

Meeting the Career Counseling Needs of European Union in Recession

Ekonomik Durgunluk Yaşayan Avrupa Birliği'ndeki Kariyer Psikolojik Danışmanlığı Gereksinimlerinin Karşlanması

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Abstract: This paper aims to present one of the very few active and successful certification programs in the field of career development in Europe, in the context of the economic recession, as perceived by individuals and private or public institutions across the continent. The gap between the societal demands and what the education system can offer significantly impacts the unemployment level in the European countries where young people are the most affected. From well-known European certification programs to private initiatives – the authors present the benefits of recognized national and international competence frameworks and certification programs in the field of career development.

Keywords: career development, European recession, certification programs

Öz: Bu makalede, bireyler, kamu ve özel kurumlar tarafından algılandığı gibi Avrupa'da yaşanan ekonomik durgunluk bağlamında Avrupa'daki kariyer gelişimi alanında sayıları çok az olan başarılı sertifika programlarından birisi tanıtılmaktadır. Sosyal talepler ile eğitim sisteminin sağladıkları arasındaki uçurum, Avrupa ülkelerindeki işsizlik oranını anlamlı derecede etkilemekte ve bundan da en fazla genç nüfus etkilenmektedir. Yazarlar bu makalede, özel girişimcilerin sağladıkları programlardan ve iyi bilinen Avrupalı sertifika programları üzerinden, kariyer gelişimindeki sertifikalandırma programları ve ulusal ve uluslararası yeterlilikler çerçevesinde tanımlanmış olmanın faydaları üzerinde durmaktadırlar.

Anahtar sözcükler: kariyer gelişimi, Avrupa'daki ekonomik durgunluk, sertifika programları

The Recession—A Few Elements

The topic of economic recession has been under discussion for almost a decade now. European and national strategies have been imagined and action plans have been implemented at various levels of public and private systems. However, we witness a full spectrum of symptoms which clearly indicate lack of success in synchronizing various social sectors in a common effort to slow down unemployment, layoffs, to increase the level of integration of youth within the labor market, and job satisfaction. When we consider Europe, we have to take into account the variety of social systems, different cultures, work patterns, and traditions involved. Although the idea of the unification of policies and markets under common standards has proven to be very appealing, it has proven to be challenging.

The traditional mission of the school—to educate upcoming responsible citizens to contribute to society and to build a better one for the future—seems to

become an increasingly distant ideal, or even be almost impossible to accomplish. The competency profiles we *imagine* that our communities will find necessary and useful in 3-5 years might not even exist anymore when the students finish their programs. There appears to be a clear shift from the traditional view of task-oriented educational programs to a more dynamic model focused on transferable skills.

An unfortunate outcome of the globalization is that the economic crisis is globally widespread. At the same time, other factors concur to aggravate the level of unemployment –the development of e-commerce and other computer based technologies, as well as the changes in corporations' profile (traditional and e-corporations). Moreover, increase of the diversity in the workforce (older employees, more women trying to find work, immigration pressure on the local markets) and changes within the business profile (due to the high impact of information technology). Probably the most acute factor is one of the direct

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outcomes of the economic crisis - downsizing. Designed as an organizational strategy to improve business efficiency or competitiveness, it is defined as an intentional management act and is different than any kind of financial related resources lost. Although this phenomenon is typically associated with human resource reductions, a career specialist might identify other ways in which resources could be reassigned in order to increase the level of economic success of the company (Szilagyi, 2010).

In addition, there are clear signs of ageing of the workforce and job polarization. The latter refers to the increasing concentration of employment in the highest (and skill-intensive) and lowest wage occupations, as job opportunities in middle level skill occupations disappear – mainly as a result of technological changes and off-shoring in the manufacture business.

It is very clear that Europe has been attempting to be proactive in meeting the challenges of a dynamic (and unified) labor market. An intriguing example is The Lisbon Strategy, which was adopted by the European Council in 2000 (in Lisbon, Portugal) as a developmental strategy aimed to support the European Union (EU) in becoming “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” until 2010 (European Council, 2000). Ambitious goals were set, from preparing to transition to a knowledge-based economy to investment in people and promoting social equality. As of 2010 however, most of the policy’s goals were declared officially not achieved and EU called for a more realistic approach in setting aims.

