Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices - Bulgaria

Please cite as:	Cedefop (2020). *Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices - Bulgaria.* CareersNet national records. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/inventory-lifelong-guidance-systems-and-practices-bulgaria
Contributor:	Lachezar Afrikanov
Reviewed by:	Cedefop

Copyright:	Reproduction is authorised, provided the source is acknowledged.
Disclaimer:	Translations of titles/names for entities, country policies and practices are not to be considered as official translations. The facts and opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily coincide with the official position of Cedefop.

Introduction

The Ministry of Education and Science (*Министерство на образованието и науката*) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (*Министерство на труда и социалната политика*) are responsible for developing policies for career guidance in education and employment. Career guidance is a new term in respect of policy. It is often used with other terms such as vocational guidance, employment advising, and labour mediation in an interchangeable manner.

Sources

Ministry of Education and Science. https://www.mon.bg/en/

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. http://seconomy.mlsp.government.bg/en/index.php

Coordination and collaboration among stakeholders

The cooperation and collaboration between all stakeholders is defined according to the aim of the regulations provided. The Ministry of Education and Science along with its subsidiary institutions are involved mainly with career guidance in school and vocational education, while the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is overseeing career guidance for adults or people who are already on the labour market.

The National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET) is the national agency responsible for the system of vocational education and the centres of information and vocational guidance (CIVGs). Indicatively, NAVET issues licences for the establishment of CIVGs and monitors their activities (further information can be found here). Furthermore, NAVET was the partner and national coordinator for the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN).

In the employment sector, the Employment agency (*Агенция по заетостта*) is responsible for delivering guidance services to employed and unemployed persons through a network of 107 labour offices directorates and their 146 branches across the country.

The Ministry of Education and Science, through the Directorate of vocational education and training, coordinates a network of 28 career guidance centres (*центрове за кариерно ориентиране*) nationwide. The network centres deliver career guidance to students within the school education system (ISCED level 1 to 5).

The current National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2014-20), defined and endorsed by the Ministry of Education and Science, aims to achieve the following objectives in improving access to guidance and the development of career management skills, as well as system coordination:

a. ensuring conditions for early career guidance and career choice through improved cooperation with all stakeholders;
b. development and expansion of the career guidance system and ensuring the conditions for the formation and development of career management skills for students as well as adults;
c. development of career guidance services for making decisions on education, training and career development;
d. providing the career guidance system with quality information and methodological resources;
e. establishing a coordination mechanism for providing career guidance to foster effective cooperation and internal exchange of information between all the agencies in the country providing career guidance;
f. conducting an active and permanent campaign on the importance of career guidance in addressing key issues of education and employment, addressing the gaps between graduates and labour market needs.

Sources

Ministry of Education and Science (n.d.). *National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2014-20).* http://mon.bg/upload/6561/strategy_LLL_2014_2020.pdf

Ministry of Education and Science (n.d.). *Vocational Education and Training Directorate*. https://www.mon.bg/en/318

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (n.d.). *Employment agency*. https://www.az.government.bg/en/pages/za-nas/

National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (2015). *Licensed as CIVGs*. https://www.navet.government.bg/en/licensed-as-civgs/

National Agency for Vocational Education and Training. https://www.navet.government.bg/en/

Access to guidance

The National strategy for lifelong learning (2014-20), defined and endorsed by the Ministry of Education and Science, has a number of objectives, including those that pertain to improving access to lifelong guidance and the development of career management skills. Access-related aims include:

a. providing easy-to-access and high-quality career guidance services at all stages of career development, ensuring the impact on all stakeholders and contributing to the overall development and reform of career guidance services;
b. facilitating access to the labour market through the development of lifelong career management skills.

Access to guidance services is available to all individuals according to their different contexts, as well as both individual and group counselling. There are several main providers of career guidance:

a. 28 centres for career guidance (*Центрове за кариерно ориентиране*) within the school education sector, coordinated by Ministry of Education

and Science. The centres are established in the main regional centres of the country. They provide *in-situ* visits to schools for promoting career guidance and also essential services of individual and group counselling delivered at the centres;
b. 51 university career centres (*Университетски центрове за кариерно ориентиране*) providing guidance focused on organising work placements and internships for students;
c. 253 labour offices of the public employment agency (*Бюра по труда към Агенция по заетостта*), providing employment-related guidance to both employed and unemployed individuals, including persons with disabilities;
d. 43 private centres for information and vocational guidance (*Частни центрове за кариерно ориентиране*) licensed by the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET);
e. 10 career centres (*Центрове за кариерно ориентиране*) under the auspices of the Regional Employment Services Departments within the National Employment Agency.

