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**DIGITAL TRANSITIONS  
IN LIFELONG GUIDANCE:  
RETHINKING CAREERS  
PRACTITIONER  
PROFESSIONALISM**

A CareersNet  
expert collection





The **European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training** (Cedefop) is the European Union's reference centre for vocational education and training, skills and qualifications. We provide information, research, analyses and evidence on vocational education and training, skills and qualifications for policy-making in the EU Member States.

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# Foreword

Career guidance and counselling is uniquely positioned to smooth lifelong journeys along individual career and learning pathways. Looking beyond the pandemic health crisis, in 2020, the Cedefop-ETF paper *Challenges and opportunities for VET in the next decade* pointed to a need for better-prepared career guidance and counselling practitioners.

Although professionalising guidance staff through relevant initial education and training and professional standards remains a priority, this is not enough. Continuous professional development, in-service and workplace training, as well as informal peer learning among colleagues, are equally important; practitioners themselves must seek training, learning while working, and self-development. Yet, the increasing calls to invest more to raise professionalism of practitioners, including in the light of the training needs brought about by digital innovation in their occupation, still contrast in many EU countries with scarce evidence on how these invest in preparing, and keeping their guidance workforce up to date.

This collection of papers by CareersNet experts therefore arrives at an opportune moment when questions about professionalising career services and career education for the young and for adults alike re-emerge on the European policy agenda, like they first did in 2008 with the Resolution and the creation of the European policy guidelines in 2015.

Just before the onset of the pandemic in 2020, Cedefop's CareersNet decided to dedicate its annual meeting to rethinking professionalism of career practitioners in a digital context. Shortly after, guidance services were abruptly suspended in many countries across settings to protect staff and clients. It is in this unique context that Cedefop and its network of experts developed the papers presented in this collection. Authors have contributed with their independent and diverse points of view, from the perspective of academic research, programme management, from inside ministries or from the vantage point of public employment services.

No one can say right now, with all the changes underway, what the career guidance system will look like in the next decade. However, there will always be a need to sharpen and renew the skills of career practitioners and service processes, and for the evolution of authentic cooperation with stakeholders and partners that directly benefits guidance users.

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The Cedefop CareersNet team provided content editing for this collection: Cynthia Harrison, who coordinated the work, and Ernesto Villalba, Department for VET and skills.

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Although not all member-experts of CareersNet during their mandate period ending in July 2021, were able to contribute papers, their active input to the October 2020 meeting is acknowledged and appreciated. The network, comprising expert stakeholders in the field, has contributed to Cedefop's evidence-based support to policy development in lifelong guidance since its establishment in 2017.



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## CHAPTER 1.

# Introduction

Cynthia M. Harrison, Cedefop <sup>(1)</sup>.

### 1.1. EU policy and evidence supporting professionalisation in career guidance

EU Member States aspire to develop more comprehensive lifelong guidance systems but are often hampered by contextual and other issues in how to approach professionalisation (Barnes et al., 2020). New dynamics in the development of ICT-driven ecosystems, at European level and within countries, play a greater role in shaping training policy and competence profiles. Professionalising career guidance is seen as one of the key principles for assuring quality in guidance services (Barnes et al., 2020; Cedefop, 2009, 2020; Ertelt and Kraatz, 2011; ETF, 2020). A continuously professionalising workforce can facilitate the functioning of education and training systems, including initial and continuing vocational education and training <sup>(2)</sup> (Cedefop and ETF, 2020). High-quality services can enable individuals to secure sustainable and relevant employment according to their competences and strengths, as well their aspirations, plans and potential. Support and incentives to careers and learning can smooth career pathways.

The Council Resolution on lifelong guidance (Council of the European Union, 2008) invited all countries to prioritise universal access to guidance services and to develop a common culture by means of quality assurance, among the various services responsible at local, regional, and national levels. Current EU policy reminds governments of the need to ensure that all individuals can access quality support services such as career guidance (European Commission, 2020a). In order to carry out their work, however, guidance professionals need to be adequately prepared to meet the evolving, high level of demand from the public, to enable clients to maximise their individual skills development appropriately (Osnabrück Declaration, 2020). National quality assurance systems for career guidance should include policies that require

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<sup>(1)</sup> Project manager, Lifelong guidance and CareersNet coordinator.

<sup>(2)</sup> Promoting CVET is a complex multidimensional process which needs synergic approaches and integrated supporting measures: guidance, validation, financing, outreach policies and other supporting measures, including professional development of guidance practitioners.



practitioners to have the competences needed to perform any tasks that fall within their dynamic role. Today, this will mean that, in addition to core field competences acquired through initial or continuing education and training, not only should they have access to accurate, real-time labour market information, but it should include skills intelligence, the correct training to mediate these data for clients, and capacity to work with digital guidance platforms. Practitioners should have knowledge of the world of work, of occupations undergoing digital transformation; of fields and jobs most affected by technological change, and which skillsets clients need to build on in future. Updating traditional competences and identifying additional ones, will be a constant task. Practitioners also need to work strategically to navigate the multiple services and sub-systems according to client needs and societal realities. The need to work with a diverse group of beneficiaries of all ages, with increasingly complex needs, requires sensitivity and understanding. Young people need school-based counsellors with the right skills, the right information and capacity to deliver career education and guidance fit for the present and beyond.

Although professionalisation of the guidance field through specialised initial education and training pathways remains a priority, it is not enough. Continuous professional development, in-service and workplace learning, non-formal learning opportunities, peer learning and exchange are equally important. In the public employment service sector, there is a need to invest more in staff to provide better customised and data-informed career guidance services (European Network of Public Employment Services, 2021). However, the increasing calls to sharpen focus on professionalism (Barnes et al., 2020; Cedefop, 2009; European Commission and Sienkiewicz, 2012; European Network of Public Employment Services, 2021; OECD, 2010, 2021; McCarthy, 2001), stand in contrast to the lack of evidence of systematic continuous professional development for career practitioners (Kettunen, 2021); but there are signs of change. Kettunen's study <sup>(3)</sup>, for example, using pre-pandemic international data from 2019, drew important policy-relevant conclusions on career practitioner training, indicating an increase in national and local activity in professionalising guidance. According to the evidence, some of this momentum was driven top-down, inspiring bottom-up innovation at regional level, and focus was on career practitioners' training and qualifications. Professional

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<sup>(3)</sup> Data were collected from a wide variety of guidance stakeholders who were governmental and non-governmental delegates of the International Symposium for Career Development and Public Policy (ICCDPP) [9th symposium](#) in 33 countries worldwide.



competences and standards, according to the findings, were either under revision or would be revised in many countries.

Papers in this collection draw attention to the need to rethink professionalism in the field and add to the evidence base on innovative shifts in enhancing professionalism with the use of blended, fully online, ad hoc training and planned programmes for professional development. Evidence and views are also offered on which competences and skills sets practitioners may need, to manage and update their future services and delivery.

Similar to the fragmented landscape of adult continuing and vocational learning (Cedefop and ETF, 2020), career learning and career guidance services are spread across many settings. This can mean provisions are positioned to be flexible, context-sensitive, and adaptable to target groups and communities; on the other hand, this can be an obstacle to policy implementation and development, particularly for integrated policy arrangements. Networked and dispersed systems place additional demands on the skills of specialist career guidance practitioners to support and resource them and require diverse training opportunities to develop a diverse workforce (Cedefop, 2009, p. 92). Fragmentation without coordination and corresponding professional networking or strategic competences (Kettunen and Vuorinen, Chapter 12 in this collection) among practitioners, can hinder professional cross-collaboration, seamless services, execution and monitoring of integrated support policies. Lack of coherence can be confusing to users who experience barriers in accessing public services. Education, training, and employment policies need to take the horizontal or transversal nature of lifelong guidance into account: that it can fill specific sectoral or other needs where services are delivered, but also fall into gaps if provisions are not coherent and coordinated. Competition for financial resources for in-service training can also be a problem.

## 1.2. Building the European evidence base on quality assurance and professionalism

Cedefop has been engaged in studies and monitoring of aspects of quality assurance in career guidance systems for over two decades. This publication is the first step in updating existing knowledge on the broad theme of professionalising career guidance since Cedefop published its 2009 volume *Professionalising career guidance: practitioner competences and qualification routes in Europe*. The study contains an overview of the career guidance landscape and an outline of key issues at the time, and Cedefop's competence framework for career practitioners.



The recent launching of Cedefop's [Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices](#), in February 2020, provides cross-country evidence on a number of system inputs and practices related to policy and legislation around high-quality service delivery, and quality assurance approaches. Information made available through contributions of Cedefop's CareersNet members <sup>(4)</sup> aims to monitor and document relevant policy developments towards achieving the objectives laid down by the [Council Resolution on lifelong guidance](#) (Council of the European Union, 2008), and the [European guidelines for policies and systems development for lifelong guidance](#) (ELGPN, 2015). Country records in the inventory provide system-wide information about national/regional policy developments and structures pertaining to career guidance, career education and career development in countries of the EU, EEA, EFTA, and EU accession countries. The inventory has a dedicated section on qualifications and training, and quality assurance, as well as other policy-relevant sections concerning access, cooperation and collaboration, ICT, guidance for specific groups and settings, and a number of social inclusion indicators.

No current discussion of professionalism in a critical service sector like career guidance and career learning could exclude the multifaceted theme of technology's impact on the field: digitalisation, the advance of new technologies and digital innovation in connection with professionalism. Quality assurance is also part of this. Big data offers the resources for real-time information for understanding in-demand skills in relation to the needs of guidance clients, but more evidence on the implications for career services and practitioners is needed. Career guidance services and activities are set in a field that crosses sectors and where evidence indicates that guidance work has been transformed, given a push by the measures enforced at the onset of COVID-19. What are the new tasks for providers, and which occupations in the labour market are affected or not by technology? What new learning is needed for providers and for clients? Are practitioners already adapting? What about self-help platforms and partnering with new technology, with the need for human intervention? What about privacy and impartiality, and the wider ethical dilemmas? Targeted competence development for career practitioners is now discussed in parallel with skills acquisition of the clients and learners they strive to empower. In the public employment services, for example, staff will need to have their skills and knowledge updated regularly, just like other workers (European PES Network, 2021, p.9). Though not a new discussion in career guidance policy, the issue of

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<sup>(4)</sup> CareersNet is Cedefop's network of independent experts in lifelong guidance and career development.



digital transformation of services, what are basic and what are advanced digital skills – of both practitioners and clients – are clearly aligned with other broad policy priorities.

An impressive number of new EU policies, priorities and initiatives mark the 2020ies as the ‘digital decade’, which is dedicated to making the European labour force fit for the digital age: the Updated Digital Education Action Plan (2020), the Digital Services Act (2020), the Digital Skills and Job Coalition <sup>(5)</sup>, the Digital Europe initiative and the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform, which offers online self-help guidance tools and resources for those looking for digital career opportunities. The new Europass multi-purpose platform also fits this emerging landscape. Finally, the European Pact for Skills and the Charter embedded in it invite public, private and civil society actors to collaborate and support all these interrelated initiatives (European Commission, 2020b).

Finally, with these developments that may intend to reach more users, it is equally important to keep sight of the European Pillar of Social Rights in respect to social inclusion, articulating the right to access the labour market and continuous learning, by identifying barriers to resources and opportunities that should benefit all. System change includes an awareness that all users have access to the appropriate channels of their choice. Along with career practitioners, managers and decision-makers need to quickly deepen their understanding of factors that may play an important role in further developments and the successful implementation of existing and emerging technologies (Kettunen and Sampson, 2019).

### 1.3. Collection of papers and CareersNet annual meeting, October 2020

Against this background, and with the pandemic evolving, the theme of the annual CareersNet meeting in October 2020, *Rethinking career practitioners professionalism in the digital context*, offered the CareersNet experts and meeting partner, the German Federal Employment Agency, and its University of Applied Labour Studies, a chance to debate these issues. It was an opportunity for reflection, peer learning and exchange on policy developments and practices at a unique moment in history, not long after the pandemic was declared. The current collection of working papers includes some of the presentation inputs,

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<sup>(5)</sup> It tackles digital skills of four groups in the labour force, and includes actions on career advice and guidance.



enriched with additional contributions by attending CareersNet experts and colleagues.

This collection is loosely structured into four parts, revolving around the broad theme of professionalising the career guidance workforce on the one hand and, on the other, the particular competences fit for the digital and wider societal context. Not all papers place direct focus on technology-related themes. Attention is also paid to other changes surrounding or triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Theoretical/conceptual and overview papers are included, while several papers present updated illustrations of national or regional systems or particular service developments.

Part I begins with a joint paper, *Identifying standards for career professionalism* (by Raimo Vuorinen, Jaana Kettunen, Ernesto Villalba-Garcia and Cynthia Harrison), introducing five different interrelated elements that help promote professionalism and ensure quality of guidance services. Evidence from Cedefop's Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices for countries included is used to illustrate how these aspects of the guidance systems have developed over the past few years.

The next contribution, *Professionalising career guidance in Greece: current and future challenges*, by Fotini Vlachaki, addresses cross-sectoral quality assurance and policy provisions already in place, as well as new legislation on qualifications and piloting of continuing training programmes initiated in 2020. Widespread adoption of new digital tools and remote support processes is visible in the career guidance and counselling services. The focus shifts slightly in *The relevance of the occupational qualification framework in the field of career guidance in Estonia* (by Margit Rammo), to the national system for awarding the career specialist qualification. The author discusses cross-sectoral stakeholder views on the advantages of the system and the qualification contents, and areas for further reflection and development. Digital skills of practitioners, portability of certificates, relevance of qualifications for capacity building and for the labour market, and the role of technology in the award process are key questions stakeholders discussed. *Digital badges for career practitioner skills validation in Italy* (by Giulio Iannisi), presents the open digital badge system for recognising and validating competences of career practitioners in one region in Italy. The new process can be carried out fully online and offers several badges. The design of the system of validating their skills and competences is based on the national standards for cross-sectoral guidance services in the country and competence standards for career practice in Italy adapted in the regions.