More specifically, there are few main agents acting in the career development field at the European level – EUROGUIDANCE and CEDEFOP among them. The European Euroguidance Network supports mobility and emphasizes the European dimension in education and career guidance. It endorses the creation of programs seeking to inform school and career specialists interested in studying or working abroad about educational and career opportunities in Europe; centers exist in 31 European countries, members and nonmembers of the European Union (Euroguidance, 2014).

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training is the European Union’s reference center for vocational education and purposes to promote the idea of lifelong learning throughout Europe. Its priority is to support the European Commission, Member States, and social partners in developing and implementing European Vocational Education and Training (VET) policy (CEDEFOP, 2014).

Tools in Europe

There are also several valuable resources/projects in Europe which were specially developed to facilitate the public’s access to information related to educational opportunities and career prospects within the countries. Such resources are delivered to the public through advanced online platforms which make them visible and easy to access. As an example, Eurypedia was created in 1980 and aims to offer information about reforms and educational systems in all 36 countries participating in the European Lifelong Learning Programme (European Member States: Croatia, Macedonia, Iceland, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland). The information is presented at the national and regional level; although everything is in English, some parts of the content are translated into the local language for increased accessibility. A wide range of experts are involved, from local specialists to national bodies across the continent. Furthermore, the website provides current information through continual updates (Eurypedia, 2014).

Thus, these questions still remain: despite the resources available to the public, why is it that the rate of unemployment is not subsiding, and why is the work force experiencing such difficulty in successful integration within the labor market? Is it possible that that the tools are not the issue at hand, but instead a deficient communication flow between the organisms in charge and the public?

According to the feedback from Romanian clients involved with career development services, some parts of the population have never heard of such resources. Schools and universities do not seem to create and maintain a successful communication relationship with the ministries and other public institutions in charge of spreading this kind of information. As for adults, unless they end up unemployed and engaged in a relationship with a career counselor within the public network, they may never learn about those valuable resources

It is apparent that there is a gap between career services offered by the private sector and those offered within a national public network. The vast majority of the most comprehensive information resources developed at the European level are created together with state institutions. Several initiatives across Europe have intended to include the private sector, but somehow those two have not appeared to successfully connect. The private sector’s modus operandi looks as if it is more dynamic, proactive, and definitely centered on results. Conversely, the public system appears to be slower in producing and implementing policies and methods as well as more

reactive. This should not be a surprise, as by definition state institutions face higher bureaucracy and inertia. In addition, it is easy to spot the differences in rapidity among the European countries when it comes to showing and implementing results.

Initiatives

In talking about local and regional initiatives, we can certainly see that at the European level the problem is taken very seriously, providing generous funding for researchers and policy-makers around the continent. As a result, valuable research projects have been funded in the last decade, educational and labor market programs have been created and implemented in the countries, and policy-makers have adopted platforms aimed to slow down and eventually stop the manifestation of negative effects of the economic recession. Educators, legislators and the public at large now have access to information and a myriad of courses promising everything from better employability skills to stronger communication abilities. Diplomas and certificates are generated every day in Europe; between the fear of unemployment and the hope for a better life, many people choose to believe and engage in new educational programs, from short seminars and workshops to extended programs at the university level. There is also an apparent increase in the flexibility of new educational programs, which tend to be more inclusive, modular, and easier to adjust according to the newer societal demands. This is a significant difference between the educational realities and policies in the last quarter of the 20th century and what has begun to develop within the last decade. As a result, the newer systems seem to be more versatile in their role of balancing the relationship between the pressure coming from the economic recession and the educational response.

Instead of adopting a reactive role and training specialists in accordance with a fixed set of standards and competency models, the curricula across Europe has started to show signs of efforts to focus on desired outcomes and to integrate a wide variety of learning styles and specifics. Disadvantaged populations have been targeted in an effort to pursue integration. Core professional competencies and country/regional specific competencies are now taken into consideration. Although technical skills are still of importance, special interest is being shown in addressing transferable skills, which is so important when it comes to labor market mobility and adaptability. If interest for outcomes orientation in curriculum design could be traced back to the 1980's in Western and Scandinavian countries, more recent developments could be witnessed in South

East Europe and Mediterranean countries in the last decade. Another facet of initiative is related to the roots of such a curriculum reform; countries like Germany, France or the United Kingdom developed outcomes-oriented educational models based on local research, while in other parts of Europe (especially among the more recently developed countries), the tendency was to import and adapt foreign models (Stanley and McCoshen, 2012).

