

# ***The State of Career Services and Career Professionals in India***

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## **Demographic Profile of India**

India is one of the oldest civilizations in the world with a kaleidoscopic variety of people and rich cultural heritage. It has achieved all-around socio-economic progress during the last 70 years of its independence. As the seventh largest country in the world, India stands apart from the rest of Asia, marked off as it is by mountains and the sea, which define a distinct geographical entity for the country. It covers an area of 32,872, 63 sq. km (1,269,346 sq mi), and has a population (as on 1 March 2011) of 1,210,193,422 with 623.7 million males and 586.4 million females (National Portal of India, 2005).

India is poised to become the world's youngest country by 2020, with an average age of 29 years, and includes around 28% of the world's workforce (UN Habitat, 2013). The working age population of India is expected to increase from 761 million to 869 million during 2011-2020. Consequently, India will be experiencing a period of "demographic bonus," in which the growth rate of the working age population will exceed that of the total population. Not only this, India is expected to enjoy its demographic dividend until 2040 (Planning Commission Government of India, 2013).

The Institute of Applied Manpower Research (IAMR), a government think tank, has forecasted the requirement of skilled manpower over the coming next decade. According to IAMR's analysis, the total number of people who need to be trained in varying kinds of skills by 2022 ranges between 249 and 290 million (Dhoot, 2013). To train such a large pool of manpower is a considerable challenge that the country is currently facing. Many initiatives, policies and plans have been formulated to meet the challenge and impart "employable skills" to the country's growing workforce. One such initiative is enhancing entrepreneurship and planning the career development landscape for the country's massive youth population. Guidance and counseling services that can effectively facilitate career decision-making in the young assume a special urgency in the Indian situation.

## **Background of Career Services in India**

The National Employment Service (NES) is the public employment service maintained by the Government of India (GoI), which meets the requirements of the International Labor Organization (ILO), Convention 88. The NES is comprised of a network of 978 employment exchanges managed by the state government based on the policies laid down by the Ministry of Labor and Employment. The Employment Exchanges work under the ambit of the *Employment Exchanges (Compulsory Notification of Vacancies) Act* (1951) and the procedures laid down in the *National Employment Service Manual* for delivery of services. The major bottlenecks in

delivery of services in NES include geographical jurisdiction for registration, seniority in registration of job seekers, and low usage of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), thus, creating islands of detached and unconnected information. Consequently, both jobseekers and employers remained unsatisfied both in terms of type of jobs offered by employers and type of candidates provided for jobs posted, leading to information asymmetry. The NES has undergone a series of changes over the years, the most recent being transformation to the National Career Service by leveraging technology for enhancing the quality and quantity of employment services.

### **Transformed System: National Career Services**

On July 2015, the Government of India unveiled the government's job board, called National Career Service (NCS), portal to meet the growing demand of comprehensive career services for its aspiring population. The NCS was conceived in collaboration with the states, leveraging their experience in employment services and the experience of private job portals. A National ICT-based portal ([www.ncs.gov.in](http://www.ncs.gov.in)) is designed to overcome the inadequacies in the existing NES to connect the employment opportunities with the aspirations of youth and facilitate registration of job seekers, job providers, skill providers, and career counselors. The portal provides job matching services in a highly transparent and user-friendly manner. The NCS has a variety of services like job matching, information about skill development courses, apprenticeship, and career counseling, along with all employment and career related services. The NCS project implementation has resulted in increasing effectiveness of the existing employment exchange network through information symmetry among stakeholders. Currently, there is an increased usage of IT systems for job vacancy postings. A database of candidates and employers for job matching and searching candidates is accessible by stakeholders. A repository of career content mapped to international standards for comparability exists for usage. There is widespread access to services through multiple access channels such as a web portal, mobile devices, Common Services Centers (CSCs) and career centers. Multi-lingual call centers are designed to enhance the on-going capacity building of stakeholders of the GoI envisions around 100 fully operational model career centers becoming operational during 2016-17 for candidate registration and tracking.

The NCS portal was launched and dedicated to the nation by the Honorable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on July 20, 2015. Since its launch, the Ministry has written to all the states and central government ministries to popularize the use of NCS. Discussions have been held with industry associations like the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), the Associated Chambers of Commerce of India (ASSOCHAM), Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI), The National Association of Software & Services Companies (NASSCOM) and the Indian Staffing Federation for garnering vacancies on the NCS platform.

