

## SDC webinar on Vocational Orientation and Career Guidance on 29.02.2024: questions posed in the chat and replies by the presenters

Q1: How successful was the project in Albania to link pupils to VET, dual-education and not only to universities? (Monique Frey)

**Reply Albania (Edlira Muedini, Helvetas):** The objective of this intervention is to build an ecosystem that enable young people to get informed about their career decisions, be it VET, universities, or labor market. It is their decision, important is that they have access to information and career guidance services that enables them to take informed decisions.

**Complemented by Michaela:** The job of a career counselor is to support the client to achieve his/ her goal. If that is university education, so be it. However, career ideas are being investigated and challenged during CG. In the end, clients might not follow their initial ideas but what they see as most fitting to their personal development. CG also teaches Career Management/ Development skills. The university student might still benefit later on, if and when graduating or dropping out. Admittedly this is outside the scope of monitoring and evaluation.

Q2: Albania is challenged by large numbers of youth leaving the country for work opportunities abroad. To what extent are vocational orientation and career guidance services used to either motivate youth to seek jobs in Albania, or to prepare them for jobs in other countries? (Sonja Hofstetter, Swisscontact)

**Reply Albania (Ermira Shyti, Helvetas):** Thank you Sonia! Yes, emigration remains a wound of WB countries. The primary aim of vocational and career guidance is to help young people to explore the opportunities within the country and get to know role models of their peers who build a career in the country.

**Complemented by Michaela:** CG needs partners to (ideally) provide first-hand information to youth. Connect with (internal and) external partners of the school (if School-based CG) or CG provider. \_In Albania, for example, there is an institution that can inform about the risks of illegal migration and explain legal ways and procedures of migrating to Germany (!) or connect job/ education searchers with institutions in Albania: <https://www.startfinder.de/de/beratungszentrum/deutsches-informationszentrum-fuer-migration-ausbildung-und-karriere-dimak-tirana>. In some countries with high migration rates, specialized units of Public Employment Services would have some information services on labor migration, too. But be also aware of those 'black sheeps' on the migration market as well. Dangerous trap for young people.

Q3: Great presentation from HELVETAS Albania! Just a quick question, I may have missed in Ermira's presentation. The project has positioned itself so to address constraints in the lack of access to LMI. I suppose that you are confident with the quality of Albanian LMI, in particular in view of skills forecasting. Is this correct? At times projects involved in skills forecasting are missing the quality link your project is building and, also, at times, it happens vice versa, with projects addressing the social demand only, with information provided through e.g. PES employers' surveys using occupation as proxy. This is the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina at least. Greetings to the RISI team! (Snjezana, Consultant Freelancer, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

**Reply Albania (Ermira Shyti, Helvetas):** Thank you Snjezana! the quality of the LMI and its dissemination for YP remains still a concern. Project support also the institutions in charge of producing and disseminating the LMI. Related to the skills forecast the project has supported establishment of Sectoral skills councils that have

institutionalized business involvement in Skills development system. Two SSCs in ICT and Tourism are operational. Their task is also skills forecast through sectoral SNA, and then embed the results in qualification system.

**Complemented by Michaela:** Labor Market statistics, in general, tend to be of little use for students and job seekers (no matter how valuable for educational and other policies they may be). For CG often too aggregated, too generic, too patchy, sometimes outdated when they become relevant for transition to work. And even when they are so very up to date, well structured, and youth-friendly designed (like in the Berufsinformationszentren in Switzerland), students need support to relate the information obtained there with their personal life and career ideas. Teaching students' exploration skills and asking them to explore the surrounding world of work is more insightful for students, families, teachers because there is a lot to discover (more vacancies than people expect) as most of the labor market is 'hidden' (no job postings, constant turnover below the perception threshold), youth get first-hand information and impressions (!), make contact and exercise communication and exploration skills. If shared and reflected in class, it can be a very insightful learning journey (not only for students). This is not to say, that students shouldn't be aware of the shape and trends of a given labor market. But it needs to be translated into digestible bites. For example, in form of a "Did you know ..." presentation (. how many students start their first position without formal contract? ... how long it takes in average for a) young men and b) young women to get their first paid job ...). Just facts about the labor market and then reflect on that. What does this mean for you/ me us? -> informed decision-taking. What's more: first jobs can/ should be seen as entrance, i.e. LEARNING position. Its value for further learning and development might be more important than income at that stage of career development.