The last paper in this group, *Active support for the unemployed: implications of digitalisation for professionalism in career guidance* (by Susanne Kraatz) discusses changing concepts of active labour market policies in the public



employment service context. It analyses to what extent the need to rethink public employment service (PES) counsellor professionalism is covered by the existing tools developed for the European Network of Public Employment Services (PES Network). Documents from the PES Network and the European competence framework for PES and EURES practitioners are briefly analysed and discussed. Reflections are shared on making career guidance for the unemployed, especially those who are most vulnerable or with complex needs, fit for the digital future.

Part II discusses professionalism in relation to the swift expansion and rise of technology and the integration of ICT in career guidance. A joint paper, *Career chat: the art of AI and the human interface in career development* (by Füsün Akkök and Deirdre Hughes), begins this set of papers positing that big data, artificial intelligence and innovative tools (such as chatbots), are dynamic, portable and flexible approaches for self-directed learning and personalised careers support. Provision of holistic career guidance also needs skilful human intervention, and an openness among practitioners to new technologies. Diving deeper into technology's reach in the guidance field, arguments for enhancing career practitioner skills and competences in understanding and managing labour market information are presented in *Labour market management skills among career practitioners: tackling increasing complexity* (by Tibor Bors Borbély-Pecze). New skills and knowledge include analysis and interpretation of labour market statistics, big data, and databases, to incorporate this knowledge continuously into practice. Without this capacity, practitioners risk losing control of the special relationship career guidance has always had with the labour market, as a central aspect of their services for all clients.

Quality frameworks are relevant to digital career guidance services, as discussed in *A context-resonant quality framework for continuous career guidance professionalisation: the case of Norway* (by Erik Hagaseth Haug). The author demonstrates his points on how context is critical, using the recent establishment of the all-age and cross-sectoral national digital career guidance service in Norway. The importance of a shift toward 'integrated guidance', which combines different modalities for delivery, is discussed, as well as the centrality of career learning and ownership of the framework, stakeholder involvement, and service development.

In Part III, the authors explore other areas for practitioner competence development, potentially overshadowed by current interest in digital skills and technology in guidance. Prompted by the pandemic, diverse aspects of professionalism have resurfaced. SEL approaches in the paper *Social and emotional skills in career guidance: a Romanian school counsellor guide* (by Angela Andrei), are seen as increasingly instrumental in coping with changes



during the crisis, and in building resilience in young people. Describing the rising interest in competence-mapping studies, the paper illustrates how SEL concepts were used in the creation of a comprehensive guide for school counsellors in Romania. The guide should foster skills in students and train guidance counsellors. Advocating for attention to another recognised competence area in *An international dimension for improved capacity building of guidance professionals* (by Nina Ahlroos, Graziana Boscato and Margit Rammo) international mobility is given renewed emphasis in EU 2020+ policy and programmes. The paper argues that global competences and intercultural understanding are not yet given sufficient attention in career practitioner education and training. As good practice examples, three online training opportunities for guidance practitioners in Estonia, France and Sweden are presented.

The last paper in this third part, *Strategic competence and the transformative role of ICT in lifelong guidance*, by Jaana Kettunen and Raimo Vuorinen, calls for more emphasis on strategic competences of practitioners to help define new roles and tasks within multi-professional networks, within and between different settings and service interfaces. These shifts may be transformed through ICT and data-driven changes and innovations having an impact on the type of skills practitioners need for strategic collaboration, to provide lifelong and seamless service. The paper is particularly timely in light of renewed interest in partnerships and intersecting ecosystems.

Part IV. presents papers on shaping training in the digital context. The first is *Enhancing practitioner skills for work in the digital context* (by Jaana Kettunen), which addresses the gaps in continuing training and professional development for career practitioners. The paper describes the design and content of an international, jointly developed ICT training programme for guidance and counselling practitioners. The approach to analysing practitioners' conceptions of social media and competence for social media in career services is presented, and how it offers ways of gaining a more complex understanding of specific topics. The pandemic context provided an impetus for updating evidence on training, as shown in the joint paper *Career practice education and training in Portugal: challenges during the pandemic* (Maria do Céu Taveira, Helia Moura and Sofia Ramalho). The authors' enquiry explored whether initial training in psychology prepared future and practising counsellors for the abrupt shift to remote delivery. Several methods were used to understand the ICT-related training available, and the respondents' views. Despite the digital skills gap and lack of initial preparation, career practitioners (counsellors) across sectors adapted using multiple intervention methods but see a need for professional development.



The last paper provides a country illustration of emerging developments in Germany, and some hurdles. *Career guidance in the digital context: trends in Germany* (by Susanne Kraatz, Matthias Rübner, Peter Matthias) presents an overview of trends in career guidance training pathways and changing job profiles in the digital transformation. The Federal Employment Agency has put a broad range of digital self-service tools in place, revamping its careers portal to strengthen a process-oriented and problem-solving presentation, integrating information in databases (Cedefop, 2020). In 2021, the focus is on piloting, evaluation and rolling out of video counselling. Digital guidance competences are considered as transversal competences in new training. Overcoming the challenge of reluctant attitudes among practitioners towards digitalisation, who see their tasks replaced by self-service tools (and increasingly, artificial intelligence), will involve creating the conditions for forward-looking attitudes.

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## **PART I**



## CHAPTER 2.

# Identifying standards for career professionalism

Raimo Vuorinen, CareersNet, Finland <sup>(6)</sup>; Jaana Kettunen, CareersNet, Finland <sup>(7)</sup>; Ernesto Villalba-Garcia, Cedefop; Cynthia Harrison, Cedefop

## 2.1. Introduction

Policy approaches supporting acquisition and professional development of career practitioner <sup>(8)</sup> competences have made progress since 2009 when Cedefop's study on professional standards and its corresponding competence framework was published. However, the landscape remains uneven. 'Establishing a coherent and holistic guidance system that is accessible over the whole human lifespan has clear implications for the competences, qualifications and continuous professional development of guidance practitioners' (Cedefop, 2009). International organisations, professional associations and networks have also been moving the field forward with the development of comprehensive frameworks, using similar principles but applied in different contexts (ELGPN, 2015b; IAEVG, 2018; Schiersmann et al., 2012).

A dynamic situation is unfolding within the context of digitalisation and its impact on public services and career guidance policy and practice. This is having an impact on the different elements of guidance systems, related to governance and strategies for ensuring quality services, including the professionalism of career practitioners. The Member States of the European Union are revisiting their policies and governance on career guidance and aligning them according to these broader trends. A sustainable multilevel structure for governance of lifelong guidance services includes legislation, strategies, standards, monitoring, technical support, and quality development. These key features of governance are necessary for the Member States to provide better access and coherence of services to the public, thus making progress in professionalising guidance and its workforce across Europe. As countries are structured differently and have

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<sup>(6)</sup> Raimo Vuorinen, Project Manager, Finnish Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

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<sup>(8)</sup> Throughout this chapter, the term 'career practitioner' will be used to encompass both guidance and counselling practitioners with various specialisations.



diverse histories, the governance of lifelong guidance and job profiles of career practitioners vary widely across countries and regions (Barnes et al., 2020).

According to Barnes et al. (2020) there is an emerging desire in some countries to raise the status of the guidance profession, but there may be a lack of effective action either through policy or through coordination of the services. Within national guidance policies across the Member States, it is possible to identify several tangible ways of promoting professionalism and identifying career practitioner competences. These include: legislation, quality standards, licensing arrangements, registers of practitioners, and accreditation (ELGPN, 2015a; Vuorinen and Kettunen, 2017). Some features of these measures have common elements and are partially overlapping, but they serve different purposes. Legislation, licensing, and registers of career practitioners are normative in nature and often connected to the funding of the career services. Quality standards and accreditation can be a mandatory condition to receive public funds but can also be voluntary (OECD, 2021). Quality standards can be useful for quality development and can focus more on guidance practice, with detailed descriptions of how career practitioners have acquired or further developed required competences. Voluntary standards can be a way for private career service providers to signal the quality of their services to potential user groups (OECD, 2021).

The scope of this paper is mainly on identifying practitioner competences relating to initial training but it acknowledges also the increasing importance of in-service training and continuous professional development (CPD), including mutual peer learning, as key measures to refresh and maintain professionalism and to enhance the quality of service delivery (Cedefop, 2009). There are variations among Member States in how CPD is organised. In many cases, in-service training is offered ad hoc as a response to emerging needs. A more concrete step towards professionalism is through regular short and refresher courses on new information or methods, organised by local or national authorities (e.g. NCGE in Ireland) or as part of accreditation programmes. Some countries (e.g. Skills Development Scotland) provide sustained CPD programmes based on identified training needs and national priorities for policy and practice (Kettunen, 2021).

Drawing mainly on the country records in Cedefop's inventory of [lifelong guidance systems and practices](#) (Cedefop, 2020a), as well as other sources of evidence (Barnes et al., 2020; OECD, 2021), this paper provides a brief review of interrelated elements that help identify policy on career practitioner competences across European countries. It also outlines important aspects of professionalising guidance, discussed in more detail in some of the other papers in this collection. The review of the elements of professionalism provided in this paper is, however,



not exhaustive, in the sense of authors having checked the latest reforms and changes in each EU country. The paper contains many examples and illustrations in order to demonstrate how standards aim to raise quality in career guidance and can be described in terms of these selected elements. The elements are useful to follow developments in changing standards. Other studies have accounted for additional and overlapping elements on the path to professionalisation (Sultana, 2018).

## 2.2. Legislation and guidelines

According to Ertelt and Kraatz (2011), legislation is the most powerful instrument for achieving a high level of professionalisation. Barnes et al. (2020) reported that 17 European countries (AT, BG, CH, CZ, CY, DK, EE, FI, FR, IS, LV, MT, PL, PT, RO, SE, and TR) have legally defined the qualifications of career practitioners. However, the legislation on lifelong guidance is inconsistent and does not cover service provision in sufficient detail (Hughes, 2012; Cedefop, 2011). According to the evidence reviewed here, only a few countries have established regulations or legislation on required qualification levels and annual professional development activities. This can be seen in Finland, Iceland, Ireland and Serbia, where specific qualifications are a legal requirement to practice in career guidance and counselling. Often the legally defined qualifications of career practitioners are embedded or integrated in legislation only for specific career services such as education or employment. For example, in Luxembourg (Cedefop, 2020m) and Malta (Cedefop, 2020n), the minimum requirements for the in-service training of career practitioners are included in legislation describing the content of career services in school settings. In Poland (Cedefop, 2020p), practitioners from the education sector should have a higher education diploma and pedagogical qualifications.



**Box 1. Serbia's legislation on career practitioner (counsellors) in the National Employment Service**

Serbia: all career counsellors working in the [National Employment Service](#) (*Nacionalna služba za zapošljavanje*) have qualifications in psychology and counselling. This is in line with the regulation on special and technical conditions for the work of employment agencies, conditions regarding professional competences of employees, and programme and methods of obtaining a licence (*Pravilnik o prostornim i tehničkim uslovima za rad agencije za zapošljavanje, uslovima stručne osposobljenosti zaposlenih, programu, sadržini i načinu polaganja ispita za rad u zapošljavanju*), *Official Gazette* RS, No [98/2009](#), which defines conditions regarding professional competences of employees in employment agencies.

Source: Cedefop (2020s).

**Box 2. Legally defined qualifications of guidance counsellors in comprehensive and upper secondary level education in Finland**

Finland: the qualifications of the guidance counsellors at comprehensive and secondary level education, and also of the vocational psychologists, are defined in legislation (628/1998, *Asetus opetustoimen henkilöstön kelpoisuusvaatimuksista*). In addition to the required qualification for teachers (a master degree or a special qualification for vocational-school teachers), all guidance counsellors must have a certificate of completion of a specialist postgraduate diploma in guidance and counselling (60 ECTS). Another option is to take a master degree programme in guidance and counselling (300 ECTS, which includes the pedagogical training equivalent with 60 ECTS).

Source: Cedefop (2020g).

Instead of specific legislation on career practitioner qualifications, countries can strengthen the status of guidance services by embedding definitions of required competences in other types of normative documents, such as strategies or guidelines for regional or local service provision. According to the OECD (2021), qualification requirements vary by context but a tertiary degree is usually required. In Scotland, the new national strategy (Scottish Government, 2020) explicitly states that professional development for practitioners will be shared more widely across the careers system, led by Skills Development Scotland (SDS): 'A vibrant national continuous professional development (CPD) programme will ensure that there is a clear focus on: e.g. multiple pathways for career information, advice and guidance (CIAG) leadership, management and practitioner learning and development both online and offline, from apprenticeship to PhD study programmes' (cited in Cedefop 2020x). In Austria, the National strategy for lifelong guidance, developed in 2006, has among its goals the professionalisation of counsellors and trainers through mandatory standards for career practitioners. The providers of the country's free adult



education guidance programmes must be certified by the Beratung und Orientierung für Bildung und Beruf (IBOBB, counselling, orientation and information for education and careers) (Cedefop, 2020b; OECD, 2021). More recently, in Finland the recently agreed national lifelong guidance strategy 2020-23 (Valtioneuvosto, 2020) includes a proposal for evaluating the existing training of career practitioners and defining a competence framework for them. The quality of services will be improved by assessing the training needs of those involved in guidance work to ensure they have the necessary skills for successful performance in guidance services across the sectors (Valtioneuvosto, 2020).

