

YOUNG ALBANIANS MAKE INFORMED CAREER DECISIONS: CASE STUDY ON HOW CAREER GUIDANCE LEADS TO HIGHER EMPLOYABILITY

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over 10,000 young women and men have received quality career guidance services in Albania from 2017 to 2021 thanks to RisiAlbania. The youth employment project has supported the transformation of the career guidance system through multidimensional and complementary interventions. This case study sheds light on these interventions and shows how the different innovations like pieces of puzzles build up and improve the Albanian career guidance system.

- Career guidance as a public good: the first career office at municipal level opened its doors to pupils, students, and parents in Tirana.
- Career services for university students: students of three big public universities benefit from quality Career Guidance services.
- Private providers come up with their solutions: an intermediation provider and a training provider reacted to the market developments and designed their own fee-based offers.
- Well-trained career counselor as the basis: two cohorts of Career counsellors graduated from the upgraded master program and four international tests are standardized to the Albanian context and are available as instruments for career counselling services.
- Media programs focus on career information: various media programs featuring career information are available in the Albanian media market and have reached hundred thousand young people.

RisiAlbania supported the partners ranging from universities, private providers to the municipality depending on their needs. Overall, the support took the form of:

- Institutional and organizational capacities of service providers.
- Development of content (digital tools, tests, manuals).
- Development of career counselors.

The case study furthermore illustrates how the different actors interact among each other. A key success factor in this regard proves to be the collaboration between Albanian and Swiss institutions. Ultimately results a high-quality and innovative career guidance system that serves young people and companies: young people develop the ability to make more sound career decisions and find more easily employment. Placement happens faster and more effective – the skilled workforce meets the companies' needs.

2. INTRODUCTION

Ebi Shaphasaj is an 18 years old student who finishes the American-Albanian high school in Tirana this Summer. A friend suggested to her to visit the newly established career center of the Municipality of Tirana, the first of its kind in Albania, as Ebi was not sure what to study at the university. The career counselors listened to Ebi and guided her in her decision-making process using different types of career tests. Ebi says that the tests helped her to understand what she likes and what she is good at. In September, she started studying finance at the university.

Many young people in Albania have similar open questions about their future career path and need quality career guidance services. For that purpose, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) through the RisiAlbania project has facilitated the establishment of new and improving of career guidance services in Albania. This has happened at different levels: The Municipality of Tirana opened the first Albanian career guidance center end of 2020 serving the public including students of all ages and their parents, four universities dispose of career guidance offices in their premises, a private intermediation provider effectively links jobseekers and employers, and a private trainer introduced career counseling as a separate service to their training offers. Future career counselors, a key bottleneck, graduate from the new Master at the Faculty of Social Sciences. Different media products shape the kids, youth and parents' perception related to career-related decisions.

Since 2019, 10,104 young people (5776 female) have benefitted from career services. 589 young people (303 female) got placed in the labour market because of improved and new career services.

This case study aims to identify, validate, and document experiences in career guidance in Albania. RisiAlbania started working on career guidance through media in 2013 and increased the scope in the second phase. Sharing experiences captured at different levels has been central from the beginning, examples are former capitalization products such as the case study on the role of media in career guidance¹ or the recent career guidance week on different online media. Based on semi-structured interviews with key partners and young women and men, this case study looks at how the public and private career guidance market has developed lately, and how the different pieces of the puzzle contribute to the career guidance system in Albania.

1. Gavin Andersen, Inspiring and influencing the young jobseekers of Albania, Tirana, 2016.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1. Youth unemployment in Albania

Albania is a small country with a population of 2.8 million inhabitants. Young people (15-29 years old) make about 23% of the population of Albania, according to latest data in 2020. Out of 661,365 young women and men, 16% of them are registered and frequent secondary education, while 20% attend higher education. Youth has the highest unemployment rate at 20.9% in 2020 while the overall unemployment rate was 11.7% for the same year. Meanwhile the youth labour force participation rate stands at 52.1%, against an overall labour force participation rate of 59.5%.²

Many parents are desperate for their children to study a prestigious subject like law or medicine, but it is very difficult for university graduates to find jobs, whereas there is a shortage of skilled people in other sectors. Young people find it difficult to find jobs because they do not know how or where to find them. Jobseekers and potential employers alike complain that the avenues available to them in their searches are limited. This indicates that mechanisms or institutions that mediate between Jobseekers and employers, matching the supply of jobs with the demand for them, are missing or not performing properly.

3.2. Career guidance in Albania

Every person faces key transition moments in her or his path from education to employment. These are moments when important career decisions are taken. The ability of young people to meet informed decisions ultimately impacts finding (better) employment.