An important aspect related to the increased professionalism within the career development refers to credentials as proven methods for distinguishing individuals with superior knowledge and skills. With access to high-quality services increasingly considered an essential human right, the demand for mechanisms to assure and ensure the delivery of high-quality services has also increased.

Our shrinking world with its expanding market opportunities requires global professional standards that are valued locally and recognized internationally within and among related professions. Professional competency standards have the challenge of meeting global demands; being recognized globally—across geographic and political boundaries—yet must also remain relevant to local and regional values, to economic and political realities, the needs of the people, the businesses and industries, and governmental interests within which the professionals practice and services are delivered.

As globalization continues to integrate economies and workforces, the need for educational/career guidance providers to place students and workers appropriately is also presented. Credentials allow for institutional assurance that educational/career guidance providers are appropriately qualified to meet the demands essential to individual, community, and, subsequently, national success.

When it comes to certification frameworks, several can be mentioned in Europe: Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF), promoted by EBCC (European Board for Certified Counselors), Educational and Vocational Guidance Practitioner (EVGP), and ECGC (European Career Guidance Certificate) which was a result of the Leonardo da Vinci project MEVOC (Quality Manual for Educational and Vocational Counselling).

The Educational and Vocational Guidance Practitioner (EVGP) certification is endorsed by an international professional body - International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG, 2014). The competencies taken into consideration are empirically determined and are organized into two categories: Core and specialized (work setting) competencies. They target knowledge,

skills, and attitudes required to deliver quality services. The assumption is that the competencies are universal and there is no need for localization. A final validity study was performed in 41 countries with more than 700 practitioners involved. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents consider that the core competencies are relevant for their work, while the relevance of the specialization competencies varied in accordance with the nature of the job. While there IAEVG-approved training providers exist, any guidance counsellor or career practitioner could apply for the certification with previous training and experience from elsewhere (Hiebert and Hopkins, 2012). The EVGP is available to specialists who can prove the completion of formal education and practical experience related to the core competencies and one of the specialized competency areas. A great freedom is allowed to the applicants, who could come from any field related to career development, guidance, counseling, psychology (IAEVG, 2014).

The European Career Guidance Certificate (ECGC, 2014) was created under the umbrella of a European project which took part in 2007-2009 and intends to serve the portion of European guidance counsellors which already obtained some training and experience in the field. Like the previous model presented, no specific training program is requested in order to become eligible for this certification scheme, assuming that those specialists could prove the required knowledge and skills according to a set of competences designed by the project. The final certification is available to those candidates who successfully pass an examination built in accordance with the MEVOC competence standards for career guidance counsellors (ECGC, 2014). The existence of a standardized evaluation brings more structure to this model, but of both those certification systems allow for applicants to have freedom in organizing their time and effort in order to prepare for the examination.

GCDF

A completely different kind of certification program was implemented in Europe back in 2003. *The Global Career Development Facilitator* credential (EBCC, 2014a) was introduced in Romania in a moment of economic collapse caused by the transition from the communist regime to a post-communist democracy. Unlike the two previously presented models, this program is related to a curriculum which required attendance and which was adapted for the national realities in Romania. The main reason behind this decision was related to the scarcity and lack of common standards of formal and informal trainings which were available at the time for the career specialists.

The same could be applied to any other practitioner who was required to perform career development tasks in his or her job – school counselors, guidance/vocational professionals, teachers who were supposed to play the guidance role in schools. The credential proved to be efficient in identifying individuals who possess the knowledge, skills, training, and experience necessary to provide career guidance and other career development services.

Far from the traditional credentialing protocol existing at that moment in Europe, the GCDF is an imported model (the country of origin is the United States of America) that has been adjusted to fit the national and local realities of each receiving country. The original CDF competencies and curriculum were developed in response to the growing need in the United States for more extensive and effective career development services. A national survey was funded through the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC) and conducted by the Career Development Training Institute (CDTI). The respondents worked in a variety of settings, including adult education, business and industry, colleges and universities, community agencies, private practice, community colleges, employment security commissions, military, and vocational rehabilitation. Based on the results, the competencies were revised in 1998 by NCDA, NOICC and CCE (Center for Credentialing and Education). The CDF curriculum was endorsed by the boards and officials of NCDA, NECA, NOICC and the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals (NAWDP) (Splete and Hoppin, 2000).

