is an ageing one, or whether young people constitute a majority (Bergmo-Prvulovic, 2017); and it also makes a difference if the local economy and labour market are vibrant and attractive enough to absorb new workers, or whether many are obliged to consider migration as an option (Fejes et al., 2021; ETF, 2021). **Scale** matters too, and there are significant differences in terms of offering career guidance in small states with a population of 1 to 3 million people, and large states with several million, where a complex division of labour prevails, having implications for employers, employees and self-employed persons alike (Sultana, 2010; Alexander, 2015). Similarly, patterns of distribution of people in rural and urban environments have an impact on the range of employment opportunities available, and on the extent to which specialisation is required or positively valued (Rosvall, 2020).

It also matters if the labour market is organised in a **formal** manner, with clear and meritocratic recruitment processes based on an individual's credentials that enjoy legitimacy, credibility, and equivalence in relation to a national qualification framework ... or whether instead it is characterised by high levels of informality, where the job-getting process works quite differently, and where who you know might matter more than what you know (Ribeiro, 2018). Here too, **culture** plays an important role in providing contexts for career services. Homogenous societies with a single dominant ethnic group, for instance, do not face the same challenges as heterogenous societies when it comes to tackling such issues as discrimination and stereotyping, both of which career guidance attempts to address. Furthermore, individualistic societies differ significantly from collectivist ones (Hofstede, 2001). The former tend to value choice and personal fulfilment over communitarian needs and gender-based traditions. Collectivist societies, on the other hand, tend to give more importance to the wishes and aspirations of parents and extended family elders, possibly leading career guidance as understood in mainstream, metropolitan countries to be erroneously seen as less important, or even irrelevant. This, of course, is problematic at a number of levels, including in relation to the right of individuals to have their own aspirations when it comes to choosing and progressing in and through work, and in relation to supplying the skills needs of the economy. Families, while potentially playing an important role in the career development of their offspring, can also have partial labour market information, and can moreover reinforce gender and other stereotypes that professional career guidance would avoid.

All these factors – demography, scale, formality of labour markets, and culture – play an important part in helping us make sense of the situation of career development services in the Western Balkans, and provide the reader with a key to understanding the dynamics involved as these feature in this synthesis report. These factors interact with each other to create specific environments, and we will consider them both separately and jointly within the three main headings of the contextual chapters of the country reports, namely demography, labour markets, and systems overview.³

³ The data cited in this section is based on several sources referred to in the country reports, *inter alia* [i] for Albania: ETF (2021c), IMF (2021), Statista (2021); [ii] for Bosnia & Herzegovina: ETF (2021d), European Commission (2019), Agency for Work and Employment of BiH (2021); [iii] for Kosovo*: World Bank (2020), European Commission (2021), ETF (2019); [iv] for North Macedonia: World Bank (2021), Ministry of Finance (2020), ETF (2019); [v] for Montenegro: European Commission (2021), World Bank (2018), Montenegrin Employers Federation (2016); [vi] for Serbia: ILO (2021), ETF (2021e), Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2021).

3.1 Demography

The demographic profiles of the six Western Balkan countries that feature in this report differ from each other in a number of ways. Serbia is the largest, with a population close to 7 million, while Montenegro is the smallest, counting little more than 620 000 people. Kosovo* and North Macedonia come next, each with 1.8 million inhabitants, followed by Albania (2.8 million), and Bosnia & Herzegovina (3.5 million).

Population size has implications for career guidance, in terms, for instance, of the range of occupations available, the need for generalists over specialists, and the way that a sense of self is developed in relation to career planning. Other consequences include the limited number of specialised national experts in particular fields, and the fact that small states are more likely to be policy takers than policy makers. Scale, however, is just one aspect of demography. Another is the **age pyramid**. 70% of Kosovo's* inhabitants are under 35 years of age, making it the country with the youngest population in Europe, even if it has a declining birth rate and high emigration rates. Serbia, Montenegro, and Albania all have ageing populations, with the share of youth in the labour market decreasing. This trend is exacerbated in some cases by the tendency of young people to leave their country. This is the case with Albania (where the best educated and most qualified go to EU countries or the USA), Montenegro (where high rates of internal and external migration are reported), and Kosovo* (which reports a declining school age population that cannot be explained solely by declining birth rates). As many as 47% of youths in Bosnia & Herzegovina plan to leave their country to find work elsewhere. Half a million left the country in the 10 years up to 2019, with 51% of residents now living abroad, making the BiH diaspora one of the largest in Europe. Needless to say, all this has significant implications for career guidance, in terms of when to offer the services, to whom, and for what purpose. Some would argue that career guidance has an ethical imperative to try to stem the brain drain, despite the attractiveness of the concept of freedom of movement (Blake & Brock, 2016).

A further aspect of demography that has consequences for career services is **ethnic composition** which, as recent Western Balkan history has reminded us, can be both a source of cultural diversity and pride, but of conflict as well. Bosnia & Herzegovina is the most heterogenous, with 50.1% of Bosniaks, 30.8% of Serbs, 15.4% of Croats, and 3.7% making up the rest. Kosovo* and to a lesser extent North Macedonia also have a diverse ethnic composition, though in their case there is a distinct majority of one group over another. 92% of Kosovars identify as Albanian (compared to 4% who are Serbs, and another 4% who are members of other minorities); 64% of North Macedonians identify as Macedonians (compared to 25% who are Albanians). All six Western Balkan countries have sizeable populations of Roma people, who tend to earn their livelihood outside the mainstream. Such diversity requires the development of career guidance services that acknowledge and respond to a range of needs as well as differences in approach to work.

Finally, as many of the international reviews of career guidance have shown (Watts, 2014; Vuorinen, 2021), the distribution of a country's population between **rural** and **urban centres** is an important factor to consider when planning, designing, and delivering guidance services. As the report from Serbia notes, where Belgrade is home to more than one third of the population, most economic opportunities are found in the capital city. This also explains the urban drift in Kosovo (where the percentage of rural dwellers went down 12 percentage points in as many years), and in Albania (where 67% now live in urban areas). Considerations here would include ensuring similar standards of service in both urban and rural areas, as well as information, advice and guidance that is sensitive to the diverse nature of labour markets, and hence more fit for purpose.

3.2 Labour markets

Two preliminary factors need to be highlighted when considering the nature of labour markets in the six Western Balkan countries (WB6). First, it is important to recall that, during the Cold War, most of the countries in the Balkans were led by communist governments, even if historically there were important distinctions between them, particularly in relation to the Yugoslav republics of Slovenia and

Croatia, which were more western-oriented. While that now seems like a distant past, it does help explain the rather recent history of interest in career guidance in the region. As has been noted by a number of researchers (Sultana, 2007; Borbély-Pecze et al., 2022), the **collectivist nature** of socialist ideology encouraged citizens to give precedence to their country's needs, often in relation to meeting economic and social goals declared in periodic development plans. Personal preference came second to such goals, and as a consequence there seemed to be little use for career guidance, which at best languished as a sub-discipline of vocational and differential psychology, if at all.

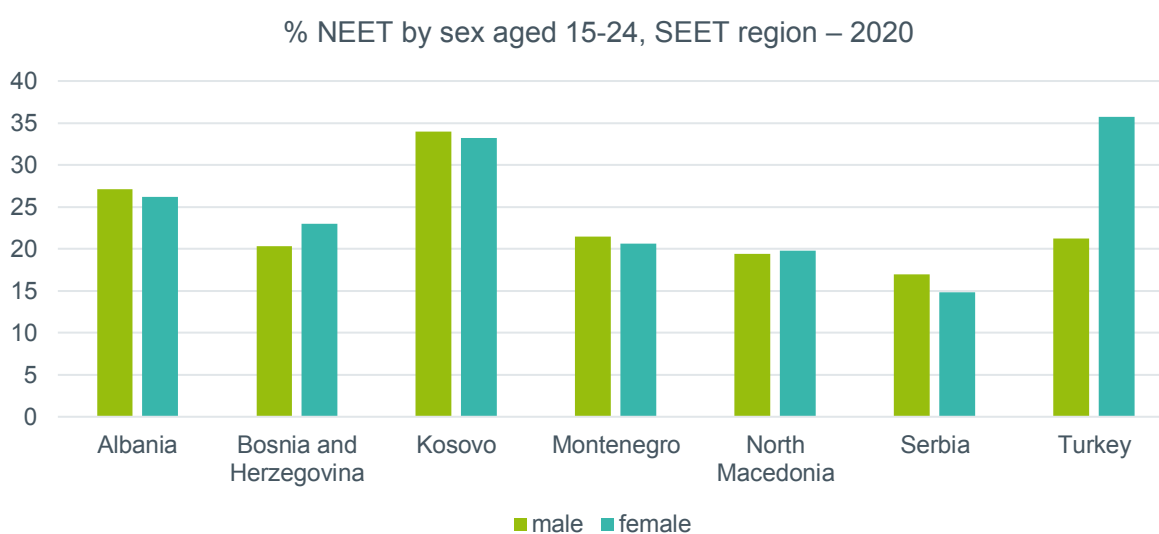
Second is the fact that four of the WB6 – namely Montenegro, Albania, Serbia, and North Macedonia – are **candidate countries** aspiring to enter the EU. Two – Bosnia & Herzegovina and Kosovo – are **potential candidates**. All therefore have an eye on emulating EU practice, which, in any case, is a requirement as aspirant countries need to integrate the *Acquis Communautaire* before gaining accession, thus coming into line with the accumulated legislation, legal acts and court decisions that constitute the body of EU law. Intensified interaction with EU Member States – through such channels as peer learning visits, collaboration in research projects, participation in networks, and funding to develop particular services – serves to drive policy into a particular direction, entailing a series of macroeconomic, fiscal, legal and social reforms. This also applies to the restructuring of the economy, and hence of the labour market, not least in order to integrate better with EU aspirations to become the most competitive knowledge-based region in the world, where lifelong learning and geographical mobility, among others, are expected to give the Union an edge in a globalised world. Such aspirations have implications for career guidance as well, which is increasingly also seen from a lifelong perspective, and considered to be a useful mechanism to ensure a better fit between demand and supply of skills, besides also supporting personal development and satisfaction at work (Barnes et al., 2020a).

The present ETF review is another such instrument that supports the process of adhesion, in that it invites the WB6 to consider their guidance services in the light of what is happening in the field across Europe, and beyond. A number of labour market-specific contextual factors stand out from the individual country reports submitted by the national experts. In what follows we highlight some of the most salient.

- First is the fact that **small and medium-sized enterprises** (SMEs), as well as micro- and family-run businesses, tend to be the backbone of the economies of the WB6. In Albania, for instance, 87.9% of enterprises employ fewer than 10 persons. This has significant implications for career guidance. Recruitment tends to be based on personal knowledge of candidates, with such knowledge being shared within extended family and community circles. Pressures to continue with the family business can run high, and multi-functionality and flexible generalisation is often prized over specialisation (Farrugia & Attard, 1989). This does not render career guidance less important, but it does raise questions as to whether the way guidance is conceived in relation to career development in large enterprises needs to be reconsidered. SME realities impact on the way one's career identity is shaped, with factors other than personal aspirations coming into play, given that people's futures are rather more a function of opportunity and of connections than of merit and long-term planning. SMEs are also unlikely to have the resources to support career development at work and therefore the role of supporting partners like intermediaries needs to be leveraged. Furthermore, they are less likely to be resilient to shocks: two-thirds of all SMEs in Serbia, for instance, were severely interrupted due to the pandemic.
- Another important feature of the labour markets in the WB6 that impacts on career guidance services is their **informality** – even if wage subsidies during the pandemic encouraged employers to formalise (as in Montenegro). The numbers are very telling: 18.7% of Serbian workers can be found in this sector, with 30-40% estimated to work without contracts or social security, while close to 20% of businesses do not pay tax. The informal economy generates 30% of GDP in Montenegro, and 34% of GDP in Bosnia & Herzegovina. One in four Kosovars work in precarious employment. Informal labour markets have their own logic when it comes to recruitment and career development, one that differs from the logic underpinning mainstream career guidance as understood in metropolitan countries with advanced economies (Ribeiro, 2018). While one has to be cautious of setting up the latter as the undisputed standard against which all other practices are judged and to which all services must comply, the fact remains that career guidance as currently understood

requires a high degree of formality in the labour market. Recognised qualifications, which reliably and convincingly signal the mastery of specific skills, help identify and distribute talent in response to clearly identified needs in the economy, thus presumably ensuring meritocracy as well as efficiency, promoting both personal and common good. As the Kosovo* expert report noted, informality tends to entrench inequalities. It also contributes to a situation where the public sector becomes more attractive than the private one, especially if average wages in the former are 40-50% higher than in the latter. This can exert a disruptive effect on the labour market and on overall competitiveness. The same holds true for Bosnia & Herzegovina (BiH). Therefore, in contexts of labour market informality, career guidance still has an important role to play. It can not only help individuals develop their skills profile in relation to changing opportunities to move into formality, but also alert them to their rights, playing an important advocacy role, because the problem is less that people are working in the informal sector, but that they remain there.

- Informality in the labour market can also contribute to significant challenges in terms of **youth employment**. All WB6 report high levels of youths aged 15 to 24 not in education, employment or training (NEET). In Serbia, 15.9% are classified as NEETs, and on average, these youths remain in this category for a whole year or longer, and when they do find work, they tend to earn less than their workmates. In Montenegro, NEET numbers have grown from 16.2% in 2018 to 21.1% in 2020. In Kosovo, as many as 33.6% fall into the NEET category. Young people find it difficult to access the labour market, find a stable job, and to remain in employment. Transitions to work in Serbia are reported to take two years and more, compared to the EU average of 6.5 months. The duration of this transition is even longer for women, and for those living in rural regions. It should be noted in this context that all six Western Balkan countries have committed themselves to prepare and implement the EU Youth Guarantee Scheme to address the high level of youth unemployment, and NEETs in particular, in which career guidance and career education feature prominently. The current review provides input in this.

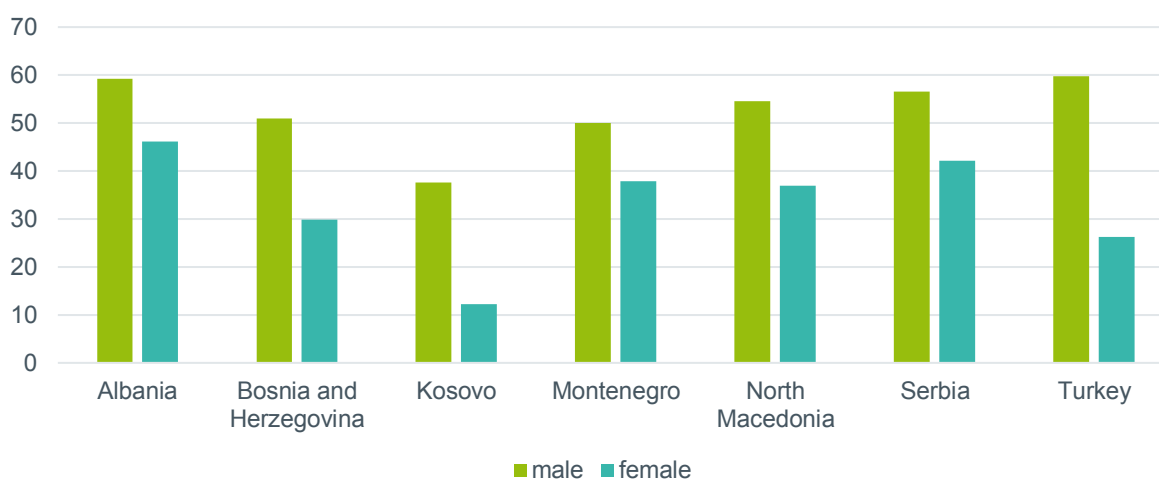


Source: country reports

- **Qualifications** seem to be less effective in opening up career pathways, even if they do increase the probability of employment. In Serbia, for instance, one in three University graduates could not find employment in 2018. In 2020, as many as 39% of Serbian 20-29-year-olds with tertiary qualifications felt that they were overqualified, and 35% of 15-30-year-olds considered that they occupied positions requiring lower qualifications. Among 15-34-year-olds, 42% considered that they worked in jobs unrelated to their course of studies. Similar patterns were reported by Kosovo, where more and more young people opted for higher education, since they saw this as increasing their chances of employment, even if this was in jobs requiring lower skills.

