

Lifelong Guidance Policies: Work in Progress

Draft Summary briefing on the work of the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network 2008-10

What is lifelong guidance?

Lifelong guidance covers all activities designed to help individuals, at any point in their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. It includes information, advice, counselling, and teaching career management skills; these may be delivered face-to-face or in web- or phone-based forms; it also includes self-help resources.

Why is it important in policy terms?

Lifelong guidance is recognised as a crucial dimension of lifelong learning, promoting economic as well as social policy goals. In particular, it improves the efficiency and effectiveness of education, training and the labour market through its contribution to reducing drop-out, preventing skills mismatches and boosting productivity. It also promotes citizen mobility and social cohesion.

What is the position of the EU?

Member States of the European Union (EU) are agreed about the need for guidance services throughout the lifespan to equip people with the skills to manage their learning and careers, and the transitions within and between education/training and work. They have resolved to modernise and strengthen their guidance policies and systems. Two EU Resolutions (2004: 2008) identified as priorities the development of career management skills, accessibility of services, quality assurance and co-ordination of services.

What is the ELGPN?

The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) is an alliance of European countries formed to support the development of lifelong guidance in both the education and the employment sectors. It provides advice to the European Commission and receives financial support through the EU Lifelong Learning Programme.

What is its purpose?

The purpose of ELGPN is to promote co-operation at Member State level in implementing the priorities identified in the EU Resolutions. The ELGPN's policy-level work complements the Euroguidance network (which helps guidance practitioners to advise citizens on learning opportunities abroad, thus promoting mobility).

Who are its members?

Membership of the ELGPN is open to all countries eligible for assistance under the EU Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-13. During 2009-10, 26 countries have played an active part (AT, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IS, IT, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, TR, UK) with 4 additional countries as observers (BE, BG, IR, RO). Countries are encouraged to include both governmental and non-governmental representatives, and to cover both education and employment. Regular contact is maintained with the social partners and other relevant bodies and networks at national, European and international levels.

What is the added value of the ELGPN?

The Network aims to provide added value to participating countries, to include:

- Sharing of ideas on common problems.
- Opportunity to test ideas and showcase good practice.
- When introducing new programmes and services, learning from relevant practice elsewhere, with the cost-benefits this may involve.

Members report that these benefits have been widely achieved. Participation in the Network has particularly supported improved co-operation and co-ordination of services: all 30 member countries have either set up or are in the process of developing a national guidance forum or other mechanism for this purpose.

How does it operate?

The Network meets twice a year. Between 2008 and 2010, much of its detailed work has been conducted through smaller working groups. Field visits have enabled the host countries to inform and enrich their own policies and practices, and to involve key policy-makers within these processes. With EU funding, international experts have been contracted to support the ELGPN's in-depth work. This work has covered six main areas:

1. Career management skills

Career management skills (CMS) are the competences which enable people to manage their career development: developing these competences represents the main sought outcomes of lifelong guidance services and programmes. CMS include ways of gathering and using information about oneself, and about education and the world of work, as well as the skills to make and implement decisions and transitions.

The ELGPN has:

- Identified how CMS might be understood in different countries.
- Examined the different ways in which the development of CMS is addressed.
- Affirmed the desirability for each country of developing a national framework for CMS development.
- Shared experience on common issues, e.g. conceptual framework, pedagogy, modes of delivery, staff training (teachers and counsellors) and assessment of CMS.
- Explored the possibility of developing a European CMS framework.

2. Widening access

Widening access to guidance services is a key issue. In most countries, guidance services are delivered in a limited range of locations and media, at limited times of the day or week, and at limited points in the life cycle.

The ELGPN has:

- Examined initiatives taken in member countries to increase access.
- Identified technology, in particular web and phone, as a key means of expanding access.
- Affirmed the complementary nature of different service channels (including face-to-face) and the need to integrate them more strongly.
- Acknowledged the need to provide different levels of service to meet different individual needs.
- Explored the social-justice need to achieve a satisfactory balance between access and quality.

