

**Pamela M. Clayton, Peter Plant,  
Ingmarie Rohdin**

**EUROPEAN SOLUTIONS  
FOR GUIDANCE  
AND COUNSELLING  
FOR SOCIALLY  
DISADVANTAGED GROUPS**



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# 1. INTRODUCTION: THE “GUIDE LIFE” RESEARCH

*by Pamela Clayton and Ingmarie Rohdin*

This book is aimed at the guidance and counselling sector, with the purpose of increasing understanding and knowledge of socially disadvantaged groups and thereby increasing their participation in lifelong learning. Many individuals face a variety of obstacles arising from, for example, dependency on others, restricted choices, physical and social barriers and prejudice. The vocational training world is no exception, because unintentional barriers are often created by providers due to insufficient knowledge and understanding of disadvantaged people. The result is that this group is effectively denied access to lifelong learning, a situation which is clearly against the priorities established in 2002 on active citizenship, social inclusion and personal development<sup>1</sup> and undoubtedly indicates that more effective guidance provision is needed<sup>2</sup>.

The objective of the research, named “Guide Life”, on which this book is based, was to collect and capture concrete experiences from both the guidance and counselling sector and members of disadvantaged groups in order to help guidance counsellors and their organisations generate a methodology to facilitate their inclusion in lifelong learning. Thus, the voices of people at a disadvantage play an important role in this book<sup>3</sup>. The groups on which the research focused were long-term unemployed people, with a special focus on younger and older; immigrants and ethnic minorities, particularly women and young people; and disabled people.

<sup>1</sup> These priorities were identified in the Resolution on lifelong learning adopted by the Council of the European Union (Education and Youth) on 27 June 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Priorities identified in the draft Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the Member States meeting within the Council on Strengthening Policies, Systems and Practices in the Field of Guidance throughout Life in Europe on 14 May 2004.

<sup>3</sup> All names and identifying details have been changed in order to respect confidentiality.

This range was made possible by the diversity of the research partnership, which involved collaboration between education and research institutions in Austria, Denmark, France, Romania, Sweden, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom. Each assembled a national work group, which included important actors in this field who analysed and provided feedback about the results throughout the project.

If guidance counsellors have an appropriate degree of knowledge about disadvantaged groups, they are better able to guide them in the right direction for their needs and wishes, as well as influencing training and vocational providers to take into account their situation. This should assist in increasing their representation in lifelong learning and decrease their drop-out rate. This is an important priority of the European Commission<sup>4</sup> and the European co-operation on which this project is founded is one of the main focuses of the Copenhagen declaration<sup>5</sup>.

### **1.1. Long-term unemployed people**

The long-term unemployed are variously categorised but in this book people are so deemed if they have been out of work continuously for at least 12 months. In practice, some may get occasional short-lived jobs, perhaps without declaring this, but they are still excluded from the mainstream labour market, which is defined here as the section of the labour market offering work at good rates of pay (that is, above the legal minimum wage), with good working conditions and prospects of promotion and carrying social status or at least not being low status. Such work may be full-time or part-time. It excludes casual work, very low-paid work and illegal work of all kinds.

Many of the people in this study had been unemployed for a long time, typically for reasons arising from the structures of society or personal misfortune, rather than personal inadequacy or indifference. Some live in areas of deprivation which are both stigmatised and may have a culture of unemployment and benefit dependence, with a lack of employed role models and the temptation to gain extra income from crime or illegal work.

<sup>4</sup> Priorities identified in the Resolution on the promotion of enhanced European co-operation on vocational education and training approved by the Council of the European Union (Education, Youth and Culture) on 12 November 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, and the European Commission, convened in Copenhagen on 29 and 30 November 2002, on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training.

Long-term unemployed people are less likely to be recent learners and insufficient notice is taken of the barriers, both personal and social, to their returning to work. They may, indeed, have multiple barriers. One is the inadequacy and disdainful attitude of some state employment services or labour offices, which in principle should help people back to work. It is therefore possible that community-based initiatives are more helpful. There also appear to be differences in the attitudes of men and women, with women returning to the labour market after time spent in caring being more optimistic and ready to seek self-development (Aleksandraviciene 2005)<sup>6</sup>.

