

# The Career Issue

## Newsletter

# Macedonia Competes

Efforts to strengthen Macedonia's competitiveness and wider economy face a critical gap between the skills offered by the country's workforce and the demands of companies who must operate and thrive in a global knowledge economy. The MyCareer initiative from the USAID Macedonia Competitiveness Project is helping bridge that gap while helping young people find employment.



College is just theory, but to gain confidence, the knowledge must be implemented in practice," says Ivana Ristovska. Recently, she was hired to work full time with EOS Matrix, a Skope-based consulting and call center company. Before she was offered the long-term position, she worked at EOS as an intern for six months. Ivana is one of nearly 60 young people to work with EOS as an intern, and one of 12 to be offered a full-time job at the company after completing an internship.

Like a growing number of graduating students and job seekers, Ivana's initial internship was made possible through the Competitiveness Project's National Internship and job placement (NIJP) program, popularly known as MyCareer. The program—a partnership between the Competitiveness Project, private companies, education-

al institutions, and local and central government authorities—is helping create the "next generation workforce" through experience-building internships and career development initiatives. The activities are reducing the gap between what Macedonian companies need in their workforce and what applicants can offer, enhancing the chances for young job seekers to obtain full-time employment.

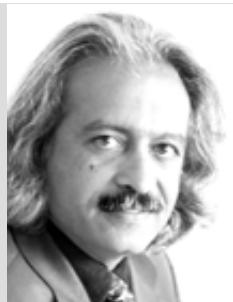
EOS Matrix is not alone in working through MyCareer to identify a pool of potential candidates for internships and full-time positions. To date, over 120 participating employers have offered internship placements to over 800 students and job seekers and offered full-time positions to 130. As the concepts and practices promoted by MyCareer gain traction, the program is not only increasing employment in the short term, but transforming the

way students prepare for their career and the way employers engage Macedonia's labor pool.

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## Message from Nimish Jhaveri MCP Chief of Party



**D**ear  
Colleagues  
and Part-  
ners,

It is a pleasure to  
introduce  
the Career

Issue of USAID Macedonia Competitiveness Project's (MCP) newsletter, Macedonia Competes. In this edition, we focus on the project's career development initiative, MyCareer, which supports a key guiding principle of our project: that significantly upgrading Macedonia's workforce is necessary if the country is to achieve sustained economic growth, and create new jobs. Currently, gaps in the labor market make it difficult for domestic companies to compete in the global knowledge economy. These gaps also keep out foreign investment and the benefits these investments bring.

MyCareer has become an important part of solving this workforce development dilemma. Through its internship and career programs, it creates a pivotal opportunity to develop a competitive workforce.

At present, many young people enter the labor market poorly prepared and lacking any substantive experience, so that employers can't find qualified workers or need to spend significant training resources to make them productive. By improving students' career preparations and building their experience, everyone—job seekers, employers and the wider economy—benefits from MyCareer.

I've been amazed as I have watched MyCareer grow from a concept to a transformational initiative that is changing the way that career development is viewed in Macedonia. I am pleased to see that employers from all parts of Macedonia are engaging interns on an ongoing basis, often offering full-time positions to those interns that truly stand out. I am excited that universities and schools are investing the capacity of their career counselors—even establishing career centers—through our Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) program to create better opportunities for their students. Finally, I am thrilled that MyCareer has matured to the point that

MCP is exploring viable options to ensure the sustainability of the program.

### Macedonia's workforce dilemma

Living in a country where official unemployment exceeds 35 percent, many recent graduates or young job seekers in Macedonia struggle to find full-time jobs, fueling the perception that professional opportunities are inaccessible. At the same time, many employers in Macedonia complain they can't find qualified applicants or that those that they do hire (most often recent graduates) lack the skills to work effectively in the mod-

ern workplace. In some cases, this is due to an educational system with curricula insufficiently aligned to the demands of Macedonian companies, while in others it is due to the young person's lack of previous work experience. Ultimately, this dilemma creates a vicious cycle that makes it harder for young people to get a job and for companies to find the skilled employees to compete in a global knowledge-based economy—thus undermining their own ability to grow and create new jobs. This im-

pact is not just suffered by the unemployed individual or company, but the wider Macedonian economy.