Q4: Thanks Ermira for the presentation. Did you already perform evaluation studies and have already results on the success/effectiveness of different services you supported to introduce/improve? Are these solutions designed to serve different target groups? (Sidita Dibra, Swisscontact)

**Reply Albania (Ermira Shyti, Helvetas):** Thank you Sidita, Yes, the solutions cater to various target group 15-29 years. As I presented, we have supported a wide spectrum of providers like municipalities penetrating to pre-university system with career education, private intermediaries, universities, training providers, etc, that deliver the services to various groups. Related to the effectiveness of the service, we measure the satisfaction of the users/beneficiaries with the service, meaning how the service meets their needs and supports them in their decision. So far, the results show a high satisfaction of 70-90%. with the services.

Q5: What are reasons for the reduction of the long-term training cycle for the next phase of VTESS (9 month from 12months before)? (Fabienne Tödtli, Helvetas)

**Reply Laos (Suzy Baudrez, Swisscontact):** Dear Fabienne, the VTESS project decided to reduce the long-term coaching cycle to 9 months (from 12 months before) because the long duration discourages young, disadvantaged people from staying committed and focused for such a long time. Within the 9 months, 4 months are dedicated for technical training, all the rest is soft skills (3months) learning and employment support (2months).

**Complemented by Michaela:** In my view, VTESS has used a great TOT approach for the training of coaches which combined 5 days theory with immediate practice, followed by reflection of practical experiences. This approach allows for experience-based adjustments of the training. Joint learning. Cocreational. Great!\_Also, in my experience, vulnerable groups are difficult to reach out to and it can be difficult for foreigners to really understand their living conditions and situations. Moreover, the immediate need for 'bread' may be too urgent for lengthy interventions. Time, focus/ concentration/ literacy might be reduced. Our conclusions in (to some extent) comparable projects (Roma youth in Serbia) were: Got to them (don't ask them to come); work with intermediaries (Roma NGOs); be flexible; use simple language, pictures, and stories; make it as short as possible by any means; and direct sessions to their immediate needs/ questions. In other cases, than with VTESS, this may lead to really

short and targeted interventions. 'Curative' interventions are more expensive/ effortful than 'preventative' measures would be.

Q6: What are the key elements of the long-term Coaching. What is the frequency of counselling and what are the key success factors you observed? (Stefanie)

**Reply Laos (Suzy Baudrez, Swisscontact):** Dear Stefanie, key elements of full Coaching Cycle:

1) Working and Learning in groups

Youth learn several soft skills such as teamwork, presentation skills, receiving feedback, self-evaluation of one's own strengths and weaknesses...etc

2) Exploring the World of Labor

Youth learn about the variety of professions that are needed in the labor market and self-reflect on which professions fits them

3) Work Exposure

Youth spend one to two weeks within a business in their chosen profession to observe the daily life in that specific profession.

4) Action Plan

Youth create a simple Action plan where they set an employment goal to reach with simple steps that lead to that objective.

5) Professional training

Youth go to training at IVET schools or with private sector as enterprise-based training)

6) Getting into employment or self-employment

**Complemented by Michaela:** In general, the usual key elements of all sorts of Career Guidance are:

- Self-Awareness: Supporting clients to uncover their strengths and values
- Opportunity Awareness:
- Self-directedness (client-led)
- And may or may not have formal or informal elements of soft skills training sessions (e.g. giving and receiving feedback, how to conduct informational interviews .) or information (facts about the world of work; labor law: rights and duties of employees, etc.)  
see PPT that has not been presented during the webinar but will be disseminated with the documentation

Q7: To Suzy: were you able to find out the reasons why young people have a low interest in starting a vocational training? (Regula Chavez-Malgiaritta)

**Reply Laos (Suzy Baudrez, Swisscontact):** Dear Regula, young, disadvantaged people need hands-on experience (more practice, less theory). VT is very much classroom based (except for 1 month internship). Generally, VT does not have a good reputation (low quality training). On the other hand, enterprise-based training allows young people to be IN business directly and have a better feeling of what their chosen profession and sector looks like.

**Complemented by Michaela:** Pure guess-work on that question on my side:

- Bad experience with schooling (drop-outs)
- Too formal a process, not flexible enough and too long. Costly, too.
- Immediate need for 'bread', family responsibilities and necessities.
- (perceived) Lack of relevance
- Meaningful alternatives (enterprise-based training)

Q8: A question for Suzy: Why was it decided to shorten the coaching duration? What are the reasons and indicators when longer or shorter coaching is offered? How helpful is short coaching for entrepreneurs? (Inga Schallau – Welthungerhilfe)

**Reply Laos (Suzy Baudrez, Swisscontact):** Dear Inga, there are 2 types of coaching in the VTESS project and the target for each type of coaching is different.