Capacity building of employment exchange officers has also been initiated and over 1000 officers have already been trained. The feedback received from the states and industry associations indicates that there is a need to further increase the awareness of NCS among stakeholders through targeted Information, Education & Communication (IEC) campaigns and encourage more job fairs so that job seekers and employers can converge for job-skill matching and placements. Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) with strategic partners have been

signed with leading job portals and placement/staffing agencies to enrich the bouquet of employment services. The NCS has over a million employers and 35 million jobseekers registered on the portal along with over 27,000 skill providers. The aim is to enhance focus on career counseling as a key activity of NCS to enable the aspiring youth to pursue the right career choice according to their aptitude so that they join the workforce with better skills for promoting growth and development.

### **Main Stakeholders of NCS**

The NCS is accessible to all stakeholders, based on partnerships, and provides large numbers of services supported by call centers or helpdesks and through a network of new nodes like CSC (common service centers). The main stakeholders of NCS include unemployed candidates seeking jobs. This includes students seeking career counseling services and candidates looking for vocational and occupational guidance. Illiterate, under-privileged sections of society, and blue-collar workers seeking placements and guidance and major stakeholders are offered help through NCS, along with persons with different abilities, ex-servicemen, veterans, and senior citizens. Employers seeking suitable candidates for specific roles can select and screen the profiles. Thus, the National Career Services is the one-stop destination for all information and services related to careers and career service providers.

The NCS is conceptualized as a comprehensive, multi-pronged, transformational project. Key aspects of this project include:

- Establishment of **career centers** which would be enabled by making the right infrastructure and linkages available to perform counseling functions;
- Implementation of a comprehensive capacity-building initiative for augmenting the skills of **career center professionals** and other ecosystem counseling partners;
- Setting up a **national portal** which will act as a platform to bridge the gap between government and the private job providing ecosystem, job seekers and the skill development ecosystem;
- Providing access to tools to analyze skill-wise the **demands of industry and supply of jobseekers**, as well as access to a rich knowledge repository of career counseling content in multiple languages so that candidates are counseled appropriately;
- **Collaboration with various stakeholders** like state governments, schools, colleges, jobseekers, skill development institutions, employers, non-governmental organizations, volunteer agencies, technology partners, and verification agencies; and
- **Establishing institutional/governance structures** and revenue models for securing sustainability and relevance of the services being offered through these centers (Directorate General of Training Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2014).