Furthermore, some long-term unemployed people live in areas of deprivation that compound their problems. Such areas include those that have suffered from industrial restructuring or have a long history of high unemployment, very often with significant numbers of older and long-term unemployed people. Areas of deprivation may develop a culture of poverty but this does not necessarily bring social solidarity. Often there is a lack of role models, that is, employed persons, in the family or even in the area. Growing poverty and high unemployment often lead to involvement in the non-legal economy, drug and alcohol abuse, crime within the area, fear and despair – and an unfortunate reputation which affects all who live there. Of particular importance is that employers are often reluctant to hire people from such areas. In many European societies, one of the most significant factors in social exclusion is social class – in the United Kingdom, for example, the phenomenon known as “postcode discrimination” is well-known – and applications from certain districts are simply ignored. In some cities this is allied with religious, sectarian or ethnic discrimination. In other cases there is little local employment and those who cannot access an adequate wage cannot afford to travel to a workplace.

Thus, there are many reasons for long-term unemployment, including structural change, burn-out, alcoholism, drug abuse, homelessness, criminal history, disability and loss of confidence and skills after absence from the labour market (for raising children or caring for family members) – or any combination of these. In other words, many cases of long-term unemployment arise from the structures of society or personal misfortune, rather than wilfulness or unwillingness to work.

The unemployed are less likely than the employed to be recent learners or to have engaged in vocational training within the previous three years, and most training for the unemployed is undertaken by young people, mainly boys. What provision exists often has no regard for “the specific

<sup>6</sup> See [www.surrey.ac.uk/politics/cse/seqeal-reports/seqeal-final-report-warwick.pdf](http://www.surrey.ac.uk/politics/cse/seqeal-reports/seqeal-final-report-warwick.pdf).

circumstances, experience, learning barriers and needs of individuals” and there is insufficient help for the most disadvantaged. Furthermore, having been on a programme for the long-term unemployed carries a stigma in the eyes of prospective employers and such schemes can fail to recruit, especially when unemployed people are also “educationally damaged” (McGivney 1993).

In previous research on long-term unemployed people, two people attending a Community Service Volunteers (CSV) project was interviewed (Clayton 1999)<sup>7</sup>. The first had suffered from the contraction of the fishing industry, coupled with his lack of education:

*Colin was raised in an alcoholic family and missed a lot of schooling. He had worked in the fishing industry but became unemployed. He had experienced two periods of homelessness and came to CSV to improve his prospects. He was now on a work placement and working towards a Business Administration Vocational Qualification (VQ). “The course instilled confidence... showed me I wasn’t as bad at these things [literacy and numeracy] as I thought... the most I ever wrote was my signature. You’re treated well. You do get a lot of support here... you still get a lot of support from CSV... I seem to have learned something, more than other places I’ve been to. They actually take an interest. It’s boosted my confidence, given me the get up and go. Hopefully I’ll have the VQ [Vocational Qualification] at the end of it”.*

The second was well educated but had experienced mental distress:

*Monica had been a teacher for ten years but stopped work after suffering from depression. She wanted a career change and was referred to CSV by Job Centre staff. She was currently working as a personal assistant in the centre. “I’ve had a width of experience in different offices. The staff has been extremely supportive. There are support mechanisms, so you can say if it’s getting too much and that can be addressed. I’ve really been looked on as another member of staff. I’ve been given respect by the managers but my status as a trainee is taken into account as well. The staff has been good at encouraging me to go for posts... trying to boost my morale... very much on the lookout for opportunities for trainees. [CSV] has been good for clarifying what I want in a career. I know what I want and what I don’t want. I’ve had a mixture, so I can see more clearly what I’m ideally suited to. Job seeking skills have been good for me”.*

<sup>7</sup> See [www.gla.ac.uk/Acad/AdultEd/Research/Leonardo.html](http://www.gla.ac.uk/Acad/AdultEd/Research/Leonardo.html).

Long-term unemployed men at the Wise Group, an intermediate labour market organisation (that is, one that provides real jobs but for a limited period), commented favourably on the support they were now getting.

