

HOW DO WE REACH VULNERABLE GROUPS FOR CAREER GUIDANCE?

An exploration
of literature
and practice in five
European countries



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AUTHOR

Marlies Elderenbosch, Daniëlla van Uden, Jessie van de Haterd, Eva-Maria Ternité

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INTRODUCTION



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and problem definition

The Netherlands is currently seeing a great many new trends in vocational guidance and lifelong learning, 'such as the STAP scheme ('STAP Regeling'), NL continues to learn ('NL leert door') and professional development budgets ('the individuele leerrekeningen').

Despite the fact that there are so many options available to people, only few people seem to be aware of them, and many of the people who do avail themselves of these options belong to societal groups who are less in need of a learning budget – for instance, because they are able to finance training independently, or because their profession will continue to be relevant for a long time to come. In short, those people who are most in need of these schemes are least likely to use them. This may be due to the fact that the schemes are hard to find, or alternatively, it may be due to the fact that many people don't realise they need to update their skills or be retrained. Which raises the question: how to reach people who, for whatever reason, are not investing in their own professional development?

Objective: On the international level, it is clear that several countries are dealing with similar dilemmas. We wish to use this exploratory study to identify the methods and approaches used by various countries to reach various target groups, in hopes that the Netherlands will be able to learn from these examples.

1.2 Research question

What is important in reaching AND motivating vulnerable people to work on career development and lifelong learning, and how are various other European countries going about this?

In order to answer this question, we formulated five sub-questions:

1. According to existing studies, what is important to vulnerable people (and reaching these people) in vocational guidance and lifelong learning initiatives?
2. What groups of vulnerable people have various countries identified?
3. How are they approaching these target groups, and what is the reach of their channels?
4. How does the aforementioned categorisation affect communications and the reach of the initiatives? Is there any room for exceptions and programmes that transcend the individual categories?
5. What methods do they use to motivate people to spring into action, and what are the results of these methods?

1.3 Research method

First we conducted a review of available literature on the subject of the aforementioned questions. To answer sub-question 1, we used target group studies and evaluations previously performed by CINOP (e.g. about the STAP scheme and functional illiteracy, as well as information obtained from previous Euroguidance interviews, e.g. a Scottish TV campaign), UNESCO, etc.

More specifically, we looked into public information campaigns. To answer Sub-Question 2, in order to identify the target groups identified by other countries, we made a point of asking about groups that are important to the Dutch context (e.g. people with poor language skills, job seekers, less educated people, people from a migrant background, etc.).

We then interviewed several experts from five EU member states about their experiences in their respective countries. These interviews were informed by the aforementioned research questions.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

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2. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

2.1 Lifelong learning

To many people, it is self-evident that we must keep learning. After all, the world is changing, and we should change with it. As Charles Darwin said, there's a survival of the fittest out there. In the case of the labour market, it's not about the extinction or continued existence of mankind, but rather about the continued existence of professions. Technological developments and the changes that come with them will cause certain professions to disappear. Furthermore, the labour market is changing because of societal changes. If working adults wish to thrive and survive amidst all these changes, they will have to go along with the changes.

Some forty years ago, developments such as birth control pills resulted in greater social freedom (Denniston et al., 1982). There was more room for different lifestyles, meaning more people were able to participate in the labour market – people who used to be unwilling or unable to participate. Jobs changed, and birth rates stopped growing quite so quickly. According to Denniston et al. (1982), the idea that switching to a different career is a natural part of the development of an adult's life was not accepted until recently. We particularly see this in the lives of women, workers whose training is no longer directly relevant to the labour market, less-educated workers and older workers. Workers who are not able to develop their skills during the course of their career are relatively likely to see their skills become obsolete (Cedefop, 2012).

Even now, national and local authorities and organisations are trying very hard to give adults an incentive to keep learning and updating their skills, so as to allow them to keep up with the ever-changing labour market. They mainly focus on groups that are at risk of falling behind and being left out. These people are categorised as follows: 'older people', 'young mothers',

'rural populations', 'low-literate people', 'job seekers', 'vulnerable people', 'people from a migrant background', 'people of low socioeconomic status', 'less-educated people', etc. According to McGivney (1993), these are also the people who are least likely to attend training sessions and workshops. Financial resources and initiatives are being made available to people who fall in these categories, so as to allow as many people as possible to join in, stick around and develop their skills. Policy-makers are trying to remove barriers to the best of their ability, so they are establishing initiatives open to anyone, free of charge. Nevertheless, we are not reaching enough people in the aforementioned target groups of vulnerable people.

For instance, if we take a closer look at the group of low-literate people, we will see that there are major differences between the people who make up this group. Low-literates may be older people, or people from a migrant background, or people who left school without graduating. There are various shades of grey in a picture that is often considered black and white, which makes it hard to find and reach 'typical' low-literate persons and get them to commit to professional development. After all, what works for one person may not be effective with another person. There is no such thing as a 'typical' low-literate person. This may sound obvious, but in actual fact, policy-makers and education institutions do often take such a black-and-white approach to the issue.

For instance, in efforts to recruit people for lifelong learning initiatives and in allocating financial resources to a particular target group, it is often impossible to distinguish between the various sub-groups and run several different campaigns at the same time, as financial resources tend to be limited. As a result, those campaigns that are launched tend to be targeted at a wide range of people, meaning that not all intended target groups can relate to the message. This then results in many people in the target groups ending up not using the opportunities for professional development that have been made available to them. Those who CAN relate to the message tend to be better educated and more naturally inclined to attend training courses and use opportunities for development, and they know where to look for grants and financial incentives. As a result, the available budget is used up sooner than intended, and the money does not go to the persons who would most benefit from it, both financially and because their position in the labour market is precarious.

Sample section or long-term perspective

Government agencies are trying very hard to find ways to help job seekers find work, encourage workers to update their skills and ensure that workers' basic skills (literacy, numeracy and digital skills) are up to scratch (2F Referentiekader Taal en Rekenen, Meijerink, 2009). At the same time, we are observing a trend towards more enquiry-based work.

The questions being asked are increasingly along the lines of: what motivates the target group and the individuals making up this group? What are people's motives and triggers that will get them to learn things and develop skills? The answers to these questions are not uniform, as they largely depend on people's personal circumstances. Do they have children? What kinds of diplomas, degree certificates and skills do they have? Are they looking for a different job or trying to get a promotion in their current job? The answers also depend on whether people know what kinds of organisations and resources they can turn to in order to start working on their professional development. Things that may constitute a barrier to learning to some people will not constitute a barrier to other people. Take, for instance, people's digital skills – they need those to be able to apply for a professional development grant under the STAP scheme.