In Belgium, guidance centres under the *Cité des Métiers* network, must guarantee a professionalisation policy as well as an annual professional development plan for every employee, including the code of ethics and professional confidentiality (Cedefop, 2020c, OECD, 2021). Executive orders or guidelines in Denmark (*Bekendtgørelse*) (Cedefop, 2020e), France (*cahier des charges*) (Cedefop 2020j) and Greece define the training requirements and qualifications of career practitioners working in schools, public employment sector (PES) or regional guidance centres (Cedefop, 2020j). In Sweden, the guidelines also address steering and leading guidance work (school owners and school heads); assuring the quality of guidance personnel and the competence needed; and teaching and cooperation among schools, in education and in working life (Cedefop, 2020t). Germany has defined binding rules for the competences of staff working in education or public employment services that are connected with the internal training of the Federal Employment Agency's University of Applied Sciences in Mannheim (Cedefop, 2020i).

A prominent example of normative measures for promoting professionalism is the Programme recognition framework for guidance and counselling in Ireland (Department of education and skills, 2016). This framework sets out criteria and guidelines for an initial training programme targeting graduates who plan to work in guidance services under the remit of national governmental authorities across the education and labour market sectors (Cedefop, 2020l).

### 2.3. Quality standards related to career practitioner competences

In countries lacking sufficient normative documents to mandate professionalism, the competences are included in national quality standards for practice. These quality standards might be mandatory or voluntary (Dodd et al., 2019a; OECD, 2021). The inventory (Cedefop, 2020s) shows that quality standards for career practitioners in different settings can be found in Austria, France, Norway,



Montenegro, Portugal, Turkey and the United Kingdom. In Belgium, the national authorities monitor quality regularly by checking whether the mandated centres meet the requirements (OECD, 2021). In Hungary (Cedefop, 2020k), Germany (Cedefop, 2020i) and Serbia (Cedefop, 2020s), professionalism is included within wider national quality standards for guidance. In Germany, the national forum for lifelong guidance has produced a voluntary Quality concept for guidance (BeQu, *Beratungsqualität*) consisting of a competence profile and a framework for quality development in public and private sector organisations <sup>(9)</sup>. To use the BeQu quality label, providers must formally apply to the National Guidance Forum, commit to work in accordance to the label and have participated in a mandatory workshop (OECD, 2021).

Serbia has extended the standards into guidelines for self-assessment of career practitioners to guide their own planning and to monitor their professional development; they also guide providers of education and training programmes for career practitioners towards improved quality programmes (Cedefop, 2020s). Romania exemplifies countries in which the ethical code for career practitioners is included in the national quality standards (Cedefop, 2020r). In Estonia, the professional competences of career practitioners are part of the national occupational qualification standards. The occupational qualification standards for lifelong guidance are available on two levels, including career specialist at European qualifications framework EQF levels 6 and 7 (Cedefop, 2020f) <sup>(10)</sup>.

## 2.4. Licensing and registries

In a few countries, career practitioner competences may be associated with licensing arrangements, with career practitioners being required to join an association or obtain a specific certification. Licences for career practitioners were required for counsellors working in the public employment services in Poland up to 2012, before different licences were abolished in a national reform on deregulation of professions (Cedefop, 2020p). Employees in counselling and placement services at the Public Employment Service Austria (AMS) are required to have passed their school-leaving examination or to have completed vocational training and must have several years of professional experience. There is also an apprenticeship programme (personnel service) that prepares participants for the counselling profession. Basic training lasts 40 weeks, alternating with work-based

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<sup>(9)</sup> See Kraatz, Rübner and Weber (2021) in this collection.

<sup>(10)</sup> See Rammo (2021) in this collection.



learning phases, and ends with a final examination (Cedefop, 2020b). In Estonia, the Association of Estonian Career Counsellors is responsible for awarding and re-certifying occupational qualifications of career specialists (Cedefop, 2020f).

In some countries, professional associations may play an important role in enhancing professionalism and in guiding the qualifications and standards of the profession. For example, Austrian career counsellors are organised in professional associations, such as the Association of Austrian Education and Career Guidance Counsellors (VÖBB), established in 2015; these associations foster the professionalisation of career guidance practitioners by offering further training programmes and encouraging exchange among them (Cedefop, 2020b). In Malta, career guidance practitioners are encouraged to become members of the Malta Career Guidance Association (MCGA); this organises training events for its members and collaborates with other national entities to strengthen the competences of the career guidance practitioners (Cedefop, 2020n). In Greece, the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP) prepares the institutional framework for the certification of qualifications of career guidance counsellors and the establishment of an official Registry of certified career guidance counsellors in Greece (Cedefop, 2020j) <sup>(11)</sup>. The national registers in Germany (Cedefop, 2020i), the Netherlands (Cedefop, 2020o), and the UK (Cedefop, 2020v; 2020w; 2020x) are examples of single national points of reference for ensuring and promoting the professional status of career practitioners across the whole sector. The registers provide information to members of the profession, their clients and employers, policy-makers and other stakeholders. In UK-England, the register is maintained by a professional association, the Career Development Institute. Career practitioners have two options to achieve the skills and qualifications to provide career guidance services; either through postgraduate academic studies or through competence-based workplace accreditation. Those interested in acquiring such a diploma or certificate have access to specialised higher education equivalent training that leads to a qualification in career guidance. In addition to demonstrating required qualifications, practitioners are expected to undertake (and record) a minimum of 25 hours of continuing professional development each year (OECD, 2021). Portugal's national registry admission requirements include a master degree and a one-year internship (Cedefop, 2020q).

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<sup>(11)</sup> See Vlachaki (2021) in this collection.



### Box 3. **UK Register of career development professionals**

The UK Register of career development professionals is the single national point of reference for ensuring and promoting the professional status of career practitioners across sectors. By joining the register, professionals can demonstrate their qualifications, call themselves registered professionals and use the RCDP logo. The register is also available as an online resource for potential clients, employers, schools, colleges and learning providers looking to find registered professionals in their area.

Source: Career Development Institute (2021).

## 2.5. **Accreditation and competence frameworks**

Some countries promote professionalism using international accreditation frameworks or professional certification, especially when there is no possibility for legislation or other normative documents to guide it. The certification demonstrates that career practitioners have the necessary qualifications, experience, skills, and knowledge to provide quality services in an ethical manner. In addition to minimum qualification, the practitioners demonstrate participation in continuous development (OECD, 2021). The Global career development facilitator (GCDF) framework of the European Board of Certified Counsellors is used in Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Portugal, and Germany (Barnes et al., 2020). In Bulgaria, the GCDF licensing framework is the main training programme (both initial and continuous) for career counselling and is embedded in relevant master degree programmes (Cedefop, 2020d). In Romania, 450 professionals have been trained and certified as GCDFs, working in human resources departments in companies, school counselling offices, university counselling centres and in private practice (Cedefop, 2020r).

Another common model of promoting professionalism is the use of competence frameworks (or an equivalent), especially in countries in which career practitioner competences are not explicitly included in detail in national or regional guidance policies. Evidence from the inventory (Cedefop, 2020a) shows that this operates on a national level as in Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, and the UK, or regionally as in Belgium or Italy. In Greece, the existing framework includes descriptions of the career guidance counsellor occupational profile, the tasks and responsibilities of career practitioners in different career services, the necessary knowledge, competences, and skills, as well as the relevant education paths. This applies to all career practitioners in their particular setting (Cedefop, 2020j).



Across Europe, career practitioners work alongside many other intermediaries, such as teachers, career coaches, mentors, careers advisers, youth workers, enterprise advisers and employers/employees in public, private and voluntary community sectors. The Netherlands has established detailed frameworks for different categories of career counsellors. These frameworks provide information on expected professional knowledge, skills and competences at different school levels in four focus areas: vision and policy, orientation and guidance, organisation and cooperation (Cedefop, 2020o). Malta (Cedefop, 2020n) and Austria distinguish professional profiles both for full time career practitioners and for teachers who provide guidance as part of their professional portfolio (Vuorinen and Kettunen, 2019).

The EU, through its support via programmes such as Erasmus+, has allocated funding for several development projects focusing on career practitioner competences. The European career guidance certificate (ECGC) in 2007-09, with partners from seven EU Member States, compiled outcomes of two previous similar projects into one standardised certification system to acknowledge the formally or informally acquired knowledge, skills, and competences of career counsellors. In 2012, the Network for innovation in career guidance and counselling in Europe (NICE) published a handbook in which it identified common points of reference that could support establishing degree programmes in the field and inform curriculum design (Schiersmann et al., 2016). These reference points were elaborated into a proposal for European competence standards as a shared agreement and a voluntary framework on the minimum level of competence needed to perform professional tasks by different types of practitioner (career advisors, professionals, specialists) in career guidance and counselling. NICE recommends as a solid basis the specialised programmes to be included at level 6 or 7 of the EQF (ibid.) depending on the type of practice, and ideally for career specialists, according to their definition, qualifications at level 8 involving doctoral training. In Estonia, the national occupational qualifications system includes the national occupational standard and qualification for career specialist referenced to the Estonian national qualifications framework (EstQF) <sup>(12)</sup> (Cedefop, 2020f). This inclusion in the national qualification frameworks might be a way of providing more weight to the qualifications associated with career guidance.

These frameworks developed with the support of European projects are built on the main tasks that career practitioners carry out in each country. Member States can pilot and validate the frameworks in cross-border or wider European

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<sup>(12)</sup> See Rammo (2021) in this collection.



networks and can enhance them through further cooperative projects (Vuorinen and Kettunen, 2017).

## 2.6. National associations and professionalism

In countries with more structured and coordinated guidance services, promotion of professionalism may be done in sustainable cooperation with national professional associations (Dodd et al., 2019b). For example, Norway organised wide consultation with stakeholders in establishing a master degree programme for career practitioners to ensure that the new programme is in line with recent development in the field and society (Cedefop, 2020y). Finland supported the establishment of regional one-stop-guidance centres with targeted in-service training in cooperation with associations. In Scotland, professionalisation is supported with individualised learning programmes, delivered through the national Skills Academy in partnership with higher education institutes (Barnes et al., 2020; Vuorinen and Kettunen, 2019).

Codes of ethics also play a role in determining professional guidance competences. When applying the membership of national associations, career practitioners adhere to the ethical guidelines or standards endorsed by the association. The inventory (Cedefop, 2020a) presents several examples across Europe in which there are definitions of ethical standards: Belgium, Finland, Germany, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Sweden, and the UK. In some cases, the ethical standards are connected to international (e.g. IAEVG, 2019) or national practitioner associations. In Portugal, the National Psychologists' Association (Ordem dos psicólogos portugueses) monitors compliance with the code of ethics (Cedefop, 2020q). In Czechia, most members of the Association of University Guidance Counsellors (Asociace vysokoškolských poradců, Avsp) follow an ethical code (Barnes et al., 2020) and the Danish Association for Career Guidance (Danmarks Vejlederforening) has among its eight objectives to assure that career guidance rests on principles of ethics in guidance (Cedefop, 2020e). The Romanian Counsellors Association (Asociația Consilierilor Români, ACROM) has produced an ethical code that cuts across different service providers, irrespective of where the service is provided (Cedefop, 2020r). In other countries, government agencies provide the ethical guidelines. In Greece, the EOPPEP is in charge of developing the Greek code of ethics (Cedefop, 2020j), and, in Italy, the ethical code is included in the document on quality standards issued by the Ministry of Labour and the Regions (Ministro del lavoro e delle politiche sociali, 2018).



## 2.7. Conclusion

The recent increased policy attention on lifelong guidance results partly from the changing nature of the world of work and subsequent career development challenges for individuals navigating new and frequent transitions, non-linear working patterns, and atypical working arrangements. In addition, recent European-level policies and priorities in employment, education, and training, have drawn attention to the pivotal importance of lifelong guidance for the young in schooling and for adults in learning lifelong, and the training and professionalism of practitioners across sectors. The values of networking, collaboration, and cooperation, as well as quality assurance, have also re-emerged as priorities that were established in the 2004 and 2008 Resolutions on lifelong guidance.

Career practitioners must possess the requisite knowledge and skills to address these emerging challenges effectively (Niles, Vuorinen and Siwiec, 2019). The different elements to promote professionalism need to be used to assure this level of knowledge and skills. Across Europe, career practitioners are also working alongside many other intermediaries in public, private and voluntary community sectors. Professionalism demands that certain standards are maintained and improved, including practice that is based on expert knowledge and understanding (Barnes et al., 2020). Thus, training programmes and competence frameworks must constantly be updated and adjusted accordingly. Framework contents need to address the extent to which practitioner competences are keeping up with digital advancements and labour market intelligence and information relevant to clients' needs (ELGPN, 2015a).

The great variety of existing frameworks and profiles may prevent policy-makers from establishing appropriate policy measures to promote professionalism in career guidance (ELGPN, 2015b). Barnes and colleagues (Barnes et al., 2020) suggest that one way to maximise the improvements in the delivery of high-quality lifelong guidance could be integration of professionalism and professionalisation into structured mutual policy learning from LLG networks. The Cedefop (2009) competence framework for career practitioners and the European reference competence profile for PES and EURES counsellors (Sienkiewicz, 2013) are examples of European level frameworks, in that they aim to support policy implementation and competence development across Europe. Both of them build on a deep analysis of existing national competence frameworks, with theoretical references and case-study analyses, and are validated by national policy and practice representatives. They address pre-service, induction and continuing training, as well as the distinctive roles of practitioners in diverse working contexts.



The competence frameworks aim to reduce variability by offering a general description that incorporates all the activities needed to deliver coherent guidance services nationally or regionally. This can help ensure guidance processes are consistent across services and align with national, regional, or local objectives, increasing the likelihood of access to equitable support. With attention to quality processes, outcomes for individuals and society may be easier to monitor, and the results of guidance interventions easier to evaluate. The frameworks can be used as a basis for minimum training as a prerequisite not only for formal qualifications (for example, further education and training), but also for different forms of learning-while-working that contribute to the acquisition of defined practitioner competences. As countries design their own career systems and policies, the frameworks need to reflect and be applied in accordance with available resources, cultural and sectoral conditions and applicable standards and codes (Vuorinen and Kettunen, 2017).

