

## **Career Development in the Mediterranean Region: Drivers for Change, Current Provision, and Policy Issues**

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**An address delivered to a forum on ‘Career Development Partnership in Jordan’, held in Jordan on 15-16 December 2009**

### **Introduction**

This is my first visit to Jordan: it is a great pleasure and privilege for me to be invited to come here. But it means that I can claim no prior first-hand knowledge of the development of career development in your country. I have however learned something about it at second hand through Jordan’s participation in the ETF project on career guidance in the Mediterranean region which I co-ordinated with Ronald Sultana. Nader Myrran was the national expert for Jordan in that project, and was a much-valued member of the project team. In my presentation today I will draw heavily on the project’s synthesis report (Sultana & Watts, 2007) and on the country report on Jordan which fed into it (Myrran, 2007).

Our task is an exciting one: to create a vision for career development policy and governance and an action plan for implementation. As a contribution to our work, I plan to do four things. First, I will discuss the concept of career development. Second, I will explore its relationship to some of the drivers for change in the Mediterranean region in general, including Jordan in particular. Third, I will outline briefly the range of career development provision in Jordan, as indicated in our review and also in the papers circulated in advance of this event. Finally, I will explore some policy issues related to this provision and to its future development.

### **Definition**

For the purposes of the ETF project, we defined the term ‘career guidance’ as an abbreviated way of referring to career information, guidance and counselling services intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. This was closely in line with the definitions used in previous studies by OECD (2004), the World Bank (Watts & Fretwell, 2004) and the EU (Sultana, 2003; 2004). Its scope is broad:

- It includes services provided to young people who have not yet entered the labour force, to job-seekers, and to those who are already employed.
- The services may be based in schools, in universities and colleges, in public employment services, in companies, and in the voluntary and private sectors.
- They may be on an individual or group basis.

- They may be face-to-face or at a distance (including web-based services).

More specifically, the services include:

- Career information (in print, ICT-based and other forms). This may include information on educational courses within schools and tertiary education, on training courses, and on occupations and employers.
- Assessment and self-assessment tools, including aptitude tests and interests inventories.
- Counselling interviews, usually on a one-to-one basis.
- Group guidance programmes.
- Career education programmes. These are programmes within the curriculum designed to help students to develop their self awareness, their awareness of the world of work, and their skills for managing their careers.
- Work-experience programmes. These are programmes designed to enable young people to experience the world of work before entering it 'for real'.
- Job-search skills training programmes. These are programmes designed to help individuals to develop their skills in looking for jobs, and in presenting themselves in job applications and selection interviews.

For the purposes of this conference, the alternative term 'career development' has been adopted, as it has now in a growing number of other countries. Its disadvantage is that it uses the same term to describe both interventions and the process in which they are attempting to intervene. But its merit is that it avoids the somewhat directive connotations of the term 'career guidance', and arguably conveys more strongly the emphasis on enabling and supporting people to manage their own careers.

It is important to distinguish career development from three related but basically different processes:

- *Selection*: i.e. making decisions *about* individuals. Aptitude tests, for example, may be used for career development purposes, but are more commonly used for selection purposes.
- *Promotion*: i.e. attempting to persuade individuals to choose particular opportunities at the expense of others. College/company brochures, for instance, may be designed primarily for promotional purposes.
- *Induction*: i.e. supporting entrants in managing their transition into a new learning or work environment.

The first two of these are primarily designed to serve the interests of 'opportunity providers' (education and training institutions, employers). Career development, by contrast, is concerned with helping individuals to choose between the full range of available opportunities, in relation to what is likely both to utilise their abilities and also to meet their interests and values, so leading to greater fulfilment and satisfaction. Career development programmes can incorporate attention to influences upon individuals' choices from other sources, notably parents: they may indeed include interventions

addressed to parents as well as their children. But their fundamental purpose is distinctively addressed to the interests of individuals, within their social context.

