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**Developing National Career Development Systems and Policies with Structured International Co-operation – Structures, Processes and Activities of the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network**

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Abstract

This chapter describes the work undertaken by European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, ELGPN during 2007-15, including the progress of lifelong guidance policy adaptation and implementation processes of the member countries at national, regional and local levels. In an evaluation of ELGPN's work, members report that participation in the Network enriched their awareness of possible responses to common challenges and given them fresh perspectives and new insights into their national provision. A key strength of the Network was the strong ownership of its activities expressed by the national delegations. ELGPN member countries stress the importance of continuing structured European co-operation between the EU member-states, the Commission and the European authorities responsible for educational, employment and social policies.

*Keywords:* lifelong guidance, career guidance, career development, policy development,

**Developing National Career Development Systems and Policies with Structured International Co-operation – Structures, Processes and Activities of the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network**

Career development and lifelong guidance are conceived at the European Union citizen level as a tool to support citizens in accessing all types of learning (including Open Education Resources) and work opportunities and for mobility. In a recent EU citizen survey 70% of those surveyed deemed career guidance to be useful in helping them to choose the right course of study while 60% reported it as valuable in helping them to find a job (Eurobarometer 2014). As citizens and societal groups differ in their capacities to source, access, interpret, and apply information about learning and work opportunities over their lifetime, and in their capacities to relate such information to themselves, their lives and circumstances, policy makers are recognizing career development services as important instruments to achieve their goals in relation to education, work and employment issues (ELGPN, 2015d).

This policy interest has emerged from a series of international initiatives that started in 2000 with an OECD 14-country career guidance review (OECD, 2004), followed up by similar reviews using the same or slightly modified survey instruments by the European Training Foundation (Sultana, 2002; Sweet, 2007; Sultana & Watts, 2007), The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Education and Training, CEDEFOP (Sultana, 2004), and the World Bank (Watts & Fretwell, 2004). Later the European Training Foundation (ETF) has done some related work in the countries of central Asia and the former Soviet Union (Zelloth, 2009). A further review, commissioned by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and using a different survey instrument, focused on guidance in Public Employment Service (PES) settings across Europe (Sultana & Watts, 2006). By the end of 2010 these reviews covered 55 countries. The key findings have been published in two handbooks in order to present the key

findings from the reviews in an operational form for policy-makers (OECD, 2004; ILO, 2006). These publications share similar analytic perspectives and address national contexts from highly developed countries to low-income economies (Sultana 2008).

The necessary links between career guidance and public policy have also been elaborated in collaborative initiatives between organizations such as the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF), the British National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC), and the OECD, beginning in 1999 with the First International Symposium on Career Development and Public Policy hosted by the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) in Vancouver (Watts, Bezanson & McCarthy, 2014). By 2015, six additional International Symposia (IS) had been carried out (in Canada, Australia, Scotland, New Zealand, Hungary and the USA) and the number of countries participating had substantially increased. The eighth Symposium will take place 2017 in Seoul, South Korea. Since 2004 three international associations, IAEVG (the International Association of Educational and Vocational Guidance), SVP (the Society for Vocational Psychology), and NCDA (the National Career Development Association) have organized joint events to examine options for more targeted co-operation in career guidance policy development (San Francisco 2004, Padua 2007 and in Washington 2010).

One of the goals of the International Symposia has been the development of a sustainable mechanism to carry out the dialogue between the career guidance practice and the policy development. This global discourse was supported by the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) in 2007-15 as an alliance of policy developers from European countries in both the education and the employment sectors.

### **The European Union and Lifelong Guidance Policy Development**

The European Union consists of 28 Member Countries and is more than just a confederation of countries, but it is not a federal state either. It is a type of structure and a political system that has been evolving over more than 50 years and does not fall into any traditional legal category. The European Union acts in economic, social, regulatory and financial policy areas with a budget which is largely paid by the member states.

At the EU level, lifelong guidance is a shared policy responsibility across the education, training, youth, employment and social affairs policy fields. From an EU policy development and co-operation perspective, the Council of Ministers (Education, Youth) and Council of Ministers (Employment and Social Affairs) have responsibility for setting policy directions. These are supported by relevant EU committees, networks, expert groups and by policy units in the European Commission, and the European Parliament (ELGPN, 2015d).