### MyCareer: bridging the gap

The MyCareer program targets the gap between supply and demand of skilled workers. While the initiative promotes and facilitates internships for recent graduates and other youth, its fundamental objective is to support full-time job placements like Ivana's. At the heart of the program is [www.mycareer.com.mk](http://www.mycareer.com.mk) (in Macedonian, Albanian and English) an online internship and job placement portal which serves as a communication tool bringing companies, job seekers, students and career counselors together. The portal allows students and job seekers to upload CVs and a career portfolio, companies to add job/internship postings, and gives access to a variety of on-line forums, video presentations and live chats, which facilitates real time communication and makes the right match faster and easier. In some cases, the NIJP Team helps companies find the right match for a specific posting. Thanks to effective marketing of the portal and growing word-of-mouth popularity, mycareer.com enjoys growing membership with over 6,600 students and jobs seekers, and over 300 companies registered as of May 2010.

### More than a Web Portal

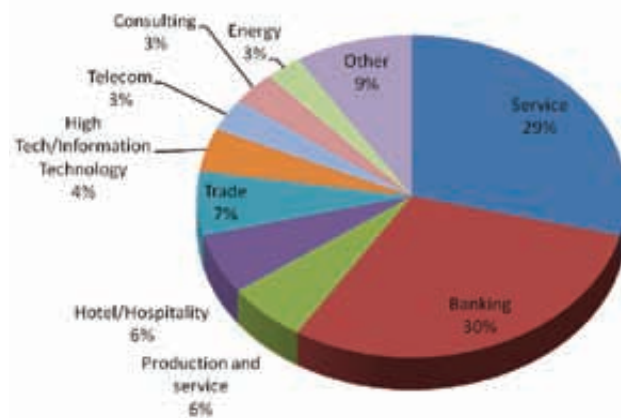
MyCareer is not just a virtual meeting place for employers and potential applicants. It aims to become a comprehensive career development resource, offering a range of services to students and job seekers, employers, and education and training institutions:

- Free profile registration on "My Career Place" portal
- Training for job seekers on writing CVs and cover letters, communication and soft skills
- Training for employers on maximizing the internship experience for both parties and the career development of their full

MyCareer Results to Date

|                                   |      |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| Registered Students               | 6691 |
| Registered Companies              | 311  |
| Companies hiring interns          | 124  |
| Job/Internship Postings           | 212  |
| Students Trained (CVs)            | 3000 |
| Students Trained (communications) | 1916 |
| Employers Mentors Trained         | 262  |
| Internship Placements             | 792  |
| Job Placements                    | 153  |
| Trained GCDF counselors           | 31   |

MyCareer Internships by Sector



- time staff
- Organization of e-career fairs
- Online promotion activities for companies
- Organization of online forums

MCP has also integrated the MyCareer initiative within efforts to strengthen the availability and quality of professional career development services, by introducing Global Career Development Facilitators (GCDF) training and certifications for career counselors working in the private sector or within educational and training institutions. As soon as June 2010, an expected 31 GCDFs

“(MyCareer) helps establish a healthy foundation for an economy based on knowledge, the key factor of development. This program helps transform the younger generation in Macedonia from social burden to a driving force with the potential to make the country more competitive and successful—as a future member of the EU, a member of other international institutions, and a part of the global economy.”

*Fatmir Besimi,  
Minister of Economy, Macedonia*

will be certified and able to offer professional career coaching and guidance, either through MyCareer or their own institutions.

**Merging interests to address workforce dilemma**

From the job seekers’ perspective, the upside is clear. MyCareer offers the tools and the linkages to internships needed to get their foot in the door and gain experience to add value to a future employer. Internships, coupled with sound career development advice, also allow students to test various career options, and find the right fit for their interests.

At the same time, engaging interns through MyCareer offers advantages to employers. Many are using internships as a cost-effective means to screen a pool of potential workers. If they choose to hire an intern full time, the “new hire” is likely to be more productive, thanks to on-the-job-training and mentorship gained during the internship.