One emphasised confidence:

*Sean, aged 27, previously unemployed 6 months: "The only help I got from anybody would have been my own help, apart from the bureau [dialect for the Employment Service] sending letters... but that's not really help, just being told... and that's only in order to get you off the bureau... [unemployment benefit] I found out about this place through a friend who was working here... I like practical work, that's what I'm good at... it's helped my confidence... I wasn't born with confidence, you know what I mean... also it made me, not that I wasn't aware, it made me open my eyes to communication with people... help with vocational qualifications – that opened my mind up as well – I've been promoted in this job, as of last week... it's giving people opportunity in society... such as building up the person's confidence... opening their mind up to show they do have qualities... they want to listen to you and they expect feedback".*

James had been in the unusual position, for a man, of caring for his children for thirteen years:

*James, aged 36, househusband 1983 to 1996, then unemployed 18 months: "JIG (Job Interview Guaranteed, an Employment Service initiative)... all they done was get you the interview. [Did they help you prepare for it?] No. I found out about this just by accident but I didn't actually know what it was... it was just a poster I saw in one of the Social Work departments... you picked up an application at the same time. It wasn't the job I was looking for... (but) now I'm progressing slowly but surely – I've been promoted to charge hand... [It's given me] extra skills... another avenue that I can actually go... I wouldn't say I came with a great deal of confidence. [And do you have more confidence now?] Aye... I've walked away with another City and Guilds... at times you feel as if you're – you know it's only a training programme so you always think along the lines, it's a Mickey Mouse company... but it does fill in a gap".*

A third suffered from the double handicap of being very long-term unemployed and his age – even though he was only 40.

*Robert aged 40, previously unemployed 4 years: "I was in the Job Club [run by the Employment Service] for six weeks, and then that's how I got the position here... [but] I found out about it myself... I knew someone who used to work here; ten years ago... the ES gave us free use of the phone, free*

*stamps... This gives us a bridge to work – I've a better chance of getting a job – because I was unemployed four years employers didn't want to know, and my age as well... this job has three or four different skills all rolled into one, and you've got to have good communication skills... sales isn't something I'd ever done before, but I find it quite interesting. The money! Not that there's very much, and it costs me £50 a month to get here [fares were paid only during the 10-week training period], but it's slightly better than the dole... I'm quite happy with the money I've got” .*

Another was discovering new skills:

*Gerry, aged 28, previously unemployed just over a year, had received no help before. The Wise Group “was advertised in the Daily Record and I just phoned up... It's taught me to do things that I didn't think I could do... you can come in and have a look at the papers, so the Job Shop is useful... it's a good thing knowing that you're helping the public, like... and now I'm making money in my spare time... I feel now I can achieve a lot more than I thought I could have... before I came in here I could never have done anything like that... [Has it given you more confidence?] Definitely... I'm looking for a job placement... if I can get my feet in the door I'll just take it from there” .*

One young man now felt respected and found his skills being extended:

*Neil aged 20, previously unemployed 18 months: “The Careers Office... wasn't any good. I just got jobs going round the industrial estates. The Job Centre was all right – I just went in and checked on the cards... [but] they never told me what to look for... I found out about this through a friend who used to work here... It's experience and it gets me back just to working... I was told it was interesting and I like it here... there's no' anybody on your case... the skills, a wee bit about computers... they've taught us things I never thought I could do...”*

Finally, the youngest interviewed had regained his self-respect:

*William, aged 18, unemployed since leaving school, had had no help before: “When I was signing on I was just signing and walking back out the door... and going to my bed or something!... My brother used to be in here and he just told me it was good in here... It's quite all right – it's quite helpful – like the Job Shop, it helps with looking for other jobs... it's giving me experience as well... I've a better chance of a job when I get out of here, because I haven't had much training and they're teaching me new things... I*

*feel a lot better now I'm working instead of just sitting about on the bureau" [living on unemployment benefit].*

Research was also carried out in Coventry, a city that within a short time changed from industrial to post-industrial (Aleksandraviciene 2005). Like the SEQUAL team in general, the researchers found that the concept of employability was at official level applied too rigidly, seeing unemployed people as the architects of their own misfortunes and therefore responsible for improving themselves. They pointed out that supply side policies needed to be complemented by demand side policies, that is, that employment possibilities should be improved and that employers also had responsibilities; and that, despite the positive aspects of welfare to work policies, insufficient notice was taken of personal and social barriers to entering or returning to the labour market.

