

One size fits all? | I-VET | Lessons Learned

Improving and introducing Career Guidance and Counselling for Students and Young People with Special Educational Needs in Montenegro, Austria and the Republic of Moldova as Support to access relevant Education and Training

Within the project I-VET “Inclusive Vocational Education – Career Guidance and Counselling as Support to Access Relevant Education and Training”, NGOs and experts from Montenegro, Austria and the Republic of Moldova have jointly worked on improving and introducing career guidance and counselling for young people and students with special educational needs (SEN) to ensure equal access to vocational education and training and to increase their employability, through the assessment of existing services, the exchange of experiences and best practices, consultancy activities, participatory workshops with the key stakeholders operating at different levels in each country as well as capacity building measures. The activities resulted in guidelines applicable in all countries, targeting practitioners and service providers who offer career guidance and counselling to students and young people with SEN.

So how can career guidance and counselling for students and young people with SEN be improved or introduced?

Through a comprehensive assessment and the comparison of the three partner countries certain key factors ensuring a successful career guiding process for SEN-students could be identified.

No matter what the preconditions in a country are, the main emphasis needs to be put on the interconnection of stakeholders. The key stakeholders such as ministries, school managements, social welfare centers, NGOs, professional counselling and rehabilitation services and employment services do vary among the countries, but are easily identified. Their interconnection is crucial in order to overcome obstacles and ensure a successful career guiding process through integrative and cooperative principles, which combine in-depth knowledge of labour market requirements with a relevant instruments and processes of identifying the specific potential each SEN student possesses.

While formats of providing career guidance and counselling services for SEN-students or other vulnerable groups vary, a success factor is the move from one off CGC services to interconnected coaching offers over longer periods of time, which reach out to both students and parents.

Also specific competences of practitioners are a pre-condition to ensure professional career guidance and counselling in an inclusive framework. A human rights approach of disability, requirements in communication and networking based on a profound knowledge of the country’s system, a methodological store of knowledge and the ability to adapt to environmental or psycho-pedagogical factors are requirements for practitioners in any country.

Yet, apart from certain common success factors, the results of the assessment also showed strong differences among the services provided in the countries, reaching from state supported institutions to a vast lack of support services in career guidance for students with SEN. The diverging country situations called for an individual approach in improving and introducing career guidance and counselling for SEN-students in the partner countries.

The broad variation among the different country systems challenged the expert team from Montenegro, Austria and the Republic of Moldova but also opened the possibility to see the whole spectrum and elaborate guidelines that are flexibly applicable in all countries and provide a practical approach and accurate orientation for service providers working within the field. The former goal of providing a “Manual” therefore was transformed into elaborating “Guidelines” that can be used entirely but also in a modularized way. The

expert team has realized the idea of guidelines that can be flexibly used, offering support to service providers in elaborating their own, best way of improving or introducing career guidance and counselling for students and young people with SEN in their work environment. Complemented with best practice examples from the three partnering countries the guidelines at hand are not only applicable in Montenegro, Austria and the Republic of Moldova but in all countries wishing to improve and develop inclusive career guidance systems, no matter what their baseline is.

The joint approach and comparison of the three partner countries in this project has shown that one size does not fit all. Although general key principals for career guidance and counselling for young people with SEN can be identified, a flexible approach offering different modules that can be used entirely or partially is needed in order to ensure a successful improvement or introduction of career guiding and counselling services for SEN students in a country. After all, the diversity of systems, institutions, practitioners and students involved also calls for a diverse approach, to ensure a unique and successful career guidance and counselling process for each SEN-student.