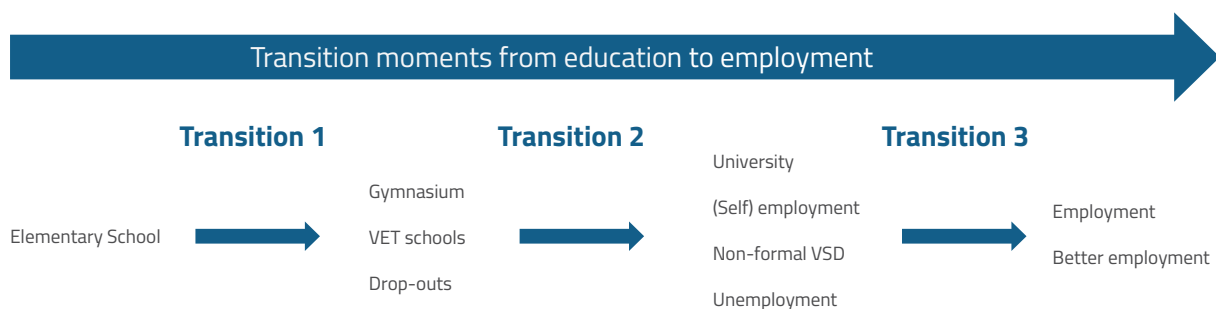


Figure 1: Transition moments

Research commissioned at the beginning of phase 2 explored seven distinct pillars of career guidance in the education and outside the education system: 1) compulsory education, 2) general high education, 3) higher education, 4) vocational education, 5) municipalities, 6) public employment services, and 7) private recruitment companies.³ The interviews

2. Labour Force Surveys 2016–2020, INSTAT [19.11.2021]

3. Visar Ademi and Sokol Avxhiu, Review of current state of Career Guidance and counseling in Albania, 2017

confirmed that while overall career guidance in Albania has improved over the years, the system is still nascent and fragmented, and lacks clear guidance from central level. Important root causes of this situation are: limited understanding of the career guidance services and their importance as well as fragmented labour market information.

3.3. RisiAlbania

Career guidance has been central in phase 1 of RisiAlbania (2013-2017), when the project focused on improving the quality and quantity of labour market information being produced by the local media, ultimately influencing the choices that young people make about employment, education, and training. The principle was to not use mass media as a short-term tool to disseminate information, but rather to change the way that media reports on employment in a sustainable way – an entirely new concept in Albania. Using very conservative estimates, over 110,000 people (49% women) have been informed on labour market issues by sustainable mass media programs, leading to over 71,000 people changing their perception on the labour market (48% women) and over 35,000 people (46% women) actively changing their behavior (such as job searching, training, etc.).⁴

In phase 2 (2017-2021), the overall aim is to realize more employment opportunities for young women and men, aged 15 to 29, in a socially inclusive and sustainable way. This is done through

- facilitating systemic change in the agrobusiness, tourism and ICT and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sectors (for new job creation);
- job intermediation and career guidance (more placement of young women and men in existing vacancies and enabling them to better choose a career); and
- improving labour market-oriented skills through non-public non-formal training.

4. Gavin Andersen, *Inspiring and influencing the young jobseekers of Albania*, Tirana, 2016.

RISIALBANIA'S CAREER GUIDANCE INTERVENTION

To meet their employment needs, RisiAlbania works on providing effective ways of linking jobseekers with the job opportunities that best match their skills, needs, and interests. RisiAlbania's outcome on job intermediation and career guidance is oriented towards both intermediation services and career guidance. This case study focuses on career guidance.

4.1. Strategic framework

Looking at career guidance, the outcome is: Young women and men make more informed career choices and gain increased employment opportunities thanks to a strengthened job mediation system.

Guidance questions

- What to deliver (content)?
- For whom to deliver (target group, outreach)?
- Where is to deliver (service providers)?
- Who is to deliver (professional human resources)?

RisiAlbania aims to reach diverse target groups among youth (15 to 29 years) overall as well as the wider public including parents through the media intervention. RisiAlbania designed a holistic, multi-parallel approach to activate and support all the necessary functions in career guidance:

- 1) introducing and continuously improving the quality of career advice services: **content and services**
- 2) strengthening the **professional capacities**: human resources equipped with the required knowledge and methodology
- 3) strengthening **institutional capacities**: adequate institutional setting and commitment of institutional providers
- 4) continuing to work with the national **media** to produce and disseminate career orientation information.

CAREER GUIDANCE

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, counseling 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**.