- Long term coaching AKA Coaching Cycle (12months)

Participants who join the full Coaching Cycle are from semi urban zones. They also have the opportunity to apply for Basic Business Skills and Seed Money to open their own small business. For those who received Seed Money they will receive an additional 6-month business mentoring from a Business Trainer/Mentor.

- Short term coaching AKA Post Training Support (10 days)

Participants who join Post Training Support are fresh graduates from the IVET schools. They are supported for 10 days on how to search for a job and how to keep a job. This coaching is focused on wage-employment.

Q9: Did you observe significant differences in the interest in self-employment btw women and men? (Stefanie)

**Reply Laos (Suzy Baudrez, Swisscontact):** Most young people interested in self-employment were women, majority doing tailoring or beauty salon.

Q10: How many of your young people have secured employment contracts? How many are going into self-employment? (Hassan Bugnard)

**Reply Laos (Suzy Baudrez, Swisscontact):** Dear Hassan, we conducted a tracer study and found out that the graduates from the long-term coaching had a higher employment rate than those who joined the short-term coaching. Long term coaching - Coaching Cycle: 72% Employment rate (52% self-employment, 20% wage employment). Post Training Support: 48% employment rate

**Complemented by Michaela:** CG in its early stages empowers youth (and their families) to deal with the labour market and understand how it functions. It activates and empowers youth to actively pursue career development within this given environment; it does not usually change the labour market, except for the self-employment/ entrepreneurship pathways or until CG actors (schools, VET schools, employers, municipalities, PES, civil-sector organisations, etc.) collaborate closely and for a longer time on the local level (!). This may have some impact on the availability/ accessibility of training courses and support programmes to the benefit of job seekers, employers and local economic development.

Q11: Question to Suzy: you mentioned that the level of basic education is low in the project region. do you tackle that challenge within the project? (Martina Ramming, SDC Education)

**Reply Laos (Suzy Baudrez, Swisscontact):** Dear Martina, the only way we tackle this issue is by providing opportunities to join coaching sessions, technical training at VET schools, enterprise based training or basic entrepreneurship training. We do not provide any specific literacy skills training.

Q12: How did you ensure that the trainees stayed in VET training and coaching- did they get a stipend/have an income during this time? (Fabienne Tödli, Helvetas)

**Reply Laos (Suzy Baudrez, Swisscontact):** Dear Fabienne, yes, indeed, the project provided some stipends for the young people who joined training or the coaching cycle.

VET trainings:

The project provided monthly allowance to students who joined training at the VET schools (for 4 months). There are also dormitories available in the VET schools where trainees can stay. This allows people from rural areas to stay at the IVET schools and therefore avoid dropping out.

Coaching Cycle:

Transportation allowance provided to participants to join the coaching sessions on soft skills and employment support. During technical training they are provided with a monthly allowance like trainees who go to training at the IVET schools.

**Complemented by Michaela:** I know of examples of Career Guidance in Technical Schools in Egypt, where students visited only the Career Guidance course. They didn't skip their other subjects, but they never attended anyway. They did come to Career Guidance class, fully on their own initiative. Good CG feels (for clients) like learning who you are and what you are capable of doing (in spite of bad school marks). It's a course for young people about themselves and more often than not the first time they are attentively listened to at all.

Q12: I would like to know the role of the family in the context of the experiences presented in the career guidance process (Batonwero Patrice)

**Reply Albania (Edlira Muedini, Helvetas):** Thanks Patrice Batonwero! The role of family in career decision of youth is very big. Having that in mind it is very important to address them by providing continuous information, first what career guidance is and where and how it is taken. Therefore, we have continuously promoted the topic addressing the above-mentioned questions and using various mediums and tools.

**Reply Laos (Suzy Baudrez, Swisscontact):** Dear Patrice, the role of family in the career guidance process is essential. Applying a holistic approach where the coach works not only with the youth but also with their social and family environment is important. The reason for this is also that youth tend to listen to their peers rather than an external coach, the capacity to influence young disadvantaged people comes in different forms and means therefore the Coach has to work with their main environment which is their family environment and friends.

**Complemented by Michaela:** Very relevant question and a piece of learning in my own professional development in career guidance in Egypt, Rwanda, Kosovo ....

CG methodologies origin in Western, counselling professions. These are very individualistic and rooted in psychology. I had to understand that, in most countries, the individual depends on the safety-network of a family, social group, etc. for survival (in the absence of social insurances). Therefore we – as CG practitioners – must involve the family in some way. Families would have 'plans' for their kids in this context. CG may be able to influence this towards an occupation choice that 'suits' the young person well and in which s/he could flourish/ be successful. Win-Win-Zone. Or CG may support the negotiation skills of clients to manage expectations and find the best

possible compromise. Teaching 'active listening' can be valuable here. Some CG colleagues did amazing work for CG in this context: Gideon Arulmani (Cultural preparedness model), Ronald Sultana (who just recently passed away – God bless his soul).

