

**Cross Border Seminar 2010,
Professional Care for Counsellors – Who Cares For Those Who Care,
Bratislava 15-16 April
Report**

Idea of Cross Border seminars came into existence in 2005 as an initiative of Euroguidance centres of three neighbouring countries – Austria, Czech Republic, and Slovakia. Main objectives were not only joining EG centres and their cooperation in common activity, but also meetings and networking of practitioners and policy makers from the field of guidance from cooperating countries. To provide participants of the seminar with the broadest possible perspective on chosen topics all centres were involved in programme planning and preparation. This way, seminar could get together national experts and offer presentations of trends and topics actual in all countries. In years 2005-2008 three Cross Border seminars were realized within this cooperation with following topics: Psychological methods in career and vocational guidance in 2005, Transition from secondary schools to the world of work in 2006, and Guidance in institutions of higher education in 2007. In 2009 three other countries - Germany, Hungary and Slovenia - were involved in preparation and organization of Cross Border seminar with the title Career guidance without barriers. This broadening of cooperation proved to be meaningful as more interesting workshops, speeches and discussions could take place. Therefore we continued in this cooperation also for Cross Border Seminar 2010 and another new country - Poland - joined this initiative, too. Cross Border seminar became this way an event involving majority of Central European countries. Participants could profit from information, experience and good practice exchange that was based on mutual understanding as the situation in the participating countries is quite comparable due to common grounds in guidance and somewhat similar social-historic development.

Traditionally also this year's seminar interconnected not only different countries but was an opportunity for bringing together policy makers, decision makers from ministries, experts from research institutions and universities as well as guidance counsellors and other practitioners. The content of the seminar was therefore as usually diverse and parallel workshops with discussions occupied most of the working time. This year the seminar was enriched by special workshop targeting directly policy issues. Representatives of National Guidance forums and ELGPN presented actual developments in their countries and proposed common goals for further cross-border cooperation regarding research and professionalization of guidance counselling.

Cross Border Seminar 2010 was dedicated to professional care for counsellors with subtitle Who Cares For Those Who Care. Professional care for those who daily deal with problems and needs of others (such as guidance practitioners, school counsellors, psychologists, etc.) is often neglected as it is seen as secondary to field of guidance. However, personnel are the core essence of all these services. Also professionalization of guidance counselling is not possible without paying particular attention to training, education and personal needs of practitioners. Some of these points were emphasized by keynote speakers Š. Grajčár (Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family) and Š. Vendel (University of Prešov in Prešov). Also nine workshops offered during the seminar dealt with these topics. Stressful situations in career guidance and coping with them were discussed in two

workshops (A. Kalbarczyk – PL, H. Hudabiunigg – AT). B. Gogala (SL) and I. Valkovič (SK) presented supervision in national contexts. Training opportunities and support of competencies for career guidance counsellors in different areas were themes in workshops led by A. Slowik (PL), S. Fritz (AT) and L. Novosad with B. Čalkovská (CZ). One workshop was dedicated to ethics and ethical dilemmas (D. Kopčanová – SK). Interactive ways of work, discussion, and exemplifications guaranteed practical orientation of the seminar what was appreciated above all by practitioners.

We also focused on mapping of current situation in this area in all involved countries. Each EG centre prepared a short survey on four main topics: supervision, further training, well-being, and intervention resources. These national surveys established a base for a comparison and a generalization of the current situation in all involved countries. (It is necessary to say that surveys represented views of their authors (EG centres and/or involved experts) and were not official documents representing countries.) Conclusions of this comparison are as follows: Supervision is mostly not obligatory in the services offering guidance counselling although there are countries (PL, SK, SL) where supervision is a part of a working standard. In Slovenia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland (education sector) and Slovakia (education sector) there are attempts to establish supervision as an inseparable part of work of counsellors and this is done mainly in temporary projects, legislative proposals or by testing some modules including supervision. Intervention as a supportive tool for counsellors is performed in all involved countries, sometimes due to lack of supervision and sometimes as a preference (GE, AT). Second area we focused on was further training where specialized trainings for counsellors were emphasized. Three possible ways of organisation of trainings were identified: as an obligation, as an optional offer or motivation measure, and without any regulation. Obligatory further trainings are a reality in Austria (education sector) and Poland (PES). Optional offers with some motivation benefits (trainings during working hours, partial cost refundments, and financial allowance for those involved in trainings) are employed in Slovakia, Poland and Czech Republic (all three in education sector) and in Slovenia. Further training is not regulated at all in Germany, Czech Republic and Slovakia (all three in PES) and in Hungary. According to national surveys further training of counsellors is mostly not specific and usually is supported equally as in cases of other employees. Regarding well-being in work it is more than obvious that this area is elaborated much less than professional requirements imposed on guidance personnel. Working conditions (including working environment, working time, work load, etc.) are usually the same as for other workers in the sector. Special attention to well-being in work is paid in Germany where the Federal Employment Agency introduced an internal health management for its employees. Another example of special care in this area was represented by a project “Safe and Friendly Schools” in Poland (education sector). In the section “intervention resources” we asked for methods and ways of help for counselling staff. In the inquired countries there exist no special, legally handled measurements regarding this. Needs of counsellors in this area are covered mostly by ad hoc seminars on burn out prevention. In some countries (Poland, Hungary) support among peer counsellors (informal self-development groups, social networking via portal for career guidance professionals) is preferred. In Czech Republic there operates an anonymous counselling helpline serving particularly the educational staff.

These comparisons and discussions during the seminar led to formulation of conclusions and recommendations in all four areas approved by participants.

Supervision and Intervention:

- Supervision is recognised and valuable measure but can be time consuming and quite expensive
- With regard to the challenging work of counsellors and clients' expectations supervision should be at least in a minimal amount included in working standards
- Intervention is more effective and appropriate for lifelong learning at the workplace. It could be successfully supported by e-tools.

Further Training:

- Professionalization of guidance requires systematic monitoring of training needs and preparation of targeted training offer
- Demand for quality vocational training from public sector is necessary for generation of offer on the training market
- Innovation of knowledge and methods is an ethical obligation of counsellor and should be a part of the working standard

Well-being and Intervention Resources:

- Working environment influences client's trust in professionalism of offered services; it is recommended to revise current facilities with regard to expectations of clients and changing needs of counselling profession.
- Attention should be focused on prevention measures in the first place.
- Employer and social partners should promote existing prevention and intervention measures among counsellors.

Participants pointed out that putting some of these recommendations into life would necessarily mean legislative changes what could be seen as too ambitious. Nonetheless with the recommendations we tried to set minimal requirements for professionalization of guidance counselling as a proposal for further consideration.

Conclusions of the Cross Border Seminar 2010 together with contributions from speakers and workshop leaders will be published in a compendium and thereby prepared for further dissemination.