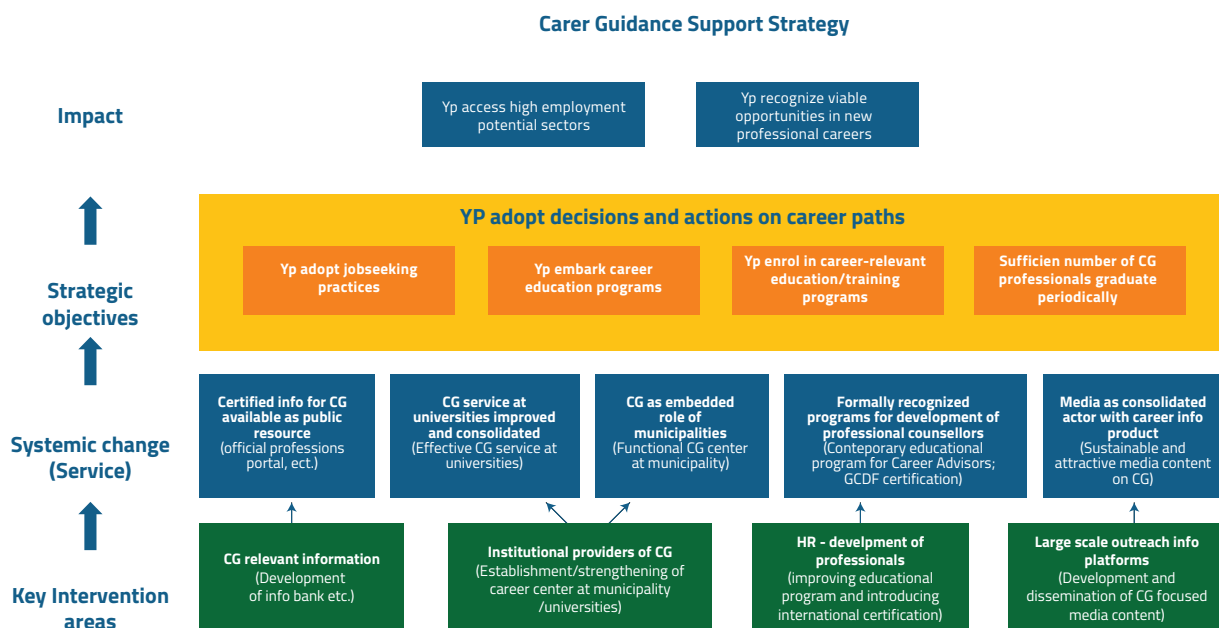


Figure 2: Career guidance support strategy

In the following, the different interventions are explained in more details.

4.2. Career guidance as a public good

Rubenc Krifsa, an 18-year-old high school student, recently visited the newly established career center in Tirana, as he is unsure whether to study medicine or programming. He especially appreciated that the counselors listened and discussed so intensively with him, and that he could make use of the PGI test⁵, a test, he believed existed only in the USA.



Figure 3: Career session with young people at the newly opened career center in Tirana

Since 2019, the Municipality of Tirana have included career guidance services in their structure in form of dedicated staff as part of the social services and have made budgetary commitments. The career office opened in December 2020 and offers career education for pre-university students, group and individual guidance, and career development training for young people and interested adults.

The Swiss career centers served as an inspiration when drafting the different services and products. Swiss career counselors shared all types of products which got adapted and translated to the Albanian context. An online self-service⁶ portal is also part of the center's offer and provides information and tools for

5. Personal Globe Inventory, a career test

6. www.karriera.tirana.al, inspired by the Swiss knowledge portal www.berufsberatung.ch

career guidance, as well as information on education and training opportunities, internships, and jobs. The counselors have received training according to international professional standards and exchanges with Swiss counterparts. The counselors use contemporary tools to explore areas of career interest for jobseekers, to analyze their needs for counseling and guidance, and to identify difficulties that young people and adults face in making decisions in their professional journey.

Summarizing, RisiAlbania has supported the Municipality in:

- Exposure to Swiss practices of career guidance (exchange, training, mentoring)
- Support development of career portal with comprehensive information bank that shows professions, available education and training, and
- Support development of a virtual infrastructure.

4.3. Career guidance for university students

In Albania, most young people opt for university studies. For the academic year 2020-2021, 123,797 students are registered across the different universities in the country. To date, RisiAlbania is cooperating with three universities, comprising of about 22% of the total number of students attending universities.

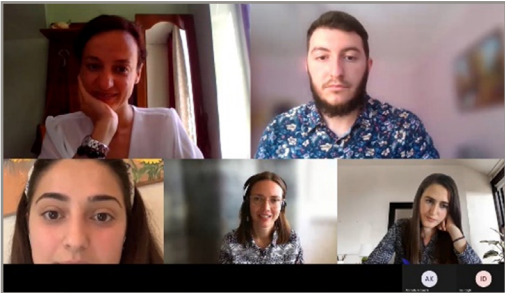


Figure 4: Focus group discussion with university students

Five of young people that study at these universities shared the experiences they had at the career offices of their universities for this case study. The counselors advised them on how to write CVs and motivation letters, informed them about internship and job opportunities, and imparted some skills in some trainings. The interviewed youth hope to work in a profession according to their studies, and to practice it with passion – be it as a teacher for foreign languages in case of Ermir or owner of her own business specialized in corporate law in case of Iris.