Public policies relating to social issues, such as career and workforce development, are areas of national competence. EU action in these areas is based on the principle of subsidiarity, which allows the European Community (EC) to act as if the objectives cannot be achieved at the Member State level and thus require an action by the EC. However, in order to promote strong convergence in social policy areas, the EU has adopted the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) as a policy instrument (ELGPN, 2015d).

### **Key policy drivers for the establishment of the ELGPN**

Watts, Sultana and McCarthy (2010) define the involvement of the European Union in the development of policy and practice related to career guidance within three broad periods: foundations (the period prior to 1992); consolidation (the period that started in that year with the Treaty of Maastricht, the name-change to the European Union, and the completion of the Single European Market); and elevation (the period that started in 2000 with the setting of the so-called

Lisbon Agenda). The first two of these periods interventions were confined to pilot projects, exchanges and placements, study visits and studies/surveys, with particular attention to young people, the period since 2000 has seen greater attention being paid to lifelong activities that support the implementation of EU policy priorities and their mainstreaming at national level.

In their Meeting in Lisbon in March 2010 the European Council set the EU an ambitious goal: to become, by 2010, ‘the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion’. Focusing on the knowledge society and economy, social cohesiveness, and global competitiveness, the Lisbon Strategy led the first decade of this millennium in terms of European-wide reflections on and reforms of national policies for education, training, employment and social inclusion. Engagement in lifelong learning was acknowledged as one of the key ways through which this goal could be achieved, and the Commission’s Communication on Lifelong Learning emphasized the key role of guidance in this respect (European Commission, 2001). As a whole, the Lisbon Strategy provided the broad policy context in which the ELGPN was established.

The Communication included a recommendation that a European Guidance Forum be established. In the event, this was deferred, and instead the Commission established an Expert Group on Lifelong Guidance. Chaired by the Commission, the group included officials from some education and employment ministries, a number of international guidance experts, and representatives of European associations of some key stakeholder groups (social partners, parents, youth, and consumers, as well as guidance professionals). The Expert Group established links with parallel international reviews and developed policy tools for use by member-states. The Expert Group also played an important role in ensuring that lifelong guidance was

referenced in relevant EC Communications, Council Resolutions, and Joint Reports of the Council and the Commission (Watts, Sultana & McCarthy, 2010).

During the Irish EU Presidency in 2004 the Council of Education Ministers adopted a first EU level Resolution on lifelong guidance (European Commission, 2004) which defined lifelong guidance as “a range of activities that enables citizens of any age and at any point in their lives (lifelong) to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make meaningful educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competences are learned and/or used (lifewide). Examples of such activities include information and advice giving, counselling, competence assessment, mentoring, advocacy, teaching decision-making and career management skills. Guidance is provided in a range of settings: education, training, employment, community, and private”. This definition allows different service providers to identify how they contribute in reaching the overarching goals and priorities of the Resolution. The Resolution also invited Member-States to “seek to ensure effective co-operation and co-ordination between providers of guidance at national, regional and local levels in the provision of guidance services and to build on and adapt existing structures and activities (networks, work groups, programmes) related to the implementation of the resolution priorities”.

### **Evolution of the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, ELGPN**

The implementation of the priorities identified in the 2004 Council Resolution was examined by Member-States’ representatives at the Finnish 2006 EU Presidency Conference on lifelong guidance policies. The reports from the EU Member States indicated that much had been achieved in improving access to guidance and the quality of guidance systems, but that much still needed to be done. The emergence of a knowledge-based society required a paradigm shift in



guidance, strengthening the role, quality and co-ordination of career guidance services to support learning at all ages and in a range of settings. It was important that the momentum of development within Member-States sustained.

The Finnish EU Presidency Conference workshop conclusions stressed that the fragility of lifelong guidance policies at national level called for a strong and stable mechanism at European level to encourage more sustainable development at national level and to support both policy development and implementation. The participating Member States came to the conclusion that the most effective way to take the work forward would be to set up a network of countries interested in working together to develop lifelong guidance systems. The Commission indicated its willingness to continue to assist this process, with the help of European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), and also to offer financial support (ELGPN, 2015b).

