



Review of current state of Career Guidance and counseling in Albania

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1. Executive Summary

Career guidance is commonly agreed as net contributor to the achievements of public policy goals in education, employment and social equity. Career guidance provision can help to better articulate demand for learning, contribute to enhancing education access and completion and improve the match between labor market supply and demand. Career guidance can play a crucial role in helping to improve labor market efficiency, for a range of reasons, including the value of information in improving labor market transparency and flexibility, and the higher efficiency of allocation as the result of a better match between individual talents and qualifications on the one hand and, on the other, the skills and qualifications demanded by employers.

The research was intended as stocktaking and reviewing exercise for established career guidance programs in Albania and identification of new potentials for effective career service delivery. The research focused on career services both in the education system and outside of the education system. The consultants explored career guidance in 7 separately defined pillars which included: (1) compulsory education, (2) general high education, (3) higher education, (4) vocational education, (5) municipalities, (6) public employment services, and (7) private recruitment companies.

Career guidance is in demand in all the seven pillars. In identifying the recommendations, the consultants considered criteria like possibility to achieve systemic change, feasibility within the project's mandate in Phase 2, measurability of results, risk factors and other cost related factors.

Intervention in the compulsory education and general high education would require a system level approach already upfront. This would mean systemic change and long-term sustainability, but would come with a relatively high bill. The intervention would need to reach out up to 370 000 students in compulsory and 125 000 in general high education. This intervention would hardly be measurable in employment or jobs created due to age of the targeted youth.

Municipalities represent a plausible opportunity for Risi's intervention which would leverage systemic change and gradual scalability. It would be an almost perfect timing to partner with selected municipalities due to the still ongoing administrative reform. Municipalities are highly motivated to build capacities in area of career guidance as part of their employment promotion policy. They can also provide an institutional platform to accommodate actors from other pillars like education or private recruitment companies.

The new higher education law creates an important momentum for career guidance. The law is expected to have an effect on the universities to compete for more students and funding. Career offices would produce some of the key indicators on which performance will be measured like employment of graduates. Private universities are more eager to advance with the issue, while public universities might need more encouragement.

2. Scope and purpose of assignment

RisiAlbania is interested to look into opportunities to support establishment and/or further strengthening of career guidance and counselling for young women and men at different stages of their life and education. For this purpose, MyCareer, an organization working in the field of career development and counseling established in Macedonia and with considerable regional experience, was hired to set out a research to map and assess current state of provision of career guidance in Albania.

For the sake of the analysis, it is worth noting here the commonly agreed definition of career guidance as provided by OECD and referred to in the ToR for this assignment. Career guidance refers to services and activities designed to assist individuals of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make education, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. Such services can be found in various locations and providers (schools, universities, training institutions, public employment services, in the community and private sectors). The activities may take place on an individual or group basis and may be face-to-face or at a distance (including help lines and web-based services). They include career information provision (in print, ICT-based and other forms), assessment and self-assessment tools, counselling interviews, career education programs (to help individuals develop their self-awareness, opportunity awareness and career management skills), taster programs (to sample options before choosing them), work search programs and transition services.

The research was intended as stocktaking and reviewing exercise for established career guidance programs in Albania and identification of new potentials for effective career service delivery. The research focused on career services both in the education system and outside of the education system. The consultants analyzed institutions from all sides of career guidance equation, the supply side, the education institutions and demand side, private sector initiatives and intermediaries, the catalysts of these initiatives, and government institutions. The consultants explored career guidance in 7 separately defined pillars which included: (1) compulsory education, (2) general high education, (3) higher education, (4) vocational education, (5) municipalities, (6) public employment services, and (7) private recruitment companies.

The conclusions and the results of the research will serve as a basis to identify opportunities for a gender sensitive intervention by RisiAlbania with the purpose to provide young women and men with enhanced career counselling in order to improve the capacity of youth to take more informed decisions.

3. Methodology

The methodology employed for the purpose of this assignment included desk research, field visits and one-to-one interviews, focus group discussion, debrief and report writing. Throughout the entire process the consultants established links of permanent communication and coordination with RisiAlbania as a main partner in the activity which also served as liaison organization between the local community and MyCareer.

3.1 Desk research

During this phase the consultants went through all of the information and written materials available on career guidance available either in print or electronic form. The consultants developed a database of relevant materials from both side of workforce development equation: analyzing the information from the “supply side” i.e. education institution responsible for creation and development of human capital and further career guidance of those entering into the labor market.

Furthermore, important were to review materials from the “demand side” and some of the practices that private sector and recruitment companies have in place to properly guide graduates and jobseekers toward their future career.

Lastly, materials on the “intermediaries” such as central and local government as well as international donor community projects that serve as catalysts in promoting these services were reviewed and analyzed to understand their role in removing any bottlenecks and in developing broken links that exist in the human capital equation.

During this phase, the consultants also identified relevant stakeholders and gauged the level of activity across sectors, assessing their willingness and capacity to address the career guidance and skill development opportunities and challenges.

3.2 One-to-one interviews

After the desk research of the secondary data was completed the consultants visited a selected number of institutions from all sides of workforce equation. During the field visit a specific methodology in selecting the institutions was followed:

- **Decision makers:** the consultants requested to spend a considerate amount of time with decision makers of institutions so that we have an inclusive and participatory model of suggesting new intervention ideas and models on career guidance. It was important to meet the decision makers because when selecting interventions for implementation than an appropriate support model should be provided and this could be guaranteed only if decision makers are part of the process.
- **Regional spread:** one of the key factors in selecting the institutions was the regional spread of selected stakeholders covering entire country and regions be equally represented of in the study. In spite of economic activity' concentration in Tirana, it is important to gain insight into the capacities of institutions outside of Tirana region, where future initiatives may scale up.
- **Access to labor market and the size of the institution:** the consultants also considered as important a horizontal spread in terms of size of institutions/companies in addition to access to labor market ;
- **Size of the institutions:** size of the institutions selected was very important criteria for the consultants in defining the final list of field visits to be conducted. This was very important because many of the bigger institutions already have integrated some of the career guidance and counseling initiatives, and could be considered as outliers and certainly not common practice among smaller institutions which on the other side have limited resources (human and financial) to deliver any of the services outside of their core competence. The diversification in meeting of institutions

representing both sides, we think, is better in getting a clear picture of what is happening with career guidance initiatives/activities in Albania;

- **Absorption capacities:** it is crucial that we meet with institutions and organizations that are working in producing talents in the professions with high absorption capacity in one side and companies that have a higher recruitment volume on the other side;
- **Positive practices implemented:** finally, we believe that positive practices in any of the sides of workforce development equations should be promoted and supported thus helping the scalability of these initiatives. This is critical also because these champion institutions could serve as pilot for know-how transferring among others that want to incorporate career guidance initiatives in their own activities.

