

**CAREER GUIDANCE, MIGRATION,
LABOUR MARKET EFFICIENCY, QUALITY OF
VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND DEMOCRACY:
IS THERE A LINK?**



Summary of the conference given by
Dr Aboubakr Abdeen Badawi

Geneva, 23rd of July 2008

Introduction

Dr Aboubakr Abdeen Badawi started his presentation by focusing on the selected title. Europe and the Middle East and North Africa Region (MENA) share some of the hot issues influencing their people and a closer cooperation is seen as a must. Among the hottest issues comes migration for work, labour market efficiency, quality of education and training offered and widening the scope of democracy. While these issues, inter alia, are tackled through bi and multilateral negotiations and agreements, a key aspect is relatively overlooked; namely the role of the individual. To assist the individuals take educated decisions regarding their education and training and/or migration for work, as well as acquiring and applying job search skills and in general exercising more democratic approaches, the need for career guidance is paramount. This may be why a new trend towards career guidance, based on a new concept of career guidance and counselling, has been widely sweeping industrialized countries as well as developing ones since 2001.

The presentation was an attempt to find the link between the hot issues faced by MENA and European countries on the one hand and career guidance and counselling on the other. The objectives of the presentation were to:

- Shed light on Career Guidance's links with Human Resource Development (HRD) issues in the Middle Eastern and North African region (MENA);
- Discuss the possible role of career guidance in supporting developmental strategies in the MENA region;
- Define a forward looking role of MENA governments in introducing career guidance;
- Identify possible support for such developmental objectives.

1. Definition and contribution of CG to an individual's life

Starting his presentation, Dr Badawi first provided an operational definition of Career Guidance indicating that it encompass many approaches/modalities including:

- Career information,
- Assessment and self-assessment tools,
- Counselling interviews,
- Group guidance programmes,
- Career education programmes,
- Work-experience programmes, and
- Job-search skills training programmes.

According to Dr Aboubakr Abdeen Badawi, “**Life Long Career Guidance and Counselling help individuals of all ages choose between the full range of available education, training and employment opportunities. It Enables them to take educated decisions about one’s career opportunities and gives individuals clarity as to what they want to pursue in their lives which in turn helps people focus and decide on what abilities they need to develop. This is easier to achieve when interests and values become congruent which in turn leads individuals to greater fulfilment and satisfaction**”.

2. The labour market and migration problem faced by Europe and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region

Using available statistics and projection, Dr. Badawi identified that Europe’s current demographic trends show **an aging population**. Consequently, the need to allow migrant workers to sustain the economy and proper functioning of the European labour market has become an inevitable reality. Besides the aging factor, Dr Badawi also highlighted the fact that the **skills and education level of the European Workforce is not as high as it should be** compared to other competitive regions in the world.

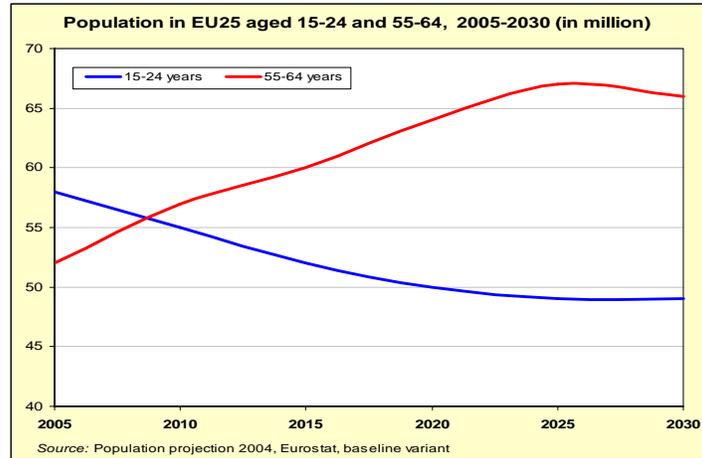
On the other hand, the Middle East and North African Region has a **very young population** and a **scarcity of employment opportunities**. In that context, Europe continues to be seen as the “DREAM Land,” for many youth in MENA countries boosting legal as well as illegal migration into Europe from those countries, constituting a formidable challenge to EU migration policies. As a result, Dr Aboubakr Abdeen Badawi emphasized that mutual cooperation is needed from both sides of the Mediterranean Sea based on the “Win Win” rule (We Need Them, They Need Us).