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## CHAPTER 3.

# Professionalising career guidance in Greece: current and future challenges

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### 3.1. Introduction

In Greece, long-term economic recession, labour market instability, increased migration flows, and the COVID-19 socioeconomic impact have intensified the need for accessible career guidance and counselling (CGC) services. Despite the progress made so far towards the institutionalisation of CGC services in Greece, there is a chronic deficiency of a coherent framework in supporting lifelong career guidance (Cedefop, 2020a; Kassotakis, 2017; Papadaki; Mirogiannis and Viki, 2012; Vlachaki, 2015). Meanwhile, widespread adoption of new digital tools and remote support processes has already been visible in CGC services (Cedefop, 2020a, b). Practitioners are presented with daily challenges in meeting with the increasingly demanding standards of professionalism and complex tasks, featuring new knowledge, skills and competences (Barnes et al., 2020; Cedefop, 2009; Schiersmann et al., 2016).

This chapter offers a brief overview of the key aspects and interventions promoting CGC professionalisation in Greece. The current state of play regarding practitioner training and qualifications is described. The analysis is focused on the Career guidance counsellor occupational profile for improving practitioner competence. Finally, areas for improvement are identified, highlighting the changing context of CGC in terms of digital transformation and drawing useful conclusions about future policy and practice challenges for well-equipped professionals.

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## 3.2. Training and qualifications of career guidance practitioners in Greece

### 3.2.1. Background, state of play and gaps

CGC services in Greece have been provided by a wide network of public and private entities in the fields of education, training, employment and social inclusion (Cedefop, 2020a). Since the 1950s, practitioners have been a highly heterogeneous group in terms of their formal qualifications, knowledge, skills, and competences. While the licensing of the career-related entities has been governed by specific legal provisions, there is no specific work permit for CGC professionals. Consequently, many people with different scientific backgrounds and professional capacities have been involved in CGC provision. Most are university graduates from different disciplines (psychologists, sociologists, educators, business consultants, economists, researchers) or have attended relevant in-service training (EOPPEP, 2015; Kassotakis, 2017; Kettunen, 2017; Schiersmann et al., 2016). Although no official data can be tracked, it is estimated that the total number of professionals performing CGC-related activities far exceeds 5,000 (EOPPEP, 2015). Among them, only a relatively small percentage has completed university level education in CGC <sup>(14)</sup>. Since the early 1990s, several CGC university-level courses (programmes) (mainly master) have been offered, ranging from two to four semesters (60-120 ECTS/ EQF 7, 8). A few undergraduate courses/programmes (EQF 6) include CGC lessons and specialisations in their curricula, while CVET courses are most frequent (Cedefop, 2020a; Vlachaki; Tetradaou and Toumpas, 2007). In 2020, a university-level qualification in CGC became a formal requirement for recruitment in publicly funded career services and programmes <sup>(15)</sup>.

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<sup>(14)</sup> According to EOPPEP (2021), 184 persons have been registered so far as career guidance counsellors level A (upper/ expert level).

<sup>(15)</sup> Formal provisions for a mandatory CGC qualification EQF 7,8 for practitioners employed in public vocational training and (adult) lifelong learning structures have been established by the new Law 4763/2020 (*Government Gazette* 254 A '). According to Law 4547/2018 (*Government Gazette* 102 A'), secondary education teachers specialised in CGC were appointed in the centres of educational and counselling support (KESYs), providing career guidance and counselling services until August 2021. A new law 4823 (*Government Gazette* 136A' 3.8.2021) reshaped KESYs to Centres for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support (KEDASYs), which are no longer provide career guidance services to students (Article 11). The new law foresees that secondary education teachers specialised in CGC will be appointed at the Directorates of Secondary Education, which operate under the respective Regional Directorates of Education, so as to support school units in career guidance issues, as well as in Offices of Counselling and Guidance



### **3.2.2. The Career guidance counsellor occupational profile and actions to enhance practitioners' competence in Greece**

Practitioner competence and CGC professionalisation has been a central element in the systemic interventions initiated by EOPPEP (National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance), including the development of quality and ethical standards (Cedefop, 2020a; IEKEP, 2007; Vlachaki and Gaitanis, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2014). However, a flagship intervention, linked to official accreditation, was the development of the Career guidance counsellor occupational profile in 2014 (Vlachaki and Gaitanis, 2014).

The project was commissioned to a group of stakeholder experts, representing the Centre for the Development of Educational Policy (KANEP) of the Greek General Confederation of Labour (GSEE) and the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV) <sup>(16)</sup>. The process included desk research and the Delphi method with in-depth semi-structured interviews with CGC professionals and employers. CGC was defined as a horizontal activity <sup>(17)</sup>, covering the whole range of sectors and fields of service provision (Box 1).

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(GRASYPs) per group of neighbouring schools (Articles 27, 48). Similarly, secondary education teachers will act as Apprenticeship Liaison Officers in the special needs vocational lower – upper secondary education schools (ENEEGy-L) to facilitate students' labour market integration (Article 94). In addition, since 2017, relevant qualification requirements have been included in the Greek PES (OAED) call for recruitment (*Government Gazette* A.S.E.P. 34/15K 2017), as well as in various ESF-funded vocational training voucher programmes, implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

<sup>(16)</sup> Law 3369/2005 (*Government Gazette* 171 A') and Joint Ministerial Decision No 110998/19.4.2006 (*Government Gazette* 566/8.5.06) foresees that the social partners, representing the employees and employers of the CGC profession are entitled to be involved in the development of occupational profiles.

<sup>(17)</sup> In accordance with the provisions of Joint Ministerial Decision 110998 (*Government Gazette* B' 566/8.5.06) and Article 3 of Law 3369/2005 (*Government Gazette* 171 A'), as amended by Article 30 of Law 3879/2010 (A' 163) and Article 19 of Law 4115/2013 (*Government Gazette* 24 A').



**Box 1. Definition of CGC as a horizontal activity**

'The Career guidance counsellor functions in various levels, planning, organising, preparing, and implementing CGC actions according to the relevant career development theories, educational policies, the socioeconomic context as well as the special characteristics and needs of the target population. It also captures, evaluates, and redesigns his/her professional practice, while developing relevant career education programmes, covering a wide range of supportive lifelong career development actions. In this scope, the CGC profession is a horizontal activity as it can be practised at different levels of hierarchy and in different sectors (education, training, and employment), while it results from the combination of various roles and learning outcomes, and requires very good knowledge of the general socioeconomic context at local, national and European level'.

Source: EOPPEP (2015). Translated by author.

The functional analysis applied, had captured the main professional functions, consisting of independent sets of individual activities, each analysed in different tasks, divided into respective knowledge, skills and competences (Dimoulas; Varvitsioti and Spilioti, 2007). The profile features two distinct levels of hierarchy and subsequent functions and tasks, which may be performed in parallel or complementarily, depending on the organisational context of CGC provision. Alternative educational paths, ways of evaluating learning outcomes and the relevant certification preconditions for both levels of practice were also described (Table 1).

**Table 1. Main professional functions of career guidance counsellor according to level of hierarchy**

| Levels of practice              | Areas of practice  | Main professional functions (Mpf)  | EQF Level | Educational paths/ Accreditation requirements   |
|---------------------------------|--|--|-----------|---|
| LEVEL B<br>(BASIC)<br>MPF 1,2,3 | Performs all the basic professional functions and tasks related to primary service provision in education, training or employment, in order to meet the needs of different target groups (students, young people, adults, the unemployed, vulnerable social groups) (MPF 1,2,3); | MPF 1 (Level B+A): Plans, organises and prepares the framework for the provision of CGC services.            | EQF 6     | University degree in any subject + CVET in CGC of at least 250 hours + 2 years of professional experience or 200 hours of internship in CGC public or private services + Written examinations including evaluation of a model counselling session |
|                                 |  | MPF 2 (Level B+A): Provides CGC services.  |           |   |
|                                 |  | MPF 3 (Level B+A): Evaluates redesigns and expands access to CGC services and his/her professional practice. |           |   |



|   |  |   |              |   |
|---|--|---|--------------|---|
| LEVEL A<br>(EXPERT)<br><br>MPF<br>1,2,3,4,5,6 | Performs both professional functions and tasks of level B, as well as advanced professional functions with increased responsibility requirements and higher scientific expertise, such as planning, conducting and evaluating career guidance training programmes, supervising, designing and development of career guidance assessment tools, scientific research etc.<br>(MPF 1,2,3,4,5,6) | MPF 4 (Level A):<br>Supervises and ensures the quality of CGC services. | EQF<br>6,7,8 | University, master or doctoral degrees in CGC<br><br>No examination procedure is required for certification |
|   |  | MPF 5 (Level A):<br>Conducts research and provides training on CGC      |              |   |
|   |  | MPF 6 (Level A):<br>Promotes the development of CGC tools.              |              |   |

Source: EOPPEP (2015). Translated by author. See also Cedefop and ReferNet Greece (2020).

A model modular CVET programme in CGC was also proposed, as a basis for the development and evaluation of relevant training leading to basic level certification (B). The profile was validated by an expert committee, organised by EOPPEP, consisting of representatives from the stakeholder ministries, institutions and social partners <sup>(18)</sup> (EOPPEP, 2015; Gaitanis, 2019; Vlachaki and Gaitanis, 2014).

The two distinct professional levels were considered appropriate by the scientific and professional CGC community in Greece (IEKEP, 2002), encompassing both the practitioners possessing long-term work experience and highly specialised professionals equipped with university-level qualifications in CGC (EQF 6,7,8). This integrated approach contributes to building a common professional identity for all CGC practitioners, featuring diverse professional roles. It also facilitates the accreditation of prior learning through competence-based learning and inter-professional mobility by identifying different specialisation routes in the field (Cedefop, 2009; EOPPEP, 2015; Kettunen, 2017; McCarthy, 2004; Schiersmann et al., 2016).

While the development of the occupational profile has been undoubtedly a very important milestone in Greece, recently established legal provisions set the

<sup>(18)</sup> As regulated by Law 4115/30.1.2013 Article 19, Paragraph 5 (amendment of Article 3 of Law 3369/2005 (A' 171) as amended by Article 30 of Law 3879/2010), Joint Ministerial Decision 110998/2006 and the EOPPEP's Governing Board decision DA/6962-100/7.2.2014.



ground for accelerating developments in this field. A new law foresees the development of a system for the certification of the Career guidance counsellor qualifications, their classification into levels A' and B', and their enrolment in the relevant registers that will be maintained by EOPPEP <sup>(19)</sup>. The Register of career guidance counsellors Level A1 was already established in 2019, following an open call targeted to university degree holders in CGC (EQF 6,7,8) <sup>(20)</sup>. A ministerial decision will define the conditions and examination process for the accreditation of Level B' practitioners, and their subsequent enrolment in the Level B' Register of certified career guidance counsellors. EOPPEP has been assigned the responsibility to validate the CVET programmes provided by the lifelong learning centres (adult continuing and vocational education), including those in the field of CGC, regarding their content, training curriculum and material, and expected learning outcomes <sup>(21)</sup>.

Important pilot initiatives, based on the requirements set for Level B' practitioners, started in 2020. The Labour Institute (INE) of the Greek General Confederation of Labour (GSEE) is currently developing a CVET curriculum and adequate training material. This ESF part-financed project also involves the creation of an examination thesaurus to facilitate self-assessment and official evaluation of the respective learning outcomes, as well as a training pilot (Sidiropoulou - Dimakakou et al., 2021; Varvitsioti et al., 2021). At the beginning of 2020, the Lifelong Learning Centre of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (EKPA) delivered a model 450-hour CVET course to 18 participants with no previous education and experience in CGC.

### 3.3. The changing context of career guidance practice: implications and future challenges

In the context of the evolving labour market digital transitions, the practice of CGC is being transformed worldwide, by new disruptive technologies, such as big data, artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, block chain technology and ubiquitous computing. In Greece, ICT-enabled solutions have been introduced in the CGC processes, mainly facilitating self-career management, information

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<sup>(19)</sup> According to Article 155 of Law 4763/21-12-2020 (*Government Gazette* 254 A') National system of vocational education, training and lifelong learning.

<sup>(20)</sup> According to the provisions of Article 21 of Law 4115/2013 and the Ministerial Decision DS/64529/27-1-2017, *Government Gazette* B' 317/6.2.2018.

<sup>(21)</sup> According to Article 57 of Law 4763/21.12.2020 (*Government Gazette* 254 A') National system of vocational education, training and lifelong learning.



provision, decision-making and distance counselling (Cedefop, 2018, 2020a, 2020b). This digital shift, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, offers innumerable possibilities for ICT innovation enabling differentiated, personalised and more accessible CGC interventions. At the same time, it creates a novel 'ecosystem' that marks new challenges and skills for CGC providers and professionals (Bakke; Haug and Hooley, 2018; Brown et al., 2019; Cedefop, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020c; Kettunen, 2017; Mezzanzanica and Mercorio, 2019; Nikolaou; Georgiou and Kotsasarlidou, 2019; Polychronaki et al., 2019).

The increasingly digitalised services will create the need to review the occupational profile and the existing CGC education and training curricula at national level. As an attempt to capture the newly emerging functions, tasks, knowledge, skills and competences arising for CGC professionals, the following aspects should be taken into account.