A common theme running through most of the research projects on which this report is drawn is the inadequacy of the state Employment Service (now called the JobCentre) compared with community-based and voluntary sector initiatives. Unemployed people often criticised the official service as unhelpful and uncaring. By contrast, community-based initiatives offered holistic, person-centred, sensitive and friendly interventions, without imposing sanctions and giving people the time and mental space necessary to prepare to return to work. Their assumption is that people want to find paid work and do not need to be forced into it. Moreover, many long-term unemployed people face multiple barriers and therefore have difficulty becoming "job ready". Once in work, there is a case for ongoing support and mentoring.

Concerning gender and class, economic restructuring has left behind people without skills and qualifications, who previously could expect to find stable and well-paid jobs, albeit with little mental stimulation or chance of career progression. Differences were observed, however, in the attitudes of men and women. White working class unemployed men were less optimistic that they would find a job they wanted, whereas women returning to the labour market after time in the home sought self-development as well as paid work and were generally more optimistic.



## 1.2. Diversity of unemployed people

We are aware that in practice one individual may belong to a number of different groups, each one of which is very heterogeneous: the division used in this project is conceptual and chosen for convenience of analysis. The following are reviewed in this book.

**Disadvantaged young people** are those who, because of poor or no qualifications, absence of work experience, location in rural areas or on housing estates far from job opportunities, find it difficult to access employment. Those aged 16-18 have left school but will have found it hard to earn an independent living. “Youth” may be defined as 16-25, but not included in this category are those still in education or training as well as those in employment. In some cases disadvantaged young people may be homeless or in housing need and suffer from psychological problems arising from family history. Others may come from families where no-one has been employed for two or even three generations.

The **older unemployed** are defined as people who, because they fall into the higher age range, find it difficult to enter or re-enter employment. There are different conventions for the lower end of the range, usually between 45 and 50 and above. In some occupations, however, individuals might be deemed “too old” even when they are 35.

**Members of ethnic minorities** were born in the country of residence but because of the presence of outward markers, such as skin colour, dress, surname or religion, are perceived as different from the majority of society. This may be the case even where they are the second, third or fourth – or more – generation of their family born in the country of residence. Overall, their life chances are lower than those of the majority, but there are exceptions. Some ethnic groups are very successful in education and the labour market, while others achieve below-average qualifications and find it hard to access employment. Even well qualified members of ethnic minorities may face discrimination and find it difficult to obtain the jobs for which they are qualified.

**Migrants** are people who were not born in their current country of residence and have either chosen to migrate (unforced migration) or have been forced to do so (forced migration). Those who have arrived with an assured job or place in education are not generally disadvantaged. The most disadvantaged are those who arrived as asylum-seekers and, even after receiving permission to stay as **refugees**, face difficulties in accessing education and employment. Men brought in from rural areas abroad as marriage partners may face problems, as may economic migrants who arrive without the

promise of a job. Where they have particular difficulties in entering the labour market it is probable that they arrived as adults and/or have insufficient knowledge of the host country language to be able to obtain mainstream employment. Women immigrants who are not asylum-seekers or refugees might have joined or accompanied one or more family members, probably as an adult.

**Disabled people** are so called because social barriers are placed in their way and too few, if any, adjustments are made to encompass their needs and allow them to participate fully in mainstream society. There are three broad categories of disability: physical, psychological and learning. In practice it is possible to have two or more of these types of disability.

### 1.3. Overview of the research

This book summarises the work of the partnership in the following two areas: identification of barriers for the different disadvantaged target groups from their perspective; and identification of barriers seen from the guidance and education perspectives. The material was generated from strategic networks, guidance counsellors and experts and members of socially disadvantaged groups. The individual interviews were fairly open-ended and broad in their scope. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured and the classification data is presented in such a way that no individual can be identified. The focus groups were made up of members of the social disadvantaged group and members from the guidance and counselling sector so that open dialogue could take place. The aim was to enhance understanding between the groups and generate valuable information on how to create a suitable guidance and counselling approach for the social disadvantaged groups. There were also meetings with the national strategic work groups to collect information about barriers and the issues that inhibit these target groups from achieving their aims in life.

Areas of discussion in focus groups from the strategic networks that were noted were the questions and barriers raised by the participants; the solutions that were suggested; and whether mutual understanding was improved through meeting in the focus group.