RisiAlbania has supported the selected universities (University of Durrës, the Agriculture University of Tirana, and the Luarasi University) to strengthen their role and capacities in serving their own students and alumni. The services aim to increase the employability of students, like adopting job searching practices. Xhafer Rakiplari, who leads the career guidance services at the university of Durrës describes it as follows: *“Helping youngsters to make a good transition from universities to work life.”*



When we don't have the right people, with whom we work, then this is a bigger problem than lack of money. The training enabled five staff to provide professional services to our students.

Shpresim Domi leads the career guidance services at the University of Agriculture of Tirana



In times of the pandemic, the universities, with RisiAlbania's support, focused on introducing innovative career e-services. In the university setting, when one career counselor is responsible for a huge number of students, online services are irrespective of the pandemic a good solution. Students also praise a manual on how to apply for jobs, enabled by RisiAlbania and also available online, as a good tool. To further improve and diversify services, Risi facilitated a series of exchanges with Warsaw University of Technology. This online process started by the end of 2020 and is led by universities themselves as they explore topics of interest for the development of their services. This allows the universities to further increase human resources capacities based on best practices and to further strengthen a network of career professionals.

The project furthermore supported the introduction of performance measurement instruments, which provided universities with the means to measure the satisfaction of students/alumni with their services and to continuously improve and tailor their services. 75-85% of students participating in the first survey indicated that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the services provided by the respective career offices and would suggest these services to their peers as well.

Looking back, it has not been easy years to build up and improve career guidance services at universities. Student protests led to tuition fees to be decreased, which implicated budget cuts, and university-external factors such as the earthquake in 2019 and the ongoing Covid pandemic. The process took time, but the partners of RisiAlbania progressed in small and contained steps. The universities were able to adapt, which shows signs of resilience. Staff is committed, the universities' management support the offices, thus, even with low budget commitments, services are delivered to students. The country's largest university, the University of Tirana, has decided to partner on improving the career guidance services for its students, too, and will join the effort in phase 3.

Summarizing, RisiAlbania's facilitative support consisted of:

- Study to become career counselor at university level
- Training of university staff through international Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) program
- Development and diversification of services and of digital content, tools and methods (career manual, career tests, webinars) and introduction of performance measurement instruments
- Promotion of exchange among universities, and with the Warsaw University of Technology

4.4. Private providers come up with their solutions

Endri Ndoni from the private intermediation provider Expert Lane acknowledges that the career guidance system at universities is slowly improving. But he states that *"there is a huge gap between the job market and universities. Although almost all universities have career offices most graduates are unaware of what the job market offers. Even though they get career guidance, on theoretical/academic level, they are not well connected to the businesses."*

Expert Lane as a private actor in this market wants to fill this gap. They consider themselves as a one stop shop for career services: customized career counseling process and soft skills training if requested. RisiAlbania supported them in building up their platform and services (assessments, counselling, trainings, intermediation, and placement), many of them online due to the pandemic, and linking them to the other actors in the field, the Faculty of Social Sciences, and the career offices of the universities. Expert Lane's clients are both the jobseekers and employers, especially from the ICT/BPO sector. Albi Alikaj, 27, is one of them. Background in mechatronics and several years of working in the tourism sector, wanted to change his professional career once again and decided to study information system in business. He signed up for a personal career counseling package for two reasons: while he now knows much more about his abilities and could further develop his business idea (digital marketing), he still hopes to get more work opportunities, that is be invited to job interviews.



Figure 5: Jobseekers receiving customized career counseling at the one-stop shop of Expert Lane

Training providers have felt the need to orient youth to better understand professional fields, at a young age, before deciding to take a formal education or a shorter training programs. This is the case of the Albanian ICT Academy, a partner of RisiAlbania for training provision in ICT. The Academy therefore offered career orientation services, but not in a formalized form. RisiAlbania supported the provider to consolidate these services and to develop a "Career Orientation manual on ICT". The career orientation for high school students and their parents now not only include career orientation in the field of ICT, but more and more other fields of employment are added. The business model builds on the interplays between career guidance and training: In the first option, a young girl enrolls in counseling, makes assessments, and pays a fee. If ICT emerges as a field of interest, she can get trained at the Albanian ICT Academy for free. In the second option, a young boy attends the ICT training at the Academy and enjoys the orientation services for free. This innovative initiative from a private provider shows the increased awareness on the importance of career services of

different stakeholders across the labour market chain. It also proves that young people are willing to pay for quality services.