2.1. EU Demographic time bomb and Worldwide skills competition

Available statistics and projections show that by the year 2030, the EU’s population will include almost 14 million additional older people and 9 million fewer young people, see figure No. (1). As a result, there will be 2 million fewer learners in Vocational Education and Training (VET) at secondary & tertiary level, assuming that workforce participation rates will not change.

In this context, future labour markets will have to rely more heavily on older workers and migrants. Quality and Life-long Training will be essential to support Europe in sustaining a competitive economy.

Figure No. (1): European Aging Population
(From ETF, Mr. Zelloth)



Moreover, Europe's scores in regard to the skill level of its workforce show alarming criteria namely:

- low on high skills;
- high on low skills;
- strong on intermediate skills.

For Europe to possess a competitive advantage in tomorrow's competitive world, European policies need to focus on:

- coping with the increasing demand for labour force in general;
- diffusing new technologies which increase labour productivity;
- consider developing TVET systems to meet anticipated demand for high skilled jobs, see figures no. 2 and 3, knowing that high skilled jobs require both vocational qualifications (secondary & tertiary level) as well as academic skills.

Figure No. (2): Past and likely future labour force qualification trends 1996-2015 (EU-25+)
Source: CEDEFOP

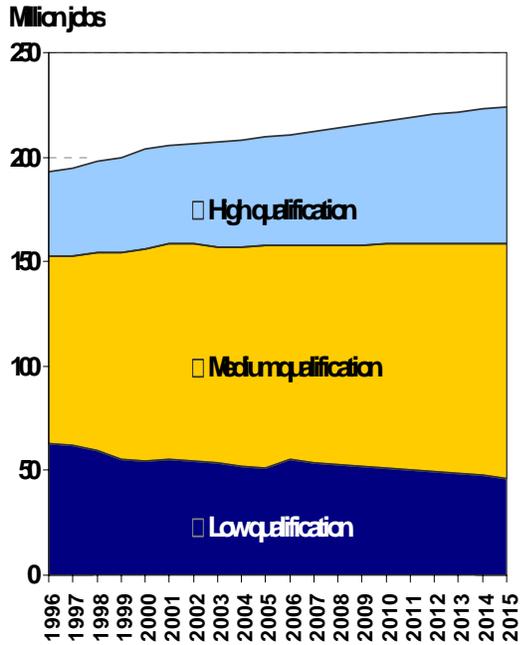
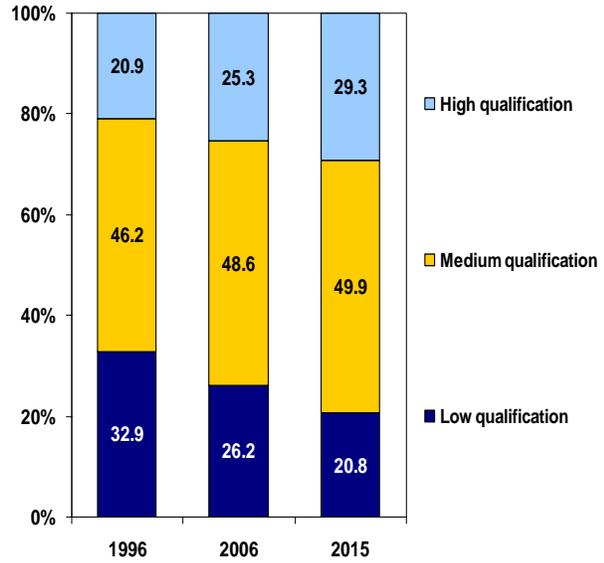
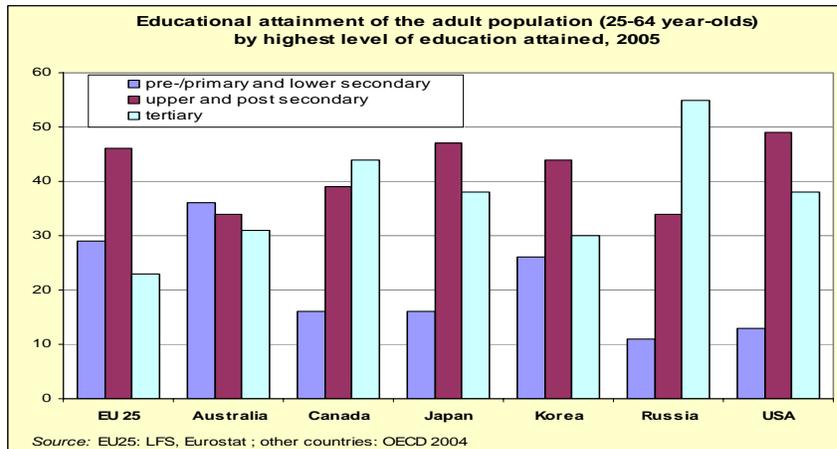