Future prospects

With the recent change (2017) in the Inclusive education regulation instituted by the Ministry of Education and Science, career guidance services will be available within schools through the support of school pedagogical advisors and psychologists. In addition, 42 pilot schools have introduced 'career clubs', which provide relevant career information. The regulation defines different forms of extracurricular activities according to students' interests, which can be dedicated to various topics, including career education. The main aim of these clubs is to provide early career guidance to students and support them in their choice of further education, training or career.

Sources

Ministry of Education and Science (2017). *НАРЕДБА ЗА ПРИОБЩАВАЩОТО ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ ОТ 2016 Г. (Regulation on general Education of 2016).* https://www.lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136927891

Ministry of Education and Science (n.d.). *National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2014-20)*. http://mon.bg/upload/6561/strategy_LLL_2014_2020.pdf

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (n.d.). *Employment agency.* https://www.az.government.bg/en/pages/za-nas/

National Portal for Career Guidance of Students (n.d.). https://orientirane.mon.bg/

Quality assurance

In the Ministry of Education and Science, two directorates are responsible for quality assurance of guidance services in the education sector:

a. Directorate for vocational education and training monitors the network of career centres focused on school education;
b. Directorate for higher education monitors the work of university career centres.

Under the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the public employment agency (*Агенция по заетостта*) ensures quality of guidance services provided within the labour offices. The National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET) guarantees the quality of centres for information and guidance through a licensing mechanism and 3-fold controlling measures:

a. ongoing control – takes place during the process of implementing the activities of the centre and is carried out by NAVET staff and can be planned and / or following a signal by third party;
b. ex-post control - control carried out by NAVET to monitor the degree of implementation of the given recommendations or the elimination of established violations and their consequences;
c. self-assessment (internal control) - each centre performs an ongoing assessment of its activity, following its internal procedures. At the end of the calendar year, the centre is obliged to send to NAVET a completed form for self-assessment of its activities. Based on the self-assessment forms, NAVET can update its annual plan for ongoing monitoring.

In 2017, NAVET and the employment agency signed a cooperation agreement to improve the quality of guidance services to both employed and unemployed individuals by synchronising services offered and the exchange of information between two national institutions.

The main standard for the career counsellor profession, along with a relevant higher education degree in the Social Sciences (e.g., Psychology, Social Work), is the *Global Career Development Facilitator* (GCDF) certificate. The GCDF certificate is a licence, proving that the holder has undergone specific training and possesses the 12 competences, accredited by the Centre of Credentialing and Education (CCE). Representative of the GCDF certification programme in Bulgaria, is the Business Foundation for Education. The foundation represents also the National Board for Certified Counsellors in Bulgaria, a prominent US-based organisation for training and credentialing professionals in career guidance and mental health, giving them the accreditation to certify career counsellors under the GCDF programme.

Besides the GCDF certificate, specialised training for career counsellors is available at post-graduate level (see section Training and qualifications). The leading master's degrees are:

a. Master degree in Career Education at Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski";
b. Master degree in Career Development and Entrepreneurship at South-West University "Neofit Rilski".

Sources

Business Foundation for Education. https://www.fbo.bg/en/

Centre of Credentialing and Education (CCE). http://www.cce-global.org/

Master programme in Career Development and Entrepreneurship. http://www.swu.bg/academic-activities/academic-programmes/masters-programmes/pedagogy-of-teacing-/career-development-and-entrepreneurship.aspx?lang=en

Master programme in Career Education. https://www.uni-sofia.bg/index.php/bul/universitet_t/fakulteti/fakultet_po_pedagogika/uchebna_dejnost_bakalavri_magistri_doktoranti_sdk/magist_rski_programi/fakultet_po_

Ministry of Education and Science (n.d.). *Vocational Education and Training Directorate*. https://www.mon.bg/en/318