Using these criteria, the consultants identified and met with 15 decision makers from institutions of all sides of career guidance equation. ***The full list of meetings and people met is provided in Appendix 2 of this report.***

In order to get a clear picture of which side of equation brings more value to support the implementation of career guidance model, the consultants used a semi-structured interviewing technique. In the first part, through a more formal process, the consultants spent time to validate information gathered from the secondary data for each of respective institutions and latter through more informal conversation the consultants asked open-ended questions.

3.3 Focus group discussion

Focus group discussion followed desk research and one-to-one interviews. The consultants made the efforts to hold two focus group discussions: one with universities and another one with municipalities. The consultants chose to invite these institutions as they were assessed as most dynamic actors and represented a high potential for career guidance provision. A focus group event was organized with University Career Center managers. Participants from municipalities did not manage to come to the second focus group discussion session. Instead, the consultants held intensive discussions with a senior manager of the Municipality of Tirana. Members of the event are provided in Annex 3 of this document.

4. Main findings and analysis

The consultants explored the seven pillars that are outlined in the ToR. This section summarizes the key findings and the respective analysis for each of those pillars.

4.1 Compulsory education

The compulsory education in Albania includes Grade 1 -9 and is regulated as a national education system. Around 377 000 students attend 1340 public schools and 124 private schools in Grades 1

through 9 throughout the country¹. The current curriculum was approved in 2014 and is under gradual implementation which should complete by 2019. No significant changes are expected in the next 5 years regarding key elements of the curriculum content. All schools are obliged to comply with the National Curricular Framework requirements. Private schools tend to provide their students with additional classes for in-demand subjects like foreign languages or information technology.

According to the Curricular Framework, the general education system should encourage development of vocational modules that aim to equip students with sets of skills that would help them enter the job market and make career related decisions: initiative, independent work, responsibility etc². In other words, the Albanian education system should develop sustainable and diverse skills that help young people adapt themselves to the changing demands of the job market.

The Curriculum Framework should provide room and opportunity for developing curriculum materials or activities that could serve career guidance purposes. This means that the system, through the formal curriculum, or in cross curricular perspective, should develop teaching and learning materials for career purposes. Overall, there is a rather weak presence of compulsory curricular or cross curricular elements with regard to career guidance. Within the civic education subject, certain classes provide opportunities for students to explore their economic and social context and roles of various jobs in their communities. These topics are addressed repeatedly in various grades. The Grade 7 curriculum includes a chapter dedicated to economic education which is titled “Economics for Success”. This is an adaptation of the Junior Achievement international curriculum for the same age group. The content of this chapter, in fact, is offered as a career guidance module for students. They are invited to explore their personal values, skills and interests and consider them against the variety of jobs (professions) they are introduced to. In this chapter, they consider the new knowledge and skills they have to gain in order to be able to adapt themselves to job requirements. A career guidance module can also be found as practice in Grade 9 in the form of an extracurricular activity since a few years. This module was developed with the assistance of donor funding. There is no evaluation whether such module serves the purpose. It has been used only sporadically.

Teacher training continues to be overall a weakness in the compulsory education overall. There are no properly trained teachers for career guidance purposes. Head teachers assigned for every class are responsible for providing career guidance, if this is needed. Training is foreseen for all civic education teachers in charge to deliver the above-mentioned chapter “Economics for Success” in Grade 7. Such training measures are in implementation and are planned to involve all the civic education teachers for Grade 7 (about 1600 teachers nationwide).

Actors of influence regarding career guidance content creation and delivery include institutions that are responsible for developing and delivering the curricula (content and the way it should be informed) such as the Institute for Development of Education (IZHA); National Agency for Vocational Education, Training and Qualifications, VET schools, employment offices, business community etc. These institutions provide

¹ Statistical Yearbook of Education 2013-2014. By the time this report was written, there were no more recent official data available.

² Pre-University Curricular Framework of the Republic of Albania, 2014.

or can provide, in a way or another, curriculum and teaching materials for students and teachers with respect to career guidance. However, one should note that in terms of curriculum development and design of teaching and learning, the education system in Albania is a centralized one. Even though, in general education, a part of curricula is meant to be developed locally by schools or regional education authorities, this has not been the case so far. Schools and teachers do not get not involved in such processes. Hence, school managers and respective teachers never had the chance to get some expertise in curriculum development. This is also the case with career guidance. Therefore, the expertise in this area (though limited) remains with the central institutions, mainly in the Institute for Development of Education (IZHA). The same institute should cooperate with the National VET Agency which can make a valuable partner in providing information on the next steps that graduates of compulsory education want to take.

In the last decade career guidance entered the curriculum vocabulary and the training program as well. Nevertheless, there is no clear understanding regarding career guidance or career education. Nor is there a shared idea about career guidance. Besides, according to education managers, parents do not show interest for such guidance at the compulsory education level. At this age, the parents consider themselves totally responsible for the education of their kids and assume to have the right to decide on their future. For this reason, there is no push for developing real curricula, or teaching materials or activities that would serve career guidance for kids and their parents.