Figure No. (3): Past and likely future labour force qualification structure 1996-2015 (EU-25+)
Source: CEDEFOP, (From ETF, Mr. Zelloth)



Educational attainment of European population, compared to other competitive countries, is also alarming (see figure No. (4)) and boosting education in new EU members seems to be a must.

Figure No. (4): Educational Attainment of selected countries
(From ETF, Mr. Zelloth)



2.2. MENA and Migration to Europe

Although the birthrates in most MENA countries are nowadays declining, they remain high compared to other geographic regions of the world. Populations in the MENA countries remain young as well while MENA economies are not able to absorb new entrants to the labour market. Long unemployment of graduated youth in MENA countries resulted in diminishing their return on education/ training. As a result, the trend towards legal and illegal migration keeps on the rise.

According to Dr Badawi, several reasons may explain why high migration from MENA countries target Europe in particular including:

- The 2001 attack on the World Trade Towers which was followed by tough security measures and tightened immigration controls by the USA and subsequent increase of migration to Europe;
- The attractiveness of European diversity which offers cultural niches for immigrations ;
- Europe's geographic location (its proximity to the MENA region);
- Previous colonial ties with France, UK, Spain and Portugal and shared languages, traditions and culture, see table for North African migration to France.
- Traditional business contacts with European companies especially to those located in the former colonial powers.

Table No. (1): Number and percentage of Migrants from North Africa to France, compared to total migration in selected years

	2000	2002	2004
Number of Migrants	(35.364)	(52.798)	(58.571)
Percentage of total migrants	38.5%	42.8%	40.80%

2.3. Difficulties facing MENA Migrants to Europe

With difficulties in finding jobs at home, migration became an important niche to secure employment for many youth in the MENA region. Besides that, migratory flows are not only driven by unemployment or severe poverty, but also by an aspiration to improve one's opportunities and standards of living.

However, MENA migrants, including those who migrate for work according to bilateral agreements with European Governments, encounter great difficulties in finding jobs in Europe. This is partly due to the competition that exists in the international labour market but more importantly because their skills are not relevant to the receiving countries labour market needs. Moreover, when arriving in Europe, they have to overcome several obstacles like the legal barriers to work in EU countries and the lack of recognition of qualifications obtained at home, which leads to problems of illegal migration and the underemployment of migrants.

Consequently, several measures would be proposed to assist MENA youth in examining their real chances of work once they migrate, and preparing them to be more competitive in the international labour market. In all proposals, career guidance might be one of the most promising tools to assist anticipated migrants to make educated choices, guide those who decide to migrate in planning their career abroad by helping them to choose appropriate training, including knowledge of the foreign language as well as other market labour and social integration requirements.

3. Labour Markets' Efficiency

Labour markets efficiency is highly related to taking flexible measures to maximize utilization of the labour force and increase its productivity. Balancing demand and supply, quantitatively and qualitatively, and mitigating unemployment necessitate a high efficiency of the labour market. Major measures include:

- The availability and good use of information:
- A successful programme for transition from school to work;
- Balanced supply and demand of labour (qualitatively and quantitatively);
- Shortening the period of frictional unemployment.

Nowadays, more and more migrants wish to return to their country of origin. This is particularly true for MENA region where strong family ties not only with the direct family (wife and children), but also with the extended family including grandparents and mothers as well as uncles and aunts. In Egypt, the majority (85%) of returning migrants reported have been employed since their return. Nearly half of salaried workers abroad became employers after returning home.

This phenomenon must also be taken into account and more attention must be paid to this kind of migration to favour the reintegration of returning migrants in their homeland.

In this context, Career Guidance might be of great help by:

- Providing migrants with labour market information about their country of origin;
- Helping individuals in making self-assessment of their competencies and interests; Providing youth in particular with information on local labour market needs;
- Helping individuals in assessing the relevance of temporary migration;
- Offering high quality training for those who plan to migrate for work;
- Offering effective school- to- work programmes;
- Analysing information on foreign labour markets and using it in career guidance;
- Sustaining efficient labour mobility between local and migration labour markets..