- (a) New professional functions, activities, and tasks. Core traditional CGC administrative tasks, such as client management and scheduling, archiving, client data collection and processing, information collection, processing and provision, client monitoring, and networking may be prone to automation. Consequently, all the activities related to the design and organisation of CGC service delivery may soon need to be revised.
- (b) New areas of knowledge. The fourth industrial revolution (Industry 4.0) <sup>(22)</sup> is creating unprecedented workplace challenges and opportunities, further intensifying the rather unpredictable, unstable, and non-linear career paths for the individuals. These prospects shift the focus of CGC from the management of career decisions to the management of change and achievement of career adaptability and resilience. This shift accompanied by boundaryless ICT innovation contributes to the emergence of new CGC interventions given the name Career guidance 4.0 (Euroguidance, 2017; Vlachaki, 2018). This refers to digital innovation practices in the changing context of career guidance provision to support lifelong career development with the disruptive changes and transitions in the world of education and work, in the digital transformation era. Therefore, updated theoretical approaches and models suitable to address career development in

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<sup>(22)</sup> See Davies (2015). Defined as disruptive transformations in the design, manufacture, and operation of systems, products, processes, and services as a result of new and innovative technological developments. It is characterised by a fusion of technologies blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres, leading to a range of changes in systems of production, management, and governance, based on technology and devices autonomously communicating with each other along the value chain (Davies, 2015; Schwab, 2016).



transitional, digitalised and precarious working conditions, such as the psychology of working theory (PWT), collaborative career exploration and shared careering, should be included in education and training of CGC professionals (Duffy et al., 2016; Hirschi, 2017; Kettunen, 2017; Oakley, 2019). Digital pedagogy and modern media literacy to enable the critical-reflective management of all new forms of digital media and ICT applications are also important (SCAS, 2016). Openness to digitalisation and a blended approach in career counselling, as well as a broader understanding of digital assets and existing European tools, are usually under-addressed in the initial education and CVET designed for CGC professionals in Greece (Bakke; Haug and Hooley, 2018; Cedefop, 2018). The knowledge of contemporary labour market information and intelligence (LMI), advanced LMI systems and data interpretation (jobs, skills, and qualifications dynamics) is crucial. Further understanding of digital career management skills, such as digital job search, social media use, building and maintaining professional digital identity, multitasking, remote working, crowd working, and job sharing will need to be developed (Kettunen, 2017; Moore, 2016). All the above, as well as the evidence-based approach and updated ethical and quality assurance issues related to mainstream CGC and ICT-based innovation practices, need to be accounted for in the profile and adequately developed through CGC initial education, CVET and in-service training (Barnes et al., 2020; Cedefop, 2019; Hooley, 2014).

- (c) New skills and competences. The acquisition of advanced digital competences for CGC professionals should be increased. These include the ability to identify, critically select, integrate, adapt, configure, and contribute to the development of new ICT methods. Emphasis should also be given to information and digital media literacy skills, such as the ability to work in a context of blended service delivery, including digital communication and cooperation, networking, and outreach approaches to target audiences (Joint Research Centre of the European Commission; Vuorikari and Punie, 2017; Kettunen and Sampson, 2019; Moore, 2017; Moore and Czerwinska, 2019; World Economic Forum, 2016). Critical soft skills, such as resilience, adaptability and readiness for change must, in principle, be developed by the CGC workforce, to be able to cope with emerging changes. Client interaction competences, which are difficult to automate, will improve practitioner employability and maintain connectivity with their beneficiaries, despite the rather impersonal conditions (Bughin et al., 2018; Frey and Osborne, 2013; Kergroach, 2017; Martin, 2018; OECD; Hanushek and Woessmann, 2015).



### 3.4. Concluding remarks

The need for quality CGC support and for adequately competent professionals is constantly increasing across the EU. National policies and actions promoting professionalism in the EU vary from ad hoc arrangements not framed by policy, established qualification standards and accreditation criteria, to highly regulated 'registers' or 'licensing' arrangements (INEK-PEO et al., 2015; Kettunen, 2017). Yet, as in the case of Greece, there are persistent gaps and long-lasting processes in defining mandatory minimum qualification requirements and accreditation procedures (Barnes et al., 2020; Cedefop, 2009; INEK-PEO et al., 2015; Kettunen, 2017; McCarthy, 2004; Schiersmann et al., 2016). However, the importance of safeguarding adequate CGC training, as well as continuing personal and professional development (CPD), self-regulation, reflective and action research practice, are also highlighted (Barnes et al., 2020; Bimrose; Hughes and Collin, 2006; Cedefop, 2009; Gough, 2017; Kettunen, 2017; Kosmidou and Usher, 1991; Lewin, 1946; Schiersmann et al., 2016; Schon, 1983; Sultana, 2018).

In this context, we can argue that Greece has undertaken institutional initiatives to enhance CGC practitioner competence, aiming to regulate the profession and assure quality service delivery. Recent legal arrangements pave the way for the long-awaited definition of minimum professional standards and credentialing for CGC professionals (Barnes et al., 2020; Cedefop, 2009; ELGPN, 2015; Plant, 2001; Vlachaki; Tetradaou and Toumpas, 2007; Vuorinen and Watts, 2012). However, the need for updated competence-based higher education and CVET programmes, reflecting the ever-changing challenges and new digitalised CGC practices, should also be prioritised. This goal can only be achieved by following the standards set in the occupational profile. Also, the early identification of practitioner training needs, as well as adequate resources in the context of increasing digitalisation and automation, should be ensured. All the above will enable the quality digital transition of CGC services, increasing accessibility for all end-users, and, with the reality of the digital divide, the necessary special focus on disadvantaged groups (Kettunen and Sampson, 2019).



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## CHAPTER 4.

# The relevance of the Estonian occupational qualification sub-framework in the field of career guidance

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### 4.1. Introduction

The Estonian occupational qualifications framework (EstQF) holds great potential in encouraging capacity building and professional development. In the context of professionalising career guidance, the EstQF, together with the occupational qualifications system, provides a meaningful and up-to-date opportunity both for those entering the profession or applying for jobs, and those who are already employed and should enhance their professionalism. Following the principles of continuous development and stakeholder involvement across sectors, it provides an important foundation for strengthening quality assurance in career guidance.

This chapter introduces the EstQF and the occupational qualifications system and its elements, and discusses their significant role in ensuring the professional development of practitioners in career guidance. It introduces stakeholder views on the value and efficiency of the occupational qualifications system today. Areas for further development are proposed. Material is based on findings from a recent focus group study (Psience, 2020) <sup>(24)</sup>, carried out by the Association of Estonian Career counsellors, the awarding body for the career specialist qualification, and the Estonian Euroguidance centre.

### 4.2. The qualification framework and occupational qualification system

Qualification frameworks for lifelong learning are widely accepted as 'powerful tools that make it easier for people to carry their skills and credentials with them to different contexts' (Cedefop, 2020b). Considering the rapidly changing need

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<sup>(23)</sup> Euroguidance Manager, Estonian Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps, Education and Youth Board.

<sup>(24)</sup> The report is published in the Estonian language and includes a summary in English.

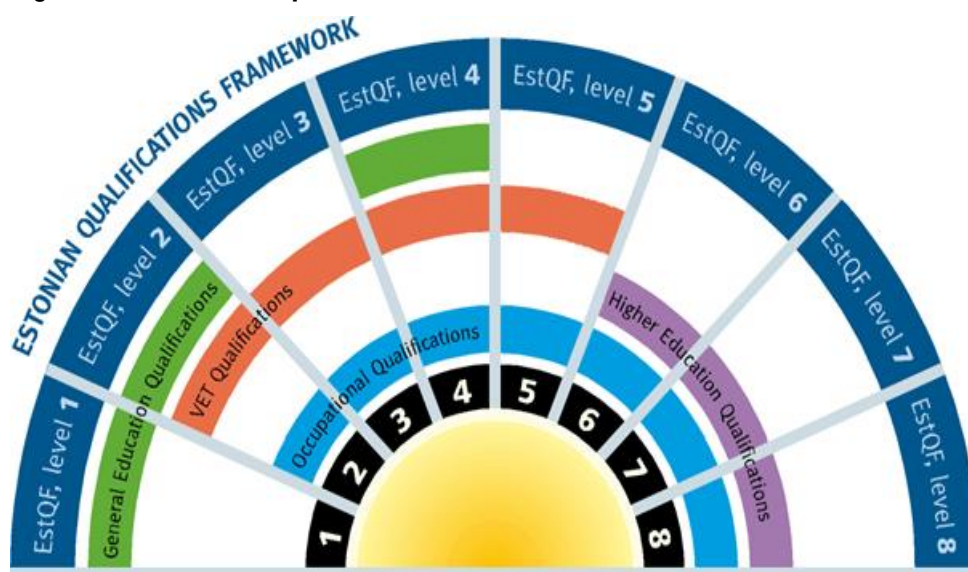


for competences, the occupational qualifications system holds great potential in encouraging capacity building and professional development.

The eight-level Estonian qualifications framework (EstQF) was established in 2008 with the main purpose of increasing the competitiveness of the national economy, to monitor and forecast labour needs, and to promote the development, assessment, recognition and comparison of individual competences (Estonian Parliament, 2008). The EstQF is a comprehensive framework, consisting of four sub-frameworks (Estonian Qualifications Authority and Aarna, 2016) as seen in Figure 1. It includes:

- (a) general education qualifications;
- (b) VET qualifications;
- (c) higher education qualifications;
- (d) occupational qualifications.

Figure 1. **Estonian qualifications framework: sub-frameworks and levels**



Source: Estonian Qualifications Authority and Aarna, 2016.

Since there are no specific higher education qualifications available for career guidance in Estonia, access to the career specialist profession is provided through awarding an occupational qualification <sup>(25)</sup>.

<sup>(25)</sup> In this paper, Cedefop decided on the use of 'occupational qualification' instead of 'profession' as used in the NQF monitoring (Cedefop, 2020b). In Estonia, the translation of the Professions Act of 2008, § 3 defines 'profession' as the qualification received after passing a professional examination, and the level of which has been



The three main elements of the national occupational qualification system are:

- (a) the occupational qualification standard <sup>(26)</sup> (hereinafter professional standard; *kutsestandard*) describes occupational activities and provides the competence requirements <sup>(27)</sup> for a profession and their levels;
- (b) the system of awarding occupational qualifications (*kutse andmine*), the outcome of which is a professional certificate, an electronic entry in the register of professions (*kutseregister*) and a document which certifies the compliance of the competence of the applicant to the requirements of the professional standard;
- (c) the register of professions (*kutseregister*) is a State database with information on sector skills councils <sup>(28)</sup> (*kutsenõukogu*), valid occupational qualifications, professional standards, awarding bodies (*kutseandja*) and professional certificates.

The EstQF and referencing it to the European qualifications framework, has provided an important incentive for the development of the lifelong learning system in Estonia, for the development of a national occupational qualifications system and a quality assurance system for lifelong learning (Estonian Qualifications Authority and Aarna, 2016).

### 4.3. Career specialist as a profession in Estonia

#### 4.3.1. Professional standard for career specialist

Career guidance in Estonia is based on three pillars – careers education, career counselling and career information provision – provided within the education and employment systems. Careers education is integrated in curricula at different education levels and has a long tradition. However, career information provision and career counselling inside and outside school has been organised differently over the years and often influenced by the resources available at a given

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determined in the relevant professional qualification standard (Estonian Parliament, 2008).

<sup>(26)</sup> Experts use both 'occupational qualification standard' and 'professional standard', where the latter is used in the official English translation of the Professions Act.

<sup>(27)</sup> The term 'competency requirement' is used in the translation of the occupational qualification standards web page.

<sup>(28)</sup> In the Estonian occupational qualification system, the labour market is divided into 14 sectors (according to a statistical classification of economic fields of activity) and each sector is managed by a sector skills council (Estonian Parliament, 2008, §8).



time <sup>(29)</sup>. In 2018, the Estonian government acknowledged that there was some room for improvement both regarding access and quality of the career services and the need to ensure guidance for all as a priority in public employment offices (PES). In January 2019, the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund, the public employment service in the country (PES), restructured its system of career services and integrated the services offered to young people (Cedefop, 2020a; Puulmann and Rammo, 2021). It became responsible for the provision of career counselling and career information for all, and career guidance professionals from the Foundation Innove *Rajaleidja* ('Pathfinder' in English) guidance centres for youth in the education sector, were transferred to the public employment services.

The role of education institutions is to ensure access to career guidance for their students and support them in reaching the learning outcomes set in curricula. The Education Act stipulates career guidance for children and the young as the responsibility of local governments. However, schools have a great degree of autonomy. For example, general education schools are obliged to ensure the availability of career-related services. The national curriculum does not prescribe what actions are to be taken to achieve the set goals: schools are able to select the best ways, methods and means. The compulsory central topic, Lifelong learning and career planning, is to be followed by all. Among the solutions there is often a mix of approaches; some offer an elective subject by their own staff, some invite experts from outside school, e.g. cooperate with PES (Puulmann and Rammo, 2021).

The occupational qualifications system plays a significant role in ensuring the professional development of practitioners (career specialists) in career guidance. The system was launched in 2006, when the Estonian Qualification Authority certified the Association of Estonian Career Counsellors (hereinafter the association) for awarding and recertifying occupational qualifications, after a public competition. This designation is valid for a five-year period, stipulating that the association must regularly ensure that it complies with the requirements. This includes demonstrating that the development of relevant professional activities is a focus, and that the association has the resources and expertise necessary to organise the awarding of qualifications.

The professional standard for the career specialist describes the occupational activity and competence necessary for practising career guidance: skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to work successfully (Table 1). The current professional standard is valid until November 2022. Professional

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<sup>(29)</sup> For more information on lifelong career guidance in Estonia see (Cedefop, 2020a).



standards were initially developed for each of the services agreed in the Estonian career service (career education, career counselling and career information provision). Since 2017, there is one valid competence-based standard for career specialist, at EstQF levels 6 and 7, equivalent to a bachelor degree and professional higher education certificate (level 6), and a master degree (level 7). The main difference between the levels is that, in addition to the service provision, the level seven practitioner has more extensive experience and competences at national or international level, such as using new tools, curricula, research, or training.