Summary

In an effort to summarize it is worth noting that overall the compulsory education system does not give career guidance the necessary importance if compared to other areas of curriculum development. Current curriculum was approved in 2014 is in gradual implementation. It is expected that by 2019 it will have installed in the entire education system. There are no other expected developments regarding career guidance for the next 5 years. There is also no push or incentive to intervene for introducing additional career guidance elements. The expertise in designing career guidance programs at school and local level is also not there. Lack of tradition in career guidance in compulsory education has strengthened the general perception that focusing on the traditional school subjects and gaining the knowledge and skills they aim to provide and develop is considered a precondition for a successful career of students and a best way to maintain all chances through to completion of pre-university education.

4.2 General high education

General high education includes Grades 10 – 12 and is regulated as a national education system. Around 125 000 students attend 332 public schools and 115 private schools in Grades 10 through 12 throughout the country. The general policy of the Ministry of Education is the same as that of compulsory education. The idea for the schools to start thinking of creating a positive attitude toward the possibility of self-employment and the spirit of initiative and entrepreneurship is part of all curriculum documents for general high school education.

Career guidance in general high education is provided through a noncompulsory, or elective module which is called “Career education” and consists of 36 teaching hours. There are three main chapters in

this module. In Chapter 1 the student should become familiar with and explain career options and also follow ways of career investigation. In Chapter 2 the student prepares information for him/herself, considering the context and its effects on the person. The concluding Chapter 3 aims at developing the student's ability to develop future plans and make career related decisions.

According to the teaching plan, which is result of the actual high school curriculum reform, the following vocational modules are suggested as elective subjects for high school students:

- Food processing
- Ethics of serving in a bar or restaurant
- Office assistance
- Agriculture activity - Decorating the house using flowers
- Client service
- Repairing and maintaining
- Dressing ethics
- Tourist guide
- Taking care of pets
- House maintenance
- Lab assistance

In addition to providing some basic knowledge and developing skills, these modules provide information for certain professions and serve as a kind of career guidance for those who fail to go to university. Delivery of these vocational modules has not proved successful. Students may pick these modules as electives to fill only free hours, but according to teachers and school managers the practice shows that students tend to fill up their very few free hours (2-3 in total) with other subjects that help them get more credits.

As far as *teachers' capacities and related training* is concerned, the situation is similar to compulsory education. There are no properly trained teachers being able or willing to teach career guidance module or other elective professional module offered in school. In almost all cases, teachers who deliver the career education module do so to fill up their teaching hours portfolio and have no incentive to deliver properly. There have been some training regarding career guidance and the elective modules, but the number of trained teachers is small and, most of the time, done in the framework of short-term projects and has proved unsustainable. These modules are not compulsory, so it is up to the school principals or teachers to make decision from year to year which module to deliver. Students do not really have the option to sign for a module of their interest. Again, teachers are not keen to teach topics that are not part of their core subject and expertise.

Psychologists are employed to provide services in each high school. Their role is largely defined in terms of the psychological support they can offer in relation to emotional health and conflict treatment and resolution, and career guidance. It is up to the school principals and psychologists to plan their activities throughout the school year. There is no evidence of any assessment of effectiveness of career guidance sessions that they have provided. Such activities are noncompulsory, hence records tend to be vague and are considered of lesser importance.

Actors of *influence regarding career guidance* content creation and delivery include institutions that are responsible for developing and delivering the curricula (content and the way it should be informed) such as the Institute for Development of Education (IZHA); higher education institutions, National Agency for Vocational Education, Training and Qualifications, employment offices, business community etc. These institutions provide or can provide, in a way or another, curriculum and teaching materials for students and teachers with respect to career guidance. However, one should note that in terms of curriculum development and design of teaching and learning, the education system in Albania is a centralized one. This is valid also for career guidance. Like in the case with compulsory education, schools and teachers do not get not involved in curriculum development processes. Therefore, the expertise in this area remains with the central institutions, mainly in the Institute for Development of Education (IZHA). Cooperation with actors outside of the education system is weak and not consistent.

Besides the reality described above, with respect to policies, curricula, teachers' capacities etc., there are other problems influencing the existence and the quality of career guidance in high school education. Even though "the best interest of the students" is a key reference in the National Curriculum and the Code of Ethics for teachers, assisting students in identifying their career paths is not a priority of the education policy. The experience in 2016 is a good illustration. Because of the higher education reform, high school students have faced many changes in the rules for applying for universities. It is responsibility of the Ministry of Education to assure that high schools provide appropriate information for students who apply for higher education admissions. The entire high education system failed to address this immediate need for career information.

Summary

Overall, there is no established tradition in the curriculum area of career guidance. There is not a shared idea about the content and objective of career guidance in high education. Hence, the education system does not consider career guidance a priority if compared to other areas of curriculum development. There is also no push for developing effective curricula or teaching materials or activities that would serve career guidance for students and parents. The expertise in designing career guidance programs at school level is very limited. High school students are interested in being informed about their career possibilities and they seek answers for their questions outside of the school through alternative channels (parents, siblings etc.). Most of the students lack information regarding the professions they would like to pursue. There is an expressed interest of parents for such a guidance as well. The higher education reforms further exposed this interest.

4.3 Vocational education

It was outlined in the ToR for this assignment that vocational education will have a limited focus in this report. The consultants analyzed available documents on VET and career guidance as provided by RisiAlbania and S4J and face to face interviews with representatives of the SDC funded Skills for Jobs

(S4J) project. It is worth emphasizing that the findings and the approach presented here are valid for the entire VET system in Albania, and not only for the S4J partner schools³.

Based on the national strategy for education the VET is currently a national priority. National Employment and Skills Strategy 2014-2020 is the strategic document harmonizing these policies. The Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth and its subordinate institutions are in charge to implement it. There are 52 public VET providers in Albania, out of which 42 offering vocational education programs and 10 vocational training centers offering short-term courses. The MoSWY vision, as expressed in the new VET law, foresees that all vocational schools will have the opportunity to become multi-functional centers and provide short-term courses.