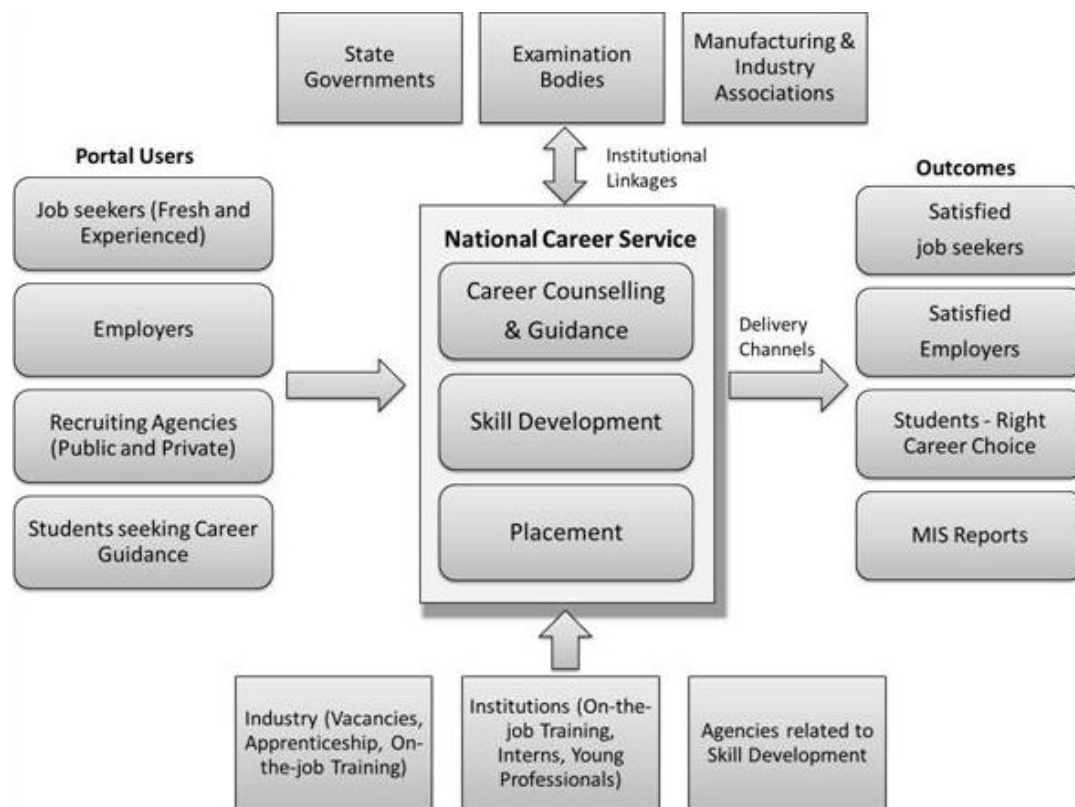


Figure 1. Architecture of National Career Services from the Government of India

The National Career Service is comprised of three broad divisions: (a) career counseling and guidance, (b) skill development; and (c) placement. The structural architecture of NCS includes tripartite bodies, i.e., state governments, examination bodies, and manufacturing & industry associations, which share institutional bi-directional linkages with the three service divisions. It is a one stop platform for various stakeholders like employers, recruiting agencies (both public and private), students, and job seekers. Vacancies, apprenticeship training programs, and on-the-job training initiatives are taken by industries for students, apprentices and young professionals. In addition, specific agencies are working with NCS to provide industry-specific skill development courses to allow the workforce to enhance and excel in their careers.

The NCS portal integrates a five-dimensional operational framework coordinated in one platform to facilitate the purpose of comprehensive career services. These five dimensions are- portal users, institutional linkages, other significant inputs, delivery channels, and outcomes. Job seekers, employers, recruiting agencies, and students seeking career guidance are the main portal users of NCS. The primary roles and functions of fresh and experienced job seekers is to create and update a standardized profile. Job seekers are provided with job search and matching services along with employment market information. Employers and recruiting agencies perform their roles by posting vacancy notifications and indexing the candidate database with

verified credentials. Both private and public recruiting agencies share the employee database through collaboration to ease the recruitment process of employers. Students seeking career guidance are helped through a single window for career counseling and guidance. Skill building and placement services are offered by defining career paths and orienting them to proper channels.

### **Institutional Linkages**

A tripartite institutional linkage is built among state governments, examination bodies and manufacturing and industry associations. The state governments help in arranging advocacy campaigns like job fairs. They act as additional service delivery points who play a major role in linking the NCS with existing state portals. They also do the work of data digitization.

The major examination bodies like the Central Board of Secondary Education, State Boards and Universities are also linked to NCS as a part of the institutional linkage program. Their role is to do candidate credential verification from databases and other periodical push-and-pull mechanisms for the system. Another important linkage is with industry and manufacturing units to increase notification of vacancies and to fulfil skilled manpower recruitment. The NCS along with industry associations standardise the National Classification of Occupation (NCO) codes and run train-the-trainer programs for staff.

### **Other Inputs to NCS**

Many other institutes and agencies are also linked to NCS to provide skill development, apprenticeship, and on-the-job training to young professionals. Affiliation with industry is necessary to report vacancies, apprenticeship programs, and on-the-job training for potential candidates. Academic institutions are associated to offer internships and skill-based training to young candidates. Specific agencies related to skill development and information management systems are also connected to the main portal. These include organizations like the Labor Market Information System (LMIS), National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF), National Skills Registry (NSR), and Aadhar Unique Identification.

### **Delivery Channels**

There is a tie-up with delivery platforms, call centers and value added service interfaces to offer streamlined delivery of career services. Common service centers and portals like e-kiosks are linked to the NCS. Multi-lingual call center based services are allied to handle diversity issues. Value added services are offered through mobile apps, a tablet friendly interface and USSD (Unstructured Supplementary Service Data) based services.

### **Outcomes**

The outcomes of the NCS endeavor are satisfied job seekers, employers and students in terms of more vacancies, low turnaround time, and transmission of symmetrical information across all stakeholders. The presence of a large verified and filtered candidate database helps employers to reach the desired candidates. The services help students to make a career choice based on accurate information and contemporary industry trends. The Management Information System (MIS) is strengthened due to e-filing of reports and returns downloadable in multiple formats.