- High rates of **unemployment, long-term unemployment, and underemployment** are in evidence across all six WB countries, where women tend to be more affected. **Gender gaps** exist not only in employment (up to 16% difference in Albania, for instance), but also in terms of pay. Labour force participation for women tends to be lower than the EU average: in Montenegro, less than half of women aged 15-64 are employed; while in Albania, the employment rate is 15% higher for men. Discrimination as well as lack of child care facilities and labour laws make it difficult to reconcile work and family life (Serbia, Kosovo).

% employment rate by sex aged 15+, SEET region – 2020



These and similar statistics, together with the observation made constantly by all local experts that there is a serious mismatch between skills supply and demand, and that VET remains a second and inferior option, would clearly suggest that career guidance has an important role to play, even if it cannot be considered a panacea for all ills (Hooley, 2014). It goes without saying that career guidance has to be an integral part of ongoing education and labour market reforms in the countries in the region, with particular reference to the Osnabrück Declaration and the VET Council Recommendation.

3.3 System overviews

As noted earlier, the roots of career guidance in the WB6 do not go deep, not least for a number of historical reasons, even if significant exceptions can be found across the broader region, beyond the WB6. While all the latter have had public employment services for a while, most of these focus on job placement, while career development support has remained rudimentary in both labour market and education sectors (Sweet, 2006). This is slowly changing, with career learning and career guidance coming increasingly into its own. National expert reports suggest that a number of issues and features of the national systems of career guidance can be highlighted.

- Many of the WB countries have given more policy attention to career guidance, with some developing a national strategy specific to the sector, integrating considerations of career guidance in many strategic and legal documents, as well as laws of all levels of education. Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo* would be illustrative of this trend. However, as the report from North Macedonia notes, these initiatives tend to remain a collection of elements in a disparate number of legislative and strategic documents, rarely making it beyond the declarative to the implementation stage.
- More progress has been achieved in providing career learning opportunities in the education rather than labour market sector, with many integrating career management skills within/across curricula, or offering the programme as an extra-curricular activity. Most of these are however optional rather

than mandatory courses. There is nevertheless an increasing acknowledgement of the fact that career learning should start early, and should be provided lifelong, with some – as in the case of Serbia – requiring schools to offer career guidance, even if the training, resources and follow-through needed are either weak or missing. Interestingly, and bucking the international trend to ignore the value of career guidance in the VET sector (Watts, 2009), Albania has ensured that career education becomes an integral part of vocational school curricula, complemented by extra-curricular activities, with a unit providing CG services in each vocational institution. An important consideration here would be the tendency to use CG to steer individuals and groups towards the VET sector, without much regard to their personal aspirations.

- Much of the development in career guidance services is driven by international donor funding, with some NGOs and community-based organisations developing home-grown initiatives and advanced skills in the area, creating context-relevant resources, and spear-heading deeper appreciation of the benefits of career guidance in the public sector as well. The down-side of this is that many of these initiatives fail to go to scale, and are often forgotten once the funding cycle comes to an end. Significantly, even those projects and initiatives that were endorsed and/or funded by government have been discontinued. This is the case with Kosovo's* National CG Resource Centre (initially staffed by representatives from the Ministries of Labour, of Youth, and of Education), and with Montenegro's Centres for Professional Services (CIPS) which were opened in nearly one-third of municipalities and which, despite being very promising, have been wound down.
- While quality issues have been given consideration in some countries (e.g. CG standards developed in Serbia in 2019), many of the service providers have only received rudimentary training, if at all. There are few, if any, instances of generally accepted guidelines for providing career guidance.
- Despite increasing awareness on the part of policy makers of the potential benefits of career guidance, the emphasis seems to be on the supply rather than demand side. This could be accounted for in a number of ways, including, among others, lack of knowledge of what CG entails on the part of the general public, and lack of relevance of CG in a labour market system marked by informality.

It is worth noting that many of these issues and features appear in an earlier ETF Western Balkan synthesis report (Sweet, 2006), suggesting that they are systemic in nature, even if progress in some areas is most encouraging (Zelloth, 2009; Regional Cooperation Council, 2021). In the following chapters we will look at many of these aspects in greater depth and detail, providing insights as to how and why such challenges exist, while also highlighting initiatives that bear promise in moving the field forward.

4. POLICY FRAMEWORKS – THE BACKBONE OF NATIONAL CAREER DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT SYSTEMS

One of the main conclusions of the country reviews carried out by the OECD, the World Bank, CEDEFOP, ETF, and DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion from the year 2000 onwards (see Watts, 2014 for an overview) was that strategic leadership was necessary in order to develop appropriate policy frameworks. The latter ensures a sense of direction and coordination between multiple actors, given that contemporary guidance approaches require different services to work together in a way that responds to career development needs over the life-course and in response to global crises and geopolitical developments.

4.1 A wide range of policy instruments

Policy documents that set out a framework for the organisation and delivery of career guidance services can either be part of a larger strategy such as education or employment (or both), or can focus specifically on career guidance itself. In the former case, and in the best of cases, the vision for career guidance as articulated across the different strategies and legal provisions is consistent (in terms, for instance, of seeing it from a lifelong and life-wide perspective rather than restricted to key transition points, or in terms of promoting gender equality in access to the labour market, or in attending to the specific needs of citizens suffering from disabilities). Despite being embedded in broader policy documents, or expressed in different laws, therefore, a clear sense of direction is communicated, instituting career guidance as an entitlement, allocating funds to it, and establishing standards of service.

However, even keeping in mind the fact that there is often a significant difference between the goals declared in policy documents, and what is actually implemented on the ground (Honig, 2006), it is often the case that there is little congruence between the different sectors, leaving career guidance without a clear sense of direction. In this chapter, therefore, we will look at the range of policy instruments that have been developed in the six Western Balkan countries under consideration. We will note that thus far, two countries – **Kosovo*** and **Montenegro** – have promulgated a strategy specifically focusing on career guidance. **Serbia**, on its part, has a ‘Strategy for Career Guidance and Counselling with Action Plan 2010-2014’. While its action plan has formally expired, the Strategy is still ongoing. The other three countries mention career guidance in several national sectoral strategies and action plans which, however, often remain disconnected from each other. This goes a long way towards explaining why career guidance remains a fledgling service which, despite several significant achievements (Zelloth, 2009), requires a more explicitly articulated framework as well as knowledgeable leadership.

4.1.1 Policy frameworks that include career guidance

Given the aspirations of the Western Balkan countries to join the European Union, it is to be expected that an overarching policy approach is articulated in line with the different goals and targets that need to be reached by all candidate countries. In attempting to conform to the *Acquis*, the Western Balkan countries have developed a number of sectoral strategies, focusing on such key areas as the economy, employment, and education, with many of these referring directly or indirectly to career guidance.

The Republic of Serbia, for instance, has committed itself to a major Economic Reform Programme (2021-2023) that includes reforms in education and training, many of which set out to ensure a better match between the supply and demand of skills. Career guidance is here considered to be one of the means by which such aspirations can be reached. Serbia has also adopted a number of national strategies in such sectors as education, employment, and youth, where career guidance is referred to explicitly as a way to further such goals as social inclusion, labour market mobility, and the

accreditation of prior learning. While a national Strategy for Career Guidance and Counselling exists, the Action Plan regulating its implementation has not taken off the ground. Even so, the different policy documents maintain a consistent commitment to developing the field, at least in a declarative fashion. Much the same can be said of the Economic Reform Programme (2021-2023) developed by **Montenegro**, which prescribes the provision of career guidance in primary and secondary schools, and which acts as a compass for all the other strategies developed in the country, given that they are required to be in line with it.

Similarly, in **Albania**, career guidance features in the National Strategy for Employment and Skills (2019-2022), and is tightly linked to legal provisions concerning VET, where career guidance is considered to be a legal obligation. In **Montenegro**, several laws refer to one or more aspects of career guidance, though the lack of synchronisation between them is evident even in the terms used to refer to and define the field.

Other policy instruments that help develop a systematic understanding of career guidance in terms of what it entails, why it can be beneficial, and to whom, include curricular frameworks that mandate the teaching of career management skills (Sultana, 2012a; Hooley et al., 2013). This is the case with **Kosovo***, for instance, where the topic 'life and work' is expected to feature at all levels of pre-university education, with legal provisions also requiring all VET school programmes to include career guidance. Similarly, the law regulating the NGO sector encourages municipalities to offer services that help young people to be purposeful in the way they consider their future. Notwithstanding all this, the lack of a comprehensive plan for career guidance leads to a situation where, while referred to in a range of documents – such as the National Development Strategy (2016-2021), the Education Strategic Plan (2017-2021), the Sector Strategy on Employment and Social Welfare (2018-2022), and the Strategy for Youth (2019-2023) – little in fact seems to be done to drive the field into a specific direction, even if some themes do keep recurring.

In other cases, however, the sheer number of issues that are addressed in an overarching policy framework, or the specific laws that consider career guidance in relation to a particular sector or service, lead to a piecemeal approach where the different elements do not communicate with each other. Such is the case with **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, for instance, where over 62 laws govern the education and employment sectors, and where career guidance either features briefly and superficially, or not at all. The situation is rendered more challenging due to the decentralised nature of the country, where the various cantons differ in their understanding of the importance or relevance of guidance, and in the efforts they make to promote it. In some cases, services are designed for specific categories of people, such as the long-term unemployed or those with disabilities, but this only leads to further fragmentation. Such fragmentation persists despite the existence of an interdepartmental working group, set up in the Federation of BiH in 2014 and led by the Ministry of Education and Science, whose role is to propose strategic directions for the development of career guidance as well as relevant action plans.

Similarly in **North Macedonia**, while one sector of the education system has given career guidance due attention, specifying a detailed programme for students in the 8th and 9th grade within its report on the implementation of its national Education Strategy, there is no mention of the service in the Law regulating secondary schools, or the Law on Youth, even if the plan to implement the Youth Guarantee (Tosun et al., 2019) sets great store by it. Career guidance is then referred to briefly in the Law on Vocational Education and in the Law on Adult Education, with the Law on Higher Education requiring universities to establish career centres. Career guidance is not referred to in the Adult Education Strategy (2019-2023), but features in the law regulating PES activities, as well as in the new Employment Strategy (2021-2027) where career guidance and career development are not only mentioned, but the benefits that can accrue from it – such as a better match between demand and supply of skills – are carefully defined, and specific ways of improving the service – such as through adequate staff training and the expanded use of digital tools – are set out. Such uneven investment appears to be on the way of being addressed, if not overcome, precisely because there is an overarching education strategy and action plan, spanning the years 2018-2025. Here more consistency becomes apparent, with a more systemic approach enabling the identification of both those sectors where the service is relatively strong, and those in which it is weak or even absent.

4.1.2 Policy frameworks that focus specifically on career guidance

In some countries, broader policy frameworks give rise to a specific focus on career guidance, leading to the drawing up of a strategy, and in some cases the promulgation of laws and by-laws that set out specific goals as well as means to attain those goals.

A Lifelong Career Guidance Strategy in Montenegro

Montenegro's umbrella strategy for career guidance has undergone three iterations, one in 2011-2015, the other in 2016-2020, and the more recent one taking in 2021-2023. Multiple stakeholders were involved in designing the strategies, including the Ministry of Education in the lead, working together with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the National VET Agency, the Bureau for Educational Services, the University of Montenegro, the Public Employment Service, VET schools, the Employers' Federation, and the Chamber of Economy. The Strategy is informed by a number of key goals, including the following:

1. Teachers, pupils, students, parents and adults should be better informed about opportunities for career counselling and career development.
2. Career guidance and counselling in education settings should be reformed through, among others, the design of new programmes for different age groups, with due attention being given to the training of staff implementing these programmes.
3. Quality assurance of career guidance and counselling.
4. Enhanced intersectoral cooperation among all those offering career guidance services.

Source: National Review Report Montenegro, 2022

While in most cases in the Western Balkans, therefore, there is a disconnect between policy documents as regards career guidance, there are cases where a programme (such as the EU-funded Youth Guarantee), an agency (such as Euroguidance), an institution (such as a university), or a project (often led by an entrepreneurial NGO), can provide an umbrella that helps bring different stakeholders together. This, to some extent, makes up for the lack of coordination at more formal policy levels, though the sustainability and longevity of such focal points is likely to be limited.

5. COORDINATION AND COOPERATION MECHANISMS

The lifelong career guidance approach, by its very nature, requires several social institutions to work together so that users experience the service in a seamless and meaningful way throughout their life. It involves the education and employment sectors, where much of the interaction between service provider and client takes place. Generally speaking, and this is also the case for the Western Balkans, other ministries have an interest in career guidance, including those catering for youth, social inclusion, and gender affairs. It can also involve the national office of statistics, which provides labour market information, employer bodies and trade unions, as well as several public and private agencies that work with young people and adults in the community. Especially in the context of low- to middle-income countries, a whole variety of international agencies – such as the ILO and ETF – as well as national agencies of EU Member States – such as the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) – support or fund projects that are often at the cutting edge in the way they organise and provide services.

In some ways, such variety can be a strength, leading to innovation and a variegated service that is more responsive to the specificity of contexts and to the needs of different groups. International research has however shown that, for this diversity to be positive and productive, there needs to be extensive coordination and cooperation between the different providers. In the absence of that, an overarching strategy is difficult, if not impossible, to develop, implement and monitor. Furthermore, datasets about labour market realities and education pathways remain unconnected, rendering it more difficult for users to see the links between their aspirations, what education and training credentials they require, and the occupational opportunities that exist. The provision of information, advice and guidance in an integrated manner, whether online or face-to-face, represents a challenge that is difficult to overcome when there is only partial access to required data, and where staff with diverse expertise are located in different institutional settings. From the point of view of the user, the service offer appears complex and not transparent, and hence difficult to access and benefit from.

This is precisely why several countries have attempted to bring the different providers and stakeholders together, in an effort to overcome fragmentation, develop a national guidance strategy, and ensure that in this framework, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Many have in fact set up a National Guidance Forum in order to facilitate such inter-sectoral coordination and collaboration, avoid wasteful duplication of resources, and ensure that career guidance services operate as a system, connecting the various sub-systems together, as the example of one-stop-shops highlight. Documentation of such efforts has shown that such an approach can be very productive, though it can also prove challenging to maintain the initial impetus, not least because people in key positions change (Cedefop, 2008).

5.1 The situation in the Western Balkan countries

As noted in the previous chapter, the six Western Balkan countries have either yet to develop a national strategy that provides a coherent and integrated policy direction, or have done so formally but have not made much headway when it comes to implementation. Without such a framework, it is difficult to envisage the possibility of having a forum where priorities are chosen, decisions are jointly made, and services are planned, implemented, and monitored.

5.1.1 Collaboration and coordination at a national level

Kosovo* and **Montenegro** are two of the WB countries that have developed such a strategy, with both setting up national coordination bodies in an effort to ensure that different policy partners and service providers work effectively together to advance the policy goals agreed to. Awareness of the need for inter-sectoral collaboration has increased over the past years. **Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)**,

for instance, where coordination is even more crucial given the decentralised nature of the country, has recently set up a working group with representatives of the relevant Ministries and cantons. Furthermore, in 2016, a Memorandum of Cooperation in the field of Career Guidance Development was signed by the Federal and the cantonal ministries of education, with the aim of ensuring a better service in helping young people choose learning pathways that facilitate their own growth as well as respond to the labour market requirements of the country.