S4J started implementation in 2016. Their group of partner schools includes two VET schools in Vlora (Pavarësia and Tregtare), a school in Lezha (Kolin Gjoka) and a school in Berat (Kristo Isak). In addition to introducing ICT-supported new ways of learning, S4J is focusing on relations of schools and businesses, and establishment of labor market integration facilities. The latter would work as career centers within the vocational schools. They will have a role in recruitment of trainees, in providing career services for their students and trainees while they attend programs at the VET school, and tracing their graduates and alumni.

In the S4J vision of change, young women and men and special needs groups attending trainings at VET schools will benefit from early interventions and strong and innovative support services for assuring their successful integration into the labor market. This would result in less drop-outs and a higher share of trainees opting for entering the labor market directly after graduation.

Two major constraints have been identified: a) the providers' readiness level for acting as labor market insertion actors, and b) the economic tissue with dominating micro and informal enterprises.

Provider's readiness level is in rather poor. Public VET providers do not consider themselves as labor market integration organizations, but limit themselves to their educational role (until lately vocational schools were under the management of the Ministry of Education). Therefore, VET schools are not sensible to labor market integration concerns, they do not systematically follow-up what happens after their trainees leave school, they do neither support nor prepare this step from the world of training to the world of work actively. They also do not offer specific services in that regard. Students are not familiar with the work environment/workplace organizational culture (soft skills) because they do not spend time in companies during their studies. Lack of a critical mass of enlightened employers in the selected regions ready to cooperate in internship schemes and alike for getting early world of work-exposure: A large number of employers in Albania, and even more so in the selected regions where the project intervenes, are micro or small enterprises with less than 10 employers.

S4J approach to address these constraints includes establishment of regional inclusive and innovative labor market insertion facilities and instruments at VET provider level. S4J will provide the partner schools with 360-degree support to establish and run career centers (labor market integration facilities)

³ Sources of the information in this section include the Skills For Jobs Research Report developed by IDM, Communication Progress and Swisscontact, and interview with S4J officers responsible for the component on labor market insertion.

at regional level, applying technology driven up-to date communication channels and work-platforms. The centers should interactively cooperate with outstanding employers. They will also offer coaching for vocational skills development as a learner support measure. S4J will further support the partner schools to apply gradual skills development schemes using state-of-the-art technology, adequate for school staff, and in close partnership with private sector. An information technology-based tracing system will also be introduced as standard procedure. The same career center should be capacitated to understand regional skill needs analysis results and actively use them for management purposes.

In brief, S4J intends to establish an excellence model in the selected partner schools with regard to career guidance. The career centers would be integrated within the vocational schools. They will have a role extended from recruitment of trainees to providing career services for their students and trainees while they attend programs at the VET school, and tracing their graduates and alumni and channeling feedback from labor market actors to the internal management decision making.

4.4 Higher education

The higher education has received significant attention at policy level in the past 3 years. Quality in the public and private universities has been a hot topic in the elections in 2013 and the government coming out of those elections sought immediate actions to address concerns. In numbers, there are 15 public and 43 private universities. Around 145 000 students attend the public universities (approx. 117 000 are enrolled on full-time programs), while around 31 000 students (almost all on full-time programs) attend private universities. In gender terms, aggregate numbers are well balanced, sometimes in favor of women. A group of main five public providers⁴ serve 77 000 full-time students and 25 000 part-time students.

Universities have begun to realize the importance the role that Career Centers have in providing the career guidance services to their students thus, have taken the serious steps in setting them up initially, by allocating appropriate staff and office space. The public Universities such as Tirana University, Agriculture University of Tirana, and Fan Noli have established Career Offices in some of the Faculties with bigger number of students whereas others such as Aleksandër Moisiu in Durrës have only appointed a career officer to develop, among other tasks, career orientation program for their students. On the other hand, private colleges are more advanced not only in building the infrastructure for their Centers, but also in having better visibility of services provided by the Centers. For example, the European University of Tirana, New York University Tirana and Marin Barleti have a significant experience in integrating such Centers within the institutions by providing career orientation services to students. Whereas the others, such as Epoka, TBU, Luarasi are a bit behind in time in setting up the Centers, but they are quickly following the news trends in creating the career orientation programs in their services. A common thing for all private universities is that almost all of them have appointed full time employees in these Centers, have a portfolio of services offered to students and have incorporated career orientation courses in some or all faculties.

⁴ The student populations of the five main providers are given in full-time and part-time students and include: University of Tirana (29k+ 8k), Polytechnic University of Tirana (14k+5k), Agriculture University of Tirana (10k+5k), Aleksandër Moisiu University in Durrës (13k+3k), Aleksandër Xhuvani University in Elbasan (11k+4k).

Most of the services are student oriented and lack strategy or concepts of interaction with other LM players especially with private sectors. The most common services offered by the Career Centers are creation of database of CV's of students, open class lecturing, trainings in career orientation and internships. Most of these career guidance services are outsourced to either recruitment companies or experts that are engaged by the Universities on an on-going basis. On the other hand, the Centers are operating as an administrative unit and not as a service and content provider of services.

Most of the universities have appointed full time staff to manage the Career Centers and have made available an office within the institutions. Only a few of the higher education institutions have appointed a full-time staff dedicated only for the needs of the Career Centers. In general, the Career Center staff have additional responsibilities besides managing the Centers. Such responsibilities involve teaching and academic tasks as well as administrative services offered to students (scholarships, exchange student program etc).

On the other side, one of the continuing problems is the limited infrastructure of Career Centers. Even though many of them did brand these offices as Centers, besides a small space for desks of employee(s), these Centers lack additional space such as for training, counseling and interviewing.

The absence of a professional career service web portal is an additional bottleneck that prohibits the Centers to function in effective and efficient ways. The portal would allow the professional staff not only to have an electronic data base of students and companies, but also have a job/internship placements filters in the portal. Currently most of the job placement features are done manually which limits the performance of the staff in creating a scalable model to reach a bigger number of students getting a professional assistance by the Center.