One encouraging assumption by Carpentieri (2014) is that a person's motivation (or lack thereof) today is a poor indicator of the likelihood that someone will participate in the future. After all, the fact that a person does not have any money today (for example, because they are a student) does not mean that they will still be in the same position five years from now. New doors may open. Many things change over the course of a person's life. People's level of participation fluctuates because their motivations, interests, opportunities and obstacles change, as well. Several researchers agree that there is a wide range of adults who each experience their own obstacles, which depend on their cultural background, socioeconomic status, gender, level of education, age, level of motivation, etc., all of which change over the course of their lives - among other reasons, because their obligations change (Wonacott, 2001; Kerka, 2005; Comings, 2007; Petty and Thomas, 2014; Carpentieri, 2014,



Barriers to learning can be related to both internal and external factors (Denniston et al., 2014). Internal factors are often related to psychological considerations prompted by changes in people's lives or in the lives of their family, such as a divorce, changing interests, illness or parenthood. External factors are related to economical or technological changes or job satisfaction levels. In short, if a person is unwilling or unable to learn, that is often due to events taking place in their life. As far as that is concerned, it does not really matter to which target group a person is assigned; the aforementioned changes to an adult's life take place in all adult lives, although certain factors will affect certain motives or barriers to learning, such as having fewer financial resources when you are unemployed, or not enjoying attending school when you are less educated (Ananiadou et al., 2004). Furthermore, background-related differences may accumulate over the years (Carpentieri, 2014). 'Disadvantaged individuals are more likely to be put at a significant cumulative disadvantage during their lives' (Blossfeld et al., 2014). In other words, if a person does not receive enough help, they may be unemployed, live in a disadvantaged neighbourhood and have debt problems on top of being low-literate. We need to realise that the high incidence of low-literacy in people who have debt problems is a vicious circle, and that it results in an accumulation of obstacles.

Nevertheless, policy-makers must be aware of the fact that assigning people to certain categories may grant us an insight in potential obstacles, but at the same time, we must keep in mind that an assignment to a particular category cannot predict what a person's inner motives are at that particular moment and what actual obstacles they may be dealing with. In line with the foregoing, Ward and Edwards (2002) argue that people do not particularly wish to achieve a particular level of literacy or numeracy per se, but are actually driven by practical considerations, such as a wish to get better at their job so that they can get a different job or a pay rise, help their children to do well at school or gain some self-confidence.

In this exploratory study, we will analyse opportunities from the perspective of individual motivations and obstacles. We assume that when people are highly motivated, they are more willing to overcome obstacles and that therefore, experiments involving communications based on motivations are more likely to help us reach the various intended target groups, because they are better able to relate to the message.

Motives and motivation

Motives are about the reason why people do certain things, and what motivates them to try and achieve certain goals. Clear goals are a major motivating factor that helps people persevere. So is actively monitoring their progress towards attaining their goals (Comings et al., 2011). Motives are generated by motivation, the will to do something or achieve something. People's intrinsic motivation depends on three basic needs being met: competence, autonomy and connectedness (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

- The need for competence revolves around the feeling and belief that you have the skills and qualities needed to perform well or be able to learn things;
- Autonomy relates to the ability to make choices oneself and act independently;
- Connectedness is about accepted and appreciated relations with others and the sense that you are not alone in this, but that you can ask other people in your life for help if needed.

The literature on the subject has presented us with a wide variety of motives, as outlined below.

Social proximity and connectedness

Personal and social objectives tend to outweigh economic ambitions. For instance, people want to learn because they want to become better parents or grandparents, or give their own children better opportunities than they had themselves (Carpentieri et al., 2011). One example provided by is that older people are often motivated to improve their digital skills because they are experiencing a social divide at work or within their family. In addition to family-related motivating factors, Carpentieri (2014) also cites studies that show the importance of social proximity and connectedness while attending a training course. The social aspects of a course help people participate and make them feel more self-confident.

Curiosity & personal growth

Carpentieri (2014) identifies several factors that may positively affect a person's motivation, such as a wish for personal development (be it personal, social or business-related).

Roberts et al. (2005) bring up the development of a new professional identity. Carpentieri (2014) mentions that learning is a stepping stone to other, new learning objectives. Carpentieri (2014) also cites Wigfield and Guthrie (1997), who argued that curiosity, engagement, importance and enjoying a good challenge are key predictors of how much information people will seek to find, and how in depth they are prepared to go. According to Carpentieri (2014), it is vital that learning be done in a step-by-step fashion, so that learners are presented with challenges at the right level of difficulty, can experience success multiple times and so learn to grow more self-confident. He also points out that individual learning needs must be taken into account. This implies responding to individual requests for learning, thus allowing people to receive tailor-made training.

Economic stability and security

Economic stability and security also play a role in adults' motivation, says Carpentieri (2014). For instance, people can be motivated by the thought of receiving a pay rise, and job security has a stabilising effect. On the other hand, Wolf et al. (2010) found that motivation is influenced less by economic motivators than by a wish to learn new skills, be more efficient in one's job and feel more self-confident when performing one's duties.

Opportunities for learning on the job

Carpentieri (2014) mentions two types of programmes that are more likely to attract people who generally do not take part in such activities: training on the job (particularly men and older people who have not attended such courses before) and family-based training (parents), after which course attendees tend to be more receptive to further education. Wolf and Evans (2011) confirm this. They, too, found that learning on the job can provide an incentive to people who would not normally attend training courses. Vorhaus et al. (2011) support this thesis and argue that learning on the job may have an impact on basic skills, particularly if employees seek to attain a higher level of job satisfaction. This can only be achieved if the right conditions are created, i.e.: 1) voluntary attendance, 2) many opportunities for contact and a decent amount of time to study, 3) ensuring there are both formal and informal opportunities to acquire new skills. It should be obvious that this will require some effort on the employer's part. It is clear that learning on the job is

useful, but getting employees to learn does involve giving them enough time for learning on the job.

Learning environment and barriers to learning

One interesting insight shared by Christophel and Gorham (1995) is the fact that learners view motivation as a problem of oneself, while regarding demotivation as a 'teacher' problem, for example, because of things happening in the learning environment'. Petty and Thomas (2014) observe that various studies have shown that motivation plays an important part, but that demotivation is at least equally important. Even people who are motivated to begin with can get demotivated due to barriers to learning. In this study, we distinguish three kinds of barriers, based on studies published by Carpentieri (2014); Petty and Thomas (2014); and Porter et al. (2005): dispositional barriers, situational barriers and institutional barriers.