Ministry of Education and Science. https://www.mon.bg/en/

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (n.d.). *Employment agency.* https://www.az.government.bg/en/pages/za-nas/

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. http://seconomy.mlsp.government.bg/en/index.php

National Agency for Vocational Education and Training. https://www.navet.government.bg/en/

National Board for Certified Counsellors Bulgaria. http://bulgaria.nbcc.org/bg/

Career management skills

The focus of current national policies in education and employment is to equip learners (youth and adults) with relevant skills, in the context of national and European labour market trends. With the introduction of the National lifelong learning strategy 2014-20 (*Национална стратегия за учене през целия живот*) there has been continuous emphasis on providing learning opportunities for acquiring the full set of key competences as highlighted in the European framework of key competences. The existing strategic and national documents highlight the importance of transversal competences, or

skills for life. Career management skills (CMS) are implicitly embedded in this group of competences.

At the current stage, there are no national documents with explicit references to CMS and career education, and the existing career guidance services are framed in terms of 'pure' counselling provisions, i.e. based on private initiative of career counsellor who provides CMS guidance.

Sources

Ministry of Education and Science (n.d.). *National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2014-20)*. http://mon.bg/upload/6561/strategy_LLL_2014_2020.pdf

Evidence, monitoring and assessment

Career guidance policy is embedded in several strategic frameworks related to lifelong learning development, promoting employment, tackling early school leaving, inclusive education and others. The principle behind national policy implementation can be summarised as follows.

a. the government (through the respective central administration) adopts a strategy in a given field and creates an annual plan with activities, in an accompanying document;
b. at the end of each year, all institutions involved in the given plan submit evidence to the coordinating/responsible administration as to their progress in reaching the defined objectives and designated indicators;
c. on the basis of the collected data that are supplied as evidence, the coordinating institution issues a consolidated report, which is used as a basis for the next stage of strategic framework implementation.

In reviewing various national reports (e.g. Analysis of the impact of the lifelong learning strategy in Bulgaria; Annual report for the implementation of the national LLL strategy; ELGPN report on career guidance in Bulgaria; Guidance system in Bulgaria – Eurydice), it is evident that only basic career guidance services data are collected, the bulk of which for both sectors (education and employment), is the number of people that received individual career counselling. The data provide only a partial overview of the national lifelong guidance system.

In addition, the network of centres for information and vocational guidance (*Центрове за информация и професионално ориентиране*) under the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET) provided guidance services to 3427 persons, most of whom have been reported as unemployed.

Please see the description of VET system in Bulgaria here.

Sources

Cedefop; National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (2019). *Vocational education and training in Europe: Bulgaria* [From Cedefop; ReferNet. Vocational education and training in Europe database]. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/printpdf/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/bulgaria

Eurydice (2019). *Guidance system in Bulgaria*. https://www.euroguidance.eu/guidance-system-in-bulgaria

Kamburova, N. (2008). *Career guidance in Bulgaria*. European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network. Work package 3. http://www.elgpn.eu/meetings/meetings-2007-2008/wp-meetings/wp3-vienna-meeting/meeting-presentations/kamburova-pla-9-of-april-bulgaria.pdf/at_download/file

Ministry of Education and Science (2013). *Analysis of the impact of the lifelong learning strategy in Bulgaria*. https://www.mon.bg/upload/6629/otsenka_LLL_strategy_28_01_2013.pdf

Ministry of Education and Science (2015). *Annual report for the implementation of the national LLL* strategy. https://www.mon.bg/upload/6554/godishen_doklad_2015_izpalnenieto_NSLLL.pdf

National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (n.d.). *Centres for information and vocational guidance*. https://www.navet.government.bg/en/licensed-as-civgs/

National Agency for Vocational Education and Training. https://www.navet.government.bg/en/

Career information, ICT in guidance

The current 'leader' among national institutions promoting the integration of digital technologies for guidance and, specifically, career information provision, is the Ministry of Education and Science. Utilising structural funding from the European Social Fund (ESF), the Ministry set up the first national portal for career guidance.

The portal provides information on education and training programmes, as well as insights into the labour market, along with a series of guidance and inspiration tools to support individuals and career counsellors in choosing their education and career paths. Moreover, it serves as a national knowledge resource for professionals in the education and guidance sector, as well as an online gateway for the '*e-guidance-for-all*' service.