In terms of financial resources, almost all of the higher education institutions have budget only for the salaries of the Career Center staff and no budget for operational purposes. Rather, if needed, they are provided with an ad-hoc budget to implement specific activities as scheduled for that period. That budget usually is very modest and limiting the Center to provide a bigger number of services outside the institutions. Additionally, providing all of the services "for free" by not having a "commercial model" in charging the clients (i.e. private sector companies) for their services limits a lot the performance of the Centers.

The performance indicators do not exist in the most of the Centers. One reason for this is because there is no clear annual plan of activities, and indicators to measure the success and volume of these activities are not there. Another reason is that most of the employees have additional responsibilities and roles such as teaching and/or administrative, which complicates their performance in career orientation programs.

There are no systematic programs that Career Centers have in regard to the LM actors especially with private sector. Mainly these programs are on an ad-hoc basis such as organizing a Career Fair or open lectures that Centers organize for their students. When it comes to labor market information, no data or publication is provided to students on the available jobs (sectors), the fast growing sectors in Albania, competencies and skills currently in demand etc.

In an effort to summarize, one can say that there is a lack of Career Counseling expertise among the Career Center staff. Mainly they are administrating and managing the office but not providing one to one counseling services to students. Additionally, there is a high turnover of Career Center staff with no institutional memory in place leaving the Center exposed to risks of not having a continuation of activities when staff is changed. The core services of Career Centers are often outsourced. Thus, the Centers play a role of connector rather than provider of services. Most of the careers counseling concepts are provided in the academic courses of Faculties in these institutions. In most of the cases the career counseling concepts are provided in various elective courses. However, there is still no unified concept of a profession career development course offered by all Faculties which will provide only career development concepts for students.

Generally, there is no annual or semi-annual plan of activities. Mostly, the Centers have an opportunistic approach, operating on ad-hoc principles and not systematically. There is no labor market information or publication available on the labor market dynamics and trends for students and companies. There is no adequate electronic infrastructure, which will have an impact on effectiveness and efficiency of the Center when it comes to database of CV's and jobs available. Moreover, automatic matching of candidates and jobs will allow for an increase of the volume of jobs and internships published by the Center. Adequate infrastructure is missing. Most of the Career Centers are operating as offices with a limited space and there is no additional facilities for training, one to one counseling and mentorship. Most of the Career offices operate without allocated budget. Mainly the institutions cover for salaries of Career Center staff, and some provide a modest financial contribution for services and activities envisioned by the Center for specific period. Few of the Career offices have a good promotion of career counseling concepts because of the large number of students, but a bigger effort must be invested in promotion and marketing of Career Center activities and impact the career guidance have for students, companies and the countries in general.

4.5 Municipalities

Before the new administrative reform started implementation, *authorities and competences* in the area of youth employment promotion have been with the central government. Municipalities acted only occasionally and project-based. With the new reform, areas of competence for the municipalities expand. Within the scope of a municipality, employment promotion falls under social services and will represent an important challenge for municipalities to develop its structures, build capacities and activate its own policy making in this regard. Employment promotion function is heavily shared with the central government (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth and the National Employment Service). The municipalities find themselves in a complex transition period as they are acquiring new competences faster than building the related capacities and structures. Among the observed municipalities of Tirana, Shkodra, Durrës, and Kamza, only Municipality of Tirana has established initial steps and embedded employment promotion in its policies and made budgetary commitments. Other Municipalities show awareness and interest, but have not yet progressed in this regard.

Under its Directorate General for Social Services, the Municipality of Tirana has a dedicated Department for Employment Promotion. The latter implements employment promotion measures, and assists jobseekers with internship placements, seasonal or permanent jobs at companies linked to the

municipality through contracts, cooperation agreements and longer tradition. In their formalized scope of services, the Department provides employment services for jobseekers and employers, it offers counselling, orientation and intermediation to every jobseeker requesting such service, and implements employment promotion and training programs. Priority is given to social groups in need. In the period of January – November 2016, the Department managed with its own capacities a register of 306 jobseekers, successfully intermediated 99 jobseekers (30 people from the Roma and Egyptian community). It maintains continuous cooperations with private recruiters and organizes regular awareness and information campaigns with employers business organizations operating in the Tirana area.

With the expansion of municipalities in the area of employment promotion, career guidance services are expected to become key services to be provided and budgeted for at local level. Tirana is the only municipality already active in career guidance. Its employment promotion unit relies on a permanent staff of 6 people. Overall capacities are limited. There is practically no outreach in the new expanded territory, there is only one office established. Instruments and tools are very simple, the staff is building capacity based on experience. The portfolio of activities in 2016 includes the following. It gives an idea of what activities and programs the Employment Promotion Department at Tirana municipality engages in.

- *Work & Study Fair*

Municipal financial contribution is minimal. The yearly Fair is organized in partnership with the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth and Tirana Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

- *Employment web portal*

The portal is intended to serve as accessible platform for employers and jobseekers and facilitate matching. The same should be used as a technological tool for daily business at the Employment Promotion Department and information management.

- *Women empowerment and entrepreneurship promotion*

A selection of 18 start-up and existing initiatives of women are supported with grants between EUR 2000 and EUR 3000. Priority is given to women from suburban and rural areas, single mothers, and women from minorities in the sectors of rural economy, tourism ICT, local artisan work, textile, and services.

- *Support program for promotion of youth social business*

The 2016-2018 program has a social inclusion focus and supports establishment of new social enterprises that prioritize employment of young men and women with disabilities between 18 and 35 years old. In the period of three years the program should provide every year 20 grants of approx. EUR 4000 each.

- *Young women towards a profession*

The program targets young women of age 18-29 years who receive economic aid or belong to disadvantaged social groups. Each program participant is provided with an opportunity for on-the-job training at private and public enterprises for a period of 3-6 months. The placement follows sessions of

counselling and orientation by the Employment Promotion Department. The program covers costs of minimum wage for the training period.

The municipalities face a series of *challenges* in area of employment promotion, career guidance and training. The key ones are summarized below.