Q13: Dear Suzy, thank you for the presentation of the VTESS project. Did you conduct a tracer study for both graduates' group, short term VET training and basic entrepreneurship training/seed money? (Manu Sells-Rohrbach)

**Reply Laos (Suzy Baudrez, Swisscontact):** Tracer studies were conducted for:

- Short term coaching for IVET graduates: 48%
- Long term coaching: 72%

We have yet to conduct a tracer for Basic Entrepreneurship & Seed Money. However, we do know that 90% of small businesses who received training in basic entrepreneurship were still active 6 months after receiving seed money.

Q14: Questions to Suzy: How long is the training for the coaches, what educational background do the coaches have, how is their set-up afterwards (institutional/financial) and where do they host the coachings? Thank you! (Miriam Speh LED)

**Reply Laos (Suzy Baudrez, Swisscontact):** Dear Miriam, training of coaches (ToC) is a series of 8 training of blocks. (8\*5days=40days). Coaches join ToC for 5 days, then travel back to their provinces to implement what they learned during ToC. Educational background of coaches: We select coaches based on their experience working with disadvantaged and liaising with the private sector for training or employment matters.

Q15: Who pays for the coaching system and what is the expectation for the future in terms of sustainability? Do young people have to pay for the training they choose? How do you identify companies for them to do the internship? (Regula Chavez-Malgjaritta)

**Reply Laos (Suzy Baudrez, Swisscontact):** Dear Regula, in the VTESS project, the project pays for all aspects of the coaching system including training costs for the young people. Sustainability is a real question mark. The young people themselves identify companies for the internship, this is part of step 2 of the Coaching Cycle. The coaches and the project also supports by sharing contact of companies.

**Complemented by Michaela:** In most cases and in particular for people from poorer segments of society, CG should be free of charge (and financed by public budget). That's, however, rarely the case in reality. CG is a new concept for many of our partner countries. Preventative measures integrated into Basic Education might be the best we can do in a sustainable way in these contexts.

Q16: How to ensure that information provided is career orientation is relevant and up to date in contexts where Skills Forecasting and LMI systems are weak? (From the break-out session with Michaela)

**Reply Albania (Ermira Shyti, Helvetas):** Good question. It is difficult still, for the individual in this process it is important to identify career options that match the individual ability, interests, strengths, weaknesses. Career advisors are provided tools that aim to know young people with World of work, and the first and important step for that is to know professions and to understand them. In addition, career advisors are trained to humiliate the job market and currently the information is digitalized. (Job portals, LM surveys, linkages with businesses)

**Michaela:** VET school teachers are often well-connected to the employers and can well be trained as (semi-professional) coaches. Teacher Training is intense because we ask them to proceed and use methods that are entirely different from regular classroom or workshop teaching. The services for youth, however, don't need to be long and effortful. (In fact they are much fun). A few days can be enough. One topic can be "How to conduct informational Interviews". Students get some instruction on how to explore the surrounding labor market and to conduct informational (not application!) interviews with professionals, HR personnel, entrepreneurs. We usually prepare the questions during class with them. The results they come back with are always exciting, surprising, encouraging, when conducted in towns and cities (can be more disappointing in remote areas).

Q17: How to work towards institutionalization beyond the project in context where stakeholders of the educational system and employment services are weak? (From the break-out session with Michaela)

**Michaela:** Then it might not be the right time for working on a CG System (like in Albania). Maybe there are options to work on a few CG services within the institutions you work with? In Rwanda we met in the school yard for sessions. Not always expensive equipment necessary. But, students had been often hungry in the afternoon sessions and had no means for transport.

Q18: How to cater for the lack of basic education / foundational skills amongst learners? (From the break-out session with Michaela)

**Michaela:** Are we talking about reading and writing skills and maybe numeracy? If we look into the criteria German employers and Labor agency have identified for 'training maturity' (Kriterienkatalog für Ausbildungsreife), one can see that out of five categories only one is on "Schulische Basiskenntnisse" (Reading, Writing, Talking and Listening, basic Math (der Dreisatz 😊) and basic business knowledge. However, under 'psychological performance indicators' (the second category) you'll find more criteria like 'having full command of (mother & father) language' and being able to think in numbers or logical and others. Sometimes people can do that well without having the marks from school. Experiences from Egypt also show that – once equipped with a life/ career plan – young people re-engage with learning; some even with schooling.