4. Quality of Training

Quality training should ensure skills relevance to labour market needs (locally and abroad). Individuals might benefit from training quality through increasing their chances to get a competitive job in highly competitive labour markets.

Training must help the migrants meet the high-tech demands in the EU. In that sense, Career Guidance could:

- Potentially strengthen the relevancy of skills training;
- Increase the quality of skills training;
- Ease the migrants' integration in their new communities;
- Enhance labour productivity;
- Improve individuals' job search skills;
- Help balance labour market demand and supply through disseminating information;
- Improve individuals and society return on education/ training

5. Democracy

According to Dr Aboubakr Abdeen Badawi, the essence of democracy is choice. Nowadays, most MENA countries are adopting policies to enhance democracy and give the citizens more say in running their societies. However, this trend towards democracy lacks the necessary mechanisms to transfer them into actions. A major obstacle towards democracy stems from the current educational policy of "channeling" students and trainees with little, if any, consideration to their own choice. Instead, democracy should enable one to make his or her own

decision thus allowing the individuals to have a say in the matters concerned as well as in the selection of their study and training. Career Guidance would help favouring democracy since:

- Career guidance is all about individuals choice;
- CG is also providing some important democratic notions like citizenship;
- CG provides opening and infinite options for individuals to practice their right to choose.

According to Dr. Aboubakr Abdeen Badawi's point of view, Career Guidance is pivotal since it helps implementing solutions to address some of the hot issues facing MENA and Europe countries such as migration, labour market efficiency, training quality and democracy.

6. Revival of Career Guidance (2001- Now)

6.1. The recent CG studies

During the last few years, different studies addressed CG as a developmental tool rather than as a service. The new concept of career guidance has been widely accepted in most industrial countries as well as many developing ones and a good number of countries has been covered by recent studies on the issue. The OECD reviewed 14 member countries, the World Bank 7 middle-income countries, the CEDEFOP seven European countries, and finally, the ETF studied 11 Acceding and Candidate countries to the EU as well as 7 Western Balkan countries and 10 MEDA countries.

Most studies show the extended role of career guidance beyond its support to learners and job seekers. For instance, the OECD found that Career guidance was not only important for individuals, but also contributed to public policy goals, e.g.:

- in education and training it increased *efficiency and enabled better utilization of the human capital*;
 - in the labour market it also increased *efficiency and improved labour mobility*;
 - in social cohesion and equity career guidance help overcoming disparities related to *social cohesion and gender as well as fostering the role of citizenship*.
- *The main studies conducted in MENA countries, including one regional and ten country studies conducted by the European Training foundation, lead to a series of Governmental actions to introduce career guidance including:*

- Egyptian educational reform conference recommending, inter alias, introducing career guidance at all levels of education;
- Jordan already taking action developing Al-Manar project to increase the role of career guidance for students as well as job seekers;
- Morocco introducing CG in Education;
- Palestine and establishing a Centre of CG; Syria and a Pilot CG Centre in Damascus (a UNDP project).

6.2. MENA's numerous challenges facing Career Guidance

MENA countries are facing numerous challenges in their attempts to introduce CG, some of these challenges are summarized as follows:

- The need to deal with huge numbers of anticipated beneficiaries;
- Improving the availability of well trained counselors;
- Offering socially and culturally adjusted CG material;
- Undertaking necessary research to support the believe that career guidance would have a positive impact on unemployment and labour productivity;
- Overcoming the usual resistance to social change;
- Increasing countries stretched budgets to enable accommodating career guidance for all students/trainees as well as job seekers

While several major steps has been undertaken by Governments in the MENA region, there are still crucial steps to be taken such as:

- Providing long-term vision and preparing immediate action plans;
- Enhance research in the area of career guidance;
- Promote multi-stakeholders involvement;
- Training adequate numbers of counselors;
- Producing appropriate multimedia material;
- Undertaking wide media campaigning;
- Maintaining high-level commitment

Conclusion

From Dr. Aboubakr Abdeen Badawi's point of view, CG is not a magic wand capable of solving all employment or youth problems, but it is a vital tool for improving human resources development, citizenship, employment and social cohesion. In that sense, considering CG is essential to the development process of all MENA countries. For that purpose, the time is just right to call on Technical Cooperation providers, most of them already implementing large scale projects, to include strengthening and promoting CG on their list of priorities. The need to

support country efforts is enormous, but the impact would be widely reaching for the youth.