## **NCS Career Centers**

The NCS is focused on establishing career centers in a phased approach ensuring that a standardized set of services is offered across the system. There is a proposal to implement nationwide Model Career Centers in industrial clusters, education and training institutions, tertiary sector clusters, rural and semi-urban centers, corporate setups, and employment exchanges. States and institutions keen to set up such centers are expected to replicate services offered in these model centers to other career centers.

The career centers will connect local youth and other job-seekers with all possible job opportunities in a transparent and effective manner through the use of technology as well as through counseling and training. While the state-of-the-art technology-driven National Career Service Portal provides information about available job opportunities and resources for career centers to function effectively, the career centers will be pivotal to outreach and offer counseling interface for many millions of aspiring youth from rural, semi urban areas as well as from disadvantaged sections of the society.

These centers will be staffed by motivated and competent personnel enabled with the necessary tools and infrastructure for effectively and continuously assessing demand for skills in the labor market. They will guide youth visiting the centers and outreach to the schools, colleges, and training institutions about the training, apprenticeship, and job opportunities in the market. They will be responsible for connecting youth and other job seekers with jobs through the portal, job fairs, and other possible interface with employees such as campus placements. The function of mobilizing employers and other placement agencies to connect to NCS for meeting their human resource requirements will also be under the purview of these centers.

The Model Career Centers will be the role model for replication of career related services. For supporting the professional assistance requirement, the ministry will be launching a scheme for young professionals to be assigned to these model career centers to facilitate the integration and institutionalization of new processes. The Directorate General of Training (DGE&T) has proposed to enlist competent young professionals through a centralized scheme for a period of three years across these model career centers. These professionals will prepare regular reports on success parameters, to be shared with all stakeholders and will identify best practices and pain areas or bottlenecks in model career center implementation. They will also coordinate outreach activities to schools and colleges and conduct job-fairs including interaction with academia, local industry, manufacturing associations, training providers and other stakeholders. In case, a center requires the services of a counselor instead of a young professional for better operationalization of the model career center, the same may be requested in the proposal.

## **NCS Action Plan**

The NCS action plan and key activities involved with the roll-out of the National Career Service initiative are laid down in the policy document. As per the action plan, there will be a two-way interaction with stakeholders to take inputs for portal design and offer services to them. The central ministries and state governments will be directly involved in the revision of forms and processes. The educational institutions will serve their roles for providing candidate

databases on a regular basis. Training providers will keep on updating and consolidating training calendars & databases of skilled people. Industries and employers will display their vacancy notifications. There will be an inter linking of state systems with the national portal. Advocacy and awareness campaigns will be launched for capacity building for NCS. Training programs, at national and regional levels for training of GoI and state personnel, will be conducted at regular locations. Ongoing activities will be held for developing resources for career guidance, counseling and train-the-trainers programs. Value added services like SMSs, emails, and mobile apps will disseminate information to all potential stakeholders. There will be a continuous monitoring and evaluation of the overall activities and services of the NCS by regulatory authority.

Overall, the National Career Services (NCS) initiative aims to address the gaps in the employment market by strategic interventions like improving decent employment, enhancing quality of workforce, enhancing female labor force participation, entrepreneurial endeavors, increasing informal to formal transitions, engaging with the rural workforce for higher productivity, re-employment (second life) opportunities etc. It is a path-breaking initiative meant to streamline the career development services in the country for a better future.

### **Career Services for Major Populations in India**

India is a diverse nation comprising of in-school youth, university students, employed adults, unemployed adults, and other specialized groups within its population. Specialized schemes, policies, and programs are formulated and implemented by state and central level ministries and departments to fulfil educational, counseling, vocational and career-related needs. A panoramic view of these is documented below.

#### **K-12 (In-school youth)**

Guidance and counseling in the country is offered at k -12 elementary, middle and high school level using different approaches depending upon the kind of program organized (in schools) and the personnel engaged in imparting guidance and counseling services. Depending on the services offered, these approaches may be grouped as the Specialist Approach, Career Teacher Approach, and Teacher Counselor Approach. The Government of India initiated and implemented the scheme of Rashtriya Madhyamaik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) under the Ministry of Human Resource Development to fulfill the vision of offering education and career services to the potential youth of the country.