The learning-outcomes-based approach, introduced for the EstQF in 2017, defines the occupational qualifications and competence assessment in terms of individual knowledge and skills outcomes. The development of this approach to professional standards resulted in the identification of the commonalities in competences required for the career specialist profession (and qualification), valid across all guidance services. Stakeholders who were involved in 2017 aimed to cover practitioners across sectors, including education and employment, but also in private services (Kinkar and Rammo, 2020).

Part A of the standard provides a general overview of the nature of the work, its main areas, necessary tools, work environment, including its specificities, the personal characteristics and skills-enhancing occupational activities. The description of work includes activities such as individual and group career counselling, information provision concerning education, the labour market and occupations for groups and individuals. Main tasks and elective areas of work are also identified.

The competence requirements are presented in part B. Four mandatory competences and the so-called 'recurring competence' <sup>(30)</sup> must be demonstrated. All competence descriptions include performance indicators. The recurring competence has been identified with performance indicators including engagement in self-reflection and continuous capacity building, customer focus, adherence to professional ethics, goal setting, outcome analysis, language proficiency, team building, and use of technology. In addition, at least one of the elective competences must be demonstrated: either career information provision or career counselling (Register of occupational qualifications).

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<sup>(30)</sup> Recurring competences relate mainly to foundation competences in Cedefop (2009).



Table 1. **Career specialist standard: work and competence requirements**

| Part A: description of work  | Part B: competence requirements  |
|--|--|
| TASKS<br>Promoting services<br>Networking to provide services<br>Service development<br>Instruction and training | MANDATORY COMPETENCES<br>The promotion of services<br>Networking to provide services<br>Service development<br>The provision of instruction and training |
| ELECTIVE AREAS OF WORK<br>Career counselling<br>Career information provision                                     | COMPETENCE OPTIONS<br>Career counselling<br>Career information provision   |
|  | RECURRING COMPETENCES  |

*Source:* Register of occupational qualifications, translated and summarised by author.

In practice, the professional standard in guidance is used as a basis for compiling curricula and training programmes that meet the requirements of the labour market; as a basis for competence assessment; to assist employers in describing and introducing occupations, recruiting employees, compiling job descriptions, defining professional requirements; and to help professionals assess own skills gaps, or for their own career development. It is also a basis for international comparisons of professional certificates. In principle, to hold an occupational qualification is optional for practitioners and is not a precondition for recruitment, but the certificate is highly valued by the PES (Psience, 2020). As a result, the contents of the professional standard have been incorporated into the relevant job descriptions, and salaries tend to be higher for those who are qualified specialists. Guidance professionals working in the private sector can benefit from having the qualification when applying for field-related projects.

#### **4.3.2. Awarding occupational qualifications**

Since the right to award an occupational qualification is limited to a five-year period, a regular update is part of the system. Accordingly, the association, as the legally appointed awarding body, is responsible for ensuring impartiality in the process, and for setting up a professional qualifications committee. According to the Professions Act (Estonian Parliament, 2008, §18), the committee involves stakeholders with an interest in the awarding system: specialists (career specialists), employers (PES), and unspecified representative employees, trainers (university or national agency), representatives of occupational associations and, if necessary, guidance client representatives, as well as other interested stakeholders.

The professional standard serves as a basis for the assessment of the applicant's competences. The assessment standard is a public document that describes the process, assessment arrangements, criteria, assessment guide for



the assessor, and contains forms for the applicant (Association of Estonian Career Counsellors, 2020).

The assessment is carried out in three successive stages. Figure 1 illustrates the stages from the awarding body and the applicant's point of view in respect to the three main elements of the occupational qualifications system.

Figure 2. **Elements of the occupational qualification system and the awarding process**



Source: Author.

#### 4.4. Focus group findings on occupational qualifications system in career guidance

##### 4.4.1. Background and methodology

Career guidance provision is constantly changing, posing new challenges for both career guidance professionals and the system as a whole. At national level, career guidance is still adapting to the changes initiated in 2019, where career counselling and career information providers from the guidance centres (Rajaleidja) were integrated into the PES structure. Additional disruptions in career services due to COVID-19 where meetings have moved online, and the introduction of digital solutions, both hinder and encourage development and create new demands on practitioners' competences. This sets the stage for



rethinking how the quality of services can be improved through updating standards and examining the pathways towards becoming a qualified career guidance specialist. To support this effort, the national Euroguidance centre initiated a study based on the collected responses from guidance specialists and stakeholders. The results reported in Psience (2020) provide an overview of the current situation of the occupational qualification system in career guidance, offering ideas for making the system more flexible and modern, to improve the quality of services.

The national Euroguidance centre is the Estonian National Resource Centre for Guidance. It provides a range of services to guidance professionals in Estonia and abroad, including practitioners, researchers, educators and policy-makers. Belonging to the European Network of Euroguidance centres, the centre aims to support the competence development of the guidance community on the European dimension of lifelong guidance. The Association of Estonian Career counsellors, the awarding body for the qualification of career specialist, is the key player in the occupational qualification system in career guidance. Along with Euroguidance, the Association shares the common aim of supporting the professional development of the career guidance community. Hence the two partners decided to involve experts, career guidance specialists and other stakeholders in the field to assess the functioning of the existing qualifications system and identify areas for improvement, to make it even more efficient and effective for the career guidance field.

The study collected stakeholder responses through online focus group discussions. These had three to seven participants per target group, and a total of eight focus groups and 50 persons, who were selected by the partner institutions. Participants included:

- (a) career counsellors and career information specialists who have or have not participated in the certification process;
- (b) experts directly involved in the process, i.e. members of the professional or assessment committee;
- (c) experts who have not been involved in the process, such as representatives from the education ministry, national agencies, third and private sectors;
- (d) school personnel, including career teachers, school principals and others involved in the development of career management skills.

A structured questionnaire (Box 1) with rating scale responses was used to stimulate the focus-group discussions. The questionnaire contained open-ended questions and seven using rating scales focused on different aspects of the occupational qualifications system. Prior to the session, participants were sent



instructions and general information, including the application process, professional standards, and current assessment standard.

**Box 2. Selected focus group topics**

Stakeholder views were sought on:

Usefulness of the occupational qualification system in the field of career guidance (i.e., for the career specialist qualification) and most important changes, according to different viewpoints

Extent the system supports professionalism of the field and supports provision of training

Digitalisation and use of ICT in the accreditation process and impact of COVID-19

Assessment of ICT competences among current guidance specialists

Whether or not content and quality of training meets the needs of the labour market

Relevance and clarity of competences in the current professional standard, and views on latest changes in competence options

Extent to which the assessment standard is understandable in order to describe competences during the application process

Developments and changes necessary for the efficient and effective functioning of the occupational qualification system in career services

Source: Author's summary of topics.

#### **4.4.2. Findings on system strengths and areas for improvement**

Based on the results of the focus group discussions, it can be concluded that the occupational qualifications system in Estonia is clearly an essential and useful component of quality assurance, with a focus on professional training of staff who support career development. In general, it is highly valued and provides a guarantee to the employer and to the client. However, several areas for improvement were identified, both in respect of modernising the qualifications system in general and to improve the awarding process in particular. Some of these observations are summarised below.

##### **4.4.2.1. Digitalisation and the use of ICT tools**

Guidance stakeholders in the focus groups were asked to share their opinion about practitioner ICT competences and digitalisation. Despite the different levels of experience and generational differences, the ICT competences of practitioners were highly valued. Some practitioners were described as very independent and innovative users of ICT, while others have lower skills levels, so they are unable to exploit the full potential of technology for remote guidance delivery. A big leap in development was noted in connection with COVID-19 in spring 2020. Various online platforms for remote delivery became commonplace, so practitioners were encouraged to upgrade their skills accordingly (Psience, 2020). For example, participation in remote services has grown considerably in labour offices, and



online career fairs proved to be valuable (Holland and Mann, 2020). Participants acknowledged that today it is not possible to work as a career specialist without a good level of ICT competences and agreed that the standards need to be updated accordingly (Psience, 2020).

Earlier research also revealed that the rapid development of ICT had a significant impact on guidance provision (Psience, 2017). ICT and digital tools were seen as an opportunity and as a challenge. The main advantages were the rapid exchange of the information and ability to communicate. From the perspective of service provision, this in turn helps to make the service more accessible, for example through online-services (e.g. chat-service) and to ensure quality nationwide service. ICT helps to obtain a broader picture (for example through gathered statistics), and digital tools make the service more attractive and interactive, while being relevant to the different target groups (ibid).

The main area for improvement in terms of professionals' digital competences is seen in relation to digital tools, such as the introduction of digital tasks and self-analysis tools (including games for young people and other assistive tools). Respondents remarked that the assessment process needs modernising. While the possibility to send documents electronically is in place, the application system does not use online forms, tests, or video counselling. According to the participants, the guidelines of the final professional exam should be more interactive; for example, instructional videos would be welcomed. Focus group participants also remarked on challenges in assessing the applicants' digital competences: the system does not require their meaningful demonstration.

#### *4.4.2.2. Renewal of professional standard with a focus on international dimension*

The findings of the study demonstrate the professionals' views on the need to ensure a stronger focus on the international dimension. Participants argued that, in the context of the globalising education and labour market, citizens are more mobile both for learning and work, both within the country and in going abroad; practitioner competences regarding international opportunities and multicultural issues are not sufficiently covered. Although the competences described in the professional standard as a whole were relevant, international aspects need closer attention, and this may lead to supplementing the required competences, and renewing accordingly both professional standard and procedure for awarding qualifications. Participants felt that the standards need to be updated in competences related to service delivery in a multicultural environment (Psience, 2020). The increasing importance of the ability of practitioners to handle more complex types and larger amounts of information, and to deal with clients of



different cultural backgrounds, was also reflected in earlier research (Rosenblad; Sömer and Tilk, 2018).

One of the objectives of the qualifications system is to make occupational qualifications internationally comparable; the focus group discussed the issue of recognition of occupational qualification system across Europe. Apparently, the comparability of the Estonian system and standard with international standards is not clear enough for the guidance community. However, the lack of recognition of foreign qualifications across Europe in different specialisations (e.g. career coach) was identified and the possibility of increasing the value of the Estonian qualifications is seen in its potential portability. Participants shared interest in having their qualification recognised in other countries and would welcome information on other settings where the certificate is valid. It was also suggested that one of the goals of the qualifications system could be to tie it to an internationally unified professional system (Psience, 2020).

#### 4.4.2.3. *The value of occupational qualification system for professionals and institutions*

The respondents generally confirm that, in the absence of a higher education qualification – an academic degree in career guidance – the occupational qualifications system is very useful for indicating that the requirements of the professional standard have been met. Further, legislation supports regular improvement; as example, the role of the awarding body serves for a limited period and there is a specific validity period for the professional standard.

Stakeholders share an understanding that the system offers professionals the opportunity for self-analysis and conscious setting of professional development goals, and that a professional certificate increases their self-confidence (Psience, 2020). The PES, as the largest employer, values the qualification, linking it to their salary system. The participants also saw the implementation of outcomes-based learning as an important step forward, but they also emphasised that the current approach regarding competence options is largely oriented towards service provision organised in PES. For example, regarding elective areas of work, participants remarked that counselling and information provision are closely linked. A client-centred approach would require the need-based complex provision of services by practitioners who have the competences of both a career counsellor and an information specialist, and the ability to apply them appropriately based on the client (ibid.).

However, according to participants, the systemic deployment of the qualifications system in education sectors still has room for improvement. The 2019 career guidance reform has had a major impact on service provision including career guidance in schools (Puulmann and Rammo, 2021). The



responsibility of schools in organising career education has significantly increased, including cooperation with extracurricular partners. Unfortunately, at the same time, participants noted that the current qualifications system does not consider the specificities of school career coordinators and teachers involved in guidance. It is difficult for a person working with career education at a school to apply for the qualification of career specialist, because the content of work and the profile of activities do not match the competences and performance indicators described in the professional standard and assessment standard (Psience, 2020). Therefore, from these observations, it is worth considering bringing the professional standard of a 'career coordinator' valid in 2005-12, back to the table.

#### 4.4.2.4. *Capacity building*

Based on the results of the study, the capacity building of career guidance practitioners could be improved. Although it is not possible to acquire the required qualifications as a career specialist through academic education, the required knowledge and skills can be obtained through higher education or through non-formal courses offered by public agencies and private companies.

According to focus group participants, training provision in career guidance is rather limited. While the training needs of practitioners in PES are well covered, training opportunities for professionals in educational institutions and the private sector are few. There are sometimes communication gaps about offers, but there is also a lack of basic and advanced training (Psience, 2020), including learning and exchange of practices at international level. However, the study confirms that the courses offered are well designed, linked with the occupational qualification system and are based on the competence requirements identified in the professional standard.

## 4.5. Conclusions and recommendations

The Estonian occupational qualifications system is an important tool in forming and ensuring the professional identity of the career guidance community of practitioners across sectors. Due to its periodic updates and systematic involvement of stakeholders under the leadership of the national qualifications authority and a professional association, it is a fundamental and recognised foundation for training providers and other stakeholders in supporting professional development of practitioners. Assuring practitioner professionalism is the key to having an impact and supporting clients in managing learning and work and moving towards a personally determined and evolving future.

Based on the outcomes of the study, two main recommendations can be identified:



- (a) digitalisation and internationalisation are rapidly evolving areas which affect people, so attention is needed in developing the competences of career guidance professionals. To provide practitioners maximum support for their professional development, studies are needed on current and future training needs, followed by suitable training opportunities;
- (b) changes in society change individual needs for skills development and career guidance. Career guidance provision is constantly changing, posing new challenges for both career guidance professionals and the system as a whole. To meet the needs of the labour market, stakeholders should focus on, and closely cooperate in, updating competence requirements, modernising the awarding procedures, and supporting capacity building of professionals.

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## CHAPTER 5.