Albania has also put inter-sectoral coordination in relation to different services high on its agenda, and has established Integrated Policy Management Groups that act as steering committees of IPA (Instruments for Pre-Accession Assistance) projects in the different sectors, thus serving as integrated sector management mechanisms. The extent to which such mechanisms have had an impact on the conceptualisation and delivery of career guidance services remains unknown at this point in time. However, it is likely that coordination exists at least in the VET sector, where we find national agencies and national councils responsible for related services and areas, ranging from VET training, to a qualifications framework, occupational lists, education and employment links, and career guidance. The National VET Council, for instance, functions as a tripartite advisory body; while it does not bring all stakeholders to the table, it does provide a national platform for dialogue on matters that are related to career guidance, whether directly or indirectly.

In some countries, a national association of career guidance practitioners can be quite influential in promoting collaboration between its members. In the case of the Western Balkan countries, however, such associations tend to group together older and more established professions, such as psychologists or human resource specialists. While both are closely related fields, they tend to have less of an interest in career development as such, and are thus not well placed to have an impact on policy development, or the legitimacy and standing to bring together the many stakeholders that populate the career guidance field.

Examples of successful efforts of national coordination and collaboration at a national level are consequently few and far between. Many efforts and initiatives have not succeeded in taking off in any significant manner, or have proved difficult to sustain over time, either because of the lack of adequate capacities, or because the establishment of such a national forum was triggered and sustained by donor funding, with the impetus dissipating once the project cycle came to an end. Even when, as in the case of **Serbia**, one Ministry has overall responsibility for career guidance across a specific sector, such as compulsory and continuing education, that responsibility is dispersed among different departments, councils, agencies, and other entities, with none of these assuming a leadership or steering role to ensure that services are meaningfully integrated and delivered. Plans to set up a National Resource Centre for Career Guidance and Counselling that could promote the overall coordination and development of the guidance system, and enhance connections between different education and employment as well as between different service providers, have not yet materialised. A fresh impetus has been provided through the setting up of a Working Group that focuses specifically on career guidance, though only time will tell whether this succeeds where other efforts did not.

Albania's Integrated Policy Management Groups (IPMGs)

IPMGs were established in 2015. They were further extended and transformed into an integrated sector management mechanism. The Sector Approach IPMG is based on the need for improved coordination and efficient implementation of government priorities. As such, the IPMGs serve as high-level forums for policy dialogue and partnership to ensure leadership and coordination in the wide priority sectors and sectors of a special importance [...]. Each IPMG acts as a Steering Committee of IPA projects in the respective sector.

Source: National Review Report Albania, 2022

Serbia's Working Group for the Development of Career Guidance Standards

The Working Group for the Development of Standards for Career Guidance and Counselling Services was mandated by the Ministry of Education in 2017, and established by the Institute for the Improvement of Education and Upbringing (VET and Adult Education Centre), and comprised of three ministries (Education, Youth, and Employment), the Council for Vocational and Adult Education, the Institute for Evaluation of Education, the Chamber of Commerce, the Serbian Association of Employers, practitioners from schools, representatives from the University-based Career Centres, Euroguidance, international organisations such as GIZ, and the NGO Belgrade Open School. The outcome of this collaborative endeavour was the Rulebook on Standards for Career Guidance and Counselling Services, which was adopted by the Ministry and has served as the recommended framework for quality assurance in CGC.

Source: National Review Report Serbia, 2022

5.1.2 Coordination and collaboration at the sub-national level

More successful efforts at collaboration and coordination have been registered in regard to specific initiatives and projects, often involving fewer partners who operate at a local level and thus know each other better. In specific towns or cities, such as in **Kosovo*** and **Albania** for instance, the municipality works with PES, Chambers of commerce and industry, and NGOs in order to deliver services that require support and funding. This helps to harness the energy that community-based organisations have and their ability to respond to specific needs. At the same time, it serves to provide support in such guidance-related areas as profiling, employment counselling, job search and job placement, internships, job fairs, and mentoring, besides other types of assistance that improve employability, such as training in entrepreneurship and childcare facilities. **Serbia**, on its part, provides some powerful examples of such NGOs, chief among them being the Belgrade Open Society and the CSO Inventive Centre. Both partner with local or international entities and agencies in order to provide training, build capacities among educators and youth workers, and weave together a range of services that are made available to the community in general. They also develop tailor-made programmes with vulnerable youths, NEETs, Roma, and migrants and refugees, in mind.

Other examples of coordination and collaboration at the sub-national level are evident in **North Macedonia**, which can boast of some donor-funded local projects that nevertheless succeed in involving key national ministries, in securing the endorsement and involvement of national institutions, and in creating a range of inter-sectoral linkages at the municipal or regional level. In **BiH**, several examples exist of NGOs collaborating closely with international donors and aid agencies, as well as with employer organisations, benefiting from funding, employability training, and mentoring. Even here, however, the challenge to maintain sustainability has generally proven difficult to overcome. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for relations between international organisations to be characterised by competition rather than cooperation and collaboration, with similar projects vying for funding and attention.

Kosovo*: Coordination of services at the level of municipalities

The Municipality Career Guidance Council in the city of Peja, in the west of Kosovo*, was established in 2019 and meets regularly on a quarterly basis. The Council brings together all actors involved in career guidance, including lower and upper-secondary schools, the municipality's education directorate, representatives of the private sector and of the parents' council, among others. The goal is to bring together all actors to try to align the education offer of the municipality with the requirements of the labour market. The Council prepares a strategic plan of career guidance activities at the beginning of each year, and supports and monitors its implementation in secondary schools.

Source: National Review Report Kosovo, 2022

Serbia: Regional collaboration

At the regional level, the project Education to Employment (E2E, 2015-2023), supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by NIRAS-IP Consult, works in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, the National Employment Service, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and other stakeholders in the field of education. In the project, career guidance and counselling is considered a bridge-builder between sectors. Local NGOs called brokers are given a central role to mediate between market players (employment services, schools, employers, and families). Seven local civil society organisations based in five cities cover around 18 localities in Central, South-East and South-West Serbia. They act as service providers, using different tools and methods obtained through the project's resources.

Source: National Review Report Serbia, 2022

6. MAIN SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES

As already noted, career development support services can be delivered in a range of contexts, with the most notable being education and employment services. Within these two main sectors, there are several sub-systems where career guidance, or elements of it, are present. As the international reviews have demonstrated, career guidance in the education sector is usually present at key transition points at secondary school level, and between compulsory schooling and further and higher education, training, or employment (Sultana, 2012b). In several contexts internationally, there is a trend to embed career guidance more firmly throughout the life-course, starting earlier from primary level schooling, and taking into account developmental concerns by having guidance provided in and/or across the curriculum throughout compulsory education, leading to what is sometimes referred to as a 'guidance-oriented school' (Canzittu & Demeuse, 2017). The range of guidance-related tasks that usually feature within education settings include the provision of career and entrepreneurship education, teaching of career management skills as well as other competences that support transition processes, career counselling to individuals and/or groups, and work and education/training exploration.

In the labour market sector, private and especially public employment services are the key players in providing guidance to the unemployed and to those who, for career development reasons, wish to change their job. The tasks that employment advisers are usually involved in include profiling, providing career guidance and counselling to help clients develop and implement a personal action plan, helping job seekers to increase their chances of employment by selecting appropriate training pathways and providers, and mediating with employers and matching service users to available vacancies, job placement and follow up.

There are nevertheless a range of other contexts in which career guidance services can be offered. Workers' career development can be of concern to employers, to trade unions, and to the community more widely. Indeed, in several countries, work-based guidance is offered by HR departments as well as by trade union officials, whether due to economic restructuring which requires employees to seek alternative employment, or because they want or have to change jobs in a vertical or horizontal direction.

Community-based organisations, such as NGOs, are also an important context for the provision of career guidance services, especially in countries where a national or regional system of guidance has not yet been established. Here, NGOs, youth organisations, and churches compensate the gaps, though they can also represent an alternative, parallel service to the state-led system, sometimes specialising in servicing the needs of particular groups, such as teenage parents, persons with disabilities, ex-convicts, refugees, etc.

As career guidance becomes more ubiquitous and more integrated in daily life, access to the service is facilitated by making it less office- and institution-bound, and more widely available either through a self-service mode (especially through web-based platforms), or by offering it in places that people usually inhabit, such as central city thoroughfares, supermarkets, gyms, health spas, etc.

This chapter will document the contexts where career education and guidance are offered in the Western Balkans, also highlighting some of the examples of interesting practice that have been reported in the country reviews. The focus will be on services offered in educational settings, in employment, and in the community. A separate chapter considers online provision of services.

6.1 Career guidance and career education within schools

It could be safely said that, in the case of the Western Balkan countries, much of the career guidance and career education takes place within the context of schools. There are different modalities through which such services are provided.

Career education normally entails teaching the standard topics of career management skills, namely how to make decisions, awareness of opportunities (in terms of further education, training, internship, and/or work), transition skills (e.g. how to write a CV or covering letter, how to respond during an interview), and self-awareness (i.e., knowledge about one's preferences and abilities). This so-called DOTS model (Law, 2001; Law & Watts, 2003) is the backbone of most career education frameworks the world over, though its design and implementation vary in terms of the developmental and life-course orientation adopted, as well as the learning theories (often experiential) and assessment modalities (often formative rather than summative) underpinning it. Key differences between one system and another include: whether the programme starts at secondary level or before, whether the topics are taught in a separate and time-tabled subject, or whether they feature across the curriculum in other curricular areas (such as history, drama, civics, language, and so on). Another criterion of difference concerns whether the career education programme is offered at key transition points in the school cycles (such as when it comes to choosing subject or trade specialisations, and deciding whether to seek work or to continue to higher education), or whether it follows the student's progress through the educational journey in a more seamless manner.

All of these modalities were reported to feature in the six Western Balkan countries.

Much of the career education programme is offered at secondary school level. However, some of the Western Balkan countries have elements of the programme at primary level as well. In **BiH**, for instance, students from the first to the fifth grade learn about work through such subjects as language, art and culture, as well as in the curricular area titled 'My environment'. **Serbia** has also introduced career education at the primary school level, thanks to a GIZ-led project involving final grade classes in 100 elementary schools, while **Montenegro** expects primary schools, as much as secondary ones, to set up a school team tasked with designing the annual career guidance plan.

Career education at the secondary school level is more common, whether as a stand-alone subject (whether compulsory or as an elective), or as an extra-curricular subject. **Albania**, for instance, offers a 36-hour non-compulsory module delivered to final grade students, while **Kosovo*** has introduced a module on career education that is taught as an elective in grade 8, and as a compulsory topic in grade 9, which is a key transition point for students. This 'Life and Work' programme is equally divided between career learning, entrepreneurship, and digital skills, and is currently being piloted before the Ministry decides to take it to scale, depending on results obtained. With the support of GIZ, **Kosovo*** has also introduced Career Clubs at a number of lower-secondary schools for students aged 13-15, and these are responsible for delivering career management skills, along the DOTS approach, through inter- and extra-curricular activities. Similarly, **North Macedonia** has set up career centres with the help of a USAID-funded project called 'Youth Employability Skills', with career education programmes being delivered in many schools, though with varying degrees of intensity.

Career education across the curriculum in Serbia

Teachers from general secondary and non-dual VET sometimes establish fruitful cooperation with local service providers from employment offices (mostly the National Employment Service), youth offices, non-governmental organisations, parents, and businesses. In some schools, students also support CG activities as peer educators. Outdoor treasure hunts, online escape games, online simulations with classic literature characters during the language classes, and virtual companies to experience the world of work are some examples of the creativity, innovativeness, and enthusiasm of career practitioners from secondary schools. In addition, school-based practitioners in some schools can cater to a range of clients' needs. This capacity is demonstrated through career guidance programmes tailored to address the specific needs of students – such as of those at risk of dropping out, with disabilities, and so on – with individual learning plans.

Source: National Review Report Serbia, 2022

Guidance planning teams in Montenegro

Each school is expected to set up a school team for career guidance (both in primary and secondary schools). The team comprises of up to 5 members, one of which must be a school pedagogue or psychologist, whereas other members are school teachers or school management. The team is tasked with designing the annual career guidance plan which defines goals and career guidance activities for students, teachers, school management, and parents.

Source: National Review Report Montenegro, 2022

Career clubs in Kosovo*

The donor-funded After School Support for Teens (ASSET) programme has been set up, with the support of the Ministry of Education, in order to develop employability, entrepreneurial skills, and a positive attitude among Kosovo's* youth. ASSET has assisted with the implementation of career and entrepreneurial education curriculum for Grades 10-12, has trained teachers of the Life and Work programme in career guidance and counselling skills, and has set up and supported Career Clubs.

16 Career Clubs function as career hubs in schools, organising a range of activities that help raise student awareness on making more informed decisions about their future careers. The Programme appoints one teacher to act as mentor of the club and around 12 volunteer students to implement the Club's annual workplan. The Programme has also invested in a designated area to serve as the 'office' and hub of the club within the school.

The Career Club mentors report on a monthly basis to the Programme and to school management. Some of the Career Club activities include the establishment of partnerships with local businesses, short internships, job shadowing, visits to companies, information meetings by different professionals, and so on. Additional activities of the club for students include training on writing CVs and covering letters, finding reliable information sources regarding further education, and sharing information about scholarships with their peers. Each career club has its own social media to promote its activities and to better reach out to their peers.

Source: National Review Report Kosovo, 2022

Those who deliver the career education programme tend to be regular teachers, often without any specific training in the area. In some countries, such as **Bosnia & Herzegovina**, the programmes are delivered by teams made up of psychologists and education specialists, besides regular teachers. In **Serbia** and **Montenegro**, such teams are expected to design an annual programme of activities related to the career education component. Employers and parents are sometimes invited to contribute to the career education programme, whether by inviting them to schools, or by meeting with them during work exploration programmes, or during job fairs. In a few instances, staff from higher education institutions and/or from the Public Employment Service also visit schools in order to provide information about further education courses, and/or labour market trends.

Few examples were mentioned in the country reports that suggest that one-to-one or group career guidance and counselling, as an activity that is similar to but goes beyond career education, takes place in schools in the Western Balkans. When they do, as in the case of **BiH** and **Montenegro**, the activity seems to focus mainly on testing carried out by professional psychologists. There is little evidence of the shift from 'testing' to 'tasting' (Zelloth, 2009), and indeed e.g. **North Macedonia** seems to put a lot of stock into a web-based Battery of Instruments for Professional Orientation (BIPO). There is also a strong focus on teaching of practical transition skills that are typical of the traditional model of preparing young people for their one major career choice for a lifetime occupation, when in fact the contemporary trend defining career education goes beyond teaching practical skills to also focus on developing the social and emotional skills needed to deal with challenging transitions over a lifetime (Katsarov, 2020). Such a goal cannot be achieved with just some hours of information provision and skills development at transition points.

6.2 Career guidance in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (VET)

The international CG reviews suggest that, in many countries, career guidance is not present in VET settings (Watts, 2009, 2013; Sultana, 2017). Particularly in middle- to low-income countries, and in settings where there is a strong segmentation between general and vocational streams, career guidance is often mobilised to help students make a choice, if not actively orient them depending on their performance at school, as in the case of **Kosovo***. Once they are in the VET stream, however, it is assumed that there is no further need for guidance since the main transition decision has been taken (or been taken for them), and this often also entails choosing the specific VET areas they will specialise in. However, first, many VET courses have a foundation year where different trades are tested out in order to gauge one's inclination and ability, before a specialisation is then followed in subsequent years. Here too career guidance can be of use. Secondly, it requires specific career dialogue for career learning, since Work-Based Learning in VET does not, on its own, replace the students' active engagement in career development. This is an important consideration, since while all VET learners may have taken the decision to participate in a particular VET programme, they might still need to clarify how to best pursue the career chosen. Furthermore, not all learners want to or are able to finish a VET programme, so there is a need to provide support to students who want to change programmes, or who are disengaging from learning and potentially dropping out. It should also be noted that not all VET programmes explicitly prepare students for a specific career. Career development support is thus needed to move from generic considerations of employment to more specific ones. Last but not least, the number of adult learners entering VET programmes is on the rise due to heightened need for reskilling/upskilling. Their career development needs are to be addressed in a well-informed and professional manner.