Delegations from the Member-States were invited to clarify their expectations and intentions regarding the Network to an inaugural meeting of the Network 7-8 May 2007 in Helsinki, Finland. A total of 23 countries attended this meeting, together with representatives from the Commission, the European Association for International Education (former FEDORA), the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG), the International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy (ICCDPP) and the European Social Partners. The participating countries agreed to the establishment of a European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) and to participate in the Network as members or observers, subject to written confirmation. The European and international bodies, CEDEFOP and the European Training Foundation (ETF) indicated their willingness to co-operate with the new

Network and support the process. The ELGPN was finally established by a contract between the Network Co-ordinator and the Commission's DG EAC in December 2007.

Membership of the Network was open to each of the countries eligible for assistance under the EU Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-14 and Erasmus+ Programme in 2015. The participating countries designated their representatives in the Network. Where national forums, co-ordination bodies or other representative structures exist, these provided a suitable basis for the composition of national delegations and for supportive communication and consultation processes. The designated members represented a lifelong learning perspective (covering education, training and employment for both young people and adults) and have been linked to relevant policy-making processes within the country concerned. They also had the capacity both to contribute to the activities of the Network and to involve the relevant stakeholders in the education, training and employment sectors, including the Social Partners and guidance practitioners. In 2015 the ELGPN consisted of 30 member-countries (AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS, SE, SI and SK), with one additional observer country (CH).

Through appropriate liaison arrangements, the Network ensured regular contact with other relevant bodies and networks at European and international levels. The European Commission was represented at ELGPN by staff from the relevant Policy Units of the DG Education and Culture (EAC) and DG EMPL and from the European Parliament. The European Social partners were also represented.

During its five phases (2007-15), the ELGPN was co-ordinated by a team from Finland. The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy designated the co-ordination task to the Finnish Institute for Educational Research at

the University of Jyväskylä. This unit convened the Network and supported the implementation of its initiatives. The ELGPN members appointed a Steering Group in accordance with EU Presidency arrangements to ensure effective management of the Network and to support the Co-ordinator in defining the priorities and budget allocation within the Work Programmes. ELGPN has also utilized the support of a number of contracted consultants.

Financial support from the Commission took the form of a subsidy of up to 75% of the Network costs and the total amount of the 25% national contribution needed in the budget was annually shared by ELGPN member countries. Costs eligible for support included the costs of Network activities foreseen in the Work Programme, relevant expenses incurred by the Network Co-ordinator, and travel expenses for representatives of each participating country, for one representative of any of the bodies or networks, and for individual experts invited by the Steering Group. At the end of each contractual period the Network prepared an annual activity report to the European Commission.

### **Objectives and Working Arrangements**

The role of the ELGPN was endorsed and described in more detail in the EU Council Resolution on ‘Better Integrating Lifelong Guidance into Lifelong Learning Strategies’ passed in 2008 under the French EU Presidency (European Council, 2008). The Resolution invited the Member-States and the Commission, with their respective competences, “to strengthen European co-operation on lifelong guidance provision, in particular through the ELGPN, with the support of the Lifelong Learning Programme, and in liaison with CEDEFOP”.

As the EU Member States are responsible for their own lifelong guidance policies and systems the Network members jointly identified in more detail the areas of guidance where national developments could be enhanced around the four Thematic Activities identified in the

2004 and 2008 Resolutions: *career management skills; access, including accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL); co-operation and co-ordination mechanisms in guidance policy and systems development; and quality assurance and evidence base for policy and systems development.*

The OMC provided a framework for the ELGPN and for the co-operation and mutual policy learning between the Member States, whose national policies could thus be directed towards certain common objectives. Working arrangements, underlying principles, structures and the governance of the ELGPN were defined by the members in biannual Plenary Meetings, including the priorities of the annual Work Programmes, number of thematic working groups and the frequency of peer learning activities, subject to budget and human resources availability. The members agreed to stimulate innovation and convergence through peer learning and exchange of best practices as well as to use jointly agreed indicators to measure the progress of lifelong guidance policy development. The long-term goal was agreed to assist the Network members and the Commission in moving forward European co-operation on lifelong guidance in the education, training, employment and related sectors.

The ELGPN was developed on a step-by-step approach. During the initial phase (2008), the Network focused mainly on establishing its structures and processes. During the second phase (2009-10) the work shifted to implementing the four Thematic Activities. The substantial work was carried out in Work Packages which had one or two lead countries to co-ordinate the activities in co-operation with the ELGPN Co-ordination Unit. Targeted peer learning events, each with a maximum of 10-12 participating countries, were implemented through a consistent process including desk studies, structured field visits and subsequent Reflection Notes. ELGPN members participated in the Thematic Activities that were relevant to their interests. Each

ELGPN national representative was invited to reflect on how each of the themes in which they are participating could enhance the development of their national policies and practices, in the various sectors in which they are located. Before implementing the activities, each participating Network member country was asked to identify their expectations and aspirations for these themes. When the work of the ELGPN was evaluated, attention was paid not only to what has been done and what has been learned, but also to what extent the activities have met these expressed expectations and aspirations, and their impact at national and European levels.