4.5. Well-trained career counselors as the basis

Research confirmed that the education of career counselors is a key bottleneck in the Albanian career guidance system. If the system is to improve qualitatively, then the education of those persons who counsel the youth is the key puzzle. Therefore, RisiAlbania supported the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Tirana in their ambition to become a centre of expertise for career guidance services through the following areas of support:

- Facilitate a long-term partnership with the University of Lausanne
- Improve the master/bachelor program curricula related to career orientation, incl. improved teaching materials and capacity development of teachers
- Strengthen research capacities



Faculty of Social Sciences and University of Lausanne signed a 5-year Memorandum of Understanding in the field of Career Counselling in April 2019

Prof. Jérôme Rossier, Vice-Dean for Research, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Lausanne (left) and Prof. Edmond Rapti, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences

The Faculty of Social Sciences adapted four contemporary international career guidance tests⁷ to the Albanian context with the support of the experts from Lausanne. Currently, the Career center of Tirana, the universities, private providers use these tests, and the young people enjoy applying these tests very much and base their career decisions on these tests, amongst other factors.

The cooperation between the two universities stands on such a good level, that the two parties expanded their agreement to include new areas of collaboration like the cooperation to develop the Center of Career Research and Counselling (CeRCo) at Faculty of Social Sciences, based on the experience that University of Lausanne has with the Research Center for Vocational Psychology and Career Counselling (CePCO).

On average, 15 to 20 students graduate from the Master program every year. Interviews confirm that the quality of their education has improved substantially over the last year. A key issue remains that not all graduates get employed according to their specialization. More awareness about the knowledge and skills of the recent graduated career counselors among those institutions that employ career counselors is needed.

7. The four tests are: Personal Globe Inventory (PGI), Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ), Analyse de la demande d'orientation (ADOR), Vocational Identity Status Assessment (VISA)



Figure 6: Pilot of career tests in schools

4.6. How media influences the career decisions

«The company I am currently hired provides me such a professional environment for the first steps in my career and I am very grateful to the media program «Think Big», which has changed my life», says Aleksia Bega, who started her first job to further complement her computer engineering studies after watching the company featured during the career orientation program «Thing Big», one of the programs supported from RisiAlbania.

The country-wide media intervention foresees that media provide relevant and attractive labour market information focusing on career guidance. Since the very beginning of RisiAlbania in 2015, RisiAlbania aimed to change the way that media reports on employment, hence also career guidance, in a sustainable way. In phase 1, RisiAlbania supported several media organizations, building capacities, knowledge, and business models to allow these enterprises to develop labour market content in a commercially sustainable manner. In phase 2, RisiAlbania supported six media programs with a special focus on career orientation. “The path to success⁸” by Club FM and “Towards work” by Shqiptarja.com continue running since phase 1. RisiAlbania supported also three new TV programs, namely “The best in the country”, “The job that I want” and “Woman’ Ray”. The novelty here has been that the project in the first two cases has cooperated directly with the program authors, opening the way for new business models around media programs focused on career orientation. In addition, “Woman’ Ray” involved a series of talks with women entrepreneurs and engaged

8. The names of all six media programs are originally in Albanian, but got translated in the case study.

in promoting decent work while it addressed some of the barriers faced by women in the labour market. Another innovative product has been “Think Big” an online program where interviews at a business site, including CEOs, Human Resources and young employed people offer a 360 degree look at what a job/profession looks like.

The media intervention has reached the maturity where different programs either need only limited support or even continue without RisiAlbania’s support. A comprehensive case study published during phase 1 shares the impact of this innovative approach on changing the youth and parents’ perceptions on professions and career guidance.⁹ The media impact assessment¹⁰ commissioned by RisiAlbania shows in how far media programs have affected the young people’s perception on career and labour market: 34.4% of respondents say that these programs have influenced the choice of education or training, 43.2 % of them said they were influenced on how they can look for work, and 32.3 % of them said they were motivated by these programs to start a business. While the programs have impacted the professional lives of direct participants in the programs like the cases of programs «The best in the country» or «The job that I want», by either getting employed for the first time or getting a better employment, the real impact has been on the thousands of followers of these programs, who have either changed their perceptions towards professions, or their behavior towards their career development.



9. Gavin Andersen, RisiAlbania Media Case: Inspiring and Influencing Young People in Albania, 2016. https://beamexchange.org/uploads/filer_public/13/d0/13d01fdf-4e22-4e0a-b682-e12e06800106/risialbania-media-case-study.pdf

10. Rruga me Pisha Foundation, Measuring the audience/viewership/listenership and perception of selected Media Programs on Career Orientation for Young People, 2021

5 KEY FEATURES

Summarizing the different interventions, the following features are noteworthy.

5.1. Holistic approach

RisiAlbania designed and adopted a holistic approach to activate and support all the necessary market system pillars in career guidance:

- Institutional and organizational capacities of service providers.
- Development of content (digital tools, tests, manuals).
- Development of career counselors.