The CDF program became “global” (GCDF) when it was implemented in other countries. It is interesting to see the differences between the modes of implementation in various countries. In the US, the GCDF is educated to act as a liaison between the clients and the career counselors, with no to very little training for real career intervention. GCDF is a paraprofessional certification and the specialists’ professional status is very clear in the US. In Europe on another hand, the program was first implemented in Romania in a moment when no other formal program for educating career specialists existed. In 2003, the certification training initially implemented in a master’s program at Polytechnic University of Bucharest. It began with 12 students, coming from various educational and professional backgrounds. The main goal for this measure was to offer the university a chance to educate specialists in the career field in an isolated attempt to fill the gap between the labor market’s demands and the educational system (Splete and Hoppin, 2000).

Certification

Besides the translation and adaptation of the program according to the certification requirements and country-specific needs, nothing else was changed at the time. The students were trained to act in a similar way as their American students were acting. After graduation, the new GCDFs were confronted in their particular work settings with cases which challenged their professional skills; they were requested to deliver career counseling interventions, something which they were definitely not prepared for. The explanation was simple: unlike their American colleagues, the Romanian GCDFs had no career counselors in which to work as a team – counseling is not a recognized profession in Romania and not many professionals in career or related fields were available at the time.

As a result of this sudden professional challenge, the Romanian team of experts working for the project integrated the feedback coming from the first generation of career consultants. The GCDF curriculum was adjusted to include a real study case, supervised by the GCDF trainer (Splete and Hoppin, 2000).

One certification requirement for the GCDF candidates is to pass an evaluation, which was from the beginning a combination of formative and summative assessment. After each module of study, the GCDF students had to finalize an evaluation paper and at the end of the program, deliver a portfolio related to the study case they were involved with (3-5 sessions). The model was quickly adopted by the other countries which started to show interest in implementing the GCDF in Europe (Splete and Hoppin, 2000).

This change of the program design immediately raised the bar when it came to the GCDF educators in all the countries – who had to deliver supervision-like activities to their students. This would not have been a problem in a well-established counseling department in the US, for example – but at that time, Romania had no counseling related programs outside of the psychology departments, or even counselor educators for that matter. In time, the program was delivered outside of the university, in private settings and business areas. Trainers with various backgrounds (psychology, education, sociology, business, etc.) found themselves in need for professional development when confronted with the complexity of the program, which was not restricted to career information and guidance anymore – but demanded more specialized skills in the career counseling and counseling supervision area (Splete and Hoppin, 2000).

It has been a while since the feedback from the European GCDFs began to be collected. The agencies overseeing the GCDF program administration decided to respond by organizing a pilot training for a supervision

certification in Romania in 2007. Forty two participants from the GCDF countries around Europe were present. Based on their feedback, a certification covering basic supervision skills for helping professionals was finalized and first piloted in 2011. Since then, GCDF career consultants and trainers from eight European countries have been certified. The purpose of this certification training is to introduce participants to the domain of supervision in the area of helping professions. The students acquire basic theoretical and knowledge of supervision. This provides the necessary foundation for the practice of supervision skills and techniques. The certification program includes participation in the training “Basics of Supervision in Helping Professions”, and extensive assessment and pre-requisites. Successful completion of all requirements leads to recognition as a Certified Supervision Professional (CSP). More details about the CSP certification could be found at <http://www.europeanbcc.eu/supervision/>.

Another noteworthy observation came from the Career Consultants and from the students (while they were experiencing counseling-like interactions with their client during the case they had to prepare). They were feeling poorly equipped to respond to the mental health issues associated to the career situations their clients experienced. The feedback came especially from the ones who had an educational and professional background outside of the helping professions. As the GCDF training programs were either embedded in Education or Management programs in universities or offered as independent courses by training providers in business settings, some of the trainers around Europe had little to no background in mental health.