- Building a technological management platform to allow for insertion of data from employers and job seeker and facilitate communication between them,
- Definition and establishment of an institutional coordination regarding jobseekers approaching both structures,
- Capacity building of staff acting as career counsellors and job intermediaries,
- Definition and establishment of a formal reporting system, definition of roles and responsibilities in interaction with external partners,
- Establishment of career counselling and guidance in 4 Municipal Social Centers,
- Further expansion of outreach in the new territory,
- Review of interactions with other LM actors and eventual synergies and overlaps with the education system, formal training, employment services,

With the ongoing administrative reform, the Municipalities are challenged with establishment and management of the following relations:

- *Relations with the Employment Office of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth*

This continues to be the reference authority providing employment services for unemployed jobseekers and funding for job creation at private employers. The local municipalities are expected to develop and implement local policies which should be in coherence with central policies, but also responsive to local community needs. There seems to be significant overlap, although the senior managers at municipalities expect that primary focuses in the local employment policies would be youth, people in need, beneficiaries of the housing programs, people with disabilities.

- *Relation with VET providers*

The Municipalities will aim at orienting jobseekers also towards training opportunities. Therefore, Municipalities will need to establish cooperation with local VET providers.

- *Relation with higher education institutions*

The scarce experience has consisted in cooperation agreements to allow students to conduct internship at municipalities and engage in voluntarism. Municipalities will need to define institutional and effective relationships with the career offices at universities in their territory but also at national level.

- *Relation with private recruiting agencies*

The local municipalities see benefits in partnering with recruitment agencies to disseminate their information about job offers.

Overall, the municipalities are facing their challenges to establish and expand their career guidance services as part of their employment promotion policies. There is awareness about the importance of such services. Municipalities see these as direct services for the community. In the next five years, employment will continue to be a highly sensitive topic and the Municipalities will need to prepare to play their role. Experience has shown that the Tirana municipality can be a champion to lead other municipalities in developing and managing career guidance services.

4.6 Public employment services

Public Employment Service plays an important role in putting into practice the national employment policies. National institutions of public employment services have a duty to contribute to the design and implementation of policies for a better match of supply and demand, for skilled workforce as well as increasing the demand for labor. Public Employment Service is also responsible for the efficient functioning of national, regional and local labor market, by increasing employment opportunities and promoting social inclusion in society.

National Employment Service in Albania (NES) is responsible for all of the major functions of the office including providing information on the labor market, guidance for jobseekers, mediation of labor and management of active and passive labor market.

The main tasks of NES are to help:

- *job seekers find the right job as quickly as possible based on the skills and competencies that they have within the legal framework, and*
- *b) to assist employers to find qualified candidates for job vacancies which are advertised by the companies.*

The regional Employment Services organize their services to jobseekers at three levels:

- *Self-service: the clients access electronic and printed information on their own.*
- *Providing information, which includes interviewing for registration, employment opportunities, etc.*
- *Counselling in face-to-face contact with staff.*

The national employment service will be transformed soon into the Agency that will have inside the responsibility for education and professional development. It will manage the employment offices, professional development centers and VET schools⁵.

The reform of the National Employment Service focuses on developing a unique model of service provision, in order to improve services to clients (as to the unemployed as well as to employers) and increase a market penetration. This national service model includes:

- Modernization of the NES offices; expansion / improvement of ICT services;

⁵ New draft legislation on VET and the National Employment Service was in discussion by the time this report was prepared.

- Staff development; improving staff-client ratio;
- Expanding network of Job Clubs;
- Implementation of the management system based on objectives; implementation of quality assurance system;
- Developing a strategy for providing efficient services to employers design and monitoring of active programs of the labor market;
- Development of strategic partnerships with other actors in the labor market, including private employment agencies etc.

The employment office plays the role of connector between the jobseeker and the candidates. The office welcomes all unemployed people however, the job seekers above the age of 50 are the most problematic to be found. It is the fact that the office is providing employment services mainly for low skilled candidates and low paid jobs. However, it is a fact that the candidates mainly use the offices to receive the health insurance and social benefits rather than finding employment.

The local employment offices have a very good cooperation and relationship with the public vocational training centers. The Centers inform regularly share information about the course offerings and the employment offices refer unskilled jobseekers to enroll in various courses of their interest.

Overall, there is a perception of mistrust that employment offices have that they don't provide a real support on employment or better they are incapable of supporting jobseekers' career orientation or career transition. With the current staff resources, none of the local office is able to provide face-to-face counseling services. There is a high burden of administrative work. Usually, there are approximately 2.500 clients visiting one office per week which is making almost impossible to focus on other services besides the administrative ones. The profession of Career counselor is not recognized in Albania which makes it difficult to find the suitable candidates or impose the standard for profession.

4.7 Private recruitment companies

It is important to state that first, there are only a few companies that work in this segment and second, they operate mainly as headhunting companies thus providing only matching services for companies. Most of the recruitment companies services include information on available jobs and CV's of job seekers and no programs on career guidance and counseling are provided. Their main service constitutes matching services for companies with the best and ideal candidate for that job. For this they charge to companies but no follow up activities are conducted once the placement is completed. However, there is a lack of capacities, expertise and knowledge when it comes to offering career orientation and development services for students and job seekers. Additionally, according to them the issue is who to charge for these services, as the main clients are students and job seekers and the latter are less willing and able to pay.

Most of the companies rely only on the job listing features providing additional solutions for companies looking for talents and employees thus, offering another platform for candidate's selection for

companies. However, long-term talent management programs and services are inexistent and not part of the portfolio of these companies.

Most of the companies are too small with limited human resources. They usually operate as a family business employing members of family with limited growth capacities. They mainly operate as technical solution provider investing resources in technical solutions rather than providing content and services for its constituents such as HR & Recruitment services. Based on the conversations, there is no clear strategy for commercialization of services which on the other hand limits a lot their financial sustainability and stability for improving the portfolio of services.

The positive aspect is that most of these companies have established a good cooperation and links with University Career Centers that allows them to offer trainings and other services to students. The main benefit for the companies is that they are able to develop relationships with students and graduates, which is an “entry ticket” for companies to create relations with future clients.