Under the specialist approach, special full-time counselors are hired in the schools to offer guidance and counseling to the students. Keeping in view the needs and specific concerns of students, guidance and counseling activities are organized for the students. In addition, group discussions, role-plays, drama and counseling are offered by organizing orientation programs and sensitization workshops.

Career teachers serve special roles in school settings. They are responsible for collection of career information and its dissemination to students. They also organize group activities and make students aware of various career paths and future roles. They are trained to do psychological assessment and testing with students and make them aware of their aptitude,

personality and subject interests. They also apply innovative techniques like play therapy, art, drama, counseling, referral etc. to guide students to the right career pathway.

Teacher counselors also play an integral role at k-12 level for enlightening students. They serve the function of integration of guidance philosophy and principles in day-to-day teaching work and other school activities and during interaction with students, parents, and principals. They are also responsible for dissemination of career information to students by discussions, display, films and one-to-one counseling.

### **Higher Education**

India is shaping its younger workforce through skill development and entrepreneurship. The institutional framework for skill development and entrepreneurship is created in the country through government and private sector initiatives. There are 23 central & state ministries engaged to train 350 million people by 2022. Besides, National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), a scheme under Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, has a target of skilling up millions of people by 2022 by fostering private sector initiatives.

In higher education at the university and college level, skill-based vocational institutes have been opened to make youth industry-ready for professional roles. Quality trainers have been hired to offer career-oriented skills training in several fields. The trainers are certified by the Quality Assessors who ensure consistent outcomes of the assessment and certification process for these trainers. Retired employees, ex-servicemen and defense personnel are hired to impart industry-specific training for skilled careers.

The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has also launched an Entrepreneurship Policy Framework that fosters the development of government-led entrepreneurship organizations and corporate trainers. Specialized business trainers and experienced existing faculties are hired to offer training programs and guidance to budding entrepreneurs. The aim of training and counseling is to educate and equip potential and early stage entrepreneurs across India and to connect them to peers, mentors and incubators. Entrepreneurship Hubs (E-Hubs) are designed to support new ideas and convert them into workable strategies. There is a focus on under-represented groups and women to encourage and catalyze a culture shift to entrepreneurship. Guidance is offered to improve ease of doing business and access to finance. The overall agenda of inculcating these steps into higher education is to foster social entrepreneurship and grassroots innovations for economic growth and development.

### **Employed and Unemployed Adults**

The NCS portal provides a nation-wide online platform for employed and unemployed jobseekers and employers for job matching in a dynamic, efficient, and responsive manner. The NCS is a rich repository of career content on over 3000 occupations across 53 sectors. For employment of adults, the NCS is connected to major recruiting agencies of the country like Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), Staff Selection Commissions (SSC), Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS), State Public Services Commissions, Public Sector Units (PSUs) and Directorates of Education. Information about skill development courses,



apprenticeship, internship, career counseling is regularly updated on the portal for the unemployed adult population of the country. They are encouraged to enroll, register and look through the databases themselves from anywhere using the online forms without visiting employment exchanges

### **Other Special Groups**

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment ensures the education, employment and career growth opportunities for the minority groups of the Indian population. The state and central channelizing agencies hire special trainers for empowerment of Schedule Casts, Schedule Tribes, Other Backward Classes, Denotified Tribes, Disabled, Senior Citizens, and other vulnerable groups. There is also a provision for education and employment for socially and educationally backward classes.

### **Credentials and Empanelment of Career Professionals**

The National Career Service (NCS) has created a Network of Career Counselors on the NCS platform where career centers are the hub of counseling services. The services include administration of psychometric tests to assess the student's or job seeker's personality, aptitude and interest. These tests are available via both online and offline modes. The NCS Portal provides an opportunity to browse through the list of the approved counselors and book an appointment with them. Counseling services are available on a face-to-face basis or via online platforms depending upon the chosen medium. The main aim of career counseling is to assist the job seekers in choosing a field that is in tune with their skills and their career expectations. The NCS Project also envisages offering vocational guidance services through empaneled Counselors and Vocational Guidance (VG) Experts, having requisite experience and expertise.

### **Eligibility for Empanelment of Counselors and Vocational Guidance Experts**

The NCS project has empaneled counselors and vocational guidance (VG) experts that are engaged in career development and employment related activities. The eligibility criteria for counselors/VG experts applying for such empanelment are detailed below.