2.1.1 Dispositional barriers

Self-concept

To many people, particularly adults, learning is a bit of a taboo. People may feel ashamed of what they do not know and may wish to 'hide' the problem (for instance, when it concerns basic skills), because it may be seen as a weakness (Carpentieri, 2014). According to Carpentieri (2014), the 'self-concept' component of motivation (which is to say: 'who do I think I am?') plays an important part in this. Carpentieri (2014) cites Porter et al. (2005), who call this 'dispositional barriers'. These are barriers that are related to a person's attitude towards learning. For instance, people may have an aversion to reading and writing, and may not be interested in learning these skills. This picture fits within statements found in other studies, such as people who think they are too old to learn (Aldridge and Tuckett, 2007), or who cannot seem themselves benefitting from these skills (Rogers, 2004).

Van der Kamp and Boudard (2003) argue that many adults who take a reading skills assessment and receive low scores overestimate their own skills and so are inclined to believe that they don't need any training. Carpentieri (2014) also shows results obtained by

Parsons and Byner (2006), which showed that one in four adults who received low scores wanted to work on improving in this regard, but only one in 25 actually attended a course.

Kerka (2005) and Quigley (1997), too, mention that a willingness to learn is largely determined by things such as people's attitude towards education, self-management, resilience and ability to deal with failure. Kerka (1998) specifically points out that this is important when dealing with vulnerable adults, because they are less self-confident and have lower self-esteem, meaning they are likely to have a negative attitude towards education. Champagne (1987) argues that it is for this reason that vulnerable adults do not have the right skills, information and job-hunting skills. This is why Comings (2007) says it is important to help learners cope with various types of negative and positive experiences.

Mandatory and voluntary participation

Carpentieri (2014) refers to O'Grady and Atkin (2006), who state that people who voluntarily attend training courses have a specific goal in mind, whereas people who are attending a training session because they have to can not see the point or claim it is not necessary, meaning they tend to learn very little (if anything) during the programme. On the other hand, Wolf and Evans (2011) found that voluntary participation in a learning-on-the-job programme helped ensure a higher degree of participation in future learning opportunities. In short, previously conducted studies point to voluntary participation being a major factor in successful learning.

2.1.2 Situational barriers

Family and caregiver duties, financial difficulties, transportation issues, health issues, language barrier, etc.

Carpentieri (2014) identifies a lack of financial resources as a reason why people generally are not willing to attend training courses. Belzer (1998), Wonacott (2001) and Petty and Thomas (2014) also point to situational factors such as getting a job, having to look after children, health crises, financial constraints, legal issues, personal or family circumstances and

transportation issues. Carpentieri (2014) shows that low-literate adults are more likely to experience situational barriers that make it hard for them to participate, such as pregnancy at a young age (Parsons and Byner, 2007) and being a single mother. Carpentieri (2014) mentions that poor reading skills make it hard for migrants to attend classes.

2.1.3 Institutional barriers

Rules and procedures

Thomas and Petty (2014) bring up institutional barriers as well as dispositional and situational ones. For instance, the level of the training courses taught, their location and the attendance and registration (or re-registration) policy. Carpentieri (2014) points out that complex rules and procedures may constitute barriers as well. Denniston et al. (1982) bring up access to financial support through employers or government agencies, and specifically point to a lack of awareness of existing financial support schemes and how to apply for support. Many opportunities to attend classes or skill development courses are only available online, or alternatively, interested parties must apply for a grant through an online portal. This requires digital skills that people with a vocational background and older people, in particular, may struggle with.

2.2 Perseverance

Carpentieri (2014) states that perseverance during a student journey is a major factor when it comes to lifelong learning. This particularly applies to independent and self-directed learning and the ability to start learning when there is a need to do so. For this reason, perseverance is essential both to embark on lifelong learning initiatives and to complete them. In order to keep going, people need motivation at various stages. This is even more true for acquiring basic skills: reading, writing, arithmetic, etc. Such skills involve other dynamics than, say, a brief training course. As Dömyei & Ushioda (2011) phrase it beautifully how reading, writing and calculations are not skills you can develop in one burst of motivation and effort. However, it requires patience, perseverance and constantly renewed motivation

when a long series of hurdles looms and is (hopefully) overcome. The longer a training programme lasts, and the harder it is, the more perseverance it takes to get started on the programme and complete it.

Measurability of perseverance

Petty and Thomas rightfully emphasise that policy-makers tend to focus a great deal on the retention and graduation rates of 'vulnerable students.' According to Petty and Thomas, this poses a challenge to many training programmes. They believe that high retention and graduation rates often boil down to perseverance.

Petty and Thomas do not provide a definition of perseverance, but do present several metrics by which it can be measured – for instance, whether students show up (Kerka, 1998), or whether students decide to drop out completely (Ponton et al., 2005), or whether any outcomes are due to interactions between the individual and the institute, or whether the learner has attained their learning objectives (Comings, 2007).

Impact on perseverance

Several factors may help learners cultivate such perseverance and keep going because they have these objectives and motivations. Dispositional, situational and institutional barriers must be reduced to the maximum extent possible. The focus should be on reducing negative forces and promoting positive forces. For instance, Carpentieri (2014) points out that studies show that child daycare help, transportation and helping learners gain access to social services can make a difference in strengthening learners' perseverance.

Carpentieri (2014) discusses two extensive evaluations of training programmes in which the effects of removing barriers were demonstrated. The first programme was the Finnish NOSTE programme, which ran from 2003 to 2009. Four success factors were identified in the evaluation, to wit: 1) courses taught free of charge; 2) outreach activities - knowledge-sharing activities advertised to a wide audience, such as social media posts, workshops, training sessions and information days (De Focus, 2021) – specific focus on workshops; 3) increasing the number of courses available locally; and 4) allowing learners to study and work at the same time. A second programme discussed by Carpentieri (2014) was the Swedish

'Knowledge Lift', which ran for five years. This programme was less successful in reaching all the target groups, but even so, the researchers identified elements that increased participation levels, such as grants and paid leave.

The trainer's role

Reaching potential learners is one thing, but retaining them is quite another. Comings (2007) and Kerka (1998) emphasise things such as the role played by trainers. They must provide high-quality training and be able to contact learners of their own accord (since not all adults will do so of their own accord), determine what the learner needs to learn and provide follow-up, particularly when people are in danger of dropping out, have actually dropped out or wish to resume the programme. This requires monitoring, reporting and clear and personalised approaches to learning for adults (Kerka, 2005; Wonacott, 2001).

