

Career Informing in Youth Offices

Round Table Recommendations

Belgrade Open School (BOS), Youth Office Vranje and joint programmes of the United Nations – Peacebuilding and Inclusive Local Development (PBILD) and Youth Employment and Migration (YEM), organized a round table dedicated to career informing in youth offices at the Army Club in Vranje on March 28th, 2012. The Round Table presented the key findings of the project Career Informers with the aim of improving social inclusion and youth employability in Serbia through capacity building of youth offices to provide services of career informing (as Career Guidance and Counseling specific services, hereinafter „CGC“). The first recommendations for further development of career informing in local youth offices occurred on this occasion. These recommendations were additionally enhanced based on the experience from other projects of the BOS, the United Nations and other partners in this field, and they are presented in this document. The recommendations illustrate an ideal situation we should all be striving for, still, being aware of the fact that the local youth offices (LYO) are fledgling institutions and that the CGC is a new conception, and therefore, each step forward in the area of career informing development at the local level is welcome, inventive and highly commendable.

Context

Career Informing is one of the Career Guidance and Counseling services and implies gathering and sharing of all information relevant for career planning, finding and keeping a job, practice and volunteering. It also includes the information about professions, skills, possible paths of career developments, trends and situation on the labour market, educational programmes and opportunities, all types of educational institutions, governmental and non-governmental programmes and services, and job prospects. The Action Plan for Implementation of the Strategy for Career Guidance and Counseling in the Republic of Serbia, adopted in May 2012 at the proposal of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, anticipates, *inter alia*, the inclusion of career informing in activities of the local youth offices.

In 2008, the Belgrade Open School initiated a process of training activists of local youth offices to act as peer counselors for career informing to help themselves, first of all, and other young people in the community get all the information relevant for career development. The concept of peer career informing implies the process of conveying knowledge, skills and stances on career development from young people who have previously acquired some knowledge or experiences to young people who have insufficient, or have no knowledge or experience. The young people who have been adequately trained to communicate the career related information and knowledge to their peers are officially known as peer counselors for career informing. Within the project Career Informers, implemented by Belgrade Open School and joint programmes of the United Nations - Peacebuilding and Inclusive Local Development (PBILD) and Youth Employment and Migration (YEM), the peer counselors for career informing were called – **Career Informers**. The project lasted from April 2011 to April 2012 and was implemented in 12 towns and municipalities, or 12 Local Youth Offices. Some relevant project results are:

- Increased capacities of 12 Local Youth Offices to provide services of career informing. The project was implemented in collaboration with youth offices of Backi Petrovac, Bujanovac, Belgrade (Palilula), Bojnik, Lebane, Medvedja, Surdulica, Trgoviste, Temerin, Vladicin Han, Vlasotince and Vranje.
- 39 young people from the Youth Offices were trained to become peer career informers, counselors for career informing.
- 24 peer workshops on career informing were organized and reached 289 young people, 64 of whom were from vulnerable groups (mainly young Roma and young people from rural areas).
- The brochure *Career Informers* was published, and electronic edition is also available at www.bos.rs/cgcc/publikacije.
- During the project, some Local Youth Offices which participated in project activities developed volunteer services to support employment of vulnerable young people (Palilula), additionally activated local volunteer services (teams) for career informing (Backi Petrovac), and ensured the possibilities to activate teams through the Youth Club's work (Temerin, Vladicin Han, Surdulica, etc.) and carried out other activities in local community.

An independent programme evaluation underlined the importance of these activities in local community. The peer workshops and individual counseling proved to be most useful both for beneficiaries and volunteers. However, it was pointed out that there is a need for better inter-sectoral cooperation and a clearer definition of the Youth Office's role in career guidance and counseling, and informing (particularly in relation to the NES and schools), better local planning and increasing efficiency at work. There is also a need to increase visibility of career informing and its effects in local community, both among young people and institutions.

Also, a discussion was raised about further development of career informing in the Youth Offices. The discussion was attended by about 50 participants, including representatives of the PBILD programme, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, UNICEF Office in Belgrade, as

well as other ministries, schools, civil society organizations, the National Employment Service and numerous youth offices.