As a result of this increasing need, a training program called Mental Health Facilitator (MHF) was integrated within the GCDF certification structure. The training is not aimed to offer a certification of any kind after completion, but it is designed to provide a set of first-response intervention skills to any lay person who might intervene in situations when no other mental health help is available. The program design is based on a set of basic skills is very versatile and prepares the participant for first intervention in a multicultural and multidisciplinary context. The program was created as the result of collaboration with an international team of experts from helping professions and related fields (EBCC, 2014c).

The MHF curriculum covers the following core competencies:

- Helping skills
- Mental stress, distress and disorders
- Disaster/trauma response
- Community resources
- Referral to other providers

In Europe, the training is of interest for people who are already active in a professional field and who desire to adjust their competency profile and improve it by adding mental health related skills. The MHF specialist could work as a GCDF or can come from outside of the program and work in any type of public or private agency where there is interaction with public or customers (schools and universities, hospitals or other types of health facilities, in nongovernmental organizations, disaster response organizations, etc.) (EBCC, 2014c).

More details about the MHF program could be found at <http://www.europeanbcc.eu/mhf/>. Both the CSP certification and the MHF training were adopted as requirements for the trainers and as optional continuing education modules for the career consultants GCDF.

It is interesting to observe how an educational program in the field of career development has helped participants in their journeys to build professional awareness, created opportunities for them to contribute to the profession, and to become active agents in shaping the profile of the program.

One of the most interesting reactions to this program was related to the public's response to the obligation of signing for an Ethical Code and to the concept of a certificate which had an expiration date. Although the terms "diploma" and "certification" are used interchangeably, the philosophy is totally different (EBCC, 2014a).

With very few exceptions (the UK is among them), all the career related programs in existence at that time in Europe were actually diploma-style – meaning that the diploma/certificate offered after the completion did not have an expiration date. Therefore, the public was not familiar with the concepts of continuing education and recertification in the career development field. Traditional Europe was offering diplomas which were good for life in various professional fields. The current results, reflected in the growing number of GCDF certified professionals around Europe, demonstrate that the public *can* actually adjust, learn and pass a very complicated process of mentality change in a relatively short time.

Offering the best combination of rigor and flexibility, the GCDF credential was designed by a team of international experts in the field of career development, and is continually modified to include the latest innovations in theory and in practice.

The GCDF Career Consultants have expertise in working with their clients in the competency areas of helping skills, labor market information and resources, assessment, employability, program management and implementation, technology, consultation, and public

relations among other competencies incorporated in the GCDF training. For educational programs, for business and industry, and for governments, the competencies possessed by GCDFs better ensure that people are treated fairly, that financial and physical resources are optimized, and that economies develop and grow. It is probable that the most significant difference when comparing the three credentials is the presence of a Code of Ethics; each career consultant GCDF has to formally agree to follow in his or her practice (EBCC, 2014a).

GCDFs facilitate the career development of people in virtually every setting, including career centers, schools and colleges, vocational rehabilitation agencies, business and industry, and employment services. Depending on their work setting, GCDFs hold a variety of titles including career consultant, career advisor, case manager, job search trainer, placement specialist, intake interviewer, school-to-work coordinator, and career resource manager.

The GCDF training also has the added benefit of providing a core 120-hour training curriculum that can be adapted to better fit local economic, educational, social and political realities. Since it was first introduced in 1997 in the United States of America, the GCDF program has been implemented in 16 countries. The GCDF training is offered in flexible formats—120 hours in the classroom or a classroom/distance learning combination model, making it one of the most adaptable trainings available in Europe (EBCC, 2014a).

GCDF certification is truly European and international in that the program is built around core competencies and country specific competencies (competencies in both categories have been endorsed by career development experts throughout the world). The GCDF program has been implemented in nine European countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Macedonia, Portugal, Romania and Turkey). The GCDF training is engineered to be flexible so that it can accommodate national differences. GCDF program administrators work with local career development experts to construct a framework that is rigorous enough to assure quality and yet is still adjustable in order to meet local demands.

At this moment, we can estimate that there are more than 2,000 GCDF career consultants certified in Europe and almost 20,000 internationally (EBCC, 2014a).