It is vital that trainers and coaches be mindful of any negative experiences learners may have had with learning in the past (Quigley, 1995). Furthermore, Tinto (1999) points out that learners must have a good idea of what to expect, while Tagg (2003) states that the learning environment must be motivating. The latter feat can be achieved by ensuring that teachers have a friendly, respectful and helpful attitude towards learners, and that they come off as well informed and are willing to provide instructions at learners' own level (Kerka, 1998), or by establishing a bond between the programme and the learners by means of activities that are not directly related to the instructions (Comings, 2007). It is crucial that learners receive help understanding the programme and that they be made aware of what practical expectations there are, and that they build a relationship with staff, set achievable goals for themselves and deal with any circumstances that might constitute barriers for them (Comings, 2007; Wonacott, 2001).

Advice and guidance

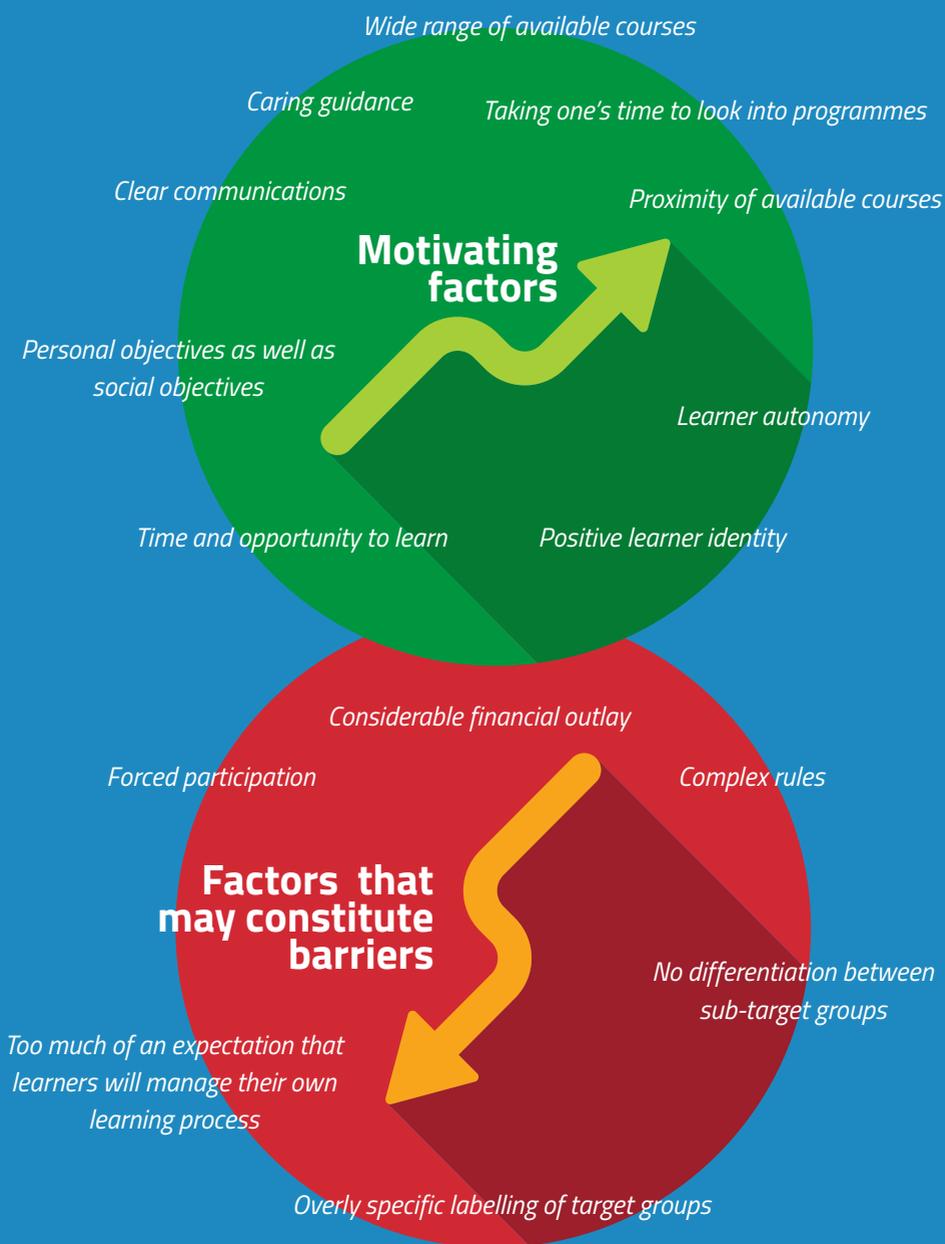
Petty and Thomas (2014) point out that it is vital that adult learners look into appropriate courses that will guide them towards training programmes. The main focus here should be on those who need assistance in this process (Quigley, 1995). For instance, looking into programmes, guidance and advice given early on in the process all help make the

learning experience successful (Kerka, 2005). Those first few weeks are generally the most important because most attendees tend to drop out at the start, generally because the programme is not right for them or because they did not properly look into it, or because they did not feel sufficiently welcome or felt no sense of connection (Comings and Cuban, 2007; Quigley, 1995; Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Thomas and Petty (2014) bring up the fact that people need the right mindset and a motivating learning environment to be able to deal with adversity and work towards success (McClelland, 2001). Therefore, it is essential for both the coach and the learner that the trainer have a good understanding of the learner's attitude and behaviour (Wendover, 1995), as this will help the coach create challenges and give the learner validation (Wise, 2003). In this way, learners will have more self-management and a better sense that their goals are achievable (Comings, 2007). Learners must be given the feeling that their studies will be successful, by regularly acknowledging that they are learning and showing role models, and by pointing out that learners are capable of learning and competent (Ryan and Deci, 2000). For instance, St. Clair (2006) found that learners who were able to adopt a positive learner identity were more likely to be highly persevering.

It is vital that this be offered from the start of the process to the end, and that people be kept involved even outside the context of the learning initiatives. Carpentieri (2014) also argues that it is vital that learners receive support during the critical periods when learners are more likely to drop out, e.g. during the first three weeks of a course (Quigley, 2000) or during their placement (Martinez, 2001; Lopez et al, 2007).

Denniston et al. (1982), too, point out that it is important that learners be provided with information on the labour market, such as knowledge of what kinds of jobs and training programmes are out there, how they fit in with their skills, what kinds of risks and costs are involved and how to make plans covering all of this. Advice and guidance are essential in this process, to help people find information and provide them with emotional support. The authors also mention the importance of proper access to such services through libraries and education institutions.