Building on these developments the focus of RisiAlbania is now on:

- Nurturing the inter-acting practices and institutional partnerships
- Institutionalization of developed content
- Continuous development of career counselors.

Career Guidance Service in Albania



5.2. Interaction among partners

An effective career guidance system empowers, firstly, young people to make the right choices and secondly, meets needs with needed skills. The following chart aims to show how the different partners of RisiAlbania interact among each other so that ultimately a high-quality and innovative career guidance system serves young people and companies.

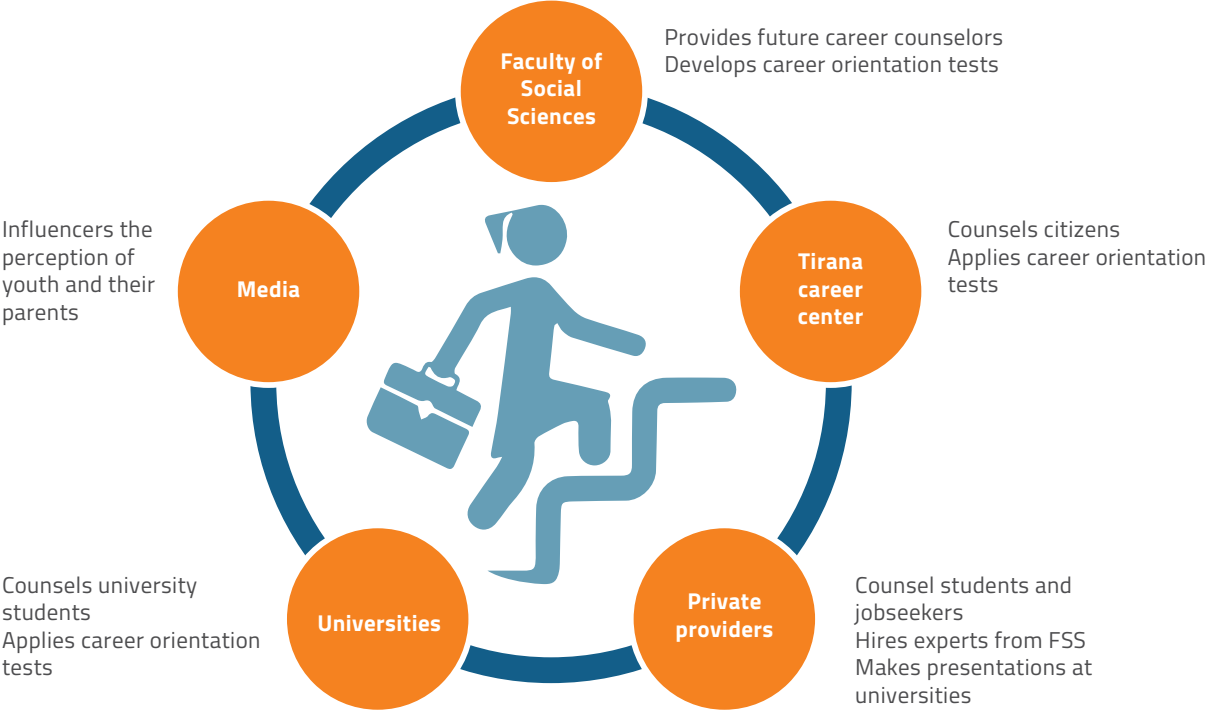


Figure 8: Interaction among partners

5.3. Evolution over time

At the beginning of phase 2, RisiAlbania supported the public institutions (universities and municipality of Tirana) to develop career guidance as a public good that is for free. The target groups were not aware of the existence of these services. Over time, private intermediaries emerged. First Expert Lane, then the non-formal training provider Albanian ICT Academy who added career guidance to the training offer. RisiAlbania by purpose experimented with the partners, and adapted the approach based on continuous learning by all involved. This iterative learning and ability to adapt can be described as adaptive management. The chart below aims to show that RisiAlbania’s work in one level brought in new actors on a different level, which leads to more scale in terms of organizations providing career guidance services and hence young people enjoying them.