Recommendations for further development of career informing in the youth offices, which occurred on this occasions, will contribute to further development of systems to support young people in planning and managing their careers, and in accordance with the Strategy for Career Guidance and Counseling of the Republic of Serbia.

Former experiences and recommendations for further development of career informing in youth offices

Within the Round Table, the participants working in small groups discussed difficulties, strengths and recommendations for further development in the fields of: (1) sustainability and duration of peer career informing in youth offices, (2) cooperation of key stakeholders at the local level on the development and implementation of career informing programmes in youth offices, and (3) reaching vulnerable young people through career informing programmes within youth clubs and youth offices.

1. Organization, funding and sustainability of peer career informing in local youth offices

- 1.1. *Lack of space.* Youth Offices do not have their own space, or it is not adjusted and available to persons with disabilities. *Recommendation for solving this problem is the preparation and implementation of projects to provide additional space for young people (volunteer centers, youth clubs) and cooperation with local partners, such as schools and municipalities, which can relinquish their space to young people for carrying out both group and individual activities related to career informing.*
- 1.2. *Establish a separate segment of activities within youth offices related to career informing and appointing a person or a youth team who will primarily be involved in informing young people about further career development.* The model of peer career informing within volunteer teams of career informers has yielded good results so far. (The project Career Informer is one in a series of projects that have promoted the development of career informing in youth offices. More details will be available in a Report on the Action Plan for Implementation of the Strategy for Career Guidance and Counseling in the Republic of Serbia, which is being drafted by the Ministry of Youth and Sports).
- 1.3. *In addition to employment and self-employment, the Youth Local Action Plans (YLAP) should also include career informing.* These activities should be funded by municipalities or towns with support from domestic and international partners. Career informing empowers young people to manage their careers on their own and

to recognize the opportunities for achieving economic independence, thus preventing further increase in the youth unemployment rate.

1.4. *Action Plans for Youth Entrepreneurship Development* should include career informing and anticipate one-year supporting budgets. Municipalities or town should provide funds for implementation of the plans with support from domestic and international partners.

1.5. Youth Offices should establish systems to monitor performance of the career informers. Apart from coverage of youth individual or group work, it is also important to monitor other achievements. Here are some indicators which can be followed and which will position the career informers in the community:

- 1.5.1.1. A system established to follow the users of the active job- search programme
- 1.5.1.2. The number and % of those who, after career informing, applied for or got involved in new forms of education –formal and informal
- 1.5.1.3. % of those who applied for volunteer programmes
- 1.5.1.4. The number or percentage of scholarships – those who applied for and/or were granted a scholarship
- 1.5.1.5. The number of young people who after the programme visited at least 2 new websites dedicated to career and employment
- 1.5.1.6. % of those who sent their CV to an employer
- 1.5.1.7. % of those who registered with the National Employment Service
- 1.5.1.8. % of those participated in the Employment Fair
- 1.5.1.9. % of those who were interviewed (for job, scholarship, informal education programme)

2. Capacity building of Local Youth Offices through education and partnership

2.1. *Continue development of human resources trained for career informing in youth offices.* Continue capacity building of new and existing teams of career informers through educational projects and new education, particularly in the work with specific vulnerable young people. The use of existing educational resources – portals and educational materials that support work of career informers, serve them and other young people and are free of charge.

2.2. *Peer education:* in some cases, peer workshops and peer authority are not accepted. The peers sometimes dislike career informers because they do not consider them to be competent to convey knowledge. *Recommendation: the selection of career informers should be based on the interest, ability and position of young people to influence their peers; it is necessary to choose and build capacities of real peers – those who are closest to a target youth group; the presence of teachers and NES employees in workshops could contribute to the importance and acceptance of career*

informers in the future, as well as to better cooperation and a high-quality and diverse programme.