Members of the guidance sector were asked the obstacles to guidance for specific target groups; the nature of the barriers they thought they faced; the action they would implement in order to overcome these barriers; what, if any, training was currently available to guidance professionals to help them work with these target groups and, if so, had they received any of this

training, whether formal or informal; and what training they thought should be provided to support guidance counsellors.

Target group members who had received guidance were asked if the guidance was useful, and how, or, if it was not useful, why not, and whether the guidance counsellor understood their situation. They were also asked when they had last participated in a training/educational programme and their opinion of any such training. More generally they were asked whether they felt they played an active role in society, what barriers they personally experienced, whether to training, work or other social areas, and what solutions they would propose to overcome these barriers. Finally they were asked what they would like to receive from guidance counselling.

In all, 78 guidance and counselling or related professionals and 72 people who were unemployed or at risk of social exclusion took part in the research and contributed the views and experiences that constitute a substantial part of this book.

Chapter Two, “Career guidance for socially disadvantaged groups: quality issues”, by Peter Plant, introduces an important and contentious topic – how do we know that vocational guidance and counselling are effective, particularly for marginalised groups? What, indeed, is guidance? He reviews both the quality issues and the ways in which guidance policy-makers have sought to ensure policy in delivery, drawing on examples from within Europe but also from Canada and the United States of America. He then reviews critically the possibility of a new quality outcome: geographical mobility before summarising non-economic approaches to quality and concluding that what is often lacking in the formation of quality standards is the voice of the guidance-seekers, in particular the most marginalised.

Chapters Three to Seven follow a similar pattern and display common problems, including stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination as well as other barriers to learning and employment.

Chapter Three, “The older unemployed”, by Pamela M. Clayton and Helmut Kronika, summarises some of the previous research on older people and the labour market that shows why, when they become unemployed, they find it so difficult to find further employment. This is illustrated by biographies of several older unemployed adults in Glasgow. The chapter goes on to describe the results of the Guide Life survey in Austria and the perceptions of older male unemployed men with histories of low-skilled work concerning the barriers to re-employment and their experience of vocational guidance, followed by the perceptions of guidance counsellors on this client group. The chapter concludes with recommendations for action by the state, the social partners and guidance training organisations.

Chapter Four, “Disadvantaged young people”, by Pamela M. Clayton, Helmut Kronika, Lorena Stoica and Riza Gürbüç, is based on previous research carried out in the United Kingdom and the Guide Life research in Austria, Romania and Turkey. It describes the very real difficulties under which some young people labour – even young graduates in times of high unemployment, but also the help given to young low-educated people by a dedicated vocational guidance service in Glasgow as described by several of the young people themselves. Both the diversity of young people and national differences are brought out in the Guide Life research. In Romania, for example, young people had little experience of guidance and in Turkey education and training are liable to be interrupted by military conscription. The recommendations, therefore, cover a diversity of needs, from the establishment of guidance services in areas remote from the capital to the improvement of training even in countries with well-established services.

Chapter Five, “Migrants, forced and unforced”, by Pamela M. Clayton, Mar Camarasa, Pilar Quevedo, Ghislaine Tafforeau and Andrew Shorey, draws on research in the United Kingdom, Spain and France, and differentiates between refugees and economic migrants and between men and women while raising issues common to all. It includes the voice of a refugee who had benefited from vocational guidance and the biographies of four women who had undertaken adult learning but had found it hard to return to their original social or economic level and one who was improving her situation thanks to outside support. The chapter also includes Roma women, who in many cases are not migrants but who suffer exceptionally poor chances in the labour market. Separate recommendations for action are offered for migrant and Roma women and for migrant men.

Chapter Six, “Ethnic minorities”, by Pamela M. Clayton, Lorena Stoica and Andrew Shorey, is based on research from the United Kingdom and Romania. The groups on which the chapter focuses are black and ethnic minority women and young Asian males in the United Kingdom and young Hungarians and older Roma in Romania. Many of the young people interviewed were well educated but still faced problems of discrimination in the labour market coupled with parental ideas of “proper” employment for their children. Older Roma in Romania, on the other hand, suffered illiteracy or low levels of education as did the Pakistani women surveyed in the United Kingdom. One disturbing finding was that many young British Asians either had had poor experience of guidance or were unaware that it was available after leaving education. The British guidance counsellors, however, were well aware of the barriers faced by this group whereas the Romanian counsellors needed extensive training.