SEEING WHAT THINGS LOOK LIKE ON THE GROUND

3



3. SEEING WHAT THINGS LOOK LIKE ON THE GROUND

Method

Euroguidance Netherlands conducted interviews with fellow career orientation and guidance officers from five countries or regions who work at a national or provincial vocational guidance centre, generally in a coordinating position. The interviewees came from the following countries/regions: Slovenia, Scotland, Germany, Flanders and Ireland.

A conversation script was followed in the interviews, but not every question was answered in each conversation. When a question was not answered, it was not included in the report. In some cases, the interviewees later provided additional information, on top of the answers they gave in the interview. Where relevant to the answers to the research questions, such information will be included below. The results are presented on a country-by-country basis.

After the answers to our questions, we will formulate several recommendations, based on the results of our review of the available literature and the interviews we conducted.

3.1 Slovenia

1. What are the particular challenges of your job?

The main challenge is reaching people who are not part of the formal education system. Once a pupil drops out, they disappear from view. Drop-outs are not recorded, and there are no regular courses for them. However, several individual initiatives have been set up to try and get these pupils to return to school. Those aged 20-30 generally do not report to agencies that keep track of unemployed people.

Another issue to be solved is how to connect career orientation and guidance professionals, employers and employees. As part of this endeavour, brief modular workshops have been taught since 2012, e.g. about how to write a proper CV. When the pandemic began, we very quickly switched to online workshops. A great deal of information on this subject is exchanged between the various regions.

2. What are the target categories defined in Slovenia?

Vulnerable people are sub-categorised as follows: Roma people, older people trying to find a job and people who receive unemployment benefits. Children are not sub-categorised. Career orientation and guidance is provided as part of the regular school curriculum. Career orientation and guidance officers working at schools can invoke labour market legislation at any time, as the law stipulates that pupils must be offered career orientation and guidance – be it as part of the curriculum or otherwise. This being the case, there are organisations that provide employment services. Universities are not required by law to have career orientation and guidance officers, but every university has a career development centre, and they do a good job. They do not sub-categorise target groups, but they do pay special attention to students or alumni with social issues.

3. How do you ensure that people use the courses on offer?

All registered job seekers must attend a vocational guidance consultation after 14 days unemployment. The consultants provide various types of on-the-job training, many of which are free of charge. Clients also receive information on the opportunities available to them in the formal education system. Many of them are incentivised by this. Exact figures are unknown.

4. How do you ensure that information on career development opportunities makes its way to schools?

All primary and secondary schools have a career orientation and guidance officer. Secondary school representatives visit primary schools in their region to introduce themselves, and a 'school market' is held once every year. In addition, once a year a national career development day is organised during which all information on this subject is provided:

what do the various jobs entail? Pupils' parents tell pupils about their jobs. And needless to say, information is provided on vocational programmes and degree programmes. The situation is similar to the one we have in the Netherlands.

There is a specific project for older people: the Slovenian Fund for the Development of Older Employees. People belonging to this group are eligible for a student grant. Candidates for this grant must be over the age of 45.

5. How does the categorisation of particular target groups affect communications?

That is hard to say, because there is no monitoring. There is a special website for adolescents, as well as one for Roma people.

5a. What channels do you use to reach your target groups?

Mostly online channels. The website offers a great deal of information, also for people who are not registered job seekers. There are online counselling services that can be accessed free of charge, even by people who do have a job.

6. How do you motivate the people in these target groups to spring into action?

By offering as many courses as possible, and by catering specifically to all the different sub-categories. The career orientation and guidance officers all have different backgrounds: counsellors, psychologists, professionals specialising in the integration of people from a migrant background, youth workers or rehabilitation professionals. The initial career orientation and guidance officer serves as the case manager who refers the client to one of the aforementioned specialists. However, this method does involve a risk of the case manager losing contact with the client, which is why it is important that there be several moments for feedback scheduled between the client and the case manager.

7. Which groups have you found easy to reach? Which are hard to reach?

We find it relatively easy to reach adolescents who still attend school or have already graduated from secondary school. It is difficult to reach Roma people, since many of them no longer attend school and the career orientation and guidance officers don't contact people outside the school setting.

8. Do you monitor how successful your campaigns are?

No.

9. Do you have any tips and/or recommendations?

Regular schools (primary, secondary and tertiary) do a good job of referring clients with functional impairment to reintegration officers or career development guidance.

3.2 Scotland

1. What are the particular challenges of your job?

There are no particular challenges. However, there are target groups that are harder to reach than others.

2. What are the target categories defined in Scotland?

We focus on career development for people who have a job. Last December our 'service for adult customers' went live. We will continue developing this project until 2023. PACE: 'partnership action for continuous education'. A very effective network was established between local groups, small-scale initiatives, lifelong learning service providers, health and wellbeing institutes and social partners. The PACE project is aimed at less educated employees in low-paying jobs, many of whom have not received any training for several years.

Another group that receives attention as part of the lifelong learning programme is migrants. This mainly involves looking at how their skills can be appreciated in the Scottish situation. The 'Big Plus' project is designed to boost literacy and numeracy. It is targeted at several groups of people.

Three personas have been created for target groups. More on this in the answer to Question 5.

3. How do you ensure that people use the initiatives and learning opportunities provided?

The Big Plus partnership is a multi-partner to Skills Development Scotland and Education Scotland, for all levels. They employ vocational guidance consultants who work at job centres. They discuss refresher courses and updating of skills with individual clients. They use a partner network to boost engagement. They promote the use of a CV-writing tool and help clients use it as part of their career development management efforts. This makes for a great stepping stone to beginning to learn. Participants receive numeracy training, are taught how to switch to a different type of job and are helped to apply for financial support for a training programme. There are no links to personas. They try to be user-centred and use personas where possible. They always seek to check whether something makes sense, which is to say: they ask clients what they need. They try to identify the client's problem. They get clients to define their motivations and aspirations.

4. How does the aforementioned target group categorisation affect communications and the reach of the initiatives?

Since we have created personas that provide more insight into how people learn, what they need, and what prompts them to learn and seek to develop their skills, we can develop the right courses for the right people, and also reach people in the right way. The key to doing so is communication; addressing the people you seek to reach in the right language and with the right tone.

5. How do you motivate the people to spring into action?

If you wish to encourage people to spring into action, you must be familiar with their situation and background. This is why we developed personas for several groups, each with their own needs, motivations and aspirations.