#### **Eligibility for Counselors**

The counselors empaneling with the NCS need to meet the standard eligibility criteria. The counselor should be working in one or more of the given three areas: (a) career development and its coordination, (b) employment services like staffing, placement, recruitment; or (c) offering specialized counseling in a relevant counseling setting.

The counselor needs to have the requisite qualifications and experience from one of the three categories mentioned below to be eligible for empanelment with NCS.

- Category A: the requisite qualification needed is a M.A. in Psychology, Social Work, Education, Counseling, Child Development, or Special Education. A minimum of one year experience in counseling in the area of specialization is required.
- Category B: the requisite qualification needed is a graduate degree in any discipline from a recognized university with a diploma in Guidance and Counseling from a recognized institution. A minimum of one year experience in counseling in the area of specialization is required.

- Category C: the requisite qualification needed is a post graduate degree from any recognized University with Diploma in Guidance and Counseling from a recognized institution like NCERT.

Further, counselors working with institutions like the network of Employment Exchanges, Career Centers, Model Career Centers, University Employment Information and Guidance Bureaus (UEI&GB) are directly eligible for empanelment with NCS. However, these officers are not entitled to receive remuneration. The counselor must not have a history of being disqualified from employment or affiliation due to disciplinary reasons or otherwise and nor have been convicted by a court.

### **Responsibilities of Counselor**

The counselor has the responsibility for the successful discharge of services to the candidates seeking them. They must regularly update information on their profile section on the NCS portal. Timely update of calendar and schedule on the NCS portal is also mandatory for them. They are to adhere to guidelines to maintain uniformity in services being offered through the NCS. Providing appropriate counseling to jobseekers or students including administering and interpreting the results of the standardized test also come under their domain of work. It is advisable for counselors to use NCO codes for better interpretation of results. Refreshing and updating the technical knowledge using the IT based provisions made on the portal is also essential for their role.

### **Eligibility for Vocational Guidance Experts**

The Vocational Guidance (VG) experts empaneling with the NCS need to meet the standard eligibility criteria. A person may apply as a VG expert if he or she is a retired Government or Public Sector Unit (PSU) officer (Group B gazette officers of central government and above) dealing with HR, recruitment, selection, public relations, finance, marketing, or administration. Private sector specialists working in HR, recruitment, selection, public relations, finance, marketing, administration and NGOs are also eligible for the role of a VG expert. Existing employment officers in employment exchanges, vocational rehabilitation centers and coaching cum guidance center can also serve the position of a VG expert. Self-employed like entrepreneurs, chartered accountants, doctors, architects and individuals dealing with overseas placement, employment and studies abroad are of great help as an expert to offer guidance and counseling. The essential qualifications and experience for a VG expert for empanelment with NCS is denoted below:

- Category 1: A post graduate degree from any recognized university is required along with a minimum five years of experience in counseling/vocational guidance in the area of specialization.
- Category 2: A graduate degree from any recognized university is required with a minimum ten years of experience in counseling and vocational guidance in the area of specialization.

### **Responsibilities of a VG Expert**

A VG expert is obliged to perform various roles and responsibilities. Like counselors, they must regularly update information on their profile section on the NCS portal and provide

timely update of their calendar and schedule. Adhering to guidelines to maintain uniformity in services being offered through the NCS is compulsory for them. They also must refresh and update their knowledge using the IT based provisions made on the portal. They must provide suitable guidance services to jobseekers and students in their areas of expertise. Their job is to help jobseekers and students in administration of the tests, if necessary, and referring him or her to a counselor for interpretation of the same. The administration of tests may be done in local languages in case required by the counselee. Thus, under the NCS initiative, the NCS Portal will be the platform where various stakeholders will be interacting for exchange of career and employment related opportunities. The counselors empaneled by the Directorate General of Employment (DGE), Ministry of Labor and Employment, will offer the various services through this platform and leverage the network of career centers (employment exchanges) in the delivery of these services.

### **The NCS- Partnership Project**

The NCS Portal provides an open architecture for partnering of institutions and organizations for delivery of career and employment related services. The National Career Service (NCS) portal envisages stakeholders' partnership in the career development space. These stakeholders are-state governments, various departments of the central government and private organizations including corporate, aggregators, placement agencies, private job portals etc.