Linked to this, there is a distinction within the education and training systems between:

- Situations in which individuals are allocated to particular programmes.
- Situations in which they in principle have choices, but these choices tend to be determined by rigid status hierarchies – i.e. a kind of self-imposed allocation operates.
- Situations in which there is more genuine choice, but no formal career development services exist to support such choices: i.e. support for them is left entirely to informal sources.
- Situations in which choices exist, and are supported by formal career development services.

Our main focus here is on the last two of these.

### **Drivers for change**

In many Mediterranean countries, efforts are being made to improve the quality of education and training systems, and their links with the labour market. Such efforts have received support from a variety of international donor organisations. Many have involved structural reforms, including stronger but also more flexible articulation both within the education and training system and in relation to the labour market. This in turn opens up more scope for individuals to make choices within the system. Arguably, however, it is not enough simply to increase the scope for choices; it is also important, if these reforms are to be effective, to take steps to ensure that support is available to help individuals to make these choices in a well-informed and well-thought-through way. This is where career guidance can play an important role.

A case in point is the steps being made to transform the status of technical and vocational education and training (TVET). In the recent past, the main role of this sector has been, in many parts of the region, as an educational alternative for those who ‘fail’ academically and for those who cannot be accommodated in higher education. It has been of low status and low quality, promoting specialisation in narrowly-defined fields, often leading to employment dead-ends. Now, however, efforts are being made to reform TVET as an instrument for developing a knowledge-based economy. This requires elevating its quality and status, and encouraging more students to choose it rather than accept it by default. It is recognised that this will need to be accompanied by developing more flexible links and pathways between general and vocational tracks.

At the same time, work has started in a number of countries on developing qualification frameworks designed to relate qualifications in different sectors to one another, developing linkages and pathways with portable credits that enable students to move more flexibly from one sector of education and training to another. This is linked to

moving away from detailed job profiles to more fluid descriptions of competences. This, it is hoped, will enable individuals to respond more flexibly to the changing needs of the labour market.

All of these structural changes increase the opportunities for learners to make choices. If the reforms are to be effective, they require learners to be able to take informed advantage of these opportunities. Accordingly, they require career development provision to be available not just on exit from the education and training system, but within this system and as an integral part of it. This includes:

- Information on the course choices available.
- Information on the longer-term career implications of these choices.
- Career education as part of the curriculum, to include exploration of the areas of the labour market to which their competences might be transferable (career education in this sense is a means of broadening the concept of vocational education, which has traditionally been concerned with preparation for entry to a particular occupation or group of occupations).
- Career counselling to help to ensure that their personal choices are well-informed and well-thought-through.

The argument for such provision is based on grounds both of efficiency and of social equity. Leaving such choices totally to the natural forces of informal influences is:

- Inefficient, because such sources are likely to have access to information only to a limited range of the opportunities available, and this information is often out-of-date.
- Inequitable, because some students have access to much richer networks of support than others do.

A specific aspect of the issue of efficiency is the risk that opening up choices without providing adequate support will lead to high drop-out rates.

Enhanced attention to career development is also linked to the move towards more active and student-centred forms of learning, based on interacting with students rather than just lecturing to them. It is further linked with efforts to encourage more motivated students, with goals that go beyond passing of examinations as ends in themselves. There is, for example, evidence from studies elsewhere that students with clear goals tend to perform better in school (e.g. Inter-Ed, 2004).

In addition to its links to education and training reforms, career development can also be linked to restructuring of the labour market. This includes attempts to encourage stronger market mechanisms by reducing the size of the public sector. Markets work most effectively when the actors within them have access to good information. Career development can accordingly be seen as a means of making labour markets work.

At the same time, moves are being made to reduce the size of the informal sector. Here in Jordan, for instance, this has included legislative measures to protect workers (including rights, minimum wages, acceptable hours and conditions of work, and social security), to decrease the taxes paid by employers and to foster entrepreneurship. Such developments all extend the potential scope for career guidance, which operates more effectively where the labour market is formalised and transparent.