- 1 the unexpectedly unemployed (people who have suddenly lost their job). These people are the focus of the PACE project;
- 2 motivated changemakers (proactive, no job, wish to grow, make a career switch);
- 3 on shift for survival (low self-esteem, low value, low self-confidence, no job or a low-paying job, the hardest group to reach).

5a. What kind of results are you getting, and what are the particular motivation triggers?

The personas help us design the services we provide. We do not offer change or outcomes, but try to support our clients. We make sure we develop things properly. The personas are used in all large-scale projects. Client satisfaction surveys may provide some clues as to how to revise the personas.

6. Which groups have you found easy to reach?

We reach the 95% who can be reached. We don't engage in any marketing to reach the remaining 5% of the target group, but we use our network for that.

7. Do you monitor how successful your campaigns are?

We conduct client satisfaction surveys, but we don't monitor how successful our personas are. Clients give feedback and there is an online tool. We gather a great deal of information from the moment clients first register. Feedback helps us improve personalised/individualised scenarios. We conducted a large-scale survey in order to create the personas. Recruitment agencies were involved in the process, as well.

8. You distinguish between online campaigns and face-to-face campaigns. Why?

Online services reach more people more easily and more cheaply. They have enormous reach, and people have access wherever they are in the country, 24/7. The quality of offer is high and the services are highly accessible. Those who do not have access to a digital device can access the services through a library or community centre.

If a client wishes to consult anyone, it can be done online or in person. We offer hybrid services.

9. Do you have any tips and/or recommendations?

Use personas to ensure that you can take a user-centred approach.

3.3 Germany

1. What are the particular challenges of your job?

Our primary target group is people aged 17-20. As soon as pupils leave school, they are hard to reach. As long as they are still attending school, it's not difficult to reach them because our right to do so is enshrined in law. Three hundred thousand school leavers cannot be traced. What are we doing about that? Social media, YouTube, public transport-based campaigns. They work with the Berufsberatung (vocational guidance) team. Every marketing campaign is monitored. As far as the work-study programmes are concerned, they come under the responsibility of the regional Handelskammer. The Handelskammer also administers exams and monitors campaigns.

2. What are the target categories defined in Germany?

- Senior secondary school pupils
- Students attending universities of applied sciences and VET colleges
- Non-pupils (adolescents who should be attending school but are not in any kind of training)
- People from a migrant background
- People with functional impairment
- Mothers
- Gender-sensitive groups
- Parents, guardians, educators

During pupils' final two years in secondary school, all pupils and their parents receive an offer from the Bundesagentur für Arbeit. In addition, there career development guidance for people who have been employed for years and seek to attain further professional development. Interpreters are available for vocational guidance purposes for those migrants who do not yet speak German. However, the Bundesagentur does not offer its clients any German language courses, because these are financed by the Ministry of the Interior. Other target groups defined in Germany include women and people with impairment.

3. How do you ensure that people use the initiatives and learning opportunities provided?

The Bundesagentur employs 4,700 career orientation and guidance officers who go out and meet people. They visit schools, guide pupils and also give presentations at events such as career fairs. In addition, we spend a great deal of money on advertisements in public places, and obviously, we publicise the available services online. This is done on various types of social media, and regularly takes the shape of a targeted campaign. The campaigns run on those media include a QR code that takes visitors to the Arbeitsagentur's website. <https://www.arbeitsagentur.de/bildung> <https://www.arbeitsagentur.de/karriere-und-weiterbildung>

What is noticeable is that clients are presented with short questions formulated in readily understood German. They are then guided to the right information, based on the answers they give. Sometimes they are asked to complete a test. The test is preceded by an explanation as to what to expect from the test. Once a client has answered several questions and taken a test (where relevant), they are referred to the service provider that will be able to help them. In most cases, clients will be granted the opportunity to schedule a face-to-face meeting with an officer, but sometimes they will be given advice online.

4. How does the aforementioned target group categorisation affect communications and the reach of the initiatives?

The campaigns only distinguish between adolescents and adults. No further sub-groups are distinguished. Many of the campaigns are consciously designed to be generic, and interested parties won't find any information that is applicable to them until they actually take a look at the website. It is an interactive way of providing information: clients are invited to answer a few questions (Check-U) and referred to the right services based on the answers provided – see also Question 3 above.

5. How do you motivate the people to spring into action?

There are videos about professions, salaries, future-proofness and flexible work in the labour market for senior secondary school pupils. We take a positive approach to clients: they are invited to show off their potential and options. The Arbeitsagentur website features a tool that can be used to assess a client's competencies.



5a. What kinds of results are you getting, and 5b. What are the particular motivation triggers?

We have no data on this.

6. Which groups have you found easy to reach?

Pupils attending secondary school are the easiest to reach, because they come into contact with an external vocational guidance coach als part of their curriculum.

7. Who is responsible for the information campaigns?

The Bundesagentur and the Ministry of the Interior.

8. Do you monitor how successful your campaigns are?

Yes. As indicated above, the Handelskammer monitors the campaigns.

9. Do you have any tips and/or recommendations?

Don't wait for adolescents to come to you. Be proactive and establish campaigns that will reach them.

Provide examples of people who will be relatable to your target groups in the form of short stories to be shown on your communication channels.

Make sure that all career orientation and guidance officers are in touch with each other and exchange information. In Germany, an online platform was established to allow them to do so: YouConnect.

3.4 Flanders

1. What are the particular challenges of your job?

On the provincial level, the focus is increasingly on work-study programmes, but it's hard to get adolescents interested in these. After all, work-study programmes have a bad reputation, and many adolescents complete these programmes without a qualification. Guiding them towards a job is prioritised, which causes people to drop out. In other words, the policy does not really motivate them.

2. What are the target categories defined in Flanders?

Flanders distinguishes between the following target groups: prisoners, non-native Dutch speakers, job seekers, people who have not received much training and people with poor job prospects. Primary vocational guidance officers try to help everyone, regardless of which group they belong to. We actually try not to categorise people too much, and we are doing a good job of that. Thankfully, our system does not require us to label people, not even for financing purposes.

3. How do you ensure that people use the initiatives and learning opportunities provided?

We work in the Huis van het Leren ('House of Learning'), an institute that is open to everyone. In addition, we teach programmes in prisons and organise online sessions for employment officers, vocational training mentors and people on welfare. In order to provide information, we organise in-person meetings, get word-of-mouth advertising and run campaigns on various social media.