Whether the VET route is based on a dual model, as in **Serbia** and **Montenegro**, or whether it is more school-based, efforts are made by those entrusted with the career guidance programme to reach out to employers, to organise visits to industrial settings and to VET institutions of higher learning, to attend career fairs, and to explore self-employment options. As the **BiH** and **Albania** reports note, by its very nature VET inevitably brings students closer to the world of work, and gives rise to several opportunities to discuss career-related matters, whether formally or informally, and whether in class- or work-based learning settings. In **Serbia**, this contact with the world of work is mandated by law,

which requires VET schools to set up career guidance teams with representatives from companies, the employment service, local municipalities, and related professional associations, besides teachers. Parents and student council representatives are also encouraged to participate in team meetings. Such teams are also expected to organise a minimum of a one-hour long career counselling session for each student every year. In **Kosovo***, 'Industrial Liaison Offices and Career Guidance' have been established specifically to carry out training needs analysis, and strengthen relations with the private sector, public institutions, and social partners.

A number of Western Balkan countries report that resources to deliver career education and guidance in VET settings are slowly building up. In **Serbia**, for instance, handbooks for teachers, students, parents and companies involved in dual education have been developed, with the use of career portfolios helping students connect the different learning opportunities that they are exposed to. In **Albania**, so-called 'development units' have been specifically set up to coordinate the different guidance-related activities of each VET school. They operate with the help of a manual that provides examples of what can be done with the CG programme, as well as the resources that can be used.

Career learning in Albanian VET schools

Since 2018, a new training component, a career orientation course called Start SMART, has been added to the Vocational Training Centres' service portfolio to complement their technical course offers. Start SMART has been developed by the National Employment Service with the support of GIZ. It is a 10-day (40 hours) training programme for registered young job seekers to unlock their personal strengths and potentials, to better orient them into training measures (based on the personal skills profile developed during the course) and support their labour market entry. Start SMART is based on the action-oriented approach and focuses especially on soft skills that are relevant for a successful job search. Since 2018, more than 11 000 job seekers were trained through the Start SMART module throughout Albania. After successful piloting of Start SMART in 5 VTCs, the training was upscaled on a national level and is now provided in all 10 VTCs to be made available to all unemployed job seekers all over the country. The project has trained more than 100 Start SMART trainers to use this methodology, among them also a pool of 15 'multipliers' qualified to train and certify additional Start SMART trainers for Albania.

Source: National Review Report Albania, 2022

VET school-based career centres in Kosovo*

School-Based Career Centres (SBCCs), set up with the support of a number of donor agencies, play an increasingly important role in assisting VET youth in the school-to-work transition. They strengthen the cooperation between education and business, foster the employment rate of VET graduates, and bring various benefits for society. These Centres focus on creating links with the labour market at the same time as creating job opportunities and providing practical guidance for students on employment and self-employment opportunities.

One of the main tasks of SBCCs is to attract prospective students for the VET schools. Activities of the Centres include coordinating internships, delivering information sessions to grade 9 students as well as daily information sessions to all during school hours, organising a career day, providing information sessions during the enrolment period, and promoting visits to businesses. Career centres organise open-door events, visit lower-secondary schools to attract students to VET streams, and participate in career fairs. They help establish and maintain contacts with members of the community, such as local authorities, employment and VET agencies, employer organisations, youth centres, NGOs, parents, teachers, and the media. They also help prevent early school leaving and connect the VET education system to the labour market.

The setup of each Centre varies slightly from school to school, depending on the student population. Generally speaking, however, staff employed by the SBCCs include a manager, who does not have teaching responsibilities but who is either school deputy director or quality coordinator, a coordinator responsible for labour market cooperation, and another coordinator responsible for cooperation with

students and community. Coordinators are teachers who either work full-time at the centre, or who also have a teaching load.

Source: National Review Report Kosovo, 2022

6.3 Career guidance in Higher Education

Higher education institutions have increasingly organised career guidance-related activities. Many have a student support service that reaches out to potential students from post-compulsory secondary schools, organises a career management skills programme, offers career counselling to individuals and groups, manages a course- and career-related website, and liaises with employers in order to help place graduates from the different faculties (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014).

Many of these activities were reported by all of the WB countries. Indeed, in the case of **North Macedonia**, such centres are now mandated by law, while in Serbia career services are one of the required criteria that the Accreditation Agency will look at when assessing institutions of higher learning. Various referred to as ‘Career and Alumni Offices’ (in **Albania**), or ‘Career (Development) Centres’ (**Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo**), the remit of the service can be quite broad, including, for instance, organising open days at schools and the university, accreditation of prior learning, help with study skills, organising internships as well as work experience whether locally or overseas, placements in voluntary associations, and setting up of business incubators.

Increasingly, such career centres are manned by full-time staff, who often work closely with a representative from each faculty in order to more effectively reach students following different courses, and to also make good use of the connections with industry that each faculty already has. A key activity remains the organisation of workshops to teach job search skills, with initiatives ranging from the most basic and ad hoc, to the more structured and embedded. Such is the case of the University of Belgrade, which introduced an elective extracurricular course in career management skills in 2015.

6.4 Career guidance services for students with special needs

In countries covered by the international reviews there are several examples of guidance services targeted at students and other persons with special needs (Sultana, 2010). These include students with disabilities, habitual absentees, students with learning difficulties, students from ethnic and cultural minorities (such as Roma), refugee and returnee students, and those who have demonstrated what some consider to be anti-social or delinquent behaviour. While all these groups can benefit from career guidance as it is offered in the mainstream, some of these services and programmes need to be adapted to the particular circumstances of these categories of students who sometimes require a bespoke set of responses.

Few examples of such specially tailored services featured in the reports from the Western Balkan countries, even if there is awareness of the needs of such students as, for instance, those with Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian backgrounds (**Kosovo***, **Serbia**). Much of the career guidance work with disadvantaged groups is carried out under the auspices of NGOs at the local community level.

6.5 Career guidance services for young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs)

As already noted, there is an increasing awareness in the region of the fact that many students tend to disengage from school (Sultana, 2006), and find themselves in a social limbo since they are neither in education, employment or training. Ongoing studies by the ETF show that the percentage of NEETs in the Western Balkans remains high, with respectively 25.5%, 21%, and 32.7% of the youth population categorised as NEETs in Albania, BiH and Kosovo* within the 15-24 age group. The average in the European Union is 10.1%. The rate is generally decreasing in the Western Balkans except for Kosovo* and Montenegro, and the gender difference is relatively small compared to other partner countries (ETF, 2021e).

NEET youths are generally provided for by Public Employment Service (European Commission, 2015), often however, as in Serbia – where almost 16% of youths are classified as NEETs – in collaboration with related Ministries of Education, and of Youth. Typical policy measures to address NEETs include prevention, reintegration, and compensation, with career guidance potentially playing a key role, especially in the first two (Robertson, 2016).

6.6 Role of parents in career guidance

Parents are a very important influence on the career choices made by young people (Barnes et al., 2020b). Recent research tells us that, by the age of 7, children have already absorbed orientations towards particular categories of work, deeming some to be desirable, while others less so or not at all (Chambers et al., 2018). Many of these orientations are based on gender, ethnic and social class experiences that are provided in the family and in the wider communities they inhabit. This has been confirmed by, among others, the PISA results for 2018, which found that only 0.5% of girls aspire towards ICT-related careers at age 15, compared to 5% of boys. This clearly reveals a substantial gender gap in terms of career expectations (OECD, 2018).

In some countries, especially those that are more 'collectivist' than 'individualist' in orientation (Hofstede, 2001), parents and adult members of the extended family can be quite influential in determining pathways that their children will follow. Most of the reports from the Western Balkan countries refer to such an influence (e.g. **BiH, North Macedonia, Montenegro**), and note that it is vital to include parents in the schools' career guidance programme, or to reach out to them through meetings, leaflets, and through a section dedicated to them on the school website (e.g. **Albania**), or through the development of specially written handbooks (e.g. **Serbia**). While there is awareness of this need, only a few (including **Kosovo*** and **Albania**) provided any details about such efforts at directing career education programmes towards parents. In **Montenegro**, where parents felt that they were not being informed well enough about study options, and consequently employment options, for their children, parents turned to their Parental Association, which organised information workshops for parents.

Parents are also involved in career guidance programmes not just as recipients of educational programmes, but also as partners in the delivery of career education. As Barnes et al. (2020b) note in their review of the international literature, several countries around the world in fact invite parents and guardians to address students and speak about the work that they do, how they chose it, what they had to study, how their career progressed over time, and so on. Parents can also be an important support to career learning programmes when they accept students as interns, or for work exploration and work shadowing purposes. In some cases, parents who are also in the business world act as mentors to students following an entrepreneurship course.

Parental involvement in career guidance activities in Kosovo*

In 2017, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MESTI), with the help of donors, drafted a school-parent communication strategy for career guidance of students from lower-secondary schools. These 9th graders are transitioning to upper-secondary education, and therefore have to choose to specialise in subjects related to occupations of their choice. The strategy aims to establish a regular two-way communication between that school and parents through sustainable mechanisms, with a view to strengthening the role of parents in guiding their children towards making an informed career choice.

MESTI conducted information and discussion sessions with parents in the different regions of the country, acknowledging the importance of carers in supporting their children during the career decision-making process. The meetings also served to promote a better understanding of the factors that influence career decisions, as well as to provide information about the trends and demands of the labour market.

Source: National Review Report Kosovo, 2022

6.7 Role of peers

Peers and alumni can be very effective in supporting the career learning processes of students, whatever their age (Felgenhauer, 2021). While of course there is a danger that misinformation and prejudice could spread, this possibility can be reduced if the peer tutoring takes place under the guidance of experienced and trained adults. Certainly, peers are more likely to speak the same 'language', tend to have more impact given that their experience of life is not as different, and are more likely to act as role models if they have been successful in the education and training pathways chosen. They are also more likely to be digital natives, able to communicate with each other effortlessly using social media and other digital tools. Alumni who attended the same educational institution and are now in the labour force can speak powerfully about their experiences, which are bound to resonate strongly with students who are still at school. Research carried out in Serbia (Renold et al., 2021) showed consistently that peers were more influential than parents when it came to making educational and occupational choices. The importance of role models is also widely recognised in breaking down stereotypes and in encouraging and empowering young women and men to choose atypical gendered careers.

A few peer-mediated initiatives were referred to in the Western Balkan reports. In **Serbia**, some Career Guidance Centres rope in peer tutors to support them in the career learning programme being offered, while peer career counsellors' schemes were also piloted in a number of youth offices and have proven to be a useful model for reaching out to young people, especially from vulnerable groups. In **Montenegro**, the NGO Zid trained and hired peer counsellors to operate the telephone line 'Career phone', while the Psychologists' Association are about to train novice psychologists, who currently have no experience, to deliver a training programme to students. These will later act as peer trainers to their school mates. In **BiH** some universities have developed alumni associations for graduates, while in **Albanian** universities, Career and Alumni Offices encourage employed graduates to share their experience with students who are still studying.

6.8 Career guidance services in the community

Community-based organisations the world over provide services that complement those offered by the state or by the market. In some cases, they are the only service providers available, making up for the shortfall of both public and private institutions. Such organisations usually focus on servicing the needs of specific groups, foremost among them being youths. They also often provide specific services to groups rendered vulnerable due to health issues, or due to systemic causes such as racism or gender-based violence. Career guidance can provide a context for action whereby groups of

people can join forces to address challenges and conditions associated with these problems (Thomsen, 2012). A major advantage of community-based guidance services is that there is a heightened sensitivity to the specificity of context, making it more likely to be meaningful and effective.

In the Western Balkans, NGOs play an important role, both in terms of advocacy as well as in the actual provision of support, including, in some cases, of career guidance. They tend to be close to the people they wish to serve, they are nimbler because they are less tied down by bureaucracy and regulations than state institutional services, and they attract donor funding that helps implement projects that are often a vehicle for new ideas to enter the country. Donor support helps capacity building, as well as the development of resources, such as websites and handbooks, which in the best cases have multiplier effects long after a project is completed. In **Serbia**, for instance, a range of civil society organisations have proved to be quite efficient in providing career guidance to NEETs, Roma, and migrant and refugee populations. In **Albania**, NGOs collaborate with the Ministry of Finance and Social Welfare in order to orient young people towards the growing tourism sector, thus helping to reduce social problems within particular communities. In **BiH**, SOS Children's Villages has been successful in contributing to the employability of young people growing up in alternative care as well as those with complex socio-emotional needs.

6.9 Career guidance in Public Employment Services

Public Employment Services (PES, also known as 'labour offices' or 'job centres') are often the lead intermediary between youths and adults on the one hand, and employment on the other. They represent one of the four categories of Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs), and their main role is to help match the unemployed with available vacancies, often running programmes and schemes that promote employability through training in hard (vocational) as well as soft (career management) skills.

As noted in Chapter 3, these roles are less pronounced in countries where the labour market is characterised by a high degree of informality, i.e. where jobs are obtained through the individual's and family's networks and social capital, rather than through formal channels that include the offer of certified skills on the supply side, and the use of job descriptions, qualification requirements, and formal recruiting procedures on the demand side. Informality is a key feature of labour markets across the Western Balkans, and some of the country reports suggest that employers register vacancies mostly to meet the bureaucratic formalities of the hiring process (e.g. **North Macedonia**). This informality also acts as a disincentive for private employment services to flourish. Where such services exist, they tend to only cater for large, often foreign, companies wishing to recruit highly qualified staff at managerial levels.

The range of clients that PES cater for includes job seekers and job changers, in many cases engaging specialised support staff to handle more challenging cases, such as the long-term unemployed (LTUs), workers with disabilities, refugees and other newly arrived persons, and NEETs. In some countries (e.g. in **Montenegro** up to recently, in **BiH**, and in **Serbia**), PES staff visit education institutions in order to contribute to the career education programme, while in others students are taken to PES premises where they learn about trends in the labour market and access up-to-date LMI on such matters as salaries, career progression pathways, and so on. In the Western Balkan countries as elsewhere, PES are also often involved in organising or participating in job fairs, whether face-to-face or virtually, and sometimes produce user-friendly guides to the labour market, drawing on national statistical information which is otherwise too technical for most people to make sense of and use in their career planning.

Given that the reform of PES is quite central to the process of adhesion to the EU, there are several overlaps in the manner in which career guidance services are offered across the Western Balkans, with a close similarity in the challenges faced and the possible solutions available. As with their counterparts in the European Union, PES staff are involved in a number of activities that (could) have a career guidance element embedded in them (Sultana & Watts, 2006). This includes keeping labour market information updated, running job search engines, profiling job seekers, helping the latter devise a personal action plan and uploading their CVs, offering one-to-one and group guidance. These

involve such settings as 'job clubs', where participants practice writing CVs, sitting for an interview, looking for labour market information, learning entrepreneurship skills, and helping each other build self-confidence in the search for work. Services can be offered face-to-face or via emails, call centres, or a dedicated internet platform. PES staff can also play an advocacy role by promoting their clients with employers, with whom they usually network on a regular basis. As in many EU countries, efforts are made to operate on a one-stop-shop model, to facilitate the delivery of services (e.g. **Albania**).

A major bone of contention is the extent to which PES staff are involved in providing skilled career guidance (a function which, in some countries, is referred to specialised psychologists), or whether most of their tasks are bureaucratic in nature. When the service they provide obliges them to make decisions as to whether a job seeker qualifies for a benefit, then the tension between professional ethics on the one hand, and bureaucratic demands on the other, becomes even more pronounced (van Berkel et al, 2017). In **North Macedonia**, for instance, a study carried out in 2019 found that over 95% of registered unemployed receive LMI and personal employment counselling, only 3% received career guidance, and most of these were young people aged 15-29 (Tasevska, 2019). Other challenges include the difference between the extent and quality of service offered in major cities and towns, compared to what one finds in PES offices in rural areas.

Many of the different tasks undertaken by PES staff with NEETs are in fact set to become grouped under the overarching umbrella programme promoted by the EU, namely the Youth Guarantee (Tosun et al., 2019). All Western Balkan countries will join this programme by June 2022, with North Macedonia having been the first to implement this scheme in 2018, even if inclusion is usually reserved to EU Member States.

6.10 Career guidance in enterprises

In some countries, career guidance is also offered to employees within enterprises, either by the company's HR personnel, or by trade union officials. Their role is to help the career development of staff within the company, or to find other work when the company is forced to downsize or even close its operations. Such career transition support packages typically include skills assessment, career counselling, advice about training or re-training opportunities, as well as help in the job search process. Guilds, employer and sectoral organisations, as well as chambers of commerce are also sometimes involved in offering similar services.

Given the informality of the labour market across all the Western Balkan countries, the rise of non-standard forms of employment (e.g. platform workers, temping, freelancing, zero-hour contracts), as well as the preponderance of micro-, small- and medium- enterprises, it is to be expected that career guidance in private enterprises is unlikely to be a strong feature in the region. The service is either considered irrelevant or unnecessary, as there is little scope for either vertical or horizontal career development, or too costly an overhead given the scale of the company.

In some of the Western Balkan countries, state enterprises are more likely to have measures that include career development. In **Serbia**, collective agreements between unions and the state specifically mention the responsibility of employers to promote staff development. Private enterprises are not obliged to sign collective agreements, though staff and career development initiatives are encouraged by employers' organisations, such as the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, or the Serbian Union of Employers. However, this is not the case across the board. **Montenegro**, for instance, reports that public institutions often do not have Human Resource departments that cater for the career needs and development of employees.

While none of the WB6 reports referred to career guidance roles carried out formally by trade unions, it is likely that much takes place at an informal level, especially during times of economic restructuring. While such guidance, where present, is probably provided by untrained trade union stewards, this does not mean that it is less precious, or less needed. It should also be pointed out that few countries across Europe have career guidance services offered by trade unions, with a few notable exceptions including Denmark (Thomsen et al, 2020), and the UK (Robertson et al., 2020). Guilds, employer and

sectoral corporations, as well as Chambers of commerce also play a role that is supportive of career guidance services, by providing labour market information and skills intelligence to companies. This can serve to strengthen the orientation services offered in-house.

6.11 New partnerships in service delivery

NGOs, which often partner up with and receive funding from donor and development agencies (such as ILO, ETF, GIZ, USAID, Swiss Development Agency, DANIDA, and many more), are among the most important entities that promote career guidance in the Western Balkans. They are often behind the introduction of services, reach out to user groups that fall outside the provision of the state or municipal authorities, adopt, adapt and develop CG-related resources that aim to be context sensitive and fit for purpose, and generally act as an incubator and a catalyst for innovation. When NGOs also partner with ministries, thus encouraging a sense of ownership and commitment on the part of the state, pilot projects may attain national visibility and even go to scale (Samoff et al., 2011).

NGOs are likely to be less tied down by bureaucracy, and hence tend to find it less cumbersome to partner with others to provide a service. Among such partnerships reported by the WB6 reports, one of the most interesting involves agreements reached by Albanian authorities with media companies. The latter agreed to promote awareness of the benefits of career guidance among the wider public.

Partnering with the media to reach a wider audience in Albania

RisiAlbania – an innovative project supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, SDC, in partnership with the Ministry of Finance and Economy and implemented by Helvetas and Partners Albania – recognises the potential dynamic and catalytic role of print and online mass media, TV and radio broadcasting, as they can reach and influence large numbers of people. During phase I (2013–2017) of the project, the goal was to make mass media an ongoing provider of information on employment issues for young people. The project partnered with various forms of media to regularly design, produce and disseminate labour market information with attractive formats and contents for young people. A special focus of the RisiAlbania support was to build commercial incentives for the media to cover employment issues in an attractive way. During this phase, work with the media also resulted in the design, launch and running of a module on labour market reporting at the Faculty of Journalism and Communication. This optional module is designed to show future journalists the importance of reporting on the labour market and guide them on ways to achieve this.

During phase II (2017–2021) of the project, RisiAlbania capitalised the successful experience of working with the media in the first phase. The support offered to mass media during phase I of the project and the sustainability and scalability shown in the dissemination of labour market information laid a strong foundation for applying a similar approach in the field of career guidance topics for young people and their parents during phase II. There are currently five media products that are active. They now run either with no further support or with very little support from RisiAlbania. These media products include: *Rruga drejt suksesit* (Path to success) by Club FM Radio; *Drejt Punës* (Towards work) by Shqiptarja.com newspaper and online platform; *Më I miri në vend* (Best in the country) disseminated in RTSH; *Puna që dua* (The job that I want) disseminated on InTV, RTSH2; and *Think Big* by New Media Communications (media producer), disseminated online.

Source: National Review Report Albania, 2022

TV serial in Montenegro

The Public Employment Services, in cooperation with TV Vjesti, produces a TV serial called Putokazi (Road Signs), broadcast once a week and informing the public opinion about how to actively look for a job, ways to start one's own business, and advertising PES services.

Source: National Review Report Montenegro, 2022

7. FUNDING MECHANISMS

Professional career guidance services cost money: other than staff salaries, one normally needs appropriate buildings and spaces, not just within educational institutions, but also in other public spaces that are readily accessible to would-be clients. Such spaces and buildings are likely to be found where people congregate, including central city shopping areas and malls, where property is expensive to rent or to buy. Funding is also needed for resources that staff need, in the shape of brochures, tests, and related materials. Recurrent budgets need to be invested in producing web-based information, as well as in purchasing or commissioning software that supports self-directed careers exploration and development work. Over and above the initial investment, other funds are needed to keep resources updated with the latest labour market information, as well as education and training offers. Such services are either fully or partly funded by the state, are fully or partly paid for by individuals, or are provided free or for a fee by community-based organisations, often with the financial support of international agencies and donors.

7.1 State funding

What we have learnt from the international reviews is that in most countries, this significant financial outlay is largely met by the state (OECD & European Communities, 2004). While fee-paying private provision of career guidance services exists, much of this is aimed at high-end jobs: for most citizens, therefore, their access to career guidance depends on the willingness of the government of the day to allocate the required funding, either separately and specifically to guidance, or to a budget earmarked for education, employment, or youth, for instance, of which a proportion is reserved for guidance-related activities. In the latter case, it is sometimes difficult to know from publicly available reports the actual amount that has gone to guidance. In federated and/or decentralised governance systems, decisions about how to spend such budgets might be partly or wholly devolved to the region or municipality. In **Kosovo***, for instance, most municipal education directorates agreed to provide financial support during the first year of operation of the online career guidance system, Busulla.com, and have also occasionally set budgets aside to support the training of guidance teachers, even if such allocations tend to be irregular and dependent on the available funding.

Such state funding can also go to individuals or groups rather than to service providers, especially when a market or quasi-market is created with services outsourced to companies that have expertise in career guidance, or delivered through a public-private partnership. Governments might also decide to give vouchers to individuals, along a set of criteria, thus ensuring that services are demand-driven. In **Montenegro**, the NGO Zid obtained small grants from the Ministry of Education in a public call for bids to run an educational project, elements of which included projects, activities and a campaign about career guidance called 'Get involved'.

Money does not always flow in the same direction as do policy declarations about career guidance. In **Serbia** and **Montenegro**, for instance, despite having several official documents highlighting the role that guidance can play, teachers are expected to contribute to career guidance activities without any additional compensation, even when these are extra-curricular or organised outside of the regular school hours. In some cases, costings of guidance-related initiatives are not made. This tends to leave the sector vulnerable since better-established services are bound to take a bigger slice of the pie unless allocations are specifically made to career guidance. In **Albania**, **BiH** and **North Macedonia**, there is no clear annual allocation for guidance services. Such ad hoc, rather than continuous and systematic, funding leads to a situation where medium- and long-term planning are difficult if not impossible.

Furthermore, as with many other countries internationally, COVID-19 has had a negative impact on public finances, with budgets understandably diverted to the health sector and to supporting individuals and companies that needed government aid to survive. Career guidance is mistakenly still seen by many to be a 'frill' rather than an investment, and therefore is among the first to suffer budget cuts. In **Montenegro**, such cost reductions are thought to be achieved by developing a digital delivery system. Online career

resources can enable self-help, thereby freeing up resources to provide assistance to those who need it most. However, digitalisation of career guidance information and advice has often been used by governments to cut costs, leaving whole swathes of the population who might be less digitally literate without any access to a service, whether personalised or online. Furthermore, the experience of receiving career guidance face-to-face is not easily replicated, let alone replaced, through an online modality.

7.2 Non-state sources of funding

Three non-state sources of funding for career guidance can be identified, namely private disbursement for services received, corporate funding, and donations by international organisations.

User participation in the financing of a service is quite rare, not least because career guidance – when citizens are aware of what it is and of the benefits that it can contribute to – is often considered to be a social service that should be provided freely. There were therefore no user-pay systems reported in the WB6, though in **Serbia** students at the University of Belgrade are required to pay €1 every year when they register for a course. This, however, is a symbolic contribution, meant to contribute additional funding to the Centre for Career Development, which also benefits from state budget allocations made to the University as a whole. Furthermore, the contribution also serves to help students become aware of the career guidance services provided, and possibly to appreciate their value even more.

Corporate investment in workforce career development tends to be limited to major international companies with branches in the Western Balkans. These companies are more likely to see career development services as an investment, and support reskilling and upskilling of individuals from key talent groups, willingly paying for coaching, assessment and development support since this ultimately benefits the companies themselves. Such is the case with **Kosovo***, where Raiffeisen Bank, Meridian Corporation, Meister Training Centre, and Bau Academy are typical examples of private-sector financed initiatives that often respond to the internal needs of their companies. Furthermore, as the report by **Montenegro** notes, spending on career development in such companies is often grouped together with training as part of a company's 'learning and development' budget.

The only other source of occasionally quite substantial funding, other than the state, is donor and international aid organisations, of which we find many operating in the Western Balkans. As all reports noted, such funding helps promote career guidance initiatives, and often serves to bring in new ideas as well as skills to the field, some of which find their way into the mainstream and outlive the project cycle. At other times, however, much of the enthusiasm dissipates once the project comes to an end, and funding dries up.

The role of donor organisations in financing CG initiatives in Kosovo*...

Many career guidance interventions and projects that are now part of the education system have been introduced and supported by the donor community. Examples of projects being implemented in Kosovo* include both lower-secondary and upper-secondary education and workforce development, such as: supporting the private sector to enhance export opportunities, international scholarship programmes for youth, skills development for young people, alignment of education to private sector needs, career guidance services, and so on. Among the donor organisations that play an important role in Kosovo's* education and career guidance context, one could mention the European Union, USAID Kosovo, Swiss Development Cooperation, International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations' Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Solidar Suisse, Austrian Development Agency (ADA), Luxembourg Development Agency (LuxDEV), and so on.

Source: National Review Report Kosovo, 2022

... and in Montenegro

There have been a number of CG activities in Montenegro that have been funded by either an international project in education or employment, or by various NGOs and professional associations.

- The first was a Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ) project on 'Designing the transition of young people to the world of work in the Western Balkans' (2008–2011), which resulted in training programmes for primary school teachers and appropriate manuals for teachers, and the development of the curriculum for the elective subject 'Professional orientation in primary school'.
- The second was a project called 'Modernisation of educational programmes and teacher training' carried out as part of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) IV project (2016–2017) in VET schools. This project addressed career guidance in vocational schools. The final result was a three-day seminar for the career guidance team in vocational schools on the topic 'Career management skills in vocational schools.'
- The third was a Labour Market Reform and Labour Force Development IPA project (2008–2012). This was the initial project with which the career guidance programme in Montenegro started fully. The project results were the development of the first Strategy for lifelong career orientation (2011 – 2015) in Montenegro, a teacher training programme for secondary schools, an appropriate manual for teachers and workbook for students in secondary schools. The project resulted in the opening of Centres for Professional Counselling (CIPS) and better cooperation between schools and CIPS.

The issue with international projects is how to secure sustainability of the programmes and activities once the projects are over.

Source: National Review Report Montenegro, 2022

8. MEASURES TO ENABLE AND ENHANCE ACCESS TO CAREER DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Access to services proved to be one of the major foci of attention of the international review process. Three main reasons can be given for this. First, remote areas of some countries are sparsely populated and difficult to reach and hence to provide face-to-face services to. Second, awareness of the benefits of career guidance is still not widespread, with many not making use of a service simply because they do not know what it is and where it can be found. Third, many aspects of career guidance are being transferred to digital platforms, including social media interfaces, in order to facilitate self-service that can then be supplemented by videoconferencing or face-to-face career conversations if and when necessary. Use of online guidance requires strong and reliable internet connectivity as well as digital skills that not everybody can muster.

Access is therefore a social justice issue, especially in those countries where career guidance is considered to be an entitlement, and where demand for the service exceeds supply. Several efforts have been made in order to facilitate access in relation to the three challenges referred to above, and in an effort to reach out rather than wait for clients to drop in. Mobile career guidance buses, for instance, have been used in some countries in order to provide services to remote regions. Some have provided transport so that parents and their children can attend job fairs that are usually organised in large cities (OECD & European Communities, 2004; Hansen/ILO, 2006).

Career guidance services have also become very much a regular feature of everyday life rather than delivered at key transition points, often in the context of an office where the opening hours do not correspond to the life routines of users. Career services are now increasingly offered in central city shopping areas, in supermarkets, in gymnasiums, and in youth clubs, among other places with high footfall. Those without an internet service or who are not digitally literate can still access services via the use of telephone interviews and call centres. This 'reaching out' mentality is especially important if services are to benefit persons that are hard to reach, such as people with disabilities, the newly-arrived, young people who are not in education, training or employment, and minorities.

Such initiatives signal the aspiration of the career guidance field to become more pervasive, easily and readily accessed within a lifelong, life-wide perspective. Needless to say, such an aspiration cannot be fulfilled if there are insufficient numbers of trained career advisers, and the ratio of counsellors to users is unreasonable. The international reviews have also noted the importance of educational institutions in ensuring access: students are, to some extent, a 'captive audience', easy to reach because they are in classrooms. Schools, moreover, are usually spread quite equitably throughout a country, covering most if not all regions. Where they do not, transport to the nearest school is provided to students, often free of charge. Assuming that there is agreement that career education and support in planning and implementing one's career development are a good thing, then it makes a lot of sense to embed career learning in the curriculum, thus ensuring access.

8.1 Meeting the challenge of access to career guidance in the Western Balkans

All six Western Balkan country reports acknowledge the difficulty in ensuring access to guidance services for all, and many highlighted the fact that those most in need are the least likely to be reached.

An interesting and original approach to providing services to those in remote regions has been trialled by **Bosnia & Herzegovina**. The so-called 'Mobile Bureau' approach deserves to be highlighted, as do the efforts in **Serbia** to reach young people in areas that are distant from the main cities.

The Mobile Bureau in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Swiss-funded Youth Employment Project developed the concept and methodology of the Mobile Bureau in Bosnia-Podrinje Canton, during 2015. This entailed the reorganisation of the Public Employment Service, introducing the Mobile Bureau that provided services in dozens of villages in the Canton, including career guidance and consulting services for the unemployed. The Mobile Office represents a unique and innovative approach by PES, one that enables the most vulnerable categories of unemployed persons to access the PES services. After a two-year trial period, the Mobile Bureau has been implemented in the Brčko District of BiH as well. This service has proven to be one of the most successful approaches to address the needs of NEETs.

Source: National Review Report Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2022

While the information that is provided in the reports tends to be impressionistic, it is backed up by research in the case of **Serbia**. It is particularly worth highlighting that the survey cited confirms that schools or faculties at universities are the institutions most readily identified as purveyors of information about the labour market (47.1%), followed by the public employment service (32.5%), while NGOs (7.3%), youth offices (6%), career centres (5.8%) and other related service providers (1.2%) lagged far behind when it came to providing young people aged 15-30 with career-related information, advice and guidance.

Access to career guidance in Serbia

The Ministry of Youth and Sport conducts an annual research exercise to find out about the situation and needs of young people in Serbia. In 2020, the research targeted 1500 young people aged 15-30 through representative stratified random sampling. When asked to identify how they were searching for and obtaining career-related information, 54.8% of young people stated that they had not participated in any career guidance activity. Out of this group, 70.1% are 15-19 years of age, whereas 67.7% are not from urban areas. It furthermore appears that the percentage of those young people who have not received any support in their career development is increasing. According to the same research, this percentage stood at 51% in 2018, compared to 49% in 2019. Lack of access to career information seems to limit career prospects for many young people. Indeed, 36.2% of young people involved in this research stated that the main reason for not participating in traineeships was the lack of information about these programmes.

Source: National Review Report Serbia, 2022

In **Serbia** too, a number of projects offer career services to migrants. The DIMAK initiative, for instance, makes good use of individual, group, and peer-to-peer counselling over various channels of communication, including face-to-face, phone, email, and on-line via Facebook, WhatsApp and Viber. Similarly, the NGO Belgrade Open School developed and piloted schemes and training delivery mechanisms to facilitate the swift labour market integration of migrants. The approach adopted included the screening of abilities, as well as skills profiling and matching, thus encouraging the entry of migrants into the local labour market. Career development in the form of career information and career counselling was also offered to migrants from reception and asylum centres.

9. USE OF TECHNOLOGY FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that digital technology is a powerful tool that can help us overcome several communication and service delivery barriers. Many knew this well before 2020, but many others too became more convinced and less sceptical about its value and usefulness. Digital technology of all sorts has in fact long been mobilised in the career guidance field. Many countries have developed increasingly sophisticated websites and digital platforms that consolidate labour market information in one place, making it easily and readily available (Cedefop, 2018). Such information is linked to education, training and career opportunities, sometimes providing encounters with persons employed in the occupational field of interest. While some function as mere ‘information dumps’, others are more interactive, with tools and software that facilitate self-knowledge and understanding (Kettunen, 2017). The development of the so-called Web 2.0 paradigm puts an emphasis on user-generated content, ease of use, participatory culture (thanks to ‘chat’ and other functions) and compatibility with other products, systems, and devices for end users (so-called ‘interoperability’).

Standards have been developed against which websites can be evaluated for gender equity, for instance, or for their readability. Artificial Intelligence, while presenting some important ethical issues, is likely to take career guidance into new, uncharted territory.

Over and above web-based platforms, digital technology, from the most basic to the most sophisticated, has been harnessed to support the career guidance process, without replacing face-to-face individual or group encounters. Social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Viber are regularly used the world over to ensure quick communication between service providers and users. Call centres have also greatly increased access in some countries, especially when the service is provided for free. Videoconferencing and the use of Zoom, Teams, Google Meet and other such platforms has become ubiquitous and an everyday phenomenon in the aftermath of the pandemic. TV and radio, even if lacking the glamour of the newer digital communication tools, are nevertheless important technological conduits of information, and can sometimes reach audiences that the newer electronic highways do not.

However, there are downsides to the increasing presence of digital technology in the field. Some countries have seen a reduction in funding for guidance, the argument being that much of the service can be delivered online, through a self-help mode. Experiments with a triage approach remind us that while a good percentage of users can navigate information systems with relative ease and with a little initial help, others quickly become lost, and yet others either do not have access to the internet, or do not have the functional and/or digital literacy required. Blended delivery is often recommended, and for good reason.

A major challenge is not just designing, but also maintaining and updating a web-based career guidance system. This is an even more pressing problem in low- and middle-income countries, whose information systems are often set up thanks to seed money provided by international partners and donor organisations in the context of specific projects. When the latter are wound up, and when the funding stream available is exhausted, the usefulness and relevance of the career website diminishes by the day.

9.1 Developments in Western Balkan countries

9.1.1 Increasingly widespread use

The reviews make it clear that IT investment has risen in the field of career guidance. Just to take the case of **Montenegro** as an example, websites have appeared, or are in preparation, bringing together information about occupations in demand, job descriptions, salaries offered, vacancies, and so on (e.g. <https://zanimanja.mk/>). A Single Information System for Electronic Data Exchange (SISEDE) has been introduced to ensure the consolidation of information from a range of state databases, some of which can support careers work, including, for instance, tracing occupational pathways taken by students after graduation. Similarly in **Kosovo***, the use of Management Information Systems in both the education and employment sectors generate new possibilities of harvesting and using data on jobseekers, employers, and training providers, greatly facilitating the matching of jobseekers to vacancies, and students to education and training pathways. Such synchronisation of data is also mobilised to support inclusive measures, with connections established with social assistance schemes through the Active Inclusion Integration Platform (AIIP).

Both public and private employment services have developed career information and employability enhancing websites, as have institutions of higher learning, with some benefiting from external funding to develop resources to help graduates in their job search efforts. Some platforms specifically set out to connect applicant profiles to vacancies and to employers.

9.1.2 From basic functionality...

As has been noted at various points in this synthesis, the situation in the Western Balkans differs somewhat from country to country in a range of issues, despite clear similarities. In some cases, such as **Bosnia & Herzegovina**, the use of digital technology to deliver career guidance is, with a few exceptions, still somewhat basic. The pandemic served to stimulate the PES to produce and upload labour market information about sunrise and sunset occupations on their website, and to send related information to students by email. This was in lieu of the regular visits by employment advisers to schools, which for health reasons were no longer possible. Other than that, however, computer use is limited to internet searches and creating CVs.

Similarly, in **Albania**, the PES platform that has been developed here serves more as an information depot and a register rather than as a tool to assist career counselling. The Europe-wide standard routine of profiling clients along three registers, developing personal action plans, and mediating with employers has led to the modernisation of an older information system, with an emphasis placed on consolidating information in national data storage systems such as health, inland revenue, and social benefits. Despite its usefulness, the system architecture provides limited opportunities for personalisation of reports and work procedures.

9.1.2 ... to more advanced use of web-based platforms

In most cases, it appears that the most common use of digital technology is the uploading of text online, with at times the inclusion of short videos with information about particular occupations. Some of the platforms offer the option of taking self-administered tests, with a case in point being the Battery of Instruments for Professional Orientation (BIPO) used in secondary schools in **North Macedonia**, for instance.

Serbia has also pioneered interactive online platforms for career development, both through its National Employment Service and through such civil society operators as the Belgrade Open School. Such platforms offer functions that have become standard in the career guidance field, including self-assessment, occupational descriptions (in text, visual and audio), guides to further education and training, as well as CV builders. Some of the more innovative approaches here include a virtual interview simulator – offered by the Career Development Centre of the University in Novi Sad – and the development of a computer game called ‘Escape Game: Career Journey Exploration’, which brings in an element of fun in the career learning programme of some secondary schools.

In **Kosovo***, the platform Busulla.com supports the career learning programme, and has both a web and mobile app interface. It facilitates self-knowledge, exploration of occupations and of education institutions and training providers, and the identification of vacancies. There is also an online advisor function. All this helps bring together learning in class which is then followed-up by homework and activities for students.

Much of the impetus for the development of digital tools and on-line portals, whether public or private, has come both from a strongly felt need by those working with youths and adults, as well as from funds made available by donors. Career guidance projects in the Western Balkan region often set aside a funding stream in order to develop IT-based services, though much of this tends to be concentrated in the VET sector, as well as in the Public Employment Services.

Indeed, the PES sector in most of the countries in the Western Balkans have seen investment in the modernisation of their digital capacities. In some cases, as in **Montenegro**, the focus has remained on providing information about vacancies and training opportunities. In other cases, however, project funding has helped career services become more innovative in the use of the internet and social media. The PES in Brčko District in **BiH**, for instance, has benefited from the support of the NGO Vermont which helped it create a website (<https://trebadaznas.com>) that puts a great deal of career guidance-related information at the fingertips of students, unemployed people and job-changers. It even offers testing facilities that support self-exploration and career learning.

Kosovo IT-based initiatives

The Kosovo Chamber of Commerce, in close collaboration with the project ALLED2 (2019-2023), funded by the European Union in Kosovo (IPA 2018), co-financed by the Austrian Development Cooperation, and implemented by the Austrian Development Agency, recently introduced the Kosovo Labour Market Barometer. The barometer is of special importance, because it connects information from 12 different national databases, presenting the data in real-time.

ALLED 2 also funded the Kosovo Skills Barometer 1.0. in 2021. The Skills Barometer serves the needs of employers and policy makers by supporting the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce-KCC in the systematic identification of competencies needed in the labour market, as well as in planning relevant VET programmes. The Skills Barometer in Kosovo is set to strongly support evidence-based policy-making, planning and reform. It should also prove useful to career advisers given the data it should generate in relation to the specific skills required by the labour market.

Source: National Review Report Kosovo, 2022

e-Workshops in Serbia

Due to pandemic restrictions, the University-based Career Development Centres accommodated their existing activities to an online setting and also developed further initiatives. In 2020, the Career Development Centre of the University in Kragujevac organised online workshops covering soft and technical skills as well as career development-related topics. The sessions were held via web platforms and social media streaming, and attracted more than 1300 students. The Career Development Centre of the University of Belgrade used Zoom for career chats called 'Zoom coffee'. Experts from a range of occupational fields used the chat function to communicate with students, while offering advice related to diverse topics relevant for career planning and development. More than 45 recordings are available online.

Source: National Review Report Serbia, 2022

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

Taking a cue from international reviews of career guidance, Europe has given increased attention to quality of service provision, and 'quality' was indeed one of the four main pillars of focus for the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN, 2016).

Three main approaches to quality have been identified (Sultana, 2018). The first is staff-centred, and attempts to enhance quality by requiring higher and specialised qualifications of practitioners, by setting out standards, by articulating a code of ethics to guide practitioner behaviour, and by guarding from entry into the profession by untrained staff through licensing and the setting up of a register of individuals and companies that are permitted to offer guidance services.

A second approach is system-centred, focusing on quality indicators and service standards, and setting out protocols for monitoring and evaluation against quality assurance specifications.

A third approach is client-centred, giving attention to what users say about the experience of receiving the service. Here charters are produced so that users know what they have a right to expect, and surveys are carried out on a regular basis to gauge client satisfaction. Furthermore, users are given the right to redress in case the service obtained is below the quality expected, thus enhancing the element of accountability of providers. In this approach too, users are involved in the design and development of the service that they are to benefit from, with the understanding that this also contributes to improving its quality.

One approach is not necessarily exclusive of the other, and there is often a mix and match approach depending on resources and on the situation. Each approach puts its emphasis on different aspects of the quality assurance process, with some being more advisory than regulatory, and with some trusting the competence of professionals while still valuing client voice (Hooley & Rice, 2019). Increasingly, the reflective practitioner model is being adopted in a range of professions, encouraging service providers to engage with a continual cycle of reflection on and in action (Schon, 1991).

An important feature of quality improvement, and which is especially relevant in a consideration of the situation in the Western Balkan states, is whether career guidance is recognised as a service in its own right, or whether it is seen as part of a whole set of services, some of which have guidance elements embedded in them. The status of career guidance has an impact on whether the service is evaluated separately and on its own terms, using indicators and in line with standards that have been formally established, or whether, in contrast, it is viewed from the perspective of the overall system, whether this be education or employment services.

As we shall note in this chapter, WB countries still have a long road to travel when it comes to quality assurance. The country reports note that the issue of standards, of appropriate and specialised staff training, of transforming labour market information into a user-friendly resource that supports the career learning process, and of processes of monitoring and evaluation are currently limited. However, it is also clear that much thinking is going into this area, and plans are afoot to develop structures and protocols to improve the quality of services on offer.

10.1 Standards

Career guidance has not yet established itself as a distinct area or profession in the Western Balkan states. In **North Macedonia**, for instance, there seems to be little shared understanding as yet of what career guidance entails, let alone of some of the more recent developments in the field. Despite several strategic documents as well as legal instruments, career guidance services are still incipient, often 'notional' (Barnes et al., 2020a) and fragmented across the region. Few of the country reviews

referred to government-led, nation-wide attempts, routines or protocols to define standards, to engage in systematic service measurement, or to give feedback that facilitates service improvement, even if participation in the ETF review process signals a willingness to consider what can be done to improve.

Serbia has however made some headway in developing organisational standards that define the conditions, requirements, procedures and principles on which the quality of a service is based, such as planning, communication, cooperation, monitoring and evaluation. The focus in this case is mostly on evaluation and self-assessment with a view to improving the career management skill programme. The standards are also useful in designing appropriate training programmes for practitioners. This is a notable and important development that others in the region might wish to emulate.

Quality standards for career guidance and counselling in Serbia

The Standards for Career Guidance and Counselling Services developed through intersectoral cooperation and adopted by the Ministry of Education in the form of a Rulebook provide a recommended framework for quality assurance of CGC in education, employment, youth and social protection. They were designed through intersectoral cooperation to promote the accessibility of CGC services and career management skills, and to ensure quality.

The standards introduce four complementary areas. Standards for career management skills are the conceptual core, as they define three key areas of personal and professional development: self-discovery and self-understanding, gaining insight into opportunities in educational and occupational spheres, and career creation.

Within these areas, individuals' competences are defined as:

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

The expected outcomes are defined for each of these competences.

Source: [National Review Report Serbia, 2022](#)

More instances of service standards were reported for the employment sector rather than for education. The PES in **Montenegro**, for instance, has adopted rulebooks and internal procedures on how a number of activities, including those with career guidance elements embedded in them, should be conducted.

When standards are present in the education sector, they tend to consider career guidance as an element in respect of the overall efforts of the school, and a minor one at that. In the external school evaluation process carried out in **Montenegro's** primary and secondary schools, one of the aspects focused on is 'Support provided to students', with one indicator being the provision of career guidance services. Here, however, there is no clear indication of what a high-quality service should look like. **Kosovo's*** Professional Standard for Career Advisers provides more clear guidelines, and in addition has credibility since it received the approval of the National Qualifications Authority in 2017. On the basis of this, LuxDEV supported the Level 5 curriculum development for career counselling qualifications.

None of the Western Balkan countries has a professional association as yet that represents the guidance field, and that articulates standards, establishes licensure procedures, and ensures quality

auditing. At best, career guidance is embedded in associations that represent older and more established professions, such as those of psychologists, or of human resource development specialists. As such, it rarely if ever receives the focused attention that is given to it in countries where the profession has more standing.

As has already been noted in other chapters of this report, many initiatives are nevertheless present at the local level, often in the context of projects funded by international donors and agencies. In **Kosovo***, for instance, donors supporting the setting up of School-Based Career Centres are reported to be planning to introduce quality standards in the VET sector, including within the SBCCs.

10.2 Staffing and staff training

Specific university level training in career guidance is only offered in Albania, where the University of Tirana offers a Masters' degree programme in collaboration with the University of Lausanne.

Elsewhere, those providing career-related services have followed short courses, often within the context of donor-funded projects. In **Serbia** as in many parts of the world, many of those in the career guidance field have proxy degrees, such as in education, psychology, adult education, human resources, and youth work. While some teachers are expected to offer career guidance in addition to teaching their own subject, there is no specialisation in the field offered during teacher training programmes.

Specialised training in career guidance usually takes the place of short in-service courses. In **Montenegro**, for instance, teachers followed short courses over 5 to 7 days. In **Serbia**, several short professional development courses are offered by NGOs, with Euroguidance also playing an important part. The difference here is that many of the short courses are in line with the CG standards referred to earlier, and some are accredited by the Institute for the Improvement of Education, with the plan being that such accreditation will eventually become mandatory.

Staff involved in providing guidance services in either the education or the employment sector tend to have other duties besides promoting career development. In **Kosovo***, career counsellors in the SBCC also teach regular subjects, thus only spending part of their time on guidance-related activities. In **Montenegro**, so-called 'head class teachers' take care of the welfare of their students as a whole, with specialised support being offered by psychologists regarding learning and personal difficulties, rather than about career planning and development. In **North Macedonia**, staff whose responsibilities include career guidance work tend to focus mostly on psycho-social issues when meeting students.

Other forms of continuing professional development in the Western Balkans include self-study, as well as peer learning as a way of reflection, of improving quality of services, and of sharing of resources, which is facilitated by the fact that similar languages are spoken in the neighbouring countries of the region. Opportunities for self-improvement through reflection in and on action also seem to be limited given the heavy caseload that needs to be managed. In **Kosovo's*** public employment services, for instance, the ratio of counsellor to clients in the year 2000 was 1:1798. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the ratio is 1:3430 in one of the cantons.

Much of the professional training of staff involved in delivering guidance services takes place within the context of donor-funded and NGO projects at the local level, whether in the education or the employment sectors. In **Kosovo***, for instance, employment advisers benefited from training provided by Swiss Contact in collaboration with the University of Applied Sciences and Arts in Lucerne, Switzerland. In **Montenegro**, PES staff, who usually have a background in psychology, have been trained through an ILO-funded initiative to use the ILO guidance toolkit.

Training career guidance staff in Albania

Masters' Level training:

The Faculty of Social Science at the University of Tirana offers a unique, joint five-year Master's degree programme for career counsellors in partnership with the University of Lausanne. The partnership between the two universities consists of a collaborative research agenda and curricula revision activities. The same Faculty has collaborated with RisiAlbania to train counsellors and develop scientific research.

Short training courses:

The first group of 20 career counsellors from 4 Albanian universities attended a 3-week-long journey and obtained the international certification: Global Career Development Facilitator. This is a significant step towards improving career services at universities and also lays the foundations for the creation of a first group of experts and facilitators of career services for the Albanian market – an indispensable role for the quality employment of youth. The new group of 20 has started working. There is growing awareness about the importance of career guidance services for student orientation in the labour market and in their academic and professional development.

Source: National Review Report Albania, 2022

Short training courses in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In the past 10 years, schools have piloted the Five-Phase Career Guidance Model for Primary Schools and the Swiss-funded Youth Employment Project 'Zoom Youth Employment' for secondary schools. In the latter, employees of public employment services in the cantons participate in the training of pedagogues and psychologists at school. In 2019, the PES of the canton Sarajevo conducted training for 80 such pedagogues/psychologists.

Source: National Review Report Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2022

10.3 Quality of data and information

The information about the quality of data and information used in providing career guidance services in the Western Balkan countries is somewhat patchy.

In the school sector, much of the information that is made available concerns education pathways that students need to know about and to choose from. The focus is on the provision of information rather than on the presentation of labour-market related data that helps students understand what the work-related consequences of choosing a particular education or training pathway are. It is rare that tracer studies are conducted, and when they are, they tend to be on an ad hoc basis, and hence unable to identify long-term patterns that can support career planning.

Information about the labour market can be quite extensive, with data typically collected by the state's statistical office, by employers' organisations, and by PES, which is usually responsible for drawing up an updated list of vacancies. Labour Force surveys, skills forecasting, and other types of data collection exercises have become the norm, not least as this is required within the process of accession to the EU.

Much of this information is readily available online, and in the case of **Serbia**, regulated by standards – at least in principle. However, here as elsewhere, the issue remains the extent to which there is the capacity for the declared standards to be met. The same issues reported by other WB6 countries are applicable here as well: there is more data produced than is made use of, with none of the databases being comprehensive or integrated with each other. This fragmentation has led **Albania** to commit to completely re-engineering its LMI system as well as its employment portal, on

the basis of a study and recommendations made by the UNDP in 2021. A study carried out 2021 in **Bosnia & Herzegovina**, involving several agencies responsible for producing labour market information, concluded that there were methodological inconsistencies in the collection of information about occupations, skills, qualifications, and regional distribution. There is awareness that unless there is harmonisation in the collection of LMI, the identification of state-wide trends is not possible, and employers will continue facing difficulties in finding the workers they need.

Over and above that is the challenge of presenting labour market information in a way that facilitates career planning, a point made by the reports of **Montenegro**, **Serbia**, and **North Macedonia**. Here a strong case is made that LMI alone is not sufficient, and that this data should be supplemented by user-friendly analysis and interpretation that support the career planning and development process of young people and adults alike.

In schools, the career guidance offer tends to be driven by supply rather than demand. Not much effort is made to see how users rate the service in place, or what can be done to improve it given their needs.

Despite these acknowledged limitations, many of the Western Balkan countries are planning to streamline their labour market information. A case in point is **Serbia**, which plans to introduce a unique education information system, with a portal that brings together digitised data that includes survey results. Similarly, the country's Employment Strategy foresees the development of a functional platform for a single labour market information system.

10.4 Monitoring and evaluation of policy feedback

In some cases, action plans regulating the goals set out in an official document, such as in **Montenegro's** National Lifelong Career Guidance Strategy, are evaluated with a view to seeing which targets were reached and which were not.

However, even where monitoring and evaluation is carried out regularly, with annual reports published, as in the National Employment Service in **Serbia**, it is rare to come across a specific focus on career guidance. Some ad hoc studies have been carried out, such as the Feasibility Study regarding the setting up of the National Resource Centre for Career Guidance and Counselling (in 2014), or the Belgrade Open School survey (in 2013) that showed a positive correlation between the receiving of career guidance and the increase of employability and employment of young people. However, in most cases, career guidance is a minor area of interest.

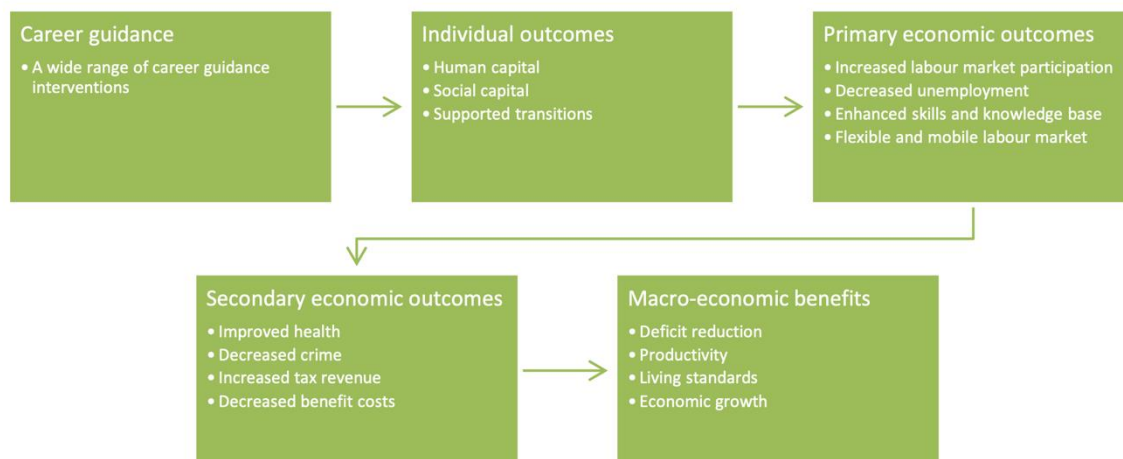
While there are no mechanisms in **Albania** to monitor the delivery of career guidance services, such as tracer studies and client satisfaction surveys, there are occasional studies carried out within the context of universities. However, none of these, or any similar initiatives, constitute a systematic evaluation or evidence of impact. Such challenges are even more pronounced in decentralised and federated systems, such as **Bosnia & Herzegovina**.

11. SERVICE GAPS, UNTAPPED POTENTIALS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Career guidance is still in its initial phases of development in the Western Balkans. Despite being increasingly acknowledged and embedded in legal instruments and directives, and despite several noteworthy initiatives and pilot projects in the education and employment and youth sectors, career guidance still needs to be established in a systemic way, such that services are less fragmented, less ad hoc, with a shelf life that goes beyond the life cycle of a funded project.

In contexts where there is a national strategy for career guidance services, complete with aims and action plans, adequate funding and monitoring, as well as capable and knowledgeable leadership, it would then be more possible to identify and carefully research weaknesses and gaps, limitations and shortfalls, and to take remedial action accordingly. In the absence of such a systemic approach, service gaps are bound to go unnoticed, and the potential of innovative, local, often low-key initiatives remain untapped unless they are scaled up.

International evidence points towards the wisdom in thinking of career guidance as an investment rather than a cost. In their overview of the literature on the benefits of career guidance, Hooley & Dodd (2015) conclude that the evidence base is clear: the effective delivery of career guidance supports three key policy areas, including improving the performance of the **labour market**, and hence of the economy more generally (e.g. better match between demand and supply of skills; better use of human capital leading to worker fulfilment and greater productivity; encouraging entrepreneurship); improving the functioning of the **education system** (e.g. less early disengagement from schooling; better fit between potential and ability on the one hand, and education and training pathways chosen, leading to enhanced motivation; reducing costly course changing); and **social equity** (e.g. reducing occupational stereotyping on the basis of class, gender, and ethnicity; provision of targeted support to vulnerabilised groups; facilitating social mobility by encouraging the capacity to aspire). As the diagram below shows, career guidance not only contributes to several positive outcomes for individuals, but these in turn have an impact on primary and secondary outcomes, leading to macro-economic benefits.



Source: T. Hooley & V. Dodd (2015). "The economic benefits of career guidance". Careers England.

The Western Balkan region is clearly taking note of such evidence, and is striving to develop its services, and to reach out to significant categories of the population in the respective countries, though not to the same extent across the territory, or in a sustained manner. Several challenges remain. The urban-rural divide is still an important consideration, with those in cities more likely to have access to career guidance services, whether in education settings, in PES, or through

community projects. Upper-secondary schools and higher education institutions seem to have more opportunities to benefit from career guidance than students of a younger age. In some cases, and due to the nature of donor funding protocols and priorities, vulnerabilised groups such as NEETs, the newly arrived, and ethnic/cultural minorities are more likely to have access to services than do those in the mainstream. Even here, however, a number of groups that would require specialised career services were hardly ever referred to in the reports. These include persons with disabilities, those with a different sexual orientation, ex-offenders, single mothers, etc. Given high rates of migration within and outside the region, guidance services that help individuals and families make informed decisions about education and training pathways, as well as about employment, are likely to respond to a need that currently does not seem to be addressed.

Research is fundamental to the monitoring process of CG services already in place, to produce up-to-date and reliable labour market information that is useful for career guidance purposes, to the identification of needs, to the evaluation of outcomes against goals planned, and to ensure that policy and practice is up to date with the latest developments internationally. While some research results were referred to in the WB6 reports, these were mostly one-off exercises rather than part of a research agenda that generates insights about the current situation, and/or longitudinal data that supports planning. Tracer studies and user satisfaction surveys, for instance, have indeed started making an appearance in a number of the WB6 countries, though here as well the tendency is for such initiatives not to outlast project funding. They do however provide an important opportunity to demonstrate their value, possibly attracting the state support that is needed to make such exercises sustainable.

The state and private sectors also need to show more than a rhetorical commitment to lifelong career guidance. The 'lifelong' dimension should be made manifest both through input at the primary school level, where key metacognitive skills (e.g. decision-making; self-awareness; understanding of the wide range of occupations) and social and emotional skills are foundational to career learning later on, as well as with adults who are looking for support to develop their careers, or who are about to retire. Furthermore, the lifelong dimension requires a systemic approach to the design of services, such that career guidance becomes a branded offer that is more readily recognised, located, and understood. This enhances the probability that adults in need of guidance services, whether because they are unemployed or because they wish to change their job, are aware of the benefits that can accrue from career guidance, know where the service can be located (whether online or in person), and make use of it in ways that help them fulfil their aspirations.

One major opportunity that lies on the horizon for all the Western Balkan states is the imminent participation in the EU's Youth Guarantee. This can provide the motivational and financial stimulus needed to approach career guidance in a more systemic manner, joining up the wide array of valuable and innovative initiatives that are on the ground under one, overarching umbrella, thus instigating the sharing and emulation of good practice, while reducing overlaps and improving sustainability.

12. THE WAY FORWARD – PRIORITY AREAS FOR SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

The reports about career education and guidance services across the Western Balkan countries provided ample evidence to show that the field is active, with a wide array of initiatives being organised at all or most levels, often with the support of the state, NGOs, donors and occasionally the private sector as well. Collectively, the region showcases a compendium of examples of noteworthy proposals, plans, and actions that provide a promising foundation on which to build on in the future. The reports were also able to identify gaps and challenges, as well as limitations and weaknesses, that needed to be addressed if the notion of a system of lifelong guidance provision was to become a reality. While several issues were mentioned by the authors of the reports, often relevant to the specific situation in their own country, the following can be considered to be a synthesis of more generic priority areas applicable across the board.

These priorities are organised around the same chapter categories that structured the country reports. Most emerge from the data and analyses provided by the country reports. Others are based on international experience with policy development, and with what tends to work and to be most effective in helping career guidance services to become more established, and more successful in fulfilling the private and public good. Not all apply to the six Western Balkan countries in the same way. Despite regional similarities, each country has its own specificity, and is likely to be at a different point in the development of its systems. Some might have already made headway in one or more of the priorities listed below. Others will have recognised the importance of specific policy directions, but are currently hampered by lack of resources, human or otherwise. Depending on the situation of each country, priorities can be considered in relation to a tentative timeline (i.e., in relation to short-, medium- and long-term objectives). Despite differences within and between countries, however, many of the central issues that have emerged from the international reviews of career guidance resonate with the situation in the WB6, providing tried and tested pointers for policy development.

12.1 Policy frameworks

- Develop a national **career guidance strategy** document that helps shape the service and give it a sense of direction. The strategy should in principle be the result of nation-wide consultation among representatives from education, youth, social policy and employment, public and private sectors, parents and students, employers and employees, as well as civil society organisations. Link the strategy to an action plan with clearly set-out objectives and timelines.
- Ensure clear connections between the national guidance strategy to other national strategies that are related in terms of the desired outcomes, such as a skills strategy, or a strategy for youth and equal opportunities policies. In this way there is coherence and congruence between different parts of the system, with one reinforcing the other, diminishing the danger of double-funding and fragmentation.
- Make sure that legal provisions are in place to enable the implementation of the strategic document once approved, and to give it the standing needed to benefit from funding from the national budget.

12.2 Coordination and cooperation mechanisms

- Strive to have strategic leadership in place, with those at the helm having a good understanding of the benefits for the nation that can accrue from investing in career guidance services. Depending on context, such strategic leadership can be exercised through enhanced intra- and inter-ministerial communication and multi-stakeholder input about matters related to career guidance, in the context of a working group with a clear mandate.

- Such a working group can take the shape of a national guidance forum with representatives from the different stakeholders that have an interest in career guidance, in order to ensure continued development and monitoring of the national strategy, and to respond to challenges and emerging needs in a timely and efficient manner. Make sure that regional and municipal authorities are either represented, regularly invited to contribute at the national forum, or have chapters of the national forum at their level. Maintain a balance between proximity to the government and autonomy: having a buffer ensures that the Forum's work is not overly determined by the policies of the current government, thus maintaining a sense of direction and stability despite changes of politicians at the helm of the country.
- Set up a well-funded national research unit in a Ministry or University with the remit to monitor and evaluate, to document best practice, to publicise local and international initiatives, and to carry out relevant studies such as labour market surveys, tracer studies, and user satisfaction, as well as the production of resources required to deliver a high quality service. Such research would also strive to develop an understanding of career guidance, as well as context-appropriate resources, corresponding to the culture, economy and traditions in the country. These include labour market realities, such as informality.

12.3 Delivery of career development services

- Ensure that a career education framework/curriculum is developed, and consider whether having it as a compulsory timetabled subject (on its own or with related curricular areas such as life skills), or whether it is better to have it feature across the curriculum, is most appropriate and feasible given the context. Explore the ways in which education institutions can adopt a whole-school approach to career guidance, and to encourage self-sufficiency through participation in youth entrepreneurship schemes. It is key that all learners are reached to leverage the easy accessibility within school settings: consider services for all (through curricular approaches), services for some who need more support and services for the few who need extended support (through extracurricular CG offers, e.g. in cooperation with PES or NGOs). In this way, the challenge for most countries facing already overcrowded curricula can be addressed more easily.
- Set up well-resourced career hubs in schools, which can serve as focal points for career education, for exploration of the world of work, for individual and group career counselling, and for self-directed searches using appropriate web-based platforms as well as print-based resources. Coordinators of such hubs could coordinate career education that features across the curriculum to bring the dispersed learning together.
- Get NGOs and donors working in the field of career guidance to get together to see what each is doing, how synergies can improve quality and avoid overlaps, and how collaboration can facilitate the development of an integrated system of services rather than a fragmented one. This could be one of the tasks of the aforementioned multi-stakeholder career guidance working group or of the national forum, if a decision to establish one is made.

12.4 Funding mechanisms

- Make sure that the relevant Ministries (of employment, education, youth) set out a budget line dedicated specifically to career guidance. In countries that have committed to a decentralised approach and to subsidiarity, this central budget could be devolved to regions and municipalities to ensure that funding is spent in relation to locally defined priorities and needs.
- Earmark some of the funds that will come through the Youth Guarantee scheme in order to improve the guidance offer and to bring together the different initiatives so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

- Encourage private entities and enterprises, as well as worker associations and unions, to recognise career development at work as a priority deserving their support. Such support could take the form of financial contributions, as part and parcel of a corporation's human resource development budget, or from the funds generated by membership dues in a trade union or professional association.

12.5 Measures to enhance access

- Invest in developing a one-stop, web-based, interactive career guidance platform that brings together the relevant labour market information, as well as self-assessment tools and other functions associated with work exploration, thus ensuring wider access to services. Use social media creatively and in a way that integrates well with other services that are digitally based. Develop innovative ways of mixing online with offline services to ensure customised delivery that meets the distinctive needs of clients.
- Consider which categories of the population require tailor-made career guidance services that respond to their specific circumstances and needs. Explore what has been done internationally in order to cater for persons with disabilities, single parents, ex-offenders, people on the move, etc.
- Try to integrate career guidance more effectively into the daily lives of citizens, by having services in areas with regular flows of people such as central city thoroughfares, supermarkets, gymnasiums, and community centres.

12.6 Enhancing quality

- Develop pre-service and in-service training programmes for career guidance practitioners. These can be taught at different levels (the lowest being Level 5), especially if the plan is to develop a tiered profession, but keeping in mind that the trend in Europe is to pitch the training at a Master's level (Level 7). The training can also be offered as a stream within already existing degrees, such as teacher education programmes and youth work. Online modules are appropriate for some aspects of training and are especially welcomed by part-time students already in employment and with family responsibilities. Training should give due attention to gender issues related to differential career aspirations and choices that reproduce social inequality.
- Enhance quality of provision by setting out standards of practice, a code of ethics, indicators, and monitoring and evaluation protocols. Make sure that roles and responsibilities are well defined. Build on already-existing successful practice. Such tasks could be undertaken by the multi-stakeholder working group, by a National Guidance Forum or by a research unit if one or the other has been set up, or by a professional association of career guidance practitioners.
- Encourage guidance practitioners to professionalise their services by having national recognition of the minimal knowledge and skills base required to practice, and by promoting the notion of the reflective practitioner as a way to constantly improve the offer, in line with best practice internationally. Embed reflective practice in a process of regular, system-oriented monitoring and evaluation, which includes identifying and building on international and home-grown successful practice.

12.7 Addressing service gaps

- Research and evaluate which groups are most in need of career guidance, and whether they have ready access to it. Examine whether the service they are getting is fit for purpose, and whether the service would be improved if representatives from each of these groups are trained to provide career guidance. Such evaluations are often carried out by a dedicated research unit, either as part

of a Ministry, of an institution of higher learning, or of a professional association. Make use of tried and tested tools (e.g. the Matrix Standard), adapting them for use in country-specific contexts.

- Pay more attention to the career development needs of persons already in employment, and put incentives in place that encourage stakeholders – such as employers, trade unions, guilds, chambers, and so on – to offer work-based career guidance services. Those in employment also include those active in the informal labour market, where career guidance would take on a stronger advocacy role given the lack of social protection, increased scope for exploitation and for disregard to workers' rights, and supporting individuals to move towards formality.
- Given the high rate of mobility of people both across the region and outside of it, examine whether there is a need for career guidance services that take such mobility into account, both in relation to education and training, as well as employment. Specific training in the use of such platforms as EUROPASS and EURES (European cooperation network of employment services) is likely to help respond to a need that is currently not addressed.

13. CONCLUSIONS

The country reports demonstrate in great detail the different efforts, initiatives and projects in the career education and guidance field in the Western Balkans. Advanced and noteworthy practices and resources are to be found alongside more basic provision, or no provision at all, not only in the same country, but also in the same region or municipality. The different governments represented in the Western Balkan review have shown some understanding of the value of career guidance both for the country and for the individual, and have signalled this understanding by embedding the mandate to provide career guidance services in a number of policy documents and legislative instruments. There remains, however, a significant divide between what is planned and what happens on the ground, and between what is desired and what is in fact implemented and enacted in education institutions and in public employment services or youth work.

Much of the innovation and cutting-edge practice in the field comes from NGOs and community-based organisations, who benefit from funding from a very wide range of donors and development agencies. Here local operators have the opportunity to learn from international efforts, to adopt and adapt resources, and to develop their own in response to the specific labour market and cultural realities of the communities they serve. In the best of cases, these innovations and practices take root, gain credibility, and go to scale, sometimes even being adopted nation-wide, triggering fresh developments elsewhere. Often, however, a lot of effort and energy goes to waste as initiatives fizzle out once project funding dries up. Even so, capacities will have been built, and may be re-activated and exploited in subsequent projects. In some of the Western Balkan countries, the sheer number of organisations involved in the career guidance field can lead to situations of unintended overlap and even confusion. It is more helpful to the country if donors coordinate their efforts so that their impact is more effective, and longer-lasting.

The country reports tend to focus on the supply of services. Less clear is the actual demand for them – something which in fact does come through other sources available for at least some of the countries in the region, where polls with young people showed how little career guidance they actually received – and how much they felt the need for it (UNICEF/ETF, 2021). In a context of widespread and entrenched informality in the labour market, where jobs are obtained by ‘who you know’, and where individuals and families have their own networks and social capital that steers educational and occupational aspirations, the question of the extent to which career guidance is relevant is a fair one to ask. CG is a service that mostly makes sense in a structured and formalised labour market, where education and training pathways are explicitly linked to labour market sectors and hierarchically organised positions that one can access on the basis of nationally recognised formal qualifications. That, in principle, if not always in fact, ensures meritocracy, where, with the support of information, advice and guidance, individuals take positions in society that they are most qualified for, enhancing well-being in both the private and the public realm.

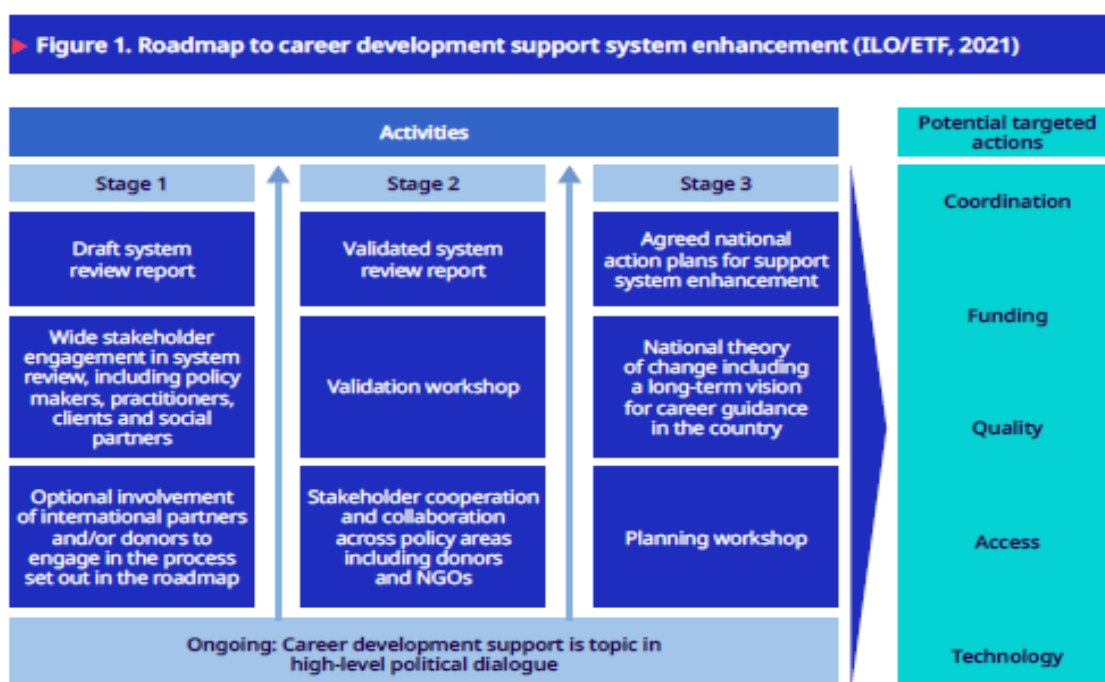
While all Western Balkan countries are trying to address the challenge of informality in the labour market – not least because the reduction of this sector is one of the conditions for entry into the European Union – the fact is that such practices are hard to die out. They have become part and parcel of the way individuals, families and groups negotiate their access to resources, with livelihood being one of the most important. This does not mean that there is no place for guidance, for instance CG contributes to support people moving out of informality; merely that one cannot indiscriminately impose models developed elsewhere and assume they will take root in a very different context. This point deserves more reflection to avoid a situation where the providers go through the motions of developing and offering a service simply because it has become a trend to do so, only to find that there is no real demand for it, or that the manner in which it is conceived is incompatible with lived realities on the ground. Pointers for action in this regard are emerging in the global South, with Brazil (da Silva et al., 2016; Ribeiro, 2018), India (Arulmani, 2011), and South Africa (Stead & Watson, 2017) being among the most significant (Sultana, 2020). Certainly, much benefit can be derived by helping young people understand the problems that an informal economy represents, in terms of its propensity for exploitation and for flouting human rights, not to mention its draining of the state from

the revenue needed to finance a modern, democratic and equitable polity. Exposure to a transformative career education programme – one that includes, but also goes beyond a technocratic focus on Career Management Skills (Middtun & McCash, 2018) – would equip young people with the knowledge and dispositions needed to develop their capacity to aspire and to strive for well-being and fulfilment at work. Given its multiplier effects, such a programme benefits individuals and communities alike, and should be at the top of the priorities of lifelong education systems across the Western Balkan region.

The country reports refer to a great number of desiderata, aspirations, and priorities. While these are to be commended, it might very well be that such ambitions are too high given the current state of play. It might be wiser to start where it matters most and where a culture that is mindful of the benefits of career guidance can grow. In this regard, establishing a career education programme for students delivered throughout all the cycles of compulsory schooling is likely to have major impact without too great a financial outlay. International experience shows that there are several models that one could implement, with possibly the most successful being that which embeds career education firmly in the curriculum, as a separately time-tabled area. When taught in an experiential and engaging manner, learners are enabled to think through aspects of one of the most important areas in their lives, one which has a very significant impact on well-being, both life-wide and lifelong. It is only when a culture that is favourable to career guidance – based on a deeper, experiential understanding of its worth – that demand for the service will not only match, but claim improved supply.

The country reports, on which this synthesis is based, can helpfully trigger continued reflections and conversations around the topic of career education and guidance. Key themes, accomplishments and challenges have been identified, around which such discussions can proceed.

However, reflection and understanding are only a prelude to action. As suggested by the ETF and the ILO (ETF/ILO, 2021), the review process ideally leads to the collaborative articulation of a theory of change and related action plan for system development. These would need to take place at three levels, namely (i) the system level, (ii) the provider level and (iii) the practitioner level (see Figure 1). Such a process, which builds on the reviews conducted, might be the trigger that brings all stakeholders together, helping to build trust among the different participants, paving the way for enhanced cooperation in the field. Such a process can only be of benefit to each and every citizen, and to the public good as a whole.



ACRONYMS

AIIP	Active Inclusion Integration Platform
ALMPs	Active Labour Market Policies
ADA	Austrian Development Agency
BIPO	Battery of Instruments for Professional Development
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CG (C)	Career guidance (and counselling)
CEG	Career education and guidance
CIPS	Centres for Professional Counselling
CV	Curriculum vitae
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DOTS	Decision-making, Opportunity-awareness, Transition skills, self-awareness
EC	European Commission
ELGPN	European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPMGs	Integrated Policy Management Groups
LTU	Long-term unemployed
LuxDEV	Luxembourg Development Agency
MESTI	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development
PES	Public Employment Services

SBCCs	School-Based Career Centres
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SEET	South Eastern Europe and Turkey
SISEDE	System for Electronic Data Exchange
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations' Children's Emergency Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WB6	Western Balkan 6 countries
WGCG	Inter-agency Working Group on Career Guidance

GLOSSARY

Note: This Glossary draws on the glossary of terms put together by the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN, 2014).

Access to guidance	Conditions, circumstances or requirements (e.g. qualification, education level, special needs, gender, age, etc.) governing admission to and participation in guidance activities, and/or the right to use guidance services or programmes.
Career	The interaction of work roles and other life roles over a person's lifespan, including how they balance paid and unpaid work, and their involvement in learning and education.
Career adviser / counsellor	Career advisers (also called career counsellors in some countries) assist people to explore, pursue and attain their career goals.
Career development	The lifelong process of managing learning, work, leisure and transitions in order to move towards a personally determined and evolving future.
Career education	Programmes and activities of learning to help people to develop the skills necessary to manage their career and life pathway. These include accessing and making effective use of career information and guidance.
Career guidance	A range of activities that enable citizens of any age, and at any point in their lives, to identify their capacities, competences and interests; to make meaningful educational, training and occupational decisions; and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competences are learned and/or used.
Career information systems (CIS)	Systems, often computer-based or online but also in print, designed to aid an individual or a group in their choice of career, employment, occupation or work by gathering together, organising and providing information about specific occupations, professions or organisations including descriptions of pay, conditions, training, qualifications and experience required.
Career management skills	A range of competences which provide structured ways for individuals (and groups) to gather, analyse, synthesise and organise self, educational and occupational information, as well as the skills to make and implement decisions and transitions.
Coordination mechanisms	Coordination of lifelong guidance activities is likely to require a coordinating structure, with operational powers and funding (and possibly a contract or legal mandate). The establishment of national fora is one way that has been used to encourage coordination of lifelong guidance activities. It could also involve the sharing of responsibility for different activities in a programme of careers work.
Distance guidance services	Guidance services that are provided remotely, for example by telephone, email or via the internet. The key feature is that the client and guidance worker are not in face-to-face contact and, in the case of automated internet guidance, no guidance worker is directly involved in the delivery of the guidance service.

e-guidance	Counselling or guidance that is delivered using ICT and which may or may not directly involve a guidance counsellor. Frequently used to describe the provision of information or the use of self-assessment tools and exercises via the internet.
Guidance systems	The way the delivery of guidance services has been designed and organised. This might be the approach taken in a particular country or region to the organisation of guidance services or a particular way of delivering guidance, such as online or remotely.
Labour market information systems	Systems, mechanisms or processes for gathering, organising and providing information about the state of the labour market and/or professions and jobs. This includes recording changes taking place within the labour market, employment, jobs and the professions.
Lifelong (career) guidance	A range of activities that enables citizens of any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competences are learned and/or used.

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