Benefits for universities and vocational training centers are multidimensional. As their students apply education to a real world experience through internships, these institutions can use feedback from students and employers to upgrade their curricula to better meet the needs of the market. Furthermore, by integrating GCDFs into their career centers, they will be positioned

to help students create opportunities for themselves.

**Transforming the marketplace**

The number of enlisted students, job seekers and employers on the MyCareer portal—and the subsequent job placements—show that internships are gaining mainstream appeal as a tool for career development (for students) and HR management (for employers). This mentality shift will have a lasting impact on the way that students, job seekers, universities/vocational schools and employers interact. As students and job seekers build skills through internships and other career development tools, and as employers invest in interns and employees, the knowledge base of the Macedonian labor market will grow, with visible effects on the entire economy.

**A USAID legacy**

The Competiveness Project is taking steps to ensure the future of MyCareer for years to come. Preparations are underway to spin off the initiative into a self-sustaining organization able to continue serving students and job seekers, employers and educational institutions beyond the scope of project and USAID funding. MCP is exploring means to earn revenue from employers that use the site for recruiting, from online advertisers, and from fee-based career development and training services.

## Companies: Using internships as an HR management tool

**M**yCareer has been popular amongst companies in several sectors, ranging from SMEs to large multinational companies with hundreds and even thousands of workers. Many praise the ability to easily choose from a wider selection of candidates, the cost and quality of recruitment, the mentorship training and support from MyCareer, and publicity gained through participation in the program. Below are a few perspectives from companies that have used internships via the program.

A number of large Macedonian companies have enlisted MyCareer to find large numbers of interns, which fits well within their wider HR management. Ohridska Banka Societe Generale Group, for example, has engaged over 80 interns in six cycles, of which five have been hired. EOS Matrix has hired 60 interns, of which 12 have been offered full-time jobs. "EOS is a global brand, which puts significant investment into recruitment and selection but also into the training and education of the quality staff in the company," said Marina Sivakova-Taskov, Human Resources Manager. "Therefore, we decided to use MyCareer as one of the channels through which we would select and recognize potential staff members."

Dojranka Anastasovska Cvetkovska, HR Representative from the Austrian-owned electricity company EVN Makedonija (which has hosted 17 internships to date) said the program is

**"We send in the specifications for the positions we need and MyCareer sends us candidates with qualifications that are above average in the country."**

*Nenad Dimitrievic,  
HR Manager at mobile phone  
company VIP*



an effective way to "engage and evaluate potential future employees" and that the ability to easily find a pool of qualified young people is particularly attractive. She added that MyCareer offers a "source of highly motivated young people." Nenad Dimitrievic, Human Resources Manager at VIP said that "we send in the specifications for the positions we need, and MyCareer sends us candidates with qualifications that are above the average in the country."

In smaller companies, interns can quickly become an integral member of the team, giving the intern substantive experience. Just as importantly, a strong intern can have a significant impact on the capacity of a small employer, either helping it carry out activities (e.g. market research) that are crucial, but might not otherwise take place due to staffing constraints. Interns can also help manage growth without taking on the financial risk of hiring full-time employees. These companies also use internships as a means to screen candidates, with many of the internships converted to jobs with small employers.

The short-term aspect of internships is also important. Not only do companies like EVN Makedonija benefit from having qualified candidates for temporary help on specific projects, but they are able to use the internship to test a potential employee. If the work is unsatisfactory, the relationship ends with little drama, whereas if an intern is exemplary and hired full time, the on-the-job training from

the internship helps the new hire add value immediately with limited hand-holding.

As part of the MyCareer program, all enlisted companies are offered training in intern and employer mentorship and career development support. A number of companies have integrated the trainings' recommendations into their HR practices. Through the mentorship training, companies are improving the ways they structure positions, recruit, train new employees and monitor performance. As companies incorporate these practices into their recruiting and HR management systems, they are able to maximize the use of new employees and their wider labor force.

In addition to the immediate benefits gained from interns, employers contribute to the growth of both individuals and the larger workforce. Dojranka Anastasovska Cvetkovska from EVN Makedonija cited "corporate influence" in the personal development of highly motivated young people as important for companies and the workforce alike. Ultimately, engagement with the MyCareer program is giving companies an effective way to bridge the workforce gap while meeting their own business needs.