3. Co-operation and co-ordination mechanisms

In all countries, guidance provision is distributed across many different sectors, under different ministries and other jurisdictions (schools, tertiary education, public employment services, social partners, the voluntary sector, the private sector). All European countries are developing national forums and other co-operation mechanisms for bringing these bodies together, in order to support more effective policy development and more harmonised service provision.

The ELGPN has:

- Identified, on the basis of sharing experiences, 10 ‘key messages’ for countries establishing such mechanisms.
- Defined four requirements for these mechanisms: to involve (or be recognised by) the government; to include other key stakeholders; to embrace the fields of education and employment; and to cover both young people and adults.
- Explored three levels at which they might operate: communication; co-operation; and co-ordination.
- Supported a number of member countries in establishing such mechanisms.
- Affirmed the importance, in many countries, of co-operation and co-ordination at regional and local (as well as national) levels.

4. Quality assurance and evidence

If lifelong guidance services are to be effective, their quality needs to be assured. If they are to be accountable, evidence is needed on their impact.

The ELGPN has:

- Affirmed the importance of a cross-sectoral approach to the design of a quality-assurance system for lifelong guidance.
- Reviewed relevant initiatives and practices in participating countries.
- Listed elements to be included in a quality-assurance framework, covering: citizen and user involvement; practitioner competence; service improvement; coherence; and outcomes/impact.
- Emphasised the importance of both quantitative and qualitative indicators.
- Identified further work on indicators and on data to be carried out in the next phase of ELGPN’s work.

5. EU policy monitoring

To be effective, the outcomes of the ELGPN’s activities need to have an impact upon regional, national and EU lifelong guidance policy development. Therefore all ELGPN members need access to information on relevant EU policy developments and opportunities to be involved in the related policy processes.

The ELGPN has:

- Informed its members about relevant EU policy developments in education, training, employment and social inclusion.
- Provided advice to help its members be involved in these processes.
- Examined the implications of the economic crisis for guidance policies and systems and for ELGPN activities.

- Supported the thematic working groups in identifying how to feed their conclusions into EU policy development.

6. EU-funded projects: synergies and links to policy

The EU funds a large number of guidance-related development projects, both at national and at cross-national levels. Their benefits could be greatly enhanced by minimising overlap between projects, strengthening links with policy, and encouraging longer-term impact after funding ends.

The ELGPN has:

- Identified ways in which enhanced value can be achieved from such projects, by establishing synergies with related projects, and seeking changes in policies and practices based on the project's work.
- Explored ways in which links with policy might be strengthened throughout the life of projects.
- Examined a wide range of projects in relation to these issues.
- Proposed four sets of suggestions addressed to different stakeholder groups: project commissioners, at both EU and national levels; national guidance forums; Euroguidance centres; and project co-ordinators.

The next phase

The next phase of the ELGPN activities will build on its existing achievements, deepening work on the key issues of career management skills, access, quality and co-ordination. Particular attention will be given to supporting concrete policy implementation through the development of practical tools to assist policy-makers, and to linking the work of ELGPN more closely to policy development in specific areas (schools, VET, higher education, adult education, employment, social inclusion), at both EU and member-country levels.

Where can I find out more?

The ELGPN 2009-10 Full Activity Report and a Short Report can be obtained from the ELGPN Co-ordinator (elgpn@jyu.fi) or can be downloaded from the ELGPN website (<http://elgpn.eu>). The Short Report is translated into a number of European languages. To find out more about Euroguidance go to (<http://www.euroguidance.net>)

The views expressed in this report are those of the ELGPN and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission nor any person acting on behalf of the Commission.

© The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN)

Co-ordinator 2009–10: Finnish Institute for Educational Research (FIER), University of Jyväskylä, Finland

<http://elgpn.eu>

elgpn@jyu.fi

Editors: Dr Raimo Vuorinen/Finnish Institute for Educational Research &

Professor Anthony G. Watts/National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling, UK