The Ministry of Education and Science will implement a project connecting schools with the labour market. For this purpose, an additional specialised module 'School - labour market' will be built into the existing National portal for student career guidance. The module is part of the project BG05M2OP001-2.001-0001 Career guidance system in school education funded by the operational programme Science and education for smart growth 2014-20, jointly funded by the European Union through the European Structural and Investment Funds.

The objective of the module is to support the career guidance that graduates in secondary education receive by providing them access to up-to-date information on the socioeconomic development of different country regions and labour market trends. The module will support career guidance, work and professional realisation in the job searching and employment process.

The portal will contain detailed information on the economy of each region of the country, including:

a. strategic priority areas;
b. leading enterprises;
c. industry sectors;
d. wages;
e. employment statistics;
f. job opportunities;
g. job requirements.

Beneficiaries of the portal will be mainly students over 15 who are looking for temporary or seasonal work, as well as graduates who have completed secondary education and acquired a professional qualification seeking a sustainable professional realisation on the labour market.

The students will be able to create a profile and curriculum vitae to reflect their achievements at school and other personal qualities and skills. These profiles will be available to prospective employers with the possibility for filtering by types and degrees of the acquired professional qualification. The students will also receive online help regarding the approaches for successful self-presentation in a job interview.

There will be online information on labour rights and responsibilities as required by the labour law. Furthermore, the portal will also maintain a continually updating database of internet sites that offer job vacancies. The system will also be used by employers, career guidance centres and career counsellors, pedagogical counsellors, school psychologists and teachers, as well as from parents and others involved in career guidance.

Sources

Ministry of Education and Science. https://www.mon.bg/en/

National Portal for Career Guidance of Students (n.d.). https://orientirane.mon.bg/

Training and qualifications

The main training programme (both initial and continuous) for career counselling is the *GCDF* licensing framework, which is also embedded within relevant master's degree programmes (see section Coordination and collaboration among stakeholders). The main providers of specialised academic training (master's degree, postgraduate courses) are:

a. master programme in career education – 2 semesters for specialists, 3 semesters for non-specialists, Sofia St. Kliment Ohridski University, Faculty of Pedagogy;
b. master programme in career development and entrepreneurship – 2 semesters for specialists, 4 semesters for non-specialists, South-West University "Neofit Rilski":

The public employment service provides counselling staff mandatory specialised training, including continuous training in ICT.

Sources

Master programme in Career Development and Entrepreneurship. http://www.swu.bg/academic-activities/academic-programmes/masters-programmes/pedagogy-of-teacing-/career-development-and-entrepreneurship.aspx?lang=en

Master programme in Career Education. https://www.uni-sofia.bg/index.php/bul/universitet_t/fakulteti/fakultet_po_pedagogika/uchebna_dejnost_bakalavri_magistri_doktoranti_sdk/magist_rski_programi/fakultet_po_

Funding career guidance

In 2016 and 2017, it is estimated that EUR 3.8 million have been used to finance guidance services in education, through the budget of the Ministry of Education and Science and the European Social Fund (ESF); the sources of funding are either from the national budget or based on the operational programmes call for proposals budget. here is no clear estimate available for the guidance services offered in the public employment sector.

The sources of funding for being trained as career counsellor can be grouped in two categories:

a. self-paid: persons, either wishing to receive the service of, or aspiring to become, counsellors invest their own funds;
b. subsidised: the costs for career counsellor training are covered within projects funded by European Social Fund, such as the System for career guidance in school education project or the employer of the career counsellor.

Sources

Ministry of Education and Science. https://www.mon.bg/en/

National Portal for Career Guidance of Students. https://orientirane.mon.bg/

Guidance for unemployed adults

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy implements the *Programmes for training and employment of long-term unemployed*. The Employment Agency, the regional employment service directorates and the Labour Office directorates across the country are key partners. The main objective is to provide employment to the long-term unemployed persons of working age registered in the labour offices and to increase their employability by placing them in training that leads to acquisition and enhancement of skills and qualifications. These are the principal activities of one such programme:

a. Labour Office experts provide information and guidance to unemployed persons about the opportunities for inclusion in the programme;
b. provision of specialised mediation services by the Labour Office directorates, including activities for the preparation of an individual action plan as well as for determining the profile of each person in order to select the appropriate form of support;
c. provision of support services such as psychological assistance, career counselling, vocational guidance and mediation in order to solve complex problems, are carried out by case managers and psychologists at the labour offices;
d. motivation for active labour market behaviour to acquire knowledge and develop skills for job search and for successful self-presentation in a job interview;
e. ensure subsidised full-time or part-time employment for up to 12 months in the private or public sector;
f. training to acquire a professional qualification from a training organisation, indicated by the employer, followed by subsidised or non-subsidised employment.

