



Executive **SUMMARY**

Labour market information and guidance



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Labour market information (LMI) should be properly integrated into a guidance or career learning process that promotes the development of reflexive career identities and autonomous exploration of career information. LMI is not a stand-alone tool for the citizen but requires integration in learning processes which enable citizens to use it to identify career and learning opportunities. Career management skills development programmes in education/training and in employment services should be associated with LMI.

Given the importance of good labour market information for career guidance and career education, its quality and provision should be addressed in national policy strategies for lifelong guidance and career education at school, monitored by the responsible institution(s). A common approach should be developed to LMI production and integration into diverse sectors in which it is used, with the cooperation of the relevant decision-making centres. This approach should take into account how lifelong guidance services are provided in different contexts: students, the employed, jobseekers, and groups with special needs.

Examination of case studies and practices across Europe for a Cedefop study has helped identify and analyse the role of labour market information in career guidance and career education. It focused on:

- (a) comparison and analysis of diverse strategies supporting the integration of LMI in lifelong guidance, including critical success factors, potential gaps and obstacles;
- (b) competences, methodologies and tools for effective LMI management, service design and delivery by guidance counsellors and teachers/trainers;
- (c) identification of levers that can aid access to LMI for individuals throughout their lifetime;
- (d) outline of the potential transferability of successful practices in applying LMI in lifelong guidance policies and practices.

The methodology consisted of a literature review on integrating LMI into lifelong guidance and on comparative pan-European identification of LMI strategies in such guidance. Fieldwork was developed in 11 EU Member States of the European Union (EU); one benchmarking (non-EU) case was considered, to provide information on good practices on LMI integration into lifelong guidance. The study also developed blueprints for practitioner LMI toolkits, which will support the debate around such toolkits in future capacity development projects by Cedefop.

The key messages address four themes:

- (a) LMI integration in guidance and career education;
- (b) using technology effectively;
- (c) increasing LMI provision quality;
- (d) empowering individuals to find better job matches.

LMI INTEGRATION IN GUIDANCE AND CAREER EDUCATION

When labour market information is offered by separate services, coordination and cooperation among stakeholders is vital. When it is gathered and provided by different ministries, separate databases and information collection tools are developed. Each of these databases provides partial coverage of the available information; frequently, they are created in ways which make consolidation difficult, preventing users making the best possible sense of labour market contexts

and opportunities. Coordination among different LMI providers is required to avoid duplication and achieve successful data consolidation. Social partner collaboration with relevant agencies and ministerial departments engaged in LMI provision improves LMI user impact and the efficiency of career guidance services.

The multiplication of online tools generates an overflow of distinct sources and of information itself. Mapping user group needs and individual needs assessments are good practice, along with management of available LMI appropriate to each of the different groups. For example, the long-term unemployed or inexperienced young people tend to require more intensive support in LMI exploration and use, compared to employed highly qualified professionals.

Future research on lifelong guidance policy in the EU should address LMI integration. There is limited information on LMI in guidance activities in most of the EU Member States. A comprehensive inventory and evaluation of LMI integration in guidance services is needed to be able to monitor different Member State policies and document successful practices, which can feed back into EU-level policy studies.

It is necessary to establish national monitoring mechanisms that provide systematic assessment of LMI-related policies and practices, to ensure permanent improvement both at EU and national levels.

USING TECHNOLOGY EFFECTIVELY

The 'e-challenge' can be addressed by setting up good-quality, well-targeted single access points which can operate as virtual one-stop shops. This type of initiative tends to have scale economies and positive spillover, with measures under the European e-government action plan aiming at cross-border e-government services for citizens and businesses (1).

Defragmenting LMI by integrating diverse but complementary sources of intelligence is essential, adding value to careers information services. All data gathered can be treated and can be presented

(1) European Commission: Digital single market: society: *European eGovernment action plan 2011-15*, Article, 19.4.2016: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/european-egovernment-action-plan-2011-2015>

in single access point; this type of portal can also offer dedicated tools to support the work of career guidance practitioners and teachers/trainers.

The design and use of digital and web-based tools must account for different levels of information and communication technology (ICT) competence across the population. Many users, particularly older people, are insufficiently familiar with ICT and must develop new skills to use self-help tools. Many guidance practitioners and career educators are also digital immigrants, born before the widespread use of PCs and internet in the workplace. Many of these professionals need to develop not only a new skillset but also a new set of positive and integrative attitudes towards ICT, updating their usual ways of working.

Online instruments are more effective when combined with other delivery methods. The service provided should offer a diversity of delivery channels: telephone, mail, chat, personal appointments, referral to physical information centres, and social media. The combination of channels must be adapted to user needs and career learning activities. Integration of services offered on-site and services offered online will be beneficial to a wide range of target groups.