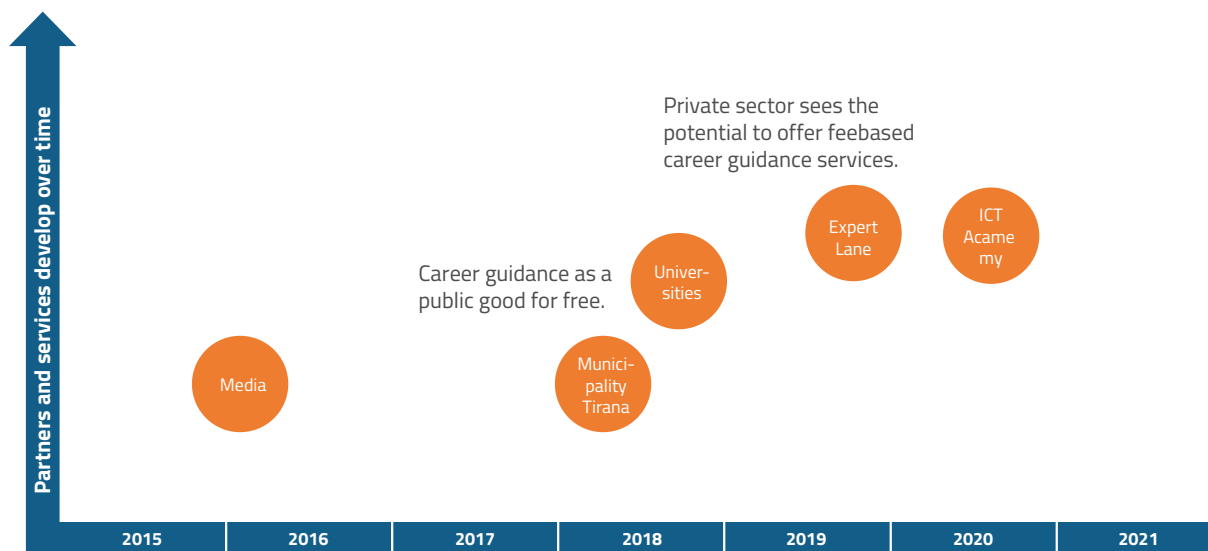


Figure 9: Evolution over time

5.4. Albanian-Swiss collaboration

The collaboration between Albanian and Swiss institutions proves to be a key success factor in this intervention. Several visits to Switzerland allowed key partners and RisiAlbania project staff to understand the Swiss career guidance system and build relationships with institutions such as SDBB.¹¹ Two long-term collaborations are especially noteworthy:

The exchange with the university of Lausanne is simply great: we improved the curricula, we validated three tools and have started with the fourth, we conduct joint research and currently push forwards the idea to set-up a similar model to the one in Lausanne:

a lab that not only allows students to acquire practical skills, but a space through which we collaborate more with schools and help the municipality in counseling challenging cases.

Nada Kallciu, lecturer and researcher at the Faculty of Social Sciences

The universities of Tirana and Lausanne not only keep exchanging and improving the Master program and standardize career guidance tools to the Albanian context, but also conduct joint research. Researchers published their first paper "If I won the lottery...": work orientations of low-qualified young adults in Albania and Switzerland on 2 June 2021.

The staff of the career center of Municipality of Tirana participated in a one-week practical training and exchange in the canton of Ticino. This training was tailor-made for the Municipality of Tirana's needs and laid the foundation for developing systems, processes, and procedures in the career center of Tirana. Albanians usually are fluent in Italian,

hence, no translation was needed for the training. And the informal exchange among the head of career counselling in Ticino and the team of the newly established centre in Albania continues.

11 Schweizerisches Dienstleistungszentrum Berufsbildung | Berufs-, Studien- und Laufbahnberatung.



Figure 10: Swiss-Albanian collaboration in Lausanne, Switzerland, and Tirana, Albania

6 HOW THE SYSTEM HAS CHANGED

RisiAlbania has introduced an array of innovations in the career guidance system, triggering creation of a conducive environment for career service delivery.

Tirana municipality has become the first municipality in the country to establish a career guidance center that offers services to local schools and youth outside universities. It offers a good platform for development of information and tools on the labour market, which were previously missing or not available in a user-friendly format. The Tirana model serves as an example and thus lays the groundwork for scalability in other municipalities that will commit to this service. Already three municipalities in the Northern Albania integrated career services as part of initiatives funded by programs of the Embassy of the United States.

Three universities now offer higher quality career guidance services and have increased the outreach of this service over the years. The University of Durrës shares that, to their surprise, students from other universities took part in their career development trainings.

Every hour young women and men spend working in the wrong job is a loss to them and to the economy.

Joniada Hito, head of career center of the municipality of Tirana

Another innovation has been the launch of a private online career's advice platform Expert Lane through which young jobseekers can access and use internationally recognized career guidance tools. The commercialization of this model in 2020 has been an important development.

By entering a long-term partnership with the University of Lausanne, the Master program 'Career Orientation' for career counselors, the only academic program in this field, could substantially be improved. This has enabled the Faculty of Social Sciences to make an important contribution to the professionalization and quality of career guidance. Cooperation among the universities has already been broadened to joint research and is transforming the Faculty of Social Sciences in a central and vanguard institution for developments in career guidance field in Albania.