- 2.3. Multiethnicity of the environment in which the peer career informers work certainly represents a challenge. Nevertheless, *joint youth initiatives* in multicultural communities contribute to better correlation of young people and exchange of information (the sport clubs in which young people of different cultural and ethnic background connect through sport activities are given as an example). *The multiethnic informer team proved to be a good practice.*
- 2.4. *Improve multi-sectoral work and partnership building for a better use of existing resources.*

3. Change of stances and youth mobilization

- 3.1. *Youth skepticism.* Career informers have recognized that young people are not familiar with the concept of career, that they question the need for career planning and that imitating relatives and teachers is a dominant pattern of deciding on a career choice. However, such stances were easily changing during the workshops. It has also been recognized that young people have evident doubts about a better future in Serbia and believe that they should leave the country. On the other hand, young people have demonstrated a low level of awareness of what they need to study or work abroad, as well as unrealistic notions about real requirements for moving to another location. *Recommendation is to further inform young people about the modern career conception (through campaigns, education, and good peer examples), as well as about the demands of education system and labour market that young people should meet. Good examples should be used to motivate and mobilize young people to search for more career related information.*
- 3.2. *Eliminate stereotypical diplomas and promote creativity and enterprise among young people.* Young people still believe that successful formal education guarantees a job. *Recommendation: Promotion of the lifelong learning concept and the importance of adopting competencies through informal and formal learning in order to boost youth employability.*
- 3.3. *Develop youth exchange programmes among towns and regions.* Recommendation is related to both career informers and young people they reach: Organize a regular exchange among existing career informers through training courses, seminars and round tables. Maintain regular internet communication and exchange of experiences. Deliver training courses/workshops for youth from different areas and organize exchanges during which young people will obtain new experiences and will jointly collect the information about career. Comparisons among different areas are recognized as significant in opening new perspectives and encouraging youth mobility.
- 3.4. *Continue support of the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Serbia through projects for the development of career informing in youth offices.*

4. Identified needs of vulnerable youth in the field of career informing and recommendations for meeting their needs

- 4.1. Experts who attended the Round Table pointed out that the recipients of social assistance had *a need to change attitude towards life*, and they should be encouraged to abandon the pattern of routine behavior in order to become active. The persons from vulnerable groups do not necessarily have the same attitude towards life like the informers, and it is important to identify the differences and react adequately. Recommendation: The youth career informers should cooperate with the Centre for Social Work and better understand the needs of vulnerable groups, on the one side, and should mobilize representatives of vulnerable groups to join their ranks to share out the information, on the other side.
- 4.2. *Vulnerable young people should be informed about the services delivered by different institutions and bodies and about terms and conditions of use of these services.* An obstacle young people come across is the discrepancy between the records of the Centre for Social Work and those of the NES. Recommendation: The career informers should learn about their functioning through cooperation with institutions in order to be able to further inform and refer their peers.
- 4.3. *A basic computer training course should be delivered* to some vulnerable young people before they become familiar with the internet contents intended for career planning and employment. Recommendation: If there is no computer training programme at the local level which vulnerable young people may be referred to, the career informers can assist them through individual work to master the basic computer and internet functions.
- 4.4. *A life skills training course should be organized for vulnerable young people* (communication, conflict resolution, public organizing and taking initiatives, all other key competencies, etc.). Recommendation: If there is no life skills training programme at the local level which vulnerable young people may be referred to, the career informers can organize such training sessions by hiring competent instructors or individually.
- 4.5. *Young people who have abandoned formal education should be referred to the programmes* that could be useful for them: the National Employment Service's programme, Second Chance (programme of the Ministry of Education), and other similar programmes. Before referring them to certain programmes, the career informers should be fully familiar with the existing programmes.
- 4.6. *It is necessary to prepare activities to include young Roma who are outside the education system* (for example, 20% of population of Surdulica are Roma, with only 5% of them being included in education system). This is certainly a complex problem that can be solved only in collaboration with other institutions. Recommendation:

The work of career informers should not be focused only on youth categories that can be reached, but also on hard-to-reach categories.