# Digital badges for career practitioner skills validation in Italy

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### 5.1. Introduction

Professionalism of guidance practitioners in the digital context is one of the main challenges for national and regional career guidance systems. Most practitioners have professional backgrounds built from different starting points and pathways, such as from diverse educational contexts and from a variety of work experiences. Career guidance practitioners learn their skills in both formal and informal contexts. 'The professionalisation of practice means that guidance practitioners will need to promote a greater awareness of the need for career adaptability. This means that career practitioners will need to promote not only formal qualifications (for example, further education and training), but must also emphasise different forms of learning-while-working that contribute to the acquisition of career adaptability competences (learning in networks, learning on-the-job and learning through occupational changes and challenges)' (Barnes et al., 2020, p.43). Considering the rapid changes in guidance settings and environments, and the new technologies now available, career adaptability should become a core competence also for each career practitioner.

In several countries, such as in Italy, a formal national skills and qualification system for career practitioners is still under construction and there are no legally defined national qualification requirements for career guidance practitioners (Cedefop, 2020). These diverse backgrounds and informal experiences are reflected in their CVs, making the recruitment of career practitioners a challenge for private and public career guidance providers.

There are also no formal training pathways or specific degrees in Italy that give direct access to work in this field. Most practitioners (68%) employed by the public employment services have obtained a secondary school qualification or lower, while only 28.7% have a university degree (ANPAL, 2017). Within the education system, teachers can be in charge of career guidance activities without having a formal qualification or specific experience in career guidance. Practitioners employed by private guidance providers have diverse backgrounds

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<sup>(31)</sup> [Centro Studi Pluriversum](#).



and qualifications (including degrees in psychology, education sciences, sociology, political sciences, law or economics). Recruitment is open to applicants from diverse disciplines and formal education pathways, and there are also procedures in place for assessing informal learning and work experience acquired in the field of career guidance.

The national system of validation is regulated but it is not fully developed. Decree 13/2013 establishes the 'National repertory of education, training and professional qualifications' which is the single framework for the certification of competences. The repertory is a comprehensive collection of national, regional and sectoral repertories, under the responsibility of the regional authorities or 'entitling bodies' (for more information, see Cedefop, 2020).

In 2016, the new national qualifications repertory – *Atlante del lavoro e delle qualificazioni* (INAPP, 2016) was created as a national reference for all regional qualifications (the regional repertories' qualifications remain active and legally valid). The national repertory is based on the descriptions of sectors, main work processes and sub-processes, work activities and expected outcomes. It includes several work activities related to career guidance. The repertory describes the practitioner's main activities and expected outputs (such as the provision of career interviews and of career information), but it does not describe the competences related to each work activity. Therefore, to certify their skills, practitioners have to refer to regional services, following both the regional and national frameworks and procedures <sup>(32)</sup>. However, in most Italian regions, these services are not yet available, nor are they fully developed.

Given the gaps in training and qualification routes in Italy in the current crisis context and in the face of vast labour market and social changes, career guidance providers are under pressure to find methods for increasing professionalism in their workforce. The public employment services (PES) is one example of a provider currently updating and expanding its workforce, to improve the quality and quantity of its services for clients. In 2021 and over the next few years, the new national plan for the PES (Italian Ministry of Labour, 2020) will strengthen the role of the PES system and around 4 000 new practitioners will be hired by regional PES.

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<sup>(32)</sup> The National guidelines (2013) and National standards on lifelong guidance (2014) are agreements signed within the Conference among State and regions. They are policy guidelines for the regions, who by law have the power to regulate regional VET, SPI, guidance systems and validation and certification services. There are different regional systems, at different stages of development. The Atlas is the national inventory for all regional references to refer to, to relate each available single regional qualification to a national standard.



In Italy, the PES system is organised and managed by the regions, following national legislation and similar funding programmes across regions. There are 20 different regional PES systems, with about 8 000 practitioners and extensive support of regional agencies and private providers. On average, there are about 380 users for each practitioner, including administrative and back-office staff (ANPAL, 2017)

Quality standards for employment services are defined by the Ministry of Labour and the Regions (Italian Ministry of Labour, 2018). The document provides a list of services and methodological references for all public employment offices in Italy and also for private job centres and employment agencies. It includes descriptions of information and career guidance services, with work processes and expected results of each service. The standards also include ethical treatment of clients, availability of career information and the obligation to explore job offers suitable for all clients (Cedefop, 2020). However, the document on quality standards does not include a description of skills and qualifications of practitioners.

## 5.2. Supporting professionalism with a digital badge system

Among national and regional initiatives to value informal learning, the use of innovative tools such as digital badges is a promising alternative to setting up an effective system of validation and a transferable model for fostering and supporting the professionalism of career practitioners. A digital open badge is 'a validated indicator of accomplishment, skill, quality or interest' (MacArthur foundation, 2011), which describes specific (prior) learning undertaken or work experience carried out in order to earn the badge. The digital badge is based on blockchain technology and is easily integrated within powerful social networks for international recruitment, such as LinkedIn. Core components of a badge include the information needed to determine its validity, authenticity, source, and value.



Figure 1. **Digital badges – Sample competence areas, public employment service practitioners**



Source: Pluriversum – Open Badges.

This information includes the recipient (who earned the badge), the issuer (the individual or the organisation taking responsibility for issuing the badge), the badge's criteria and description (what the recipient needed to do or demonstrate to earn the badge), evidence (an authentic representation or connection to the underlying work performed or contribution made to earn the badge), a date (when the badge was awarded), its expiration (when, if ever, the credential is no longer valid), and a certificate or assertion (a connection to an official form of verification vouching for the validity of the award) (Finkelstein; Knight and Manning, 2013).

An innovative digital badge system for career guidance practitioners, *Competenze Servizi Lavoro* (Competences for the employment services) was recently developed and tested in Tuscany. This new system was created by one of the largest <sup>(33)</sup> career guidance providers in Italy, in order to support the career development of its practitioners who work in the regional public employment service (PES). The digital badge system is based on the *Atlante del lavoro e*

<sup>(33)</sup> [Pluriversum](#) is a career guidance provider which employs about 150 career practitioners.



*delle qualificazioni* (INAPP, 2016), through an open and transparent system <sup>(34)</sup>, in order to validate the core competences of PES practitioners (also for career progression and career mobility). It includes relevant competences for other career practitioners employed in school settings, in career services of universities, and vocational training institutions. The Atlas developed by INAPP experts used several sources, including the 2014 Standards for lifelong guidance, regional qualifications and interviews with experts and practitioners.

Digital badges ensure wide online visibility, which helps protect from counterfeiting and falsification. The system is based on an objective and impartial evaluation procedure, following UNI-ISO 17024 standards and with the involvement of an external team of evaluators <sup>(35)</sup>. Participation in the digital badge validation procedure is voluntary. The whole validation procedure includes tutorship by an expert, and can be fully managed online, through a dedicated web platform and videocalls between tutors and recipients.

Through a system of digital badges, each practitioner can easily demonstrate his/her own skills, collecting evidence of learning and working achievements, through the creation of an open e-portfolio in their profile in major social networks where the badges are shared.

### 5.3. Digital badges and PES career practitioner competences

A team of experts and practitioners in Italy developed all badges, starting from daily experience in the provision of career guidance services in the PES and from the descriptions of the national repertory, but also including related competences. In this model, each digital badge describes a specific competence area required within career service delivery that the practitioner-recipient should demonstrate has been acquired (Figure 1) (English translations provided by the author):

- (a) analysis of users' needs and definition of the service agreement (*analisi bisogni e patto servizio*);
- (b) career guidance (*consulenza orientativa*);
- (c) coordination of career services (*coordinamento servizi occupabilità*);
- (d) advice for self-employment and enterprise start-up (*creazione impresa/lavoro autonomo*);
- (e) career education (*educazione all'orientamento*);

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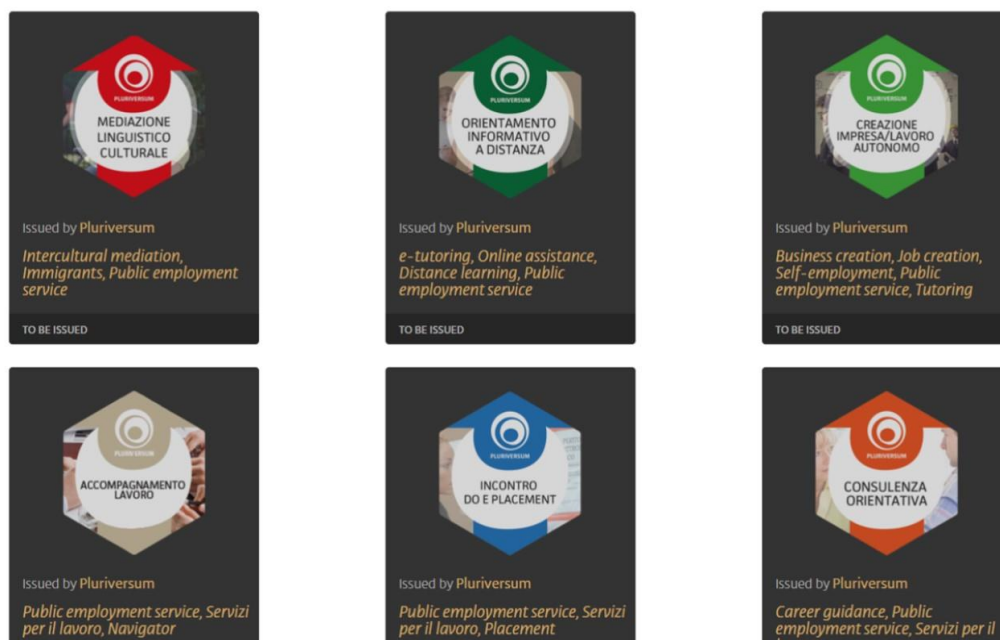
<sup>(34)</sup> The description of the system is available [here](#).

<sup>(35)</sup> The external team includes members of the [association of evaluators](#).



- (f) intercultural mediation in employment services (*mediazione linguistico culturale*);
- (g) career information (*orientamento informativo*);
- (h) career e-guidance (*orientamento formative a distanza*);
- (i) career services for disadvantaged users (*orientamento lavorativo svantaggio*);
- (j) placement services (*incontro DO e placement*);
- (k) services for identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning (*individuazione competenze*);
- (l) support for job placement (*accompagnamento transizioni*).

Figure 2. **Digital badges in six competence areas (public employment sector)**



Source: Pluriversum – Open Badges

The development of each badge followed a participatory bottom-up process with the direct involvement of career guidance practitioners and experts. The team of experts worked with practitioners to identify the specific skills, with reference to each specific area of activity. This bottom-up process facilitated the process of making the badges more effective in describing the actual activities carried out within the main guidance services and the associated skills, and tools.

In this way the badges include competences and skills found in the National repertory as well as additional ones based on an examination of activities carried out by practitioners working at the public employment services.



Box 1 provides the common format for each badge, through the example of the contents of the badge awarded for career e-guidance (C-Box competences, n.d).

**Box 1. Digital badge content, Career e-guidance competence**

The recipient (who earned the badge): Name of the practitioner.

The issuer (the organisation taking responsibility for issuing the badge): *Pluriversum* (career guidance provider).

The badge's criteria and description (what the recipient needed to do or demonstrate to earn the badge):

The owner of this badge participated in the identification and assessment of skills through which the possession of the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve the following expected results (ER) was ascertained.

**Knowledge**

- (a) business organisation concepts for data processing and return, in relation to the type and needs of the users of the data;
- (b) customer care elements to manage the conversation with the customer / user in case of improper use;
- (c) methods of managing information sessions in person (group or individual) or remotely for the phase of access to the service and reception;
- (d) information on training offered in the territory;
- (e) planning of moments of verification in compliance with the defined times, the learning objectives and the assessment methods prepared;
- (f) digital resources, guidance software and e-guidance systems;
- (g) user reception techniques;
- (h) techniques for analysing the characteristics and the information request of users who access the services;
- (i) assertive and non-verbal communication techniques;
- (j) techniques for administering qualitative and quantitative data collection tools (including client assessments);
- (k) tutoring techniques;
- (l) terminology of computer and multimedia systems to effectively manage their use.

**Skills**

- (a) welcoming the user, ensuring the transmission of information, through direct and/or virtual communication with the user to provide advice, guidance and assistance;
- (b) apply intervention methodologies to support the client in the process of research, self-consultation and critical reading of information on training and professional opportunities also with digital tools and e-guidance devices;
- (c) apply procedures for research, cataloguing and updating of integrated information systems (physical and virtual information boards) dedicated to the training offer and job opportunities;



- (d) apply mediation and communication facilitation techniques between the actors who intervene in various capacities in information and training activities. Detect the needs of the participants and the critical issues;
- (e) provide information to users on the needs and methods of intervention in case of malfunction of communication tools; provide for the resolution of functionality problems also through contact with technical assistance services;
- (f) detect any learning problems and assist inexperienced users in accessing services and using IT tools in the context of computer literacy, mediating and disseminating knowledge, tools and techniques of new technologies to facilitate access to telematic services, also through virtual community animation activities;
- (g) use the tools defined for gathering information; periodically produce reports to contact person through the use of appropriate drafting techniques.

Evidence (an authentic representation or connection to the underlying work performed or contribution made to earn the badge).

Date (when the badge was awarded).

Expiration (when, if ever, the credential is no longer valid).

Certificate or assertion (a connection to an official form of verification vouching for the validity of the award).

This badge allows its holder to obtain recognition of their professional skills by Pluriversum and by other organisations which, operating in the sector of employment services, have granted the endorsement.

Source: [Pluriversum](#). Translated by the author.

## 5.4. Challenges and areas for improvement

This digital badge framework is an innovative experiment promoted locally to empower the skills of a large community of career practitioners, using new technology. It needs to be further improved and tested, but it has already brought an innovation in the way of designing and managing the organisational chart of a career guidance company that provides services regionally.