In total, 161 companies have posted internship postings on the MyCareer portal. Over 260 have gone through mentorship training to maximize the internship experience for all parties.

## Using e-Career fairs for interactive and productive exchange

From the start, MyCareer has looked for innovative ways to reach out to employers and students, smooth the process of matching and allow for a more interactive experience. This vision has gone beyond the structure of the MyCareer job placement portal to include other IT-based functionalities. E-Career fairs, held so far in October 2009 and March 2010 are accessed through the MyCareer website. They are live, fully interactive events that last for five days, offering a platform to allow students and job seekers to interact with potential employees in real time.

MyCareer e-Career fairs differ from traditional fairs in that users can talk to each other from home, office, school or a favorite coffee shop—anywhere they can get an internet connection. Before the e-Career fair, employers post information on their company and specific internship or job postings. Students and job seekers, who attend the event for free, then contact that company's recruiters directly during the fair and learn more about the company or posting and interview in real time without the hassle of standing in lines or dealing with the people traffic found at typical job fairs. Through MyCareer's exclusive interview chat program, some job seekers are able to conduct interviews at the same time.

“Participating in the e-Career fair allowed us to communicate with students all over the country, thus allowing us to be even closer to future employees and the talented workforce that our company has a need for.”

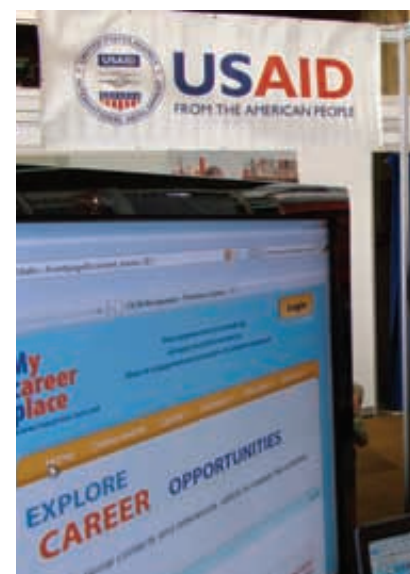
*Iskra Trajkoska, HR Manager at software developer Nextsense.*



Many employers that have participated in the e-Career fairs also find the event productive as they avoid the headaches of brick-and-mortar career fairs—organizing a booth, marketing, travel, and weeding through hundreds of physical meetings to determine who might even be qualified for an interview. The MyCareer e-fair requires only a profile registration on the web site and time interacting from the office. Every virtual “booth” is completely customizable and can include links to web pages, multimedia files (video and pictures), presentations and marketing materials.

Iskra Trajkoska, HR Manager at software developer Nextsense, summarized the benefits for an employer: “Participating in the e-Career fair allowed us to communicate with students all over the country, thus allowing us to be even closer to future employees and the talented workforce that our company has a need for. As an ICT company, we must say, the electronic fair was not only the cheapest but also the most effective way, allowing us not only to receive job/internship applications, but also to discuss the career development of interested users.”

The ease of taking part in a e-Career fair helps attract a wider group of participants from more regions of Macedonia than would be likely in a traditional career fair. During the March 2010 fair, there were 7,295 visits over the 5-day e-Career Fair, 81,415 page views (11.16 average page views per visitor). Over 80 people took part in as many as 20 individual chat sessions discussing various job postings. Over 170 interviews were conducted as applicants vied for 32 different postings.



### Education and Training Institutions: Adopting MyCareer principles

In most developed economies, universities and vocational schools play an important role in career development and creating job opportunities for their students. Prospective students may even select a university based on their track record for facilitating job placements. In Macedonia, most universities have career development or counseling centers available to students, although the quality of the services varies; often successful placements are linked to a professor's relationships with employers than a systematic and effective career development program. While most universities and training institutions in Macedonia are directing students to the internship portal, several are also adopting the practices promoted by MyCareer to upgrade or introduce career development services to better serve their students.

MyCareer's emphasis on career development has prompted some schools without working career centers to establish them and start counseling services. Bitola University developed a new career center and now works with MyCareer to build the center's capacity and assist staff to introduce and deliver services of benefit to individual businesses local workforce needs.