4.7. *The CV writing and active job searching course should continue, since it turned out that some vulnerable young people did not even know what “CV” was, while the preparation of a quality working résumé presented an additional challenge.*

4.8. *The lack of information among young Roma and other vulnerable groups about the work and programmes of youth offices/youth clubs. Career informers encountered difficulties to implement some programmes with vulnerable young people because they were not aware of the existence and functioning of the local youth office. Recommendation for surmounting this difficulty is a better cooperation of the youth offices with local associations dealing with vulnerable groups, the National Employment Service, Centre for Social Work, informing young people within their schools, improving cooperation with Roma politicians and Roma health mediators in some municipalities of the Jablanica and Pcinj district.*

4.9. *The Round Table also presented a proposal to form mobile teams of peer career informers who would come out on the field and other places where young people gather to deliver the information about career planning.*

5. Cooperation of stakeholders on the development of career informing programmes in youth offices

5.1. Planning and entering into partnership of stakeholders on the development of youth career informing programmes

5.1.1. *Networking. Recommendation: A better networking of local youth organizations with the Youth Office aimed to perform career informing. It is necessary to establish coordination between programmes and institutions (YO, NES, NGO, schools, and adult education schools, in particular) which implement the career informing programme in order to avoid a programme overlap and situations in which some young people attend the same or similar workshops more times, while others, for example, attend no training session at all.*

5.1.2. *Cooperation with the Centre for Social Work in reaching vulnerable groups may improve by recommending the Centers to make a change in formulating the beneficiary database and introduce the youth category aged between 15-30 years as a separate group of service beneficiaries. (Temerin has recorded progress in this field).*

5.1.3. *Better inter-sectoral cooperation. It has been assessed that the cooperation among the NES branches, schools and youth offices is not satisfactory.*

Furthermore, no cooperation has been established so far between the youth offices and successful local businessmen or their associations. *Recommendation: It is necessary to **plan activities jointly and in concert**, and design joint activities of the YO, businessmen, schools and the NES.* The organization of such activities will give young people a better chance to get relevant information and jobs subsequently. Young people proposed to establish permanent cooperation among these stakeholders in form of joint actions.

5.2. Concrete actions for improving cooperation among stakeholders on the development of youth career informing

- 5.2.1. *It is necessary to encourage cooperation with public institutions in order to open them more to all young people, including those from vulnerable groups, and inform them about the services they offer (example: Doors Open Days in the buildings of the municipal or town administration).*
- 5.2.2. *Difficulties of pedagogical workers.* Young people are not sufficiently informed, and there is also some resistance to the attempts of educational workers to inform them. *Recommendation: Cooperation between educational workers and career informers in youth offices can be useful.* Joint activities would open a possibility to reach more young people.
- 5.2.3. *Peer promotion of faculties and universities:* Promotion of faculties and high schools is based on the obsolete *ex cathedra* teaching method, which is the reason why young people find these activities boring, and as a result, the activities lose their purpose. *Recommendation: Representatives of a promotional faculty team should design presentations in collaboration with peer career informers.* Thus, they will become interesting and attractive to future students. The joint aim of all stakeholders is to increase the number of highly educated young people.
- 5.2.4. Notice boards in youth offices and schools designed in cooperation with the NES. *Recommendation: The notice boards that offer the information about the NES' work and services, as well as job and vacancy competitions, should be put up in every youth office/youth club and vocational school after which young people are fully ready for the labour market.*
- 5.2.5. The youth office notice boards: *Recommendation: Put up the notice boards that include the information about the YO's work and services.* These notice boards should also include the updated information about workshops organized within the youth office.

- 5.2.6. Pupil Parliament: Recommendation: *Inclusion of pupil parliaments in informing, and integration of inactive and less motivated pupils in the youth office workshops.*
- 5.2.7. The National Employment Service: Recommendation: *Providing the information in youth offices about the NES' work and vice versa, referring young people by NES to workshops organized by YO.*
- 5.2.8. Fairs. Recommendation: *Organize a number of promotional activities to inform young people about the possibilities to continue formal and informal education. Job fairs, including job offers, may also be a chance for cooperation among many local stakeholders (NES, YO, businessmen associations and local companies).*
- 5.2.9. Companies. Recommendation: Encourage cooperation between youth offices and local businessmen who have corporate social responsibility programmes in order to inform young people about jobs and professions, deliver them some form of training or help them expand their capacities in some other way.