Each Work Package had an opportunity to prepare one or two conceptual papers or brief desk studies to enhance the targeted discussions around the field visits. Before the field visits, the lead countries and the ELGPN Steering Group could have joint meeting or a teleconference to agree the consistency of the Thematic Activities and how transversal themes were would be elaborated in each Thematic Activity. Part of the annual budget was allocated for Network members to conduct the national work or desk studies required prior to and subsequent to the Peer Learning Activities with an aim for concrete learning outcomes at both European and national levels.

The work of the Thematic Activities was supported with a policy focused Task Group, which examined the transversal elements of each Work Package and their interface with existing EU level policy developments in different sectors. Through the work of this Task Group, ELGPN sought to be more politically visible at EU level frequent contacts and presence in the Commission and key policy processes by establishing a more consistent network of contact persons both within the Commission and at national level. At European level, ELGPN made connections in a co-ordinated way with the education and training sectors, especially through the formal channels such as the EU Committees and relevant Commission Working Groups. The

national representatives were encouraged to report on the ELGPN activities to relevant national bodies and stakeholders (ELGPN, 2010).

The 2011-12 Work Programme (ELGPN, 2012) was designed to build on the experience and development of the first two phases and to improve the internal efficiency of the Network. During this period the Lisbon Strategy has coincided with the economic downturn, leading to a significant increase in both unemployment and under-employment across most ELGPN member-countries. The awareness of the need for improved anticipation and matching of labour market skills appeared in the EU policy documents proposed by the Commission and adopted by the Council, both on education and on employment. This provided a challenge to lifelong guidance services, but also potentially enhanced the significance of the policy contributions they could make. The 2011-12 Work Programme also took into account both the new EU2020 (European Commission, 2010) priorities and the strategic tools supporting the implementation of these priorities. The first ELGPN tool *Lifelong Guidance Policy Development: A European Resource Kit* (ELGPN, 2012b) was drawn from the national experiences and case studies.

The aim of the ELGPN 2013-14 Work Programme was to assist the lifelong guidance policy adaptation and implementation process of the member-countries at national, regional and local levels, using the ELGPN Resource Kit and providing opportunities for discussion and reflection on on-going and planned national developments during Thematic Activities. The evidence base for lifelong guidance was further enhanced through the development of the ELGPN Evidence Guide (Hooley, 2014) for policy-makers.

The ELGPN 2015 Work Programme was designed as a transition programme with an aim to finalise the outcomes of the 2007-14 Work Programmes and link them more closely to current and future European priorities and initiatives, and to position lifelong guidance in the

new EU policy agenda and pave the way for new forms of structured European co-operation in relation to lifelong guidance policy and systems development. A key design principle for this last phase was to bring together the existing ELGPN products into a coherent toolbox, using the European Guidelines for Lifelong Guidance Policies and Systems Development (ELGPN, 2015) as an instrument for this purpose, with strong cross-references between the products. In doing so, the Network examined the implications of the evidence collected on the impact of the existing ELGPN products.

### **ELGPN outputs**

The ELGPN developed a comprehensive range of EU reference tools and publications for European lifelong guidance policy and systems developments at EU and national levels through systematic policy sharing and learning. The tools are informed by the experience of the Network members and supplemented by international best practice.

The European Resource Kit (ELGPN, 2012b) was developed to help policy-makers and other stakeholders to review existing lifelong guidance provision within their country or region, and to identify issues requiring attention and gaps that need to be filled, drawing from practices in other European countries. Its specific focus was the four priorities for action identified in the Council Resolution 2008: CMS, Access, Cooperation and Coordination, and Quality Assurance and Evidence. These priorities were also examined from a sector perspective. The ELGPN Glossary (ELGPN, 2012) provides a common set of definitions for lifelong guidance (LLG) policy development and related guidance terminology.