Sources

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (n.d.). *Employment agency*. https://www.az.government.bg/en/pages/za-nas/

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. http://seconomy.mlsp.government.bg/en/index.php

Guidance for early leavers

The Strategy for reducing the share of early school leavers 2013-20 is the basis for the creation of a special plan for implementation every school year. The plan for 2016-17 is implemented according to the EU Council conclusions on reducing early school leaving and promoting success in school, and in consistence with the European Commission recommendations on school policies as reflected in the report A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving.

In accordance with this approach, all members involved – directly or indirectly – in the school community (directors, teaching and non-teaching staff, students and families) are responsible and have an active role to prevent school dropout. Cross-sectoral cooperation with a wide range of stakeholders (social services, youth service workers, psychologists, specialists in guidance, local authorities, business, trade unions and others) and the community as a whole, is also significant.

Special emphasis of the plan for the period 2016-17 was placed on:

a. the role of the whole system of actors and relations between them, recognising the impact of each stakeholder;

b. cooperation in education institutions to promote positive school culture, teamwork within the school community;
c. coordinated measures at all levels;
d. monitoring the progress and interim evaluation of the implementation of the strategy.

Sources

Council of Ministers (2013). *Strategy for reducing the share of early school leavers 2013-20*. https://www.mon.bg/bg/143

European Commission (2015). *Education & Training 2020: Schools policy. A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving* https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/early-leaving-policy_en.pdf

Guidance for NEET

In 2017, a network of youth mediators was put in place to reach out non-registered NEETs in their environment and activate them. Youth mediators act as intermediaries with public institutions that provide social, health, educational and other kind of services under the national plan of the European youth guarantee 2014-20.

The National Programme Activation of Inactive Persons demonstrates that the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy supports youth employment. The main objective of the program is the activation and inclusion of inactive persons (including discouraged and unemployed people) in the labour market, achieved through different administrative tools and services; the ultimate goal is to attract and motivate them to register in the labour offices and encourage their involvement in training and/or employment. The work with young people is supported by psychologists and case managers appointed by the national programme.

Sources

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. http://seconomy.mlsp.government.bg/en/index.php

Sources

[URLs accessed 10.02.2020]

Business Foundation for Education. https://www.fbo.bg/en/

Cedefop; National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (2019). *Vocational education and training in Europe: Bulgaria* [From Cedefop; ReferNet. Vocational education and training in Europe database]. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/printpdf/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/bulgaria

Centre of Credentialing and Education (CCE). http://www.cce-global.org/

Council of Ministers (2013). *Strategy for reducing the share of early school leavers 2013-20*. https://www.mon.bg/bg/143

European Commission (2015). *Education & Training 2020: Schools policy. A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving* https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/early-leaving-policy_en.pdf

Eurydice (2019). *Guidance system in Bulgaria*. https://www.euroguidance.eu/guidance-system-in-bulgaria

Kamburova, N. (2008). *Career guidance in Bulgaria*. European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network. Work package 3. http://www.elgpn.eu/meetings/meetings-2007-2008/wp-meetings/wp3-vienna-meeting/meeting-presentations/kamburova-pla-9-of-april-bulgaria.pdf/at_download/file

Master programme in Career Development and Entrepreneurship. http://www.swu.bg/academic-activities/academic-programmes/masters-programmes/pedagogy-of-teacing-/career-development-and-entrepreneurship.aspx?lang=en

Master programme in Career Education. https://www.uni-sofia.bg/index.php/bul/universitet_t/fakulteti/fakultet_po_pedagogika/uchebna_dejnost_bakalavri_magistri_doktoranti_sdk/magist_rski_programi/fakultet_po_