A number of educational institutions with career centers are also taking part in the GCDF program. After the initial wave of certifications, 10

**"...I see GCDF as an organized, structured and professional program that enables students, unemployed and all other individuals to make right decision about their career paths"**

*Dushan Milanov, Career Center Administrator and GCDF career counselor, Goce Delcev University, Stip*



GCDF (Global Career Development Facilitator) career counselors from 10 educational institutions will offer advice based on international guidelines and practices. Ljubinka Rtoska, a Career Center Administrator and GCDF career counselor from secondary school Dimitrija Cupovski in Veles, said the GCDF program will help her work with students as "they start thinking about their careers, the skills and aptitudes they need to develop to be ready for the future challenges in their professional life... The combination of career development services and internship placements will help students to upgrade their CV and to learn how to leave good impressions presenting themselves in front of their future potential employers."

Dushan Milanov, Career Center Administrator and GCDF career counselor at Goce Delcev University, Shtip, said, "Today we face the need for a qualified workforce that can answer the needs of the business community, meaning having the right profile in the right working environment. ... I see GCDF as an organized, structured and professional program that enables students, unemployed and all other individuals to make right decision about their career paths, in accordance with their wishes, needs, interests and potential." Under the GCDF concept, the career center at

the university in Stip will expand its career counseling services and offer students individual or group counseling, such as how to use their transferable skills in their career and get more information about the labor market.

Some universities are going one step further. The American College in Skopje is not only involving counselors in the GCDF program, it is integrating MyCareer's training in CV and cover letter writing and other communication skills into its curricula. In 2009, the American College made these trainings compulsory for all third-year students. After completion of the training, the students need to develop a CV and cover letter and send it to the career center manager to receive a certificate and be rewarded with one credit. MCP expects other universities to follow suit, creating a sustainable way of enhancing employability skills of the students without the direct involvement of MyCareer or donor-funded projects.

Moving forward, MCP expects career development centers in education and training institutions will play a large role in the long-term sustainability of the MyCareer initiative and the eventual spin-off. Career center are the crucial link between student needs and qualifications.

## Municipality of Gazi Baba: Public authorities using MyCareer

**B**usinesses are not the only employers facing a skills deficit. Government authorities also need qualified and motivated young people able to contribute to the administration and delivery of public services. Within the MyCareer initiative, MCP has reached out to municipalities, not only as potential employers for interns, but also as a cost-effective means to bring companies and young people within their constituencies into the MyCareer fold.

“With the decentralization process, local governments gained increased authority in planning and facilitating local economic development, making this one of their highest priorities. ... With this new partnership, local governments will have the opportunity to help local businesses hire the best skilled workforce available in their municipalities.”

*Dusica Perisic, Executive Director of Association of the Units of Local Self-government of the Republic of Macedonia ZELS.*

The municipality of Gazi Baba has a large number of companies and is the largest industrial zone in Skopje, representing one-third of Macedonia's GDP. Some of the largest manufacturers in Macedonia are located there: Alkaloid, Mak Steel, Skopska Pivara, Skopski Pazar, Elektroelement, Lek etc, Beton and Toplifikacija. Yet the municipality still faces the same high rates of unemployment found elsewhere in the country. Since joining the MyCareer effort, Gazi Baba integrated the internship concept into its daily business, hiring 15 interns to date.

For its mayor, the rationale for collaboration with MyCareer was clear. “The municipality learns more about the available workforce potential, is better able to inform the business sector about available workforce capabilities, while strengthening the link with the business community and reducing unemployment among young people,” Mayor Toni Trajkovski said. “The municipality contributes to its community by giving the opportunity for students to gain their first work experience.” The municipality has.

Initially, some Gazi Baba officials were hesitant to hire interns. “When we started this project, we were not sure how the administration could find the time and resources to enroll the in-



terns, but the organized mentorship approach that MyCareer introduced has made the process very easy,” Mayor Trajkovski said. In the end, the administration found great value in the interns. Emilija Gjurginovska, the MyCareer-trained intern mentor, said that “in some departments, the administration was overloaded with current projects and activities, and the interns were a great contribution in finishing some active projects in a way that they brought a new perspective in the working processes and fresh ideas.” She also noted that working with interns builds a database of qualified workers from the municipality that could be engaged in the future.