The ELGPN Evidence Guide (Hooley 2014) presented the existing international research base on the impact of lifelong guidance, including its educational outcomes, economic and employment outcomes. It was built on previous work by the Network and synthesized the

existing evidence on the impact of lifelong guidance and suggests how policy-makers might want to make use of this evidence and contribute to its development with key examples drawn from the literature.

The ELGPN Tool on *Designing and Implementing Policies Related to Career Management Skills (CMS)* is addressed to policy-makers who wish to further develop a comprehensive national guidance policy with the focus on the acquisition of CMS (ELGPN, 2015). The tool on *Strengthening the Quality Assurance and Evidence Base for Lifelong Guidance* (ELGPN, 2015c) aims to stimulate stakeholder discussion and action for the continuous improvement of lifelong guidance policies and practices, focusing on strengthening quality assurance and evidence-based policy systems development. Five key quality elements include practitioner competence, citizen/user involvement, service provision and improvement, cost benefits to governments and cost benefits to individuals.

*The Guidelines for Policies and Systems Development for Lifelong Guidance: A Reference Framework for the EU and for the Commission* (ELGPN, 2015d) provides a comprehensive framework that links together the ELGPN tools and products developed in 2007-14. The Guidelines cover transversal (common to all sectors) issues e.g. funding, ICT, and sector (specific to a sector) issues e.g. schools, unemployed, disadvantaged groups. Each guideline explains its importance and gives suggestions for improving policies. They contribute to improving the consistency of individual career learning experience across the education, training, and employment sectors and to strengthening the professionalism of services, tools and products within the EU Member States.

During 2013-15 the Network produced Concept Notes, Policy Briefings and Internal Working Papers on relevant EU policy developments from a lifelong guidance perspective, to



support national and European debate and consultations on these topics. The Concept Notes examined the relationship of lifelong guidance to the Youth Guarantee Initiative, to early school-leaving, and to different forms of work-based learning. The Internal Working Papers examined the role of career education in teacher training, funding mechanisms for lifelong guidance services, and the PISA 2012 results related to career development.

The ELGPN Policy Briefings were designed for internal use within ELGPN, examining lifelong guidance as a cross-cutting approach, touching upon general principles applicable to all policy fields, as well as being a specific element of sectoral fields and special horizontal policies (notably, youth and active ageing policies). These Policy Briefings played an important role in linking lifelong guidance in general, and Network developments in particular, to policy-making and policy developments at EU level. The Network acted thus as a ‘supra-national-level discussion ground’ for its members.

The ELGPN website (<http://elgpn.eu/publications>) acted as a document repository, including links to the main background documents. The website included also an online platform for the Network members for sharing documents in a consistent structure and for documentation of the progress on national lifelong guidance policy development.

### **Perceived added value and impact**

While maintaining a transversal overview of lifelong guidance policy development, ELGPN examined how guidance as an integral cross-cutting element can contribute to EU policy development in six key policy field in particular: schools, VET, higher education, adult education, employment and social inclusion. The aim was to deepen the interfaces with these policy areas and to shift the Network activities from conceptual work to policy implementation, with more structured co-operation across the themes. In the course of the implementation of the

2008-14 Work Programmes, an ELGPN Continuous Improvement Cycle (ELGPN, 2014) was developed (see Figure 1).

*Figure 1: ELGPN Continuous Improvement Cycle*

Much of Stage 1 of this Cycle was completed during the 2011-12 Work Programme, though some elements have been added subsequently, notably the Guidelines published in 2015. The main focus of the 2013-14 Work Programme was on Stages 2-6 in relation to development of the first policy tools. The work on finalizing the ELGPN 2008-14 outcomes in the ELGPN toolbox and linking them more closely to current and future European priorities and initiatives was the main focus of the last 2015 Work Programme.

The ELGPN impact evaluations (ELGPN, 2015b) conducted in spring 2014 and in spring 2015 were integrated into the above-mentioned ELGPN Continuous Improvement Cycle. At national level the evaluation focused on the ELGPN influence and success factors for impact on national policies in related policy fields which have an interface with lifelong guidance (e.g. lifelong learning, employment, social inclusion). A second focus was on the communication and co-operation processes between different ministries and other policy-making organizations, and between guidance service providers responsible for implementation of guidance policies. Third, the evaluation sought to identify influences on the establishment of new lifelong guidance practices or on changes of existing practices at service level. The ELGPN member-countries were also requested to provide information on whether they have sought to influence EU-level lifelong guidance policy development and on their views on how future challenges in European lifelong guidance policy development could be met through structured European co-operation.