As reforms to education/training systems and labour markets of these kinds proceed across the MEDA region in general and in Jordan in particular, there would seem to be a strong case for considering career development as an integral part of these reforms.

### **Current provision**

So what is the extent of current career development provision? At the time when the ETF country report on Jordan was prepared in 2006, a number of services were in place.

Within the school system, in particular, there was a well-developed system of educational counselling. The work of the counsellors was primarily concerned with educational and psychological counselling, but included helping students to discover their vocational interests and utilise their potential talents. In addition to seeing pupils individually, the counsellors conducted occasional classroom sessions.

The Ministry of Education had developed a *Me and My Profession* series in collaboration with UNICEF, plus a career guidance plan for grade 10 pupils to assist those eligible to choose the educational stream matching their capabilities and interests. The vocational education classes provided for all pupils in grades 4-10 were based mainly on workshop practice and included some introduction to relevant areas of the world of work. The education directorates helped schools to establish career guidance committees comprising the educational counsellor, the vocational education teacher and parent representatives. Their role was to co-ordinate lectures from professionals from various sectors and field visits to factories and companies in order to extend pupils' knowledge of the world of work, but they were not very effective in practice and in some cases existed on paper only.

At post-school level, the King Abdullah II Fund for Development with the Al-Manar Project at the National Centre for Human Resources Development (NCHRD) had established career counselling centres in 20 public and private universities. These provided career counselling services and labour-market information to university students and graduates. The community colleges, however, did not have career counselling centres.

Within the labour-market sector, the employment services in the Ministry of Labour were weak, and career counselling services largely non-existent. But the Ministry had established a National Employment Centre to strengthen its employment services, particularly through developing an Electronic Labour Exchange, which is now up and

running. This is clearly a major development. It matches people to jobs in terms of skills, education and experience. It is available in Arabic and English, and has adopted a broadly-based occupational classification system, so enabling it to act as a labour exchange mechanism for all Arab-speaking countries and the Gulf region. It is available on a 24/7 basis.

Alongside this, work has also continued on developing Career Professional Counselling (PCC), a web-based system which provides both counsellors and individuals with on-line career development tools and access to accurate labour market information.

In addition, the report for ETF noted that some NGOs provided career counselling services in co-operation with public institutions. An example was the family counselling and guidance centres supported by the Ministry of Social Development, which aimed to empower women economically and socially. Another example was INJAZ, which aimed to enhance the skills of young people aged 14-24 so that they were able to enter the labour market as employees or entrepreneurs. In many countries such non-governmental services are a very significant part of career development provision, and it is important that we keep them in our field of vision.

## **Policy issues**

There is clearly a growing base on which to build. So what are the issues we need to address in moving towards a coherent strategy? Within the ETF report we identified six. I will adapt these a little, and add a seventh. I emphasise that I do so very tentatively, recognising that I am doing so on the basis of a second-hand knowledge of both your provision and your needs. But I hope that the questions will be helpful as a basis for our discussions.

First, is further work still needed to improve the comprehensiveness and quality of career information? Good information is not *sufficient* to support good career decision-making, but it is absolutely *necessary*. Without it, any career development provision is likely to be ineffective. Comprehensive provision needs to include:

- information on education and training courses (including content, entry requirements, qualifications to which they lead, labour-market outcomes);
- information on occupations (content, characteristics, personal attributes and qualifications required), and about the relationships between the two;
- information on the labour market (on present and likely future supply and demand for different occupations, preferably at national, regional and local levels).

Ideally, too, this information needs to be integrated, so that users can explore the career implications of education and training options. Clearly, a lot of work has been done here in Jordan on career information, notably through the PCC system. Is this sufficient, or is there further work to be done, and if so, what and how?

Second, is further work needed to strengthen the attention to career development issues within the educational counselling services? In the OECD and World Bank reviews, we found many countries where the role of the guidance counsellor covered personal and social as well as educational and vocational counselling. In such countries, a consistent finding was that career development tended to be marginalised, in two respects:

- Guidance counsellors tended to spend much of their time on the learning and behavioral problems of a minority of pupils, at the expense of the help needed by all pupils in relation to their educational and vocational choices.
- Guidance on such choices tended to focus mainly on immediate educational decisions, rather than on occupational decisions and on longer-term career implications.