4. How does the aforementioned target group categorisation affect communications and the reach of the initiatives?

We have established a work-study project. Bureau Billy Bonkers was hired to conduct research on how to differentiate between various groups. They are looking at various groups. Teachers, pupils and contextual situations have been classified as types. We are developing type-specific instruments on the basis of these ranges of characteristics, as we wish to avoid implementing a one-size-fits-all policy. We want to use a more refined approach, which will allow us to make refined choices, too.

4a. What kinds of channels do you use to reach your target groups, and how many people are you reaching?

We try to reach our target groups by using all available channels and by repeating the message over and over again. There are many initiatives, steering groups and partnerships offering Dutch-as-a-second-language classes. Het Huis van het Leren focuses on operational duties, while the provincial government tends to focus more on negotiations. They complement each other, which works. We get to see a leverage effect: for instance, initiatives initiated by the provincial government focus on complementary facilities. We run pilot projects that are publicised so as to create a regular framework.

4b. Is there any room for exceptions and programmes that transcend the individual categories?

It is always useful to ask yourself first and foremost: 'What added value will this create for you [non-native Dutch speakers]?' It is important in this regard that your efforts cater to the target group. As far as giving people jobs is concerned, it is useful to look at people's chances in the labour market and to tell people about their options – for instance, by having experienced people who are doing the training programme provide information about said training programme.

5. Which groups have you found easy to reach? Which have you found hard to reach?

It is easy for us to reach prisoners and non-native Dutch speakers who are attending Dutch-as-a-second-language classes. The hard-to-reach groups are the ones who are not registered, such as stay-at-home mothers and chronically ill people. We should be able to reach those through health insurance companies. We are about to start some projects designed to activate these groups, both with regard to learning and with regard to work. However, we do wonder whether it is right to try and get everyone to develop, because that choice should be up to people themselves. In addition, not all people realise that learning and working might change and improve a situation.

6. Do you monitor how successful your campaigns are?

We do not monitor much, because you can only get a fragmented view of the situation. After all, many people refer people to others, which means that the data you get isn't all that accurate.

7. You distinguish between online campaigns and face-to-face campaigns. Why?

Since the pandemic we've had more online meetings, and we've had more people do the online session with the employment intermediary (which takes about an hour). However, we still have about 80% no shows a lot of the time.

8. Is one type of campaign more successful than the other?

It is easy to reach people who are in prison. In Bruges, 50% of prisoners have received guidance in the last four years. People are motivated to use their time in a useful manner, even if they are not necessarily intrinsically motivated to do a particular training programme. However, that doesn't seem to negatively affect the course completion rates.

9. Do you have any tips and/or recommendations?

One recommendation is to influence the policy-making process in such a way that there will be a greater focus on lifelong learning. The financing system should be simplified, too, because right now, it is quite complicated, what with so many income brackets. It is important not to implement too many rules. It should be possible to temporarily stop working on one's career, and courses should be flexible. In addition, it is useful to allow people such as young parents and people who do shift work to complete hybrid training programmes. Furthermore, it is vital that both clients and society take responsibility for lifelong learning. Prior learning should be evaluated and recognised, and the procedure for doing so should be simplified, and bridging programmes should be used. One good practice we have seen in Flanders is taking a positive approach to trying to reach people in a one-stop shop. Proper collaboration between organisations active in the field is very helpful.

3.5 Ireland

1. What are the particular challenges of your job?

The main challenge is reaching people. First of all, many people misunderstand what career development guidance is all about. Many people have a limited and outdated idea of what career development entails: 'You will tell me what to do.' This constitutes a problem, because both clients and professionals sometimes think this way. There is a second challenge, as well – the low level of coordination between the various types of service providers. After all, there is no vocational guidance in services focusing on social security and health care, or for people with impairment or addiction issues. So the real challenge is getting systems to be receptive to collaboration, and to let each other know that they exist and what they can do.

2. What are the target categories defined in Ireland?

We have very particular target groups: people for whom traditional education did not work. In 2000, a whitepaper was published about career development guidance for adults. People who leave school without a school-leaving certificate are at risk of unemployment, and also at increased risk of turning to crime or becoming substance addicts. Target groups identified at the time include people with literacy- or numeracy-related problems,

people who lack digital skills, people with impairment (e.g. dyslexia) and homeless people. The emphasis is on working with migrants.

3. How do you ensure that people use the initiatives and learning opportunities provided?

To this end, we established Adult Educational Guidance Services (AEGS) back in 2000. This is the network service model established to acknowledge that people are in adult education all over Ireland. The network coordinator builds networks focusing on things such as social security, literacy groups and community service, and maximises services. He works with these organisations and asks them what they need. It is important to tell people who are vulnerable and are experiencing difficulties that there is career development guidance out there, and that there is information available to them.

4. What kinds of channels do you use to reach your target groups, and how many people are you reaching?

We mainly communicate the services we offer through newsletters and advertising in many different places and media. Our public information campaigns have changed over the years. For some vulnerable groups, online communications work best, particularly through social media. However, we should not forget that we are dealing with a digital divide. The most vulnerable people do not have digital facilities, or not enough of them, causing them to miss out on the services being provided. There is no alternative to face-to-face guidance for highly vulnerable adolescents. For this reason, it is essential that we build and maintain relations, on top of running campaigns. While interacting with the target group, we learn more about their needs, which then helps us provide the right services.

5. Do you have any tips and/or recommendations?

The success of the Adult Education Guidance Model is something I am very proud of. We also have systems allowing us to collect data for reports. Recently, Cedefop published a paper about guidelines for guaranteed professionalism, and about the in-person and intellectual availability of vocational guidance officers. Intellectual availability means that a professional is open to exploring things with individual adult clients or groups. Part of the model is about following the individual and working on the guidance relationship. In addition, it means being available to every group.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4



4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion and summary

The aim of this exploratory study is to identify the methods and approaches used by various European countries/regions to reach various target groups, in hopes that the Netherlands will be able to learn from these examples. The study mainly focused on the following question: What is important in reaching AND motivating vulnerable people to work on career development and lifelong learning, and how are various other European countries going about this?

In order to answer this question, we performed a literature review and conducted several interviews.

Literature

Our literature review focused on what is important in reaching vulnerable target groups with regard to career development and lifelong learning initiatives. What we found was that motives arise from motivation. People's motivation depends on three core needs. The first need identified was competencies. It is important that learners feel that they have the capacities to be able to function properly, and that they will be able to acquire these competences. The second need identified was autonomy, particularly with regard to whether learners have freedom of choice with regard to whether or not to attend training. Thirdly, it is vital that there is connectedness, and that learners feel they will receive help from others if they need it. To boost learners' motives and motivations, it is useful to formulate personal and social goals, make sure the services offered are in line with the client's needs and that courses are taught close to where the client lives, and to ensure that clients be given time and opportunity to learn while working.