Gazi Baba is now in the process of recruiting a second round of interns. The municipality plans to continue with this program and employ former interns. To date, 52 municipalities have enlisted in MyCareer and engaged a total of 37 interns.

### Career development within Macedonia's wider workforce development agenda

The MyCareer Initiative is part of a larger agenda to address Macedonia's workforce dilemma. Whereas MyCareer focuses on building the general skill sets of the country's younger workforce, other MCP workforce activities target specific industry needs. These include:

- **Industry-led training:** Tailored training programs support either Macedonian exporters to enhance the productivity and effectiveness of new or existing employees, or potential investors needing specific skill sets to smooth out investment roll-out. Often involves collaboration with local or regional vocational schools.
- **Revolving Fund:** Helping Macedonian companies and investors train new recruits through a cost-sharing arrangement; new recruits or applicants pay 10% of the training costs, the company pays 20%. MCP covers the final 70% and assists in the design and delivery of the program. Once training is complete, hired recruits are expected to repay the MCP amount within 6-8 months, to be used for future trainings
- **Certifications:** Cost-sharing and facilitating the delivery of certification training and accreditation to allow companies and individuals to pursue market opportunities

## USAID Macedonia Competitiveness Project (MCP): Who we are and what we do

The USAID Macedonia Competitiveness Project (MCP) is a five-year project, implemented by CARANA Corporation, that supports initiatives to stimulate foreign and domestic investment, capture higher value export markets, and generate significant numbers of new jobs for Macedonia. MCP implements cost-effective, high-impact and market-oriented activities within an integrated approach that considers sector-specific issues as well as those that affect Macedonia's ability to achieve export-driven growth across sectors. These activities are structured on vertical and horizontal levels.

Vertical component activities focus on apparel, light manufacturing and ICT, creating new business and investment and enabling Macedonian companies and supply chains to better compete within a given industry or market.

Horizontal or cross-cutting compo-

nent activities benefit multiple sectors and make Macedonia a more competitive place to do business.

Components include: access to finance, workforce development, and facilitation of foreign investment. MCP market-led interventions typically involve:

- Market linkages with international companies resulting in new export deals and strategic partnerships involving joint business ventures, investment and knowledge/technology transfer.
- New foreign investment—green field, brown field or joint venture—leading to export-oriented job creation and the strengthening of supply chains and industries within Macedonia.
- Financing—debt or equity—for Macedonian companies aiming to improve profitability, competitiveness and market positioning

through investments in capacity expansion, productivity upgrades and product development.

- Adoption of modern technologies and practices and compliance with certifications required to perform and be seen as credible partners.
- Investments in students and employees, resulting in a workforce with upgraded skills and flexibility.

MCP leverages USAID funds through intensive collaboration with local implementing partners (who often offer in-kind services) and cost-sharing activities with project beneficiaries. Cost-sharing is a critical element to not only stretch use of available funds, but increase the likelihood of success and sustainability, as beneficiaries have a greater stake and ownership in the process.

MCP would like to express gratitude to our project partners for their generous contributions to *Macedonia Competes*:

**Ivana Ristovska,**

full time employee in EOS Matrix

**Fatmir Besimi,**

Minister of Economy, Macedonia

**Marina Sivakova-Taskov,**

Human Resources Manager, EOS Matrix

**Nenad Dimitrievic,**

Human Resources Manager, VIP Operator

**Dojranka Anastasovska Cvetkovska,**

HR Representative, EVN Makedonija

**Iskra Trajkoska,**

HR Manager, Nextsense

**Ljubinka Rtoska,**

Career Center Administrator and

GCDF career counselor,

**VET Dimitrija Cupovski,** Veles

**Dushan Milanov,**

Career Center Administrator and GCDF career

counselor, Goce Delcev University, Stip

**Dusica Perisic,** Executive Director of Association of

the Units of Local Self-government of Macedonia, ZELS

**Toni Trajkovski,** Mayor of Municipality of Gazi Baba

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