There were a number of reasons for this:

- The demands of learning and behavioral problems, and of subject choices, were immediate and pressing, and tended to be viewed by school management as being of higher priority.
- The training of guidance counsellors often tended to be strongly psychological in nature, and to pay limited attention to career development in general and to knowledge of the labor market in particular.
- Guidance counsellors' links with the labor market tended to be weak, and they often had little access to sources of comprehensive and up-to-date occupational and educational information.

For all these reasons, at least two countries (Norway and Poland) had decided to split the role, and to appoint specialist career counsellors, thus:

- Focusing more attention on career guidance within the school.
- Enabling the specialist to pay attention to the distinctive needs of career guidance work, including keeping in touch with changes in post-school education and training provision and in the labor market.

Is this analysis relevant to Jordan? If so, what steps might be taken to address it?

Third, is there a need to establish career education more strongly within the school curriculum? Career education is important both in orienting young people to the world of work and in helping them to develop the skills for managing their careers. Is more work needed to define the nature of these skills in a Jordanian context, and to identify ways in which they can be developed more effectively?

Fourth, is there a need to make career development services available more broadly? Are they currently accessible to all who need them, when they need them? If not, for which groups, both of young people and of adults, are further services needed? And does their provision require the extension of existing services, or the establishment of new services?

Fifth, is enough being done to ensure that such provision takes full account of the socio-cultural context of Jordan? The importance of this issue has been strongly emphasised in Ronald Sultana's contribution to this conference. An example is the importance of the family. This suggests that career guidance interventions need where possible to include the family. At the same time, there needs to be space on occasion for individuals to review their own futures, taking into account the influences of their family, so that they 'own' the impact of these influences on their decisions. The balances here are subtle, and need to be adapted sensitively to local circumstances. What are the other factors of this kind that we need to take into account, and how do we do so?

Sixth, is further work needed to increase the number of career development staff and to develop their competences? The quality of services depends significantly upon these competences. At the time of our review, the extent of specific career development training provision in the region was very limited. In some countries, including Jordan, there were diplomas and degrees in counselling, but often with little or no attention to career counselling and wider career development matters. Attention to this issue is crucial if the quality of services is to improve. What is being done in Jordan to address it, and what more is needed?

Finally, what structure and process is needed to provide a focal point for strategic leadership across the career development field in Jordan? This Forum is a major step in this direction, with the Al-Manar Project playing a crucial catalytic role in convening it. It brings together representatives from the public and private sectors, funding organisations, secondary and post-secondary education, labour organisations and employers. All have a critical role to play in developing a vision and an action plan. Experience with setting up such bodies in a number of European countries suggests a number of key messages (CEDEFOP, 2008), at least some of which may be relevant here in Jordan. These include the importance of:

- Linking the vision to broader strategies – for example, on lifelong learning and employability.
- Establishing common definitions and terminology as a necessary prerequisite for dialogue and debate. This often takes time, but in the long run it is time well spent.
- Having clearly identified tasks, rather than being a mere 'talking shop'. Such tasks might include, for example, developing quality standards for use across the field.
- Finding one or more strong champions to give visibility to its work.
- Defining a clear relationship with the Government.
- Establishing the benefits to individual citizens as a core principle for the Forum's work, partly because this is a principle to which all present are likely to give assent, and which may make it easier to transcend narrow sectoral interests.

A related issue is whether there is a need for a professional association for career development professionals in Jordan, and if so, what its relationship should be with any strategic leadership body that may emerge from the Forum.

As with all I have said, these suggestions need to be reviewed in the light of the distinctive cultural context and distinctive needs of Jordan. I hope, however, that my paper will have provided some useful ideas and suggestions for us to explore further in our discussions.

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