Ministry of Education and Science (2013). *Analysis of the impact of the lifelong learning strategy in Bulgaria*. https://www.mon.bg/upload/6629/otsenka_LLL_strategy_28_01_2013.pdf

Ministry of Education and Science (2015). *Annual report for the implementation of the national LLL* strategy. https://www.mon.bg/upload/6554/godishen_doklad_2015_izpalnenieto_NSLLL.pdf

Ministry of Education and Science (2017). *НАРЕДБА ЗА ПРИОБЩАВАЩОТО ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ ОТ 2016 Г. (Regulation on general Education of 2016)*. https://www.lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136927891

Ministry of Education and Science (n.d.). *National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2014-20)*. http://mon.bg/upload/6561/strategy_LLL_2014_2020.pdf

Ministry of Education and Science (n.d.). *Vocational Education and Training Directorate*. https://www.mon.bg/en/318

Ministry of Education and Science. https://www.mon.bg/en/

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (n.d.). *Employment agency*. https://www.az.government.bg/en/pages/za-nas/

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. http://seconomy.mlsp.government.bg/en/index.php

National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (2015). *Licensed as CIVGs*. https://www.navet.government.bg/en/licensed-as-civgs/

National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (n.d.). *Centres for information and vocational guidance*. https://www.navet.government.bg/en/licensed-as-civgs/

National Agency for Vocational Education and Training. https://www.navet.government.bg/en/

National Board for Certified Counsellors Bulgaria. http://bulgaria.nbcc.org/bg/

National Portal for Career Guidance of Students. https://orientirane.mon.bg/

Coronavirus Update

During the Covid-19 outbreak, the focus of the national authorities in Bulgaria is to maintain critical systems like health, education and economy. Guidance services especially those linked to employment services seem to have a potentially significant role in light of the increasing number of unemployed. On average, since the beginning of April 2020, the number of unemployed people grew to 30,000 and

is continuously rising. Most people losing their jobs would need some form of support beyond the temporary financial provisions for the social welfare system. Some of them are coming from sectors like tourism, where the horizon for improvement following the COVID-19 outbreak is not clearly visible and it will probably stay like this within current and next years, which means high risk for long-term unemployment. Guidance services can contribute positively in two directions:

a. immediate motivational support;
b. counselling for retraining and reshaping the career pathway for people, whose professional domains are highly affected by the current situation.

The provision of guidance services embraced the need to utilize different instruments available for online communication. Each guidance practitioner has the freedom to choose among communication channels based on client's preference.

In parallel to the increase in demand of guidance services at employment level as highlighted above, the provision of guidance at education level demonstrates a slight decrease due to several circumstances. According to the Minister of Education and Science cited in national media, nearly 10% of Bulgarian students at school education level do not have access to an online environment. These are usually learners facing wide range of socio-economic obstacles or living in small rural areas with unstable access to internet connection. These learners could not take advantage of both online education and guidance services provided.

Furthermore, career guidance in school education is part of the so-called extracurricular/accompanying activities for students. Since the emphasis, in the quarantine period, of the national authorities was placed on teaching the main subjects, there was an additional withdrawal of learners from career guidance services. The provision of guidance is linked to the policy and practice adopted by each educational institution with regard to the organisation of online learning. Different online platforms have been used in that regard and guidance practitioners needed to adapt accordingly. According to information from interviews with regional career centres in the education sector, some practitioners report that while the online environment provides access to more students, especially in group counselling formats, it also might lead to decrease in their engagement. This is observed also in online education session. Learners appear online, but it is not clear whether they are fully engaged in the education process.

The interviewees also observed a strong positive effect of the COVID-19 crisis has with regard to the development of guidance practices as a whole. The need to quickly transfer services online triggered a process of reviewing and upgrading career instruments used so far. The transformation of tools was not related to adapting them for online utilization, but also to adding new content and in some cases creating brand new instruments.

Overall, career guidance practitioners are continuing their efforts to provide quality guidance services, since this is perceived strongly to become an inevitable integral element of their work.

Sources

Ministry of Education and Science. www.mon.bg

National Statistical Institute. www.nsi.bg

Nova (2020). *Красимир Вълчев: Училищата са безопасни, дезинфекцират се редовно*. https://bit.ly/3f5DTmN

Public Employment Agency. www.az.government.bg