According to the results in the impact evaluation (ELGPN, 2015b) more than half of the ELGPN member-countries reported that the Work Programmes 2008-14 had a significant influence on national policies on lifelong guidance, and 15 countries listed examples of some impact. The members provided a number of concrete examples where the Network has acted as a catalyst for national policy development, or where ELGPN products have been used in the national context. The role of lifelong guidance in legislation was revisited in nine member-countries. A national strategy for lifelong guidance was launched or was in progress in seven countries; and lifelong guidance has been integrated into other sectoral strategies in eleven further countries. Two countries had prepared national guidelines for guidance systems and policy development. National evaluations of guidance services were carried out in four countries. The impact on related policy fields which have an interface with lifelong guidance was reported mainly in relation to policies on lifelong learning, schools, VET, employment and youth.

Countries often face the challenge of fragmentation and sector interests in the lifelong the guidance practice and policy development. Most ELGPN member-countries reported that the ELGPN 2008-14 Work Programmes had either significant impact or some impact on the communication and co-operation processes between different ministries and other policy-making organizations (e.g. social partners and non-governmental organizations). In most countries the establishment of a national lifelong guidance forum or other representative structure was a concrete example of the influence of the Network's activities. A national forum had brought together all relevant partners in the field of education, training, employment and social inclusion, including relevant ministries, agencies and experts. Participation in the Network and communication with national stakeholders had led to continuous processes of exchange of

information on guidance-related initiatives and resulted in developing measures which make co-operation between ministries more efficient.

Participation in the Network activities had also influence on structures for co-operation between guidance service providers in different policy fields (e.g. co-operation between organizations responsible for implementation of lifelong guidance policies or for lifelong guidance service delivery). Examples of increased co-operation included national conferences, joint development projects, working across borders between delivery agencies or stakeholders. Although ELGPN focused primarily on lifelong guidance policy development, seven member-countries reported significant influence in establishing new lifelong guidance practices or in changing existing practices at service-design level (e.g. outreach services, local one-stop guidance centers, integrated online career services or integration of career education in national curricula).

The success factors reported were connected to the strong engagement of the national delegations and their impact on the development of national representative structures or national lifelong guidance forums. The national forums had raised the awareness of the transversal nature of lifelong guidance policies and the common understanding of shared terminology and goals for a coherent national lifelong guidance system. The national delegations had supported national lifelong guidance strategies and also the translation and adaptation of the ELGPN tools and other publications. The catalytic role of the ELGPN was particularly evident during national seminars which were arranged in conjunction with ELGPN Plenary Meetings or Work Package meetings. The European Commission and CEDEFOP support for the Network activities strengthened the legitimacy of the mutual policy learning and sharing of experiences (ELGPN, 2015b).

### **Lessons Learned and Future European Co-operation**

The establishment of the ELGPN was an initiative by the EU Member-States through the Open Method of Co-ordination and in line with the OMC principles the member countries have been able to use the outcomes of the ELGPN in accordance with their own priorities. The Network was a mechanism to promote co-operation at member-country level on lifelong guidance and to support the establishment of national/regional co-ordination structures across sectors. The ELGPN created also an interface with parallel international collaborative projects on policy issues of mutual interest, notably the biennial International Symposia on Career Development and Public Policy, thereby facilitating and promoting worldwide exchange of knowledge, experience and expertise in the field of policy and systems development.

The added value of the ELGPN was related to the fact that in the European Union the Member States face broadly similar challenges and problems. The ELGPN was a tool for policy-makers, practitioners and researchers to work together and share examples of good practice. While there are significant differences in how EU Member States construct their lifelong guidance systems there are certain communalities which can be used as common reference points in mutual policy learning.

Lifelong guidance is a shared policy and administrative responsibility of several ministries at national and regional levels. This urges consistent networked lifelong guidance services to guarantee access and social equity in accordance to local cultural, economic and social contexts. One of the key roles of such services is to help individuals to move effectively across sectors in the course of their personal and career development. Effective policies for lifelong guidance need to involve a number of different authorities and stakeholders. A national lifelong guidance forum is a mechanism for bringing these bodies together, in order to produce more effective policy development and more harmonized and consistent service provision. Also

the implementation of a strategic approach in the use of Information and Communication Technology in relation to lifelong guidance requires a jointly agreed cross-ministerial strategy for lifelong guidance and a common conceptual framework for the service delivery and funding (Kettunen & al, 2015). The ELGPN Guidelines for Policies and Systems Development for Lifelong Guidance (ELGPN, 2015d) reflect this shared nature of policy and administrative responsibility.