Trainers are important in this process, particularly with regard to making sure the learners stay motivated. To improve chances of learners staying motivated, trainers are expected to have the following: sensitivity to the learner's situation; a friendly and respectful attitude; an ability to give learners a good idea of what to expect; an ability to make sure the training is in line with the learner's level; a willingness to build a relationship and help the learner develop more self-esteem. Furthermore, it is vital (particularly at the start) that learners receive intensive guidance, so as to prevent them from dropping out.

In addition to success factors for motivation, the literature on the subject also discusses the concept of demotivation. Learners are demotivated by three types of barriers. First, there are dispositional barriers: self-esteem; how do I view myself and how do I become resilient. Voluntary participation is a success factor, because when learning is mandatory, people will feel resentment. Secondly, situational barriers are important: a person's situation and living conditions affect their ability to attend training courses. They may be dealing with family and caregiver duties, a poor financial situation, health issues and a lack of fluency in the language of instruction. Lastly, learners may be affected by institutional barriers. These include complex rules and procedures governing training courses and a lack of awareness of the opportunities for support and how to apply for it.

Furthermore, many learners need a great deal of perseverance to be able to complete lengthy training programmes. Several factors have been identified as success factors to boosting perseverance and motivation. For instance, it is vital that dispositional, situational and institutional barriers be eliminated to the maximum extent possible. This may be achieved by offering the following things: grants, work-study programmes, paid leave, no tuition fees and a wide range of available courses.

Situation on the ground

Judging from the interviews, countries have identified similar, yet different groups of vulnerable people. For instance, Ireland, Scotland and Germany all focus on people from a migrant background, while Slovenia is the only country to focus specifically on the Roma people. In other words, it would seem that context is important in identifying target groups.

Countries are guardedly optimistic about using online channels to reach their target groups. For example, judging from the interview with the Scottish representative, online services reach more people and are cheaper. They have enormous reach, and people have access wherever they are in the country. However, face-to-face services continue to be important. The interviews with both the Irish and Scottish representatives showed that face-to-face services are essential to people who do not have access to the Internet. We found that there were different methods to encourage people to spring into action: newsletters, face-to-face guidance, videos, career orientation and guidance professionals, an online tool, etc. Different countries use different methods, and the target groups that are reached most easily differ from country to country, as well. For instance, in Flanders the group most easily reached are non-native Dutch speakers in Dutch-as-a-second-language courses, and in Germany, it is secondary school pupils.

How target group categorisation affects the information campaigns differs from country to country. Some countries/regions find it beneficial to identify target groups for their information campaigns, such as Scotland and Flanders. Germany is taking a different approach: their campaigns only distinguish between adolescents and adults. No further sub-groups are distinguished. Many of the campaigns are consciously designed to be generic, and interested parties do not find information specifically applicable to them until they take a look at the website.

In conclusion

The literature we reviewed showed key motives and motivations as to why people attend training courses. It also showed obstacles. In practice, we found that different countries have identified similar, yet different groups of vulnerable people. Some countries use this classification to run campaigns geared to particular target groups, while others do not. Many strategies are followed to reach target groups, both online and in person.

Lastly, we would like to make some recommendations on how to reach vulnerable groups regarding vocational guidance and lifelong learning initiatives.

4.2 Recommendations

Recommendation no. 1: Removing taboo

As mentioned in the chapter on barriers, embarrassment may stop people from finding a way to learn more. Media campaigns may be a solution to this problem, as they bring the problem out in the open, thus making it easier for people to talk about it. In Ireland, for instance, there was a TV and radio campaign (NALA, 2005), and the United Kingdom had its 'gremlin campaign' (NAO, 2004).

Recommendation no. 2: Framing the objective

Frame learning as a meaningful and relevant activity by formulating specific goals that are in line with people's personal objectives, because most people do not regard learning as an objective in its own right.

Recommendation no. 3: Framing the learning environment

People do not have to learn things at school. It makes a great deal of sense to let them acquire new skills on the job, where they need them and where they will apply them. Here, too, people can work on basic skills such as literacy.

Recommendation no. 4: Act quickly when someone is referred for assistance

Make hay while the sun shines. When a person has just attended a consultation in which learning objectives have been formulated and a budget has been made available, it is vital that this person be allowed to get started soon.

Recommendation no. 5: Do not earmark available financial resources for an overly narrow group

Make sure that the rules regarding the manner in which resources are to be spent do not inadvertently cause one or more groups to be excluded (as happened to young mothers in Sweden and the UK).

Recommendation no. 6: Prevent 'computer-says-no' situations

Not everyone will be able to successfully complete a programme in one go. Make sure that people can acquire new skills in small modules, thus allowing for microcredentials.

Allow people to set individual targets and make sure that those individuals who want to complete a course quickly can do so. Do not impose any age requirements.

Recommendation no. 7: Collaborate with organisations that are in direct touch with the target group

Ensure that an umbrella organisation such as a provincial government coordinates opportunities in the labour market: available employees, start-ups, businesses that are going to make employees redundant or have gone into receivership, VET colleges, probation and aftercare services, rehabilitation clinics, not-for-profit organisations catering to specific target groups, etc.

This will allow for a better match between demand and supply. It may also be a good idea to establish an organisation that will assume coordination duties, such as Ireland's AEGS.

Recommendation no. 8: Be specific when identifying target groups

By properly identifying target groups and asking their members what they needed, as was done with the personas in Scotland, we can arrange for the right courses to be taught, and we will allow people to get where they fit in and are needed more quickly. Always remain mindful of the fact that learners may belong to more than one target group.

Recommendation no. 9: Establish one permanent and easily identifiable career development service provider

Countries like Italy and Finland have ensured that there is one recognisable service provider and granting agency to which people on temporary employment contracts and self-employed people can always turn for training. Ideally, this would not be a temporary set-up, but a permanent one, enshrined in law, with services provided by the individual provincial authorities so as to ensure that they are in line with the local situation. Such embedding in the law is a point we wish to emphasise, since the Netherlands tends to establish learning initiatives and offer guidance in a project-based manner, rather than on a permanent basis. If there is a centralised point of contact as well as a centralised granting agency, there will be continuity in project staffing.



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Euroguidance Netherlands

PO Box 1585

5200 BP 's-Hertogenbosch

Phone: +31 (0)73 680 0762

euroguidance@cinop.nl

www.euroguidance.nl



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