Most of the companies with bigger absorption capacity such as commercial banks, telecommunication and insurance companies have incorporated good practices when it comes to mentoring the internship programs, but it lacks connection with Career Centers on the feedback on their performance.

Overall, under current strategy most of the companies are offering recruitment services to companies and there are no talent management programs in place. The consultants recognized that many of the recruitment companies have not identified a set of unique career guidance services, which would then lead to developing core competencies for each company. The core competencies would enable companies to build up their comparative advantages which on the other hand clients, would distinguish between talent management companies and pure technical headhunting companies. The recruitment companies usually offer their career guidance services free of charge to their existing clients. Even though most of the companies sit on the “golden mine” because of its huge data base of job seekers and employers, there are still no services developed on commercial basis. With regard to their management, one of the biggest threats of these companies is that they have limited human resources making company really vulnerable of providing add-on services to their clients. The web portals have only jobs on listing features and no other features to support the career orientations of students and graduates

5 Conclusions

Career guidance is, in principle, a good idea and can contribute to the achievements of public policy goals in education, employment and equity. For example, the ways in which career guidance is provided can help to better articulate demand for learning, contribute to enhancing education access and completion and improve the match between labor market supply and demand. Labor economists and labor market policymakers have long recognized the role that career guidance can play in helping to improve labor market efficiency, for a range of reasons, including the value of information in improving labor market transparency and flexibility, and the higher efficiency of allocation as the result of a better

match between individual talents and qualifications on the one hand and, on the other, the skills and qualifications demanded by employers⁶.

Across the seven pillars defined by RisiAlbania for this assignment, labor market information stands out as an issue. Albania is facing the double challenge of not yet having reliable and comprehensive labor market information and translating it into user-friendly career information relevant to the different career development stages of young people. The major reason for the weak provision of career information seems to be linked to the lack of reliable labor market information; alternatively, where this information is available, it might not always be readable by users. Another problem related to gaps in information or non-client-friendly publications, is the minimum level of coordination between various ministries and agencies which produce information and statistics⁷.

However, the research for the purpose of this assignment shows that the career guidance understanding in Albania stands at a much simpler (primitive) level. There is only limited and fragmented understanding of career guidance concept. The education system overall has not been challenged to incorporate career guidance as a guiding principle in designing and delivering the curriculum. The decision making mechanism in the education system has traditionally considered only the supply side with a rigid (maybe arrogant) approach of the type “there is no other option”. The 2014 curricular reform of the compulsory education was a great opportunity to consider the career guidance more broadly and at systemic level, but only scattered elements managed to accommodate (like the Grade 7 chapter in civic education). The ongoing reform in general high education is expected to provide by default more room for career guidance, although the relatively weak commitment in the strategy documents would de-prioritize career guidance if pressure for other topics would not be properly aligned with overall objectives of the curriculum. Vocational education will start to feel more pressure for career guidance. Interventions like career centers with the support of S4J will help provide public VET management and policy makers with practical translation and explanation of the misused jargon of “labor market oriented VET”.

Higher education institutions have increased awareness about career guidance and have progressed at different paces for establishing and running their career centers. Private universities have shown higher flexibility in creating and running career centers. Their primary objective has been to use career office for marketing purposes during their new enrolment campaigns. The public universities are taking their first steps only in the last five years. Among the established services and activities one should mention job fairs, internship placement, involvement of students in voluntary work positions. All career offices in both public and private universities face common issues which include need for capacity development for staff and managers, raising awareness about their role and services, introduction of counselling services, creating a web portal to enhance efficiency and expand features, secure higher level commitments in their respective institutions regarding financial resources and full-time personnel. Overall, the consultants observed a high interest in partnering with projects like RisiAlbania for advancing their career centers development.

⁶ ETF Report on Career Guidance in EU Neighboring Countries, 2009.

⁷ ILO, Career guidance: A resource handbook for low- and middle-income countries, International Labor Organization, Geneva, 2006a.

With the expansion of *municipalities* in the area of employment promotion, career guidance services are expected to become key services to be provided and budgeted for at local level. Tirana is the only municipality already active in career guidance. It has embedded it in its policy documents, has established an employment promotion department, and has made budgetary commitments for certain activities. However, they are in need for support to design and provide career guidance services at appropriate professional levels. Other municipalities are also aware, but have not managed to progress towards the career guidance services. The main reasons include struggling with absorption of new authorities and competences, and limited financial resources.

One would expect the *public employment service* to be natural provider of solid and effective career guidance services. Their under-used information and institutional resources represent a basis on which capacities for career guidance can be built. However, any measures for long-term effect can be easily hampered by short-notice changes in the planning and resource allocation of the employment services. The new law may present a unique opportunity to establish a solid management system whereby career guidance and counselling in the employment services would naturally interface with career centers in the VET schools and with skills development providers.

Private recruitment companies are aware of what career guidance services in the broadest sense. However, the readiness of their individual clients to pay for this kind of service has proved questionable. The ones that try to keep such services in their overall portfolio tend to provide counselling ad hoc and free of charge for their existing clients.

6 Recommendations

Career guidance is in demand in all the seven pillars. The consultants have prepared the listing and description of recommendations in this section assuming RisiAlbania's perspective and considering criteria like possibility to achieve systemic change, feasibility within the project's mandate in Phase 2, measurability of results, risk factors, limited financial resources available, possibility the partner institutions commit their share funding.

In *compulsory education and general high education* RisiAlbania can take only systemic approach. An intervention would need to penetrate into the entire system nationwide. Elements of the intervention should be:

- Advocate for solidly incorporating career guidance into the overall general education policy;
- Make career related issues part of the curricula both as dedicated hours and cross curricular;
- Make career related issues part of the teacher training curricula;
- Make parents part of the process of identifying curriculum priorities related to career guidance;
- Involve local education authorities in career guidance and develop context based career guidance.