The Guidelines and the comprehensive ELGPN toolbox can be used for two key purposes in the future. First, to evaluate the role of lifelong guidance provision in the implementation process of the different EU 2020 policies providing evidence for evidence-based policy planning, implementation and correction during 2016-2020 and beyond. Second, to support European citizens and to empower them to make increasingly difficult transitions during the lifespan. These two goals cannot be achieved separately. The second Council Resolution on lifelong guidance (European Council, 2008) stated that the four policy priority areas (access to services, career management skills, cooperation and coordination, quality assurance and evidence base) go together. Encouraging EU citizens to learn and apply career management skills only has meaning if states/regions have knowledge in lifelong guidance policy design and the capacity and resources to develop access to career services. Improving access to services requires cross-sectoral and cross-professional cooperation. Ensuring the quality of career services requires data/evidence collection and analysis (ELGPN, 2015b).

It turned out to be important that the countries are aware of this wider paradigm of lifelong guidance as an integrated entity and a part of a broader social context. Lifelong guidance can be examined as a policy, as an activity of individual organizations or networked services in collaborative contracts between public administration and private sector as well as an individual

process. In this kind of structure, the policy, national and regional contexts and service providers represent different levels where guidance processes are independently constructed. It is important that knowledge, authority, and actions are formed in interaction between these levels. The strategic planning and implementation of the lifelong guidance policies in national and regional levels are collaborative vertical and horizontal processes. In addition to national and regional forums for lifelong guidance service provision there is a need for new type of leadership and management of multi-administrative networks (Nykänen & al 2012).

The ELGPN promoted placing the citizen/user at the center for lifelong guidance policies, including the articulation of the user voice and the guidance practitioner voice, and the role of civil society in policy development. This reflects an approach to guidance policies and guidance practices that aims to build on the resources of the users of guidance; to engage them actively in the guidance process; and to facilitate their inputs to the planning of guidance activities and methods, so that they are viewed as co-owners and co-designers of guidance provision. In these respects, it is an agenda of empowerment and democratization.

Within the ten-year process the Network collected an extensive research base which supports lifelong guidance as a key tool for employment, youth and social policies (Hooley, 2014). The members also endorsed ten evidence based principles for the development of lifelong guidance policies and services. According to existing evidence lifelong guidance is most effective where it:

- 1) Is lifelong and progressive.
- 2) Connects meaningfully to the wider experience and lives of the individuals who participate in it.
- 3) Recognizes the diversity of individuals and provides services relevant to their needs.

- 4) Combines a range of interventions (e.g. one-to-one and online support).
- 5) Encourages the acquisition of career management skills.
- 6) Is holistic and well-integrated into other support services.
- 7) Involves employers and working people, and provide active experiences of workplaces.
- 8) Is delivered by skilled, well-trained and motivated practitioners.
- 9) Draws on good-quality career information.
- 10) Is quality-assured and evaluated.

The strength and success of the future use of ELGPN tools at European level depend a great deal on the capacity of the national representatives to have impact at national level. The members constructed the link to their country and from their country to the Network. The amount of time that members used in preparation for, participation in, and follow up to the Network's European-level activities was very small in comparison to their national role and function. During the second phase of the ELGPN, the member countries started to adopt different strategies for involving different ministries without taking up too many places. Almost all countries included representation of the education ministry; some included representation of the ministry of labour/employment; some also included NGOs.

As a Member-State driven network, the ELGPN examined the processes, dynamics, and also the tensions that arise in the effort to co-construct policy directions in and across Europe. Within the member state level these can relate to mixed representation between the ministries, sustainability of the national teams and their mandates in policy making. The complexities in policy learning and policy transfer varied also on the level of centralization and de-centralization of their national policies and on the current progress in the lifelong guidance systems and policy development.



When developing the common reference points for the national guidance systems and policies the members reflected whether ELGPN was a policy-driven or an evidence driven network. This required special attention to the links between research and policy. A challenge for the ELGPN was to analyze its role in policy development, especially the interaction between EU member states, and between member states and the European Commission, in the context of a member-state-led European policy network supported by the European Union.