GCDF Competencies

The GCDF Career Consultant facilitates clients' access to the labor market information and career development opportunities, offers support to clients

in their effort to increase career self-awareness, and assists them in making informed decisions. The 12 competency areas promoted by the program are flexible at the level of the sub-competencies; they have encountered modifications in each country the program was adopted. This was in accordance with the recommendations offered by a local team of experts, coordinated at the European level by European Board for Certified Counselors (EBCC, 2014b). The competencies with explanations include:

Career Development Models. Understand career development theories, models and techniques as they apply to life-long development, gender, age, and ethnic background.

Helping Skills. The GCDFs are proficient in the basic career facilitating process while including productive interpersonal relationships.

Diverse Populations. The GCDFs recognize special needs of various groups and adapt services to meet their needs.

Assessment. The GCDFs comprehend and use (under supervision) informal career development assessments in order to support the client to learn about their skills, to make informed decisions and for career planning purposes. There are countries where formal assessment is not available to career practitioners, by law – usually in the places where counseling is not a recognized profession per se. This is the reason why the GCDFs are very well trained for informal evaluation; they also have detailed information about formal assessment and about the most common tool used in the field – therefore they are ready (and encouraged) to work in teams with their colleagues from other helping professions.

Technology. The GCDFs demonstrate high level skills in using technology for communication reasons and for career development related computer applications.

Labor Market Information and Resources. The GCDFs demonstrate skills in accessing labor market and occupational information. They are able to use current resources available at the national and European level.

Employability Skills. The career consultants know job search strategies and placement techniques, especially in work with specific groups.

Training Clients and Peers. The career consultants GCDF prepare and develop materials for training programs and presentations.

Program Management and Implementation.

The GCDFs understand programs and their implementation, and work as a liaison in collaborative relationships.

Promotion and Public Relations. Career consultants have the skills to promote career development programs with staff and supervisors.

Consultation. The GCDFs accept suggestions for performance improvement from peers, consultants and supervisors.

Ethical and Legal Issues. The GCDFs follow GCDF Code of Ethics and keep current with labor market related legislative regulations (Szilagyi, 2008a).

The content is structured on seven modules, organized according to the core competencies and the country specific areas, as follows:

1. Career Development: Theory and Information: The introductory chapter covers definitions and career development models, theories (structural and developmental), roles of the career consultant, with an emphasis on adult development issues and diversity.

2. Communication Skills and the Helping Process: The second part presents the helping skills and a model of career intervention (similar to a career counseling model: relationship building, assessment, empowerment and goal setting, intervention and termination, follow up and reinforcement), basic communication skills, developmental and environmental conditions of the counseling process.

3. Assessment Process: Career Counseling is focused on informal instruments and it is delivered in an experiential way. Students learn to administrate informal evaluation instruments, to integrate results within a final report and to deliver feedback in an appropriate manner.

4. Training Process and Career Development Programs: This chapter covers principles and methods of training, designing career development, programs encouraging participation, behavior management, presentation skills, and elements of speech.

5. Goal Setting and Action Plans: This includes decision making process, assisting clients in the goal setting process, job search strategies, promotion and public relations for career consultants.

6. Career and Labor Market Information: Key concepts of the labor market, economic and structural changes, labor market policies, unemployment, global trends, and local issues.

7. Ethical and Legal Issues: Review of standards of practice, the GCDF relationship, confidentiality, professional responsibility, relationships with other

professionals, the rights and responsibilities of clients, ethical standards for the Global Career Development Facilitator, and supervision (Szilagy, 2008b).

Implementation

At this moment, the GCDF training is embedded in master's programs, offered as an independent course in universities, delivered by private training institutions, and is available for lay people or for career practitioners that have never had a chance to complete a coherent educational program in the field. The GCDF Career Consultant could perform any kind of career development activities in a variety of social environments – from schools and universities to corporations and non-governmental agencies.

An added benefit of this credential is a well-constructed portability policy. Any career consultant carrying a valid GCDF certificate could apply for a GCDF certificate in another country, following several steps and under the supervision of program administrators in both countries and at the European level. One of the steps refers to the completion of an approved GCDF supplemental training that includes the identified country-specific areas of the GCDF core competencies. In the end, the respective professional will carry two certificates; one for each country, proving expertise in country-specific competency sets related to the two different cultural, legal and economic spaces (EBCC, 2014a).