The thematic field of career guidance is drawing more and more attention in Albania. Different market actors are responding by strengthening or improving their roles at different levels in this ecosystem. The Ministry of State for Youth and Children drafted the New National Strategy for Youth 2022-2029, in which the development of career guidance services for youth is one of the concerned topics. Partners Albania, an Albanian NGO which is also the implementing partner of RisiAlbania, is engaged in a country-wide promotional campaign to show the importance of career guidance. New actors have entered a collaboration with RisiAlbania recently, such as the University of Tirana, and new initiatives have emerged such as the boostemployment platform with digital labor market information (initiated by Swisscontact) and the career guidance services in the municipalities of Kukës, Dibër, Mat (initiated by the Embassy of the United States). UNICEF moreover develops a career

guidance program that will be used for supporting adolescents and youth, addressing career guidance at compulsory education and lower secondary education including VET schools.

In addition to career guidance at municipal and university level and paid services through private providers, there are also the schools (compulsory education, general high education, and vocation education) at the different levels which play a crucial role in advising kids at the transition moments (cf. figure 1). Via the career center in Tirana, RisiAlbania’s work indirectly targets schools. The different experts interviewed also confirm that their expertise is sought after from schools. Even though it needs time to change recruitment practices, the Master program of the Faculty of Social Sciences contributes with the graduates to the future workforce of counselors – to be employed at different levels.

The career guidance system must counsel the kids and youth in school and university. As a private provider we can bring in the private sector’s perspective and make it more hands-on.

Endri Ndoni, Expert Lane

Summarizing, RisiAlbania designed and adopted a holistic approach to activate and support all the necessary market system pillars in career guidance: institutional and organizational capacities of providers, development of content, and development of career counselors. By prioritizing digitalized tools and content, RisiAlbania also ensured easy access to the products for service providers and increased outreach to the end users.



7. YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE BETTER CAREER DECISIONS AND ULTIMATELY FIND EMPLOYMENT

Career guidance is a cornerstone for youth employment, as young people develop the ability to make more sound career decisions and placement happens faster and more effective. In terms of results achieved at outcome level, 10,104 young people used career guidance services from 2019 to October 2021, and hence improved their employability. 5776 of them are women. The results at the Municipality of Tirana are likely to increase tremendously over the coming months and years now that the center has been opened.

Unlike above results at the level of employability, career service takes medium to long term to produce measurable results concerning employment. At universities, the career services support faster placement into more adequate jobs, as the students and alumni community make a Jobseekers community. In total, 589 young people (303 female) got placed during phase 2. Especially at municipal level, the employment results are in the long term as the young person asking for advice might make other transitions (cf. figure 1) before entering the labour market.

Table 1: Results at outcome and impact level

| | Use of career guidance services | Placements |
|---|---------------------------------|------------|
| Municipality of Tirana | 1140 | |
| Universities | 5751 | 103 |
| Private intermediaries and training providers | 3213 | 420 |
| Media | | 66 |
| Total | 10,104 | 589 |



Figure 11: Young women reading up on different professions

8 LESSONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Connecting the actors of the career guidance ecosystem is a continuous effort by RisiAlbania. Exchange and collaboration have emerged around common themes such as the newly developed tools, trainings that were attended by staff of the different levels, and initiatives that are jointly pushed forward such as the exchange with the Warsaw University of Technology.

All universities praise that their management supports their career offices. The resources remain an issue: not all offices dispose of staff that can fully dedicate themselves to career guidance as teaching remains the prime activity, the offices usually do not dispose of its own budget, and staff turnover remains high. Despite these structural bottlenecks, universities have been able to constantly increase the scope and quality of their services and more universities express their interest to collaborate with RisiAlbania in this area.

Skilled career counselors are a key bottleneck in the Albanian system and RisiAlbania rightfully tackled this through the collaboration with the Faculty of Social Sciences. To revise Master programs and substantially increase the quality of it needs time. One could have expected that the graduates – the first ones in the Albanian market with this skillset – would immediately be employed by the institutions in need of such experts (career centres at university, private providers, municipality). Promotion of the new Master program and constant lobbying to change recruitment practices in universities, for instance, is needed to make this matching happen. Investing in professional development is an ongoing task. Staff turnovers ask for immediate remedy, but also long-standing staff needs continuous further training.



Figure 12: Continuous professional development of career counselors

While phase 1 focused on enabling media businesses to develop labour market content in a commercially sustainable manner, the starting point of phase 2 has been career guidance as a public good at municipal and university level. Now, few private providers have found a niche in the market and offer fee-based counseling services.

Career guidance offers a thematic field, where Swiss expertise brings an added value and where the two parties enjoy collaborating so much that they continuously expanded their collaboration.

RisiAlbania overall intends to improve matching supply to current market demand for jobs, enabling young Jobseekers and potential employers adjust to markets change, and building skills for future labour market demands. The role of career guidance is key in this: it makes the labor market more transparent, and it contributes to a better match between individual talents, qualifications and skills and qualifications demanded by employers.