From a wider EU policy perspective, the creation of the ELGPN helped policy-makers to meet the challenges they face in enhancing national reforms through implementing the EU 2020 strategy, as well as the key tools supporting the strategy. In the ELGPN impact evaluation, the Network members reported the increased communication and co-operation between the government sectors in many member countries. However, the ELGPN was not able to reach the same level of understanding at the European Commission level. As the guidance structures vary across the EU Member-States, there is a need for an effort to make sure that lifelong guidance becomes a transversal element between the sectors similarly in the Commission as in the Member-States.

In the last ELGPN Plenary Meeting in 2015 the members suggested, that the sustainability in policy development could be better achieved by setting up a mechanism for further analysis and development of lifelong guidance policies that contribute to achievement of EU 2020 targets at EU and national levels. The continuation of European co-operation could help to further develop and reinforce guidance systems with a view to reducing skills mismatches, increasing young people's employability and reducing long term unemployment. It is also important to maintain positive and wide public awareness of lifelong guidance and its wider impact to education, labour market and social policies as well as deepen the understanding

of lifelong guidance as a cross-cutting element between these policy fields and ensure that ELGPN outcomes are implemented in relevant EU strategies and programmes. As the ELGPN completed its in 2015 task by developing the common reference points for mutual learning in national level one option for the future European co-operation would be to transfer the ELGPN work to a Commission-led Working Group to ensure that the message percolates to all relevant actors and sectors.

According to the ELGPN member countries (ELGPN, 2015b) the future structure of European co-operation in lifelong guidance policy development should be clear on the difference between strategies and actions and it should be distinguished from the operational co-operation on the promotion and use of current European tools. The future structure should have the capacity and competence to identify best policy practices of the role of guidance in meeting these policy challenges and promote mutual policy learning across the Member States with the support of the Commission by providing the necessary knowledge, guidelines and framework, European level rationale and pressure, and some funding, to aid national policy and systems reform. This new structure could;

- Make policy recommendations common for all countries;
- Provide support for peer learning and exchanges for policy sharing and learning, including through thematic conferences and thematic clusters;
- Promote the use of the *Guidelines for Policies and Systems Development for Lifelong Guidance*, through their political adoption by Council Resolution;
- Provide high political visibility to lifelong guidance in EU policies for education, training, employment and social inclusion, in particular drawing the attention of the EU Ministers to its importance;

- Develop a common set of benchmarks and indicators for measuring the achievement of lifelong guidance policies and systems;
- Use such benchmarks and indicators in external reviews of policies and systems for career guidance in Member States; and
- Develop an EU Inventory and a data base/country fiches of good policies and systems for lifelong guidance.

To avoid fragmentation and to maintain and strengthen the political momentum of lifelong guidance policy development, it is necessary to further enhance synergies between and among the different guidance actors and stakeholders at national, regional and local levels.

### **Possible Implications for North America**

The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) consisting of individual national guidance forums was a mechanism to promote cooperation at Member State level on lifelong guidance and to support establishment of national/regional structures in education and employment sectors. The ELGPN has discussed similarities and differences between the EU Member States. Within this structured horizontal and vertical dialogue, the Member countries were able to preserve diversity while maintaining common goals for lifelong learning and sustainable employment.

The ELGPN had also an interface with the International Centre for Career Development and Public Policies, for example in initiating international collaborative projects on policy issues of mutual interest or in providing international or facilitating and promoting worldwide exchange of knowledge, experience and expertise in the field of policy and systems development. It might be useful to examine whether there is a similar need to assist states or regions to develop

policies, systems and practices for career development within and across sectors in North America.

The usefulness of such a network would depend largely on the degree of interest among participating states/regions. The process of establishing the ELGPN might provide case studies to benchmark to what extent similar type of coordination mechanisms and funding arrangements would be feasible and what have been the key challenges in bringing together different guidance practices and policy development cultures.

A sample of states could initiate the process. A first step would be to conduct a study on the current policies related to guidance in order to identify the goals and funding opportunities for a potential network. This new US network could provide valuable input for new legislation and reauthorization of existing legislation. The network could also help in establishing rules and implementation of the legislation. A joint long term challenge would be to look for synergy between international networks in enhancing a more sustainable and transparent evidence base for lifelong guidance practice and policy development.

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