According to Stanciu (2013), a quantitative study of the Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) Romania certification program has been recently finalized. The research project had two main goals: first was to assess the GCDF Romania training program and the second to conduct a job analysis of the Romanian GCDF Career Consultants. The framework used was

...provided by two of the four levels of Donald L. Kirkpatrick's training evaluation model: learning and behavioral. The learning level was evaluated by assessing the self-reported preparedness ratings of the participants to perform GCDF tasks after their participation in the GCDF Romania training. The behavioral level was assessed by investigating the frequency with which participants apply GCDF tasks in their career consulting work and the importance of these tasks in helping their clients." (Stanciu, 2013, p. 8-11)

The conclusions of this research project, the first of its kind within the GCDF community in Europe, represent a valuable source of information for the

program administrators, in their effort to permanently adjust the GCDF Romania curriculum. In addition, it created a model which could be implemented in other GCDF countries interested in assessing the work related-behaviors of the career consultants.

Benefits of the Program and Areas of Intervention

GCDF career consultants are trained to intervene in a variety of social settings, from schools, career centers and universities, to public institutions, business and non-governmental agencies. The GCDFs have the skills to interact in individual and group settings, and also to act as a liaison between the clients and other experts, groups and institutions. This is an effort to access the existing community resources or, when those are not available, to develop the necessary connections in order to assist the clients. GCDFs could work with high school pupils, university students, youth and elderly, short and long-term unemployed adults, women and other disadvantaged types of population interested in career development or simply in need for career tools.

Data collected from the career consultants confirm the statistics published at European level in relationship with one of the most disadvantaged category of population – youth. It would be actually difficult not to focus on this part of the population; according to a study published by the European Social Fund (under European Commission) in 2011, "more than one third of all young people in the EU between the age of 18 and 24 are not in education, employment or training (NEETs). One fifth of children do not have basic standards of literacy and numeracy" and "one out of five children up to age of 17 lives in families at risk of poverty, many of them in families with young parents" (European Commission, 2011, p. 11).

The economic reconstruction in Europe, while confronting the reality of an ageing workforce, depends upon today's adolescents, young professionals. They represent one of the most valuable resources that exist and deserve total commitment from policy makers and experts in the education, career and economy sectors. As one of the most vulnerable population categories, with almost a quarter of them incapable of finding employment, it is obvious how severely their lives have been impacted by the economic crisis.

In 2012, youth unemployment in Europe almost doubled the level of the general unemployment (10.4 %) among which 32 % are long-term unemployed. A total of approximately 7.5 million young Europeans aged 15-24 cannot be found either in employment or in education and training. The highest levels of unemployment are located in Greece and Spain, with more than 55 % of the

young population. Only three countries show youth unemployment levels under 10 % - Austria, Germany and the Netherlands (Tibu, 2013). Born in a university and then implemented in other agencies, the GCDF program educates professionals who, besides equally serving all categories of clients in need, also carry the mission to support the young generations in the difficult endeavor of building their own careers, as well as the society marked by severe economic difficulties.

However, young people are not the only ones who become engaged in an interaction with a career consultant. In private business area, the majority of clients are indeed young adults. Even still, clientele comprised of adults and even baby boomers acting in management positions and close to retirement. In such settings, the work is mostly concentrated on selection and recruitment, promotion and professional development, building strong work skills, career development, etc.

Discussion

One of the current challenges the GCDF administrators in Europe face is the lack of empirical research (other than the Romanian study). The need for professional development is also clear. GCDF administrators in the countries and at the regional level

are working together to build common standards for their professionals as well as to permanently adjust the access of educational opportunities for GCDF specialists. To offer an example, group intervention skills are not well covered in the curriculum, therefore in Romania and Bulgaria separate workshops and trainings were organized as continuing education modules.

The GCDF credential has demonstrated to be more flexible than the traditional career educational programs delivered by the universities or than the vocational/career trainings available on the market. GCDF seems to be a possible response to the need of certifications which can be recognized by the industry and can be portable across borders.

As an alternative to mainstream career guidance and development programs in Europe, the GCDF has shown to be a useful response to the public's need for immediate and concrete support in the career development field. The program offers skills for the entire spectrum of interventions under the umbrella of career development, including basic career information, and career guidance. Considering the supplemental elements of GCDF—with its additional mental health training and quality expert supervision from professionals trained under common standards—the European program undoubtedly has potential to serve as a model for other countries.

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