A further spread of digital badges will provide a 'map' of the skills of practitioners in all areas of the region, with data on skills needs and overlapping and strategic information to ensure the best performances in all PES offices. This will help to manage the turnover, to move mentors and coordinators, and also to plan training and hiring of new staff.

There is a need for developing new digital badges focused on the practitioner's ICT skills, to map and foster a large and complete implementation of new distance services, based on new technologies for career e-guidance and to support wider access to e-guidance resources and tools.

Another challenge is the accessibility of these digital badges. The process of acquisition could be difficult and stressful for many practitioners and, overall, for schoolteachers, who are only minimally involved in some guidance activities.



Most are likely to possess only partial competences needed to earn one badge and this will discourage many practitioners and teachers from applying if there is a high risk of failure.

For this reason, it could be useful to design two different kinds of badges: 'heavy badges' related to main career guidance skills for professional progression of career practitioners (who have to provide evidence of their skills) and 'light badges' related to basic knowledge, specific activities or tasks (for example: to use digital tools to provide career information or e-guidance). 'Light badges' should more easily be earned by practitioners and teachers, and they may encourage engagement in career guidance activities, so boosting interest in the 'heavy' ones.

The training offers could be redesigned to support candidates to learn the skills and knowledge related to each badge and to prepare applicants for the acquisition of further digital badges.

## 5.5. Conclusions and implications for policy

Recognition and certification of workplace learning, and competences is one way of enhancing the career practitioner's professionalism. This has many implications for policy, particularly in respect to meeting the increasing demand for training, making skills visible and for quality assurance among providers.

The digital badge system, with the detailed map of the areas of activity and skills, also stimulates practitioners in their choice of specialisation and encourages demand for training courses and other learning opportunities in areas where practitioners have not yet acquired any badge. For example, the huge and urgent development of career e-guidance services is increasing the demand for new specific digital skills in career guidance. Practitioners who already have these skills can quickly apply for the related badges and they can provide evidence of their skills to all career guidance providers of their region and also become e-trainers or e-mentors for other practitioners.

Badges can also represent different levels of work and engagement, including more granular, specific skills or achievements. They are a promising tool for validating and demonstrating the skills of practitioners, where a formal system of training and qualifications is still missing. Badges also support smoother mobility of practitioners from one region to another or from an organisation to another, because each badge represents the evidence of a clear and specific performance, a set of skills, and it includes also all the necessary documents and evidence for an easy and fast validation process (or also a formal certification) in other regional systems.



The digital badge system is useful for practitioners, but it brings great value and strategic benefits for career guidance organisations to map the whole set of skills available, and to identify gaps and skills shortages and types of skills, for strengthening provision and set up more effective training plans.

Although the focus has been on the digital badge system and competences suitable for career guidance provided by the public employment services, practitioners working in the education and training sector can also benefit from the badge system.

Badges are valuable for validating skills and competences acquired outside formal systems and for recognising workplace skills development among practitioners. However, full professionalisation of career guidance in Italy, across sectors, will require development of comprehensive pathways in initial training and in courses targeting specific professional competences, requiring knowledge of career development theory.

The recent regulations in Italy in 2018 and 2020 <sup>(36)</sup>, referred to in this paper, offer a new essential framework to begin the urgent process of qualifying practitioners in the national career system, and to build a formal training offer, and update the system for all career practitioners.

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## CHAPTER 6.

# Active support for the unemployed: implications of digitalisation for professionalism in career guidance

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## 6.1. Introduction

Career guidance offered by Public Employment Services (PES) mainly targets the unemployed. Employment counsellors assist jobseekers in the development of integration strategies to find a job comprising job search assistance or more complex interventions such as helping with internships, training, or working in partnership with various other social services. This is different from educational and vocational guidance having the objective to facilitate orientation and decision-making (Rübner, 2017). Sometimes misleadingly referred to as the ‘job interview’, employment counselling is recognised as one of the most effective active support measures for finding a new job (ELGPN, 2015).

Much research exists on career guidance and different aspects of digital transformation (Bakke; Haug and Hooley, 2018; Barnes et al., 2020; Goss and Hooley, 2015; Sampson; Kettunen and Vuorinen, 2020). A gap is noticeable, however, regarding digital transformation and career guidance for labour market integration, a field where numerous career guidance counsellors are working.

This article explores the impact of digital transformation on the job profile of employment counsellors working with unemployed individuals. To that end, it proceeds in several steps: First, it characterises the specifics of career guidance for unemployed individuals in the context of changing concepts of active labour market policies. Second, it looks at the concept of career guidance for the unemployed and professionalism used by the European Network of Public Employment Services (PES). Third, it examines the state and impact of digital transformation on the job profile of employment counsellors. In a fourth step, it analyses to what extent the need to rethink PES counsellors’ professionalism is covered by the existing tools developed for the European PES Network. The article concludes with points for future reflection to make PES career guidance provision for the unemployed fit for the digital future. It is mainly based on

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analytical and strategic papers produced for or by the European Network of Public Employment Services.

## 6.2. From activation to active support

Career guidance for the unemployed takes place in the policy context of active labour market policies (ALMPs). After two decades of so-called activation policies, there are indications following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic of a conceptual transformation in the policy approach at European level.

At the heart of the so-called activation paradigm is the objective not to limit support to the payment of 'passive' benefits to unemployed individuals, but to motivate and support them through ALMPs including career guidance, training, work experience or subsidies to find a new job.

Promoted by the European institutions, the labour activation paradigm 'from welfare to workfare' has been embraced all-round within the European Union. Activation policies manifest themselves in a diverse manner within the various European welfare regimes depending on institutional traditions and ideological factors. According to Moreno (2012), they lie on a continuum between two poles of welfare models, the liberal Anglo-Saxon model and the Nordic flexicurity model: 'In the former, social policies have a limited role and their short-term paramount concern is to incite individuals to search actively for jobs [...]. In the latter, activation is meant to provide social services from a long-term perspective in an attempt to break an equilibrium between individuals' and society's demands' (Moreno, 2012)

The specific type of governmental activation policy, together with PES strategic management priorities, has an impact on the service concept for career guidance and employment counselling. If closer to the flexicurity model, career guidance has a stronger focus on securing transitions on flexible labour markets; if closer to the liberal model, the risk of benefit dependency, administrative monitoring and enforcement have a more important role (Table 1):



Table 1. **Activation policies between two welfare models**

| Flexicurity model   | Liberal welfare model   |
|---|---|
| <p>Activation – active securities for better transitions on flexible labour markets (flexicurity), social citizenship</p> <p><i>Concept of human behaviour:</i> Autonomous individuals, welfare State to secure resources – skills matching to the economic circumstances</p>   | <p>Activation – employability + enforcement of benefit eligibility conditions</p> <p><i>Concept of human behaviour:</i> Passive individuals, welfare State to manage individuals' behaviour – moral contract: access to social rights/ entitlements dependent on behaviour.</p> |
| <p><i>Policy approach</i></p> <p>Active securities (financial): Generous benefits 6-9 months<br/>Career – right to development and voice<br/>Active securities (support): protecting employment, not the same job, social justice considerations<br/>Empowerment – enabling individuals to change from one work situation to another<br/>Professionalised employment services and case management</p> | <p><i>Policy approach</i></p> <p>Out-of-work benefits may lessen the motivation to look for or take up employment<br/>Expanding job opportunities (hiring incentives, job mobility)<br/>Effective labour market institutions and policies</p>                                   |
| <p>PES counsellors:<br/>Empathy + challenging unemployed to try hard + encouraging to take over risky transitions</p>   | <p>PES counsellors:<br/>Strengthening motivation (support + administrative monitoring, sanctioning)<br/>Increasing job readiness (skills)</p>   |

Source: Own compilation based upon Moreno, 2012, pp. 141-143 (models); Schmid, 2010; OECD, 2018; Grubb, 2012.

From a guidance and counselling perspective, it is also important to note the different underlying concepts of human behaviour (Moreno, 2012): an autonomous individual that needs to be encouraged through a mix of empathy and challenging (flexicurity), and a passive individual that needs to be activated through a mix of support, control and sanctions, the so-called 'carrot and stick approach', inherent in the liberal welfare model.

Recently, indications of rethinking activation at European and at international levels can be noted.

With the European Pillar of Social Rights, proclaimed by the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council in November 2017, a fundamental change can be observed, which may transform the mainstream activation paradigm in the future. Principle 4 'Active support to employment' sets out that:

'everyone has the right to timely and tailor-made assistance to improve employment or self-employment prospects.'. In the same vein, the Recommendation on an effective active support to employment following the COVID-19 crisis (EASE) (European Commission, 2021), forming part of the European Social Pillar focuses on active support comprising hiring and transition incentives, enhanced support by employment services for job transitions,



upskilling, reskilling and support measures. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the OECD recommended different steps for easing the normal requirements placed on jobseekers given a limited number of job openings in times of such crisis while maintaining the activation approach (OECD, 2020).

### 6.3. Professionalism in employment counselling: performance assessment in the PES Network

To ensure effective and sustainable activation as a main driver for cooperation of PES at European level, in 2014, the hitherto informal European expert group of Heads of Public Employment Services (HoPES) was scaled up in status and scope of action through an EU legal act, a Decision by the European Parliament and the European Council (see PES Decision 2014, amended in 2020).

The PES Network has elaborated a strategic vision attributing a key role to service and client orientation as well as to career guidance and employment counselling. Inspired by the Nordic activation model and building on the theory of transitional labour markets (TLM) (Schmid, 2010) PES in Europe strive to become transition management agencies enhancing career management skills. They shall 'build bridges', taking a holistic approach. Bridging career transitions is a matter of empowerment: jobseekers and job changers need to be enabled to build bridges themselves, to take control of their own careers, supported by guidance, advanced digital technology and skills development. PES should adapt their services to new challenges, changing customer groups and needs: 'The evolution from bureaucratic organisations towards more flexible, market and network-oriented structures must continue [requiring] a mental and cultural shift.' PES should equally invest in the empowerment of staff promoting the development of competences, and acquisition of qualifications (PES Network, 2018). This approach is broadly compatible with the principles for lifelong guidance set out by the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN, 2015).

To strengthen PES capacities for service delivery in practice, the PES Network, with support from the European Commission, has set up the so-called 'Benchlearning'. Building upon the European Foundation of Quality Management (EFQM) model, the Benchlearning framework defines operational standards for a qualitative performance assessment in combination with quantitative performance data. While participation in the Benchlearning exercise is binding for PES members of the European Network, the competence for service design remains with the Member States and the PES. The general structure of the qualitative performance assessment consists of a self-assessment by a given



PES and a subsequent external assessment. Each assessment ends with feedback and a summary report on strengths and weaknesses, priorities for action and recommendations including which other PES could be contacted to for learning what to learn, and from which PES (ICON Institute Public Sector; Fertig and Ziminiene, 2017; overview: see Kraatz, 2019).

In line with the PES Network's strategic vision (ICON Institute Public Sector; Fertig and Ziminiene, 2017), the Benchlearning framework equally puts sustainable activation, management of transitions and career guidance by PES counsellors centre stage: employment counsellors are tasked with identifying the employment potential and needs of an unemployed individual in a collaborative process, resulting in agreement to an individual action plan for labour market integration. Following the principle of mutual obligation defining rights and responsibilities, this plan sets out the PES commitment in terms of supporting measures, such as job search or training, while the client commits her or himself actively to engage and comply with the activation requirements (number of applications, attendance of training).

**Box 1. European PES Network: Benchlearning**

The framework for qualitative performance assessment consists of seven areas of so-called 'enablers'. Each of the areas is underpinned by a set of operational standards and items in a questionnaire to measure the 'maturity' of a PES:

- (a) strategic PES management;
- (b) design of operational processes + use of information (including digitalisation);
- (c) sustainable activation + management of transition (including guidance, individual action planning – if legally possible based upon mutual obligation/conditionality);
- (d) relations to employers;
- (e) evidence-based design and implementation of services;
- (f) effective management of partnerships and stakeholders;
- (g) allocation of resources (including HR, training).

Source: ICON Institute Public Sector; Fertig and Ziminiene, 2017.

What is different from the PES Network's vision is that the Benchlearning framework presents a mixed approach combining support with conditionality of benefit payment (if legally possible) implying enforcement and sanctioning: the 'carrot and stick approach' common to the liberal welfare model. Consequently, employment counsellors must balance between enabling unemployed individuals and enforcing national rules for activation, including decisions on sanctioning if part of their job profile. As the Benchlearning framework states: PES counsellors 'have a job profile that can combine the role of broker, counsellor, social worker and includes administrative tasks' (European Commission, 2014). Acting in a



setting of conflicting goals they have to manage switching roles between client-oriented counselling and administrative monitoring in a concrete counselling situation (European Commission, 2014).

How does the Benchlearning framework conceive of professionalism of PES staff? The excellence model described in the publicly available Benchlearning manual sets broad standards for assessment requiring the existence of qualification requirements and competence profiles for all PES staff. Each PES should have a competence-based training and career development plans in place (Box 2). That the PES have agreed on common standards can be considered a milestone. Nonetheless, from the publicly available information it is not clear whether there is agreement on a set of basic competences every employment counsellor should have, and which should form the basis of training.

**Box 2. Benchlearning manual – Standards for human resource strategies**

The shift in the role of PES towards services focused on activation and facilitation of transitions, has strengthened the counselling and guidance elements in the job of employment counsellors. [...] The differentiation of tasks requires a broad range of interdisciplinary knowledge as well as adequate 'hard' and 'soft' skills with the expected balance between key administrative and customer service competences.

PES HR strategies should include:

- (a) the definition and description of qualifications and competences profiles;
- (b) an initial training plan for new employees upon entry tailored to qualifications and competences recruits have;
- (c) mentoring and coaching programmes;
- (d) competence-based training and a career development plan incorporating a life-cycle approach to be linked with incentives and training for implementation of blended services should be part of HRM.

Source: European Commