

# Reform of educational systems: European policies for lifelong guidance to fight early school leaving and unemployment

## KEY FINDINGS

- There is increasing **international consensus and evidence** from research that lifelong guidance and the systematic development of career management skills lead to better educational and employment outcomes. Nevertheless, a recent survey shows a **persisting delivery gap in guidance provision** in the Member States.
- An analysis of selected policy documents (Council, European Parliament) suggests **guidance** is a **relevant policy element within the related policy fields**. However, the documents do not refer to existing European policy initiatives and structured cooperation for lifelong guidance as an own policy field.
- **European policies for Lifelong Guidance** have been promoted by two Council Resolutions (2004, 2008) and by the **European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network** (2007) which has shown considerable impact on national guidance policies. The current network will be funded by the Commission until the end of 2015. Different options will be considered for continuation.

## 1. LIFELONG GUIDANCE AND CAREER MANAGEMENT SKILLS: POLITICAL RELEVANCE AND CONCEPT

There is **increasing international consensus that effective guidance programmes have a positive impact** on educational, economic, employment and social outcomes. As the OECD puts it in a section dedicated to innovation in education, '*career guidance can help to make the best use of human resources in the labour market as well as in education by allowing better matches between skills and interests and opportunities for work and learning*'. Cedefop, in a briefing note of December 2014, underlines another aspect of guidance: its contribution to coping with challenges in times of instability, as it enhances the '*science and practice of adaptability*'<sup>1</sup>.

Evidence from research suggests that guidance in schools contributes to increasing engagement and success. It helps to implement strategies to enhance permeability of education pathways. In general, it shows a positive impact on managing transitions from schools, training and education institutions to education or work, transitions between jobs in case of job changes and from unemployment / inactivity to employment.<sup>2</sup>

**Lifelong guidance** refers to '*a continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point of 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 those capacities and competences are learned and/or used*'<sup>3</sup>. Over the last decade, "**career management skills**" have received increasing attention as research argued that earnings variation in OECD countries may be partly explained by people's ability to build, manage and deploy their skills, rather than by education and qualification alone. This implies a wider focus of career guidance with a view to systematic career education starting in schools and to be continued at work as

well as in the context of employment services when enabling jobseekers to effectively search for jobs and develop their employability<sup>4</sup>.

Lifelong guidance programmes encompass a multi-dimensional approach:

- **Cooperation and coordination** of stakeholders for policy development and of delivery services at all levels to bridge the gap between education and the world of work.
- **Legislation and organisational rules** (e.g. career education in curricula, activation and individual action planning in employment services).
- **Service delivery concepts** (e.g. web portals including information about occupations and the labour market, training paths, tools for self-assessment; individual career guidance; group information and counselling).

To develop effective lifelong guidance provision requires **programmes and policies in a cross-cutting perspective as well as in each of the relevant fields**: education (schools), vocational education and training, higher education, adult education, employment (for working people and unemployed) and social inclusion (e.g. early school leavers and dropouts, long-term unemployed or disabled), education and employment mobility (e.g. ERASMUS, EURES).

## 2. EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT: GUIDANCE IN EUROPEAN POLICIES

### Guidance aspects in selected Council Recommendations / Resolutions

Guidance is referred to in a direct (or indirect) manner in all documents adopted by the Council with regard to youth unemployment, early school leaving (and dropout), education and skills policies to improve the match of skills demand and supply<sup>5</sup>:

Policy document	Guidance and related aspects
Council Recommendation European Youth Guarantee	Ensuring that young people have full access to information about the services and support available Developing partnerships between public and private employment services, education and training institutions, career guidance services and with other specialised youth services ... that help smooth the transition from unemployment, inactivity or education into work Enabling employment services, together with other partners supporting young people, to provide personalised guidance
Council Declaration Alliance for Apprenticeship	Facilitating the participation of young people with fewer opportunities by providing career guidance, preparatory training and other targeted support
Council Recommendation Early School Leaving	<i>Prevention</i> : Motivate pupils to continue education and training <i>Intervention</i> : early warning mechanisms and targeted support for pupils at risk; mentoring and guidance and counselling to support students' career choices and transitions <i>Compensation</i> : targeted individual support
Council Conclusions on investing in education and training (Rethinking Education)	Reducing the number of low-skilled adults ... by providing information on access to lifelong learning services, such as information on the validation of non-formal and informal learning and career guidance
Council Resolution on New Skills for Jobs	Supporting jobseekers by providing them with vocational guidance and a personal training plan, which should identify the competence modules required to move to new jobs where there are skills gaps

## European Parliament Resolutions call for establishing better guidance

The same holds true for the European Parliament: In all resolutions dedicated to youth employment, early school leaving and rethinking education, it calls upon Member States to<sup>6</sup>:

- establish better guidance and tailored career service centres;
- equip young people with the right information, advice and guidance to make sound career choices, and to motivate them to study and to acquire vocational training;
- promote programmes providing vocational guidance and support for learners in choosing a career;
- establish better career guidance and high-quality work-experience schemes to tackle early school leaving;
- ensure appropriate and ongoing training of careers guidance counsellors so that they can proactively engage with potential early school leavers;
- introduce special career guidance courses in primary and secondary schools and higher education institutions, as well as mentoring schemes and career guidance for women to reduce gender stereotypes in education;
- invest in early labour-market activation mechanisms;
- provide information and guidance to attract more foreign learners to VET in the EU.

To conclude, European policymakers have put career guidance on the agenda within all policy fields covered here. However, lifelong guidance as a policy field of its own among European policies and of structured cooperation is not referred to in the documents.

### 3. THE EUROPEAN LIFELONG GUIDANCE POLICY NETWORK: IMPLEMENTATION OF TWO DEDICATED COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS

At European level **two Council Resolutions (2004, 2008)** have been dedicated to lifelong guidance policies, as policy reviews had identified that guidance provision in the Member States was often fragmented and uneven: The first, on 'Strengthening Policies, Systems and Practices in the field of Guidance throughout life in Europe', defined the concept and called for building up European structures for policy coordination. The second, on 'Better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies', encouraged strengthening European cooperation through the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) along four priority areas: 1) Acquisition of career management skills, 2) Facilitation of access to guidance services, 3) Development of quality assurance in guidance provision, and 4) Encouragement of cooperation and coordination among stakeholders.

Since 2007, the European Commission (DG Education and Culture) has been funding a **Member-State driven policy network, the ELGPN**. ELGPN aims to assist the EU Member States (plus neighbouring countries) and the Commission in developing lifelong guidance policies. Currently, it has 30 member countries (plus Switzerland as observer). Each member country nominates up to three representatives from education ministries, labour ministries and/or NGOs. Since 2009, DG Employment and Social Affairs has been taking part, thus illustrating the link between education and employment at EU level<sup>7</sup>.

The network has produced a number of **European tools for policy implementation** and **Concept notes** connecting ELGPN activities with European policy priorities (e.g. Youth Guarantee, Early School Leaving). As a cooperation product "**A European Resource Kit - Lifelong Guidance Policy Development**" was issued in 2012 and translated in 16 member countries; working groups are following its implementation. A second tool to be mentioned is "**The Evidence Base on Lifelong Guidance: Guide to Key Findings for Effective Policy and Practice**" combining findings from research with recommendations for evidence gathering<sup>8</sup>. In 2015, ELGPN will be compiling the existing tools into **European Guidelines for Lifelong Guidance**.

**A recent survey demonstrates considerable impact of structured EU cooperation:** More than half of the ELGPN member-countries (17 - AT, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FR, HR, HU, IS, IT, NO, PL, PT, RO, SK) report that the Work Programmes 2008-14 have had

*significant* influence on national policies on lifelong guidance, while all remaining countries list examples of *some* impact<sup>9</sup>.

The **future of European policy development and cooperation** is, however, **uncertain** as funding under ERASMUS+ ends in 2015. Different options will be considered for continuation. Following the reorganisation of the Commission, the responsibility for the network lies now with DG Employment and Social Affairs as part of the skills policies strand.

#### **4. POLICY CHALLENGES: CONTINUING DELIVERY GAPS**

To conclude from a recent Eurobarometer survey, **career guidance provision does not correspond to citizens' needs in Europe**:

Only one out of four respondents (**24 %**) **have used a career guidance service** at some point, mostly while they were still in education, followed by those looking for a job. More highly educated are more likely to have used a career guidance service. The findings vary considerably for individual Member States, ranging from a high of 55 % in Denmark and 47% in Sweden to a low of 3 % in Hungary and Bulgaria. Close to half (45 %) indicated **lack of access as main reason**. According to another study, by the European Parliament, quality career guidance based on labour market information is reportedly not available to all VET students<sup>10</sup>.

This contrasts with the Eurobarometer finding that **most citizens (71 %) agree that career guidance services are useful** for making the right choice for further studies, while 62 % think that these are useful for finding a job, and 53 %, for finding opportunities to work or to study in another country<sup>11</sup>.

- 
- 1 OECD: <http://www.oecd.org/edu/innovation-education/careerguidancepolicyreviewhomepage.htm>.  
<http://www.oecd.org/edu/innovation-education/19975192.pdf>;
  - 2 Cedefop: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/9094>.  
<http://www.elgpn.eu/publications/browse-by-language/english/elgpn-tools-no-3.-the-evidence-base-on-lifelong-guidance/>.
  - 3 <http://www.elgpn.eu/elgpn/db/files/server/files/45>;  
[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/educ/104236.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/educ/104236.pdf).
  - 4 <http://www.oecd.org/edu/innovation-education/19975192.pdf>;  
<http://www.elgpn.eu/publications/browse-by-language/english/elgpn-research-paper-no.-1-pisa/>.
  - 5 Youth Guarantee: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2013:120:0001:0006:EN:PDF>;  
Alliance Apprenticeship: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/139011.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/139011.pdf); School Leaving: <http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2011:191:0001:0006:en:PDF>;  
Rethinking Education: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/135467.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/135467.pdf);  
New Skills: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2007:290:0001:0003:EN:PDF>;
  - 6 Youth Employment: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2014-0010+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>;  
Early school leaving: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2011-0531+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>;  
Gender stereotypes: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-%2f%2fEP%2f%2fTEXT%2bTA%2bP7-TA-20130074%2b0%2bDOC%2bXML%2bV0%2f%2fEN&language=EN>;  
Rethinking Education: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-%2f%2fEP%2f%2fTEXT%2bTA%2bP7-TA-2013-0433%2b0%2bDOC%2bXML%2bV0%2f%2fEN&language=EN>;  
Education/Training 2020: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-%2f%2fEP%2f%2fTEXT%2bTA%2bP7-TA-2012-0323%2b0%2bDOC%2bXML%2bV0%2f%2fEN&language=EN>.
  - 7 <http://www.elgpn.eu/>.
  - 8 [http://www.elgpn.eu/publications/browse-by-language/english/ELGPN\\_resource\\_kit\\_2011-12\\_web.pdf](http://www.elgpn.eu/publications/browse-by-language/english/ELGPN_resource_kit_2011-12_web.pdf);  
<http://www.elgpn.eu/publications/browse-by-language/english/elgpn-tools-no-3.-the-evidence-base-on-lifelong-guidance/>;
  - 9 Concept Notes: <http://www.elgpn.eu/publications>.
  - 10 Significant change reported by AT, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FR, HR, HU, IS, IT, NO, PL, PT, RO, SK, source: ELGPN Progress Report (2013-2014) <http://www.elgpn.eu/publications/elgpn-progress-report-2013-2014>.
  - 11 [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014\\_2019/documents/cult/dv/esstdualeducation/esstdualeducationen.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/documents/cult/dv/esstdualeducation/esstdualeducationen.pdf).  
[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_417\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_417_en.pdf).

---

**DISCLAIMER**

The content of this document is the sole responsibility of the author and any opinions expressed therein do not necessarily represent the official position of the European Parliament. It is addressed to Members and staff of the EP for their parliamentary work. Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy.

This document is available at: [www.europarl.europa.eu/studies](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/studies)

Contact: [Poldep-Economy-Science@ep.europa.eu](mailto:Poldep-Economy-Science@ep.europa.eu)

Manuscript completed in February 2015

© European Union

EMPL 2015-01



ISBN: 978-92-823-6586-1 (paper)

ISBN: 978-92-823-6585-4 (pdf)

CATALOGUE: QA-04-15-119-ENC+N

doi: 10.2861/982221 (paper)

doi: 10.2861/608356 (pdf)