However, it is worth noting a few key aspects:

- Compulsory education curriculum has been approved recently (2014) is currently under gradual implementation in the entire system. Decision makers in the Ministry of Education and Sport considered its reviewing at this stage is rather unlikely.
- In the general high education curriculum, there would be possibilities to discuss and maybe materialize some support for incorporating career guidance in grades 10 – 12. Institute for Development of Education would be the relevant partner to approach. However, the feasibility poses a risk as the process might take longer than the project's mandate in Phase 2.
- Size of interventions would have to encompass the entire system and would take away significant resources from RisiAlbania budget. In a rough estimate (based on consultants' experience) an intervention in general high education might absorb between EUR 800 000 and EUR 900 000, while intervention in the compulsory education would exceed EUR 2 million in direct costs.
- Results measurement would also pose some difficulties if Risi would expect to measure effect on employment and jobs creation. In the case of a general high school intervention, impact on students could be realistically measured at least 5 or 6 years after their graduation from high school.

Instead of compulsory education or general high education, an eventual program with the *Municipalities* might be more plausible. Risi's intervention at local government level can provide systemic change. It is an almost perfect timing to partner with selected municipalities due to the still ongoing administrative reform. Municipalities are highly motivated to build capacities in area of career guidance as part of their employment promotion policy. Municipalities can provide a platform to accommodate actors from other pillars (education, public employment services, private recruitment companies). With the increase of competences, local governments will have more access to the compulsory education and general high education in their respective territories and provide more qualitative access for career guidance activities. The interaction with the public employment offices would require a careful review. However, it is worth noting that the municipalities would be very proactive aiming at delivering career guidance as a direct community service⁸, while the position of the employment offices on career guidance (in full) continues to be ad hoc. Risi's support for municipalities could include:

- Assist to define their role and embed career guidance in their employment promotion policies;
- Develop capacities of new personnel;
- Develop services and respective instruments;
- Support creation of physical and virtual infrastructure;
- Define interactions with other institutions to create synergies and avoid overlaps where possible.

⁸ It is worth noting the size of population in the observed municipalities. At national level, the youth (15-29 years) make approx. 24% of the population. Here are the figures of overall population and youth in the observed municipalities: Tirana 800 000 (192 000 youth), Durrës 300 000 (72 000 youth), Shkodra 250 000 (60 000 youth), Kamza 100 000 (24 000 youth).

A new *higher education* law was approved in 2015 and is expected to have an effect on the universities to compete for more students and funding. Career offices are expected to produce some of the key indicators on which performance will be measured (employment and employability of graduates, interaction with labor market actors, etc.). Private universities are more eager to advance with the career offices, while public universities might lag behind primarily because of more complex decision making mechanisms. Risi's intervention could include:

- Support for institutional, managerial and conceptual development of Career Centers;
- Support physical and virtual infrastructure;
- Support capacity building through training measures and one-to-one coaching for staff;
- Support for establishing additional services;
- Support for elaborating labor market dynamics into client-friendly information;
- Support to establish self-employment programs at career centers.

Public employment service should be an actor to constantly have on board. At the current situation, the consultants did not identify the possibility for the public employment service to allocate its own resources to strengthen counselling for its clients. RisiAlbania has built some significant experience in the past in cooperating with the national employment service. In case their management can take sustainable commitments to allocate resources, Risi's support would be valuable for activities like process establishment, capacity building, enhancing IT-based instruments, etc.

Private recruitment companies are profit oriented entities, therefore they would also be most pro-active actors in developing new services like career guidance. However, the key issue concerns purchase power of their clients. They can be encouraged to re-think career guidance services. Maybe they can re-define their clients and expand their portfolio beyond job matching. However, if universities take a stronger role with their student communities, and municipalities commit and establish their career guidance services, private recruitment companies could well be their outsource partners. If so, Risi might see an opportunity for valuable investment in capacity building of recruitment companies.

7 Appendices

Appendix 1: List of key meetings and people met

Appendix 2: List of documents/bibliography

Annex 2: List of key meetings and people met

| No. | Name | Institution | Position |
|-----|--------------------------|--|---|
| 1. | Mr. Shezai Rrokaj | University of Tirana | Deputy Rector |
| 2. | Mrs. Kseanela Sotirofski | Aleksandër Moisiu University, Durrës | Rector |
| 3. | Mr. Adrian Civici | European University in Tirana | President |
| 4. | Mrs. Anisa Subashi | European University in Tirana | Dean of Students Supervisor of Career Office |
| 5. | Mrs. Brikena Nallbani | National Employment Service | Deputy General Director |
| 6. | Mr. Indrit Buka | Employment Service Durrës | Director |
| 7. | Mrs. Marisa Kacorri | Employment Service Tirana | Director |
| 8. | Mrs. Borana Bajrami | Skills for Jobs, Swisscontact | Labour Market Insertion Component Manager |
| 9. | Mrs. Anisa Keri | Raiffeisen Bank | Human Resource Department |
| 10. | Mrs. Eranda Ymerali | The Headhunter Group | Co-Chief Executive Director |
| 11. | Mr. Dritan Mezini | DM Consulting | Director |
| 12. | Mr. Gert Janaqi | Institute for Development of Education | Director |
| 13. | Mr. Astrit Dautaj | Institute for Development of Education | Head of Curriculum Department |

| | | | |
|-----|----------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| 14. | Mrs. Zamira Gjini | Ministry of Education and Sport | Director of Pre-University Education Department |
| 15. | Mrs. Tatjana Dodbiba | Protagonistët, private school | Director |
| 16. | Mrs. Besjona Dede | Municipality of Tirana | Director for Social Services Department |
| 17. | Mr. Dritan Meta | Municipality of Shkodra | Deputy Mayor |
| 18. | Mr. Shpresim Domi | Agriculture University of Tirana | Career Office Coordinator |
| 19. | Mrs. Joniada Hito | New York University in Tirana | Career Office Manager |
| 20. | Mrs. Julinda Gjeka | Luarasi University | Career Office Manager |
| 21. | Mrs. Rezarta Godo | Tirana Business University | Career Office Manager |

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