### **Eligibility Criteria for Partnering Institutions under NCS**

The organizations and institutions partnering with the NCS need to meet the specified eligibility criteria. The organization or institution should be working in the areas of career development and its coordination. Such organizations should be involved in employment services like staffing, placement and recruitment promoting commerce, industry and entrepreneurship for direct and indirect employment. The organization or institution should be registered in India under one or more of the acts, such as the *Societies Registration Act*, *Indian Trusts Act*, *Companies Act*, *Shops and Establishments Act*, and the central or state government authority statutes.

The organization and institution must have been in operation for a minimum of two years from the date of submission of application. In case of organizations providing highly skilled employment or career services, the criteria may be relaxed. The applicant must have a minimum of 50 employees on its payroll as of 1<sup>st</sup> April of the financial year of submission of application. In case of organizations providing highly skilled employment or career services, the criteria may be relaxed. The organization must not have been blacklisted by any central or state government department in the last three years of the date of submission of proposal.

Thus, NCS also provides a scope of partnering with allied institutions, industry and organizations to take maximum benefit of all the stakeholders in offering the holistic career development services to the people.

### **Future Directions**

India has a significant advantage with a young population and a declining dependency ratio, offering huge potential for a demographic dividend. There are, however, challenges which

need to be addressed for fully procuring this unique dividend in the present scenario.

Vocational guidance, career counseling, career development, and credentialing of career development practitioners are currently at a very young stage of development in India. Most young people have either limited or no availability for career development services. Typically, the young career aspirant in India makes choices based on hearsay, prevailing career beliefs and prestige variables pertaining to specific careers. The existing education system does not equip them for making a career choice based on their interests, aptitudes, personality traits, and market needs. The avenues of well-defined career plans and career paths for the young people are few and remain localized to the accessibility of only a small segment of the society. The flow of information on the availability of diverse kinds of careers and job opportunities is tardy. As a result, young people in India face an environment in which they find themselves confused regarding the right kind of career to choose.

In the last decade, the economy grew at an annual rate of around 8%, but job growth was below 1% (Ministry of Labor and Employment, 2016). The proportion of persons in the labor force declined from 43% in 2004-05 to 39.5% in 2011-12, with a sharp drop in female participation rate from 29% to 21.9% (Ministry of Labor and Employment, 2016). Although the overall unemployment rate is at 2.2%, the unemployment rate for youth in the age group 15 to 29 years, and particularly those possessing secondary level of education and above, are higher. More than 52% of the workers are engaged in self-employment and a significant proportion of women workers are primarily home based (Ministry of Labor and Employment, 2016).

Another challenge faced by the country is a dearth of qualified and trained career service providers and trainers. India is facing an acute shortage of professionals who can impart employable skills and career paths to its growing workforce over the next few decades. A pool of trained, accredited and certified career counselors is needed to cater to career/employment needs of youth and adults. There is a scarcity of well qualified, trained career practitioners working in all levels of education, colleges, universities, business, industry and workforce. The formal training, certification, and accreditation of professionals who provide career services have just begun to standardize in the country. Presently, the undergraduates and postgraduates with a major in psychology are playing the role of career practitioners and counselors in schools and universities. A handful of these are have a doctorate in psychology with counseling or educational psychology as the subject of their research and practice. The NCERT (National Council of Education, Research and Training) provides a one-year diploma course for training of professionals in guidance and counseling. The course aims at enhancing the skills and competencies of teachers to promote holistic development of pupils and handle their academic, socio-emotional, and ethical problems. The course is open to teachers, teacher educators, school administrators and untrained guidance personnel from India, other SAARC, and Afro-Asian countries.

India needs a large pool of career professionals to help people of all ages to investigate employment, work-related resources and training options. High quality guidance and counseling services are required to meet the needs of the national population and to support lifelong learning, career management and continuous professional development. Certified and accredited

career professionals in terms of knowledge and technological skills are essential to assist candidates to find jobs, apprenticeships and trainings. In addition, career professionals are also required at school level to advise students about various career options and facilitate smooth transition from school to work.

With such a high need and demand for career professionals to serve the youth, adults, and especially the female population of the country, the opportunity to be a part of this endeavor of NCDA will provide a platform to meet the growing needs of the Indian workforce. It will be beneficial to partner with national and international organizations engaged in career development and enhancement practices to reap the benefits of professional practices in the country. The magnitude of the population currently in need of career guidance and counseling coupled with the growing demand for a skilled workforce are challenges that can be met with such accredited programs.

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### Author Bios

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