Online tools and instruments, such as CV-building, edutainment, job exploration, self-assessment, and social media, should be developed, sustained and regularly updated by a professional careers service, which can work as a back office. This is particularly important when social media are made available. Having a guidance practitioner as a central figure is beneficial as it makes the responsible team multidisciplinary in nature.

INCREASING LMI PROVISION QUALITY

LMI should be impartial, to avoid biased vocational choices. Career guidance practitioners, teachers and parents can, consciously or unconsciously, enforce bad vocational choices by supplying partial and biased labour market information to young people. In some countries, general education enjoys a positive image, while vocational education has a more negative one, independent of the labour market outcomes of graduates from both learning tracks. Parents, guidance practitioners and educators may tend to promote academic pathways, even when they offer less for employers and are not necessarily

in accordance with the career preferences of young people. Comprehensive information on the employability from diverse and alternative pathways should be provided, particularly to young people, together with information on the actual work environments and career development possibilities of several occupations.

Providing online tools for career advice does not substitute or dispense with intervention by qualified career guidance practitioners and should not be viewed primarily as a cost-saving in terms of staff. In many cases, LMI provision must be combined with (or integrated in) the advice of a counsellor. A pure self-service approach is particularly inadequate for individuals with lower career management skills and reduced knowledge of occupations and learning options. Even where a self-help service is set up without providing direct access to a career counsellor, it must be supported by a professional careers service which should create and update the available information and advice.

LMI provision is only effective if people have learned to identify opportunities from the information provided. Career management skills (CMS) development should start at a relatively early stage, before students have to make vocational choices which can determine their futures. Individuals start building career identities early on and can develop particular stereotypes and misconceptions about occupations. If not supported by appropriate career learning at school or via guidance services, young people may have poor ability to interpret LMI, which will carry into adult years. Career education in schools can serve this purpose, either as a separate strand or within the curricula of other disciplines. Simple activities, such as visits from professionals or videos showing the reality of occupations, combined with enquiry-based methodologies, can be used for early CMS development. Engagement of strong influencers, such as parents, friends of parents and other family members, improves results.

LMI is well-assimilated and particularly useful as part of practice-oriented career learning activities. It becomes more useful as a support to informed career choice if integrated into activities which raise questions, change perceptions and increase understanding about the practice and context of occupations. Experiential learning, such as work tasters, is a particularly successful way to transmit information about occupations, promoting effective

reflection on career choices. Individuals, particularly the young without work experience, like to learn about work through experimentation, trying out a job or a skill in a workshop or a traineeship. Enquiry-based learning provides interesting activities for career education and guidance and aims to develop enquiring minds and attitudes that are required to cope with an uncertain future. Job shadowing and tasters have proved beneficial to individuals and require the active cooperation of professional services and the private sector.

EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS TO FIND BETTER JOB MATCHES

Quality LMI provided through career guidance services can help address the mismatch between people's skills and job requirements. LMI provision should account for skills matching, especially in youth career counselling. The development of sector councils is a powerful way to gather and transmit up-to-date information on the reality of occupations and production, as well as current skills needs. Sector councils bring together representatives of employers, educators and policy-makers. They can provide the trigger to involve employers in the development of qualification standards, skills needs analysis by sector, and standards of vocational qualifications for occupations and jobs. This improves the relevance and accuracy of the information provided.

The provision of accurate labour market forecasts for different economic sectors also increases the quality of LMI and contributes to bridging the gap between labour market demand and supply.

Forecasts should have adequate geographic coverage, time span and occupation detail to be fit for purpose. National information is particularly important in generating short-term forecasts with high occupation and geographic detail, which is particularly useful for adult job searchers. Medium- and long-term forecasts tend to be more useful in counselling young people who are defining career identities and making vocational choices, since they convey information about evolution of sectors and professions.

Forward-looking information should combine material from more than one forecast. Combination of market signalling techniques, such as expert and employer consultation, with sophisticated quantitative top-down approaches is desirable. Forecasting information should also be combined with presentation of distinct local scenarios for the evolution of demand and work conditions, to expand its value. To increase its utility to practitioners and end-users, this information should be presented simultaneously with occupational profiles, work conditions and contexts.

Regularly updated job vacancy information can often serve career guidance better but tends to be less reliable. There is a trade-off between accuracy/reliability of data and the value of real-time information on the volume and geographic distribution of vacancies, provided by private recruitment companies and other job adverts. Despite the high relevance of these data, information published by public sources tends to be more accurate and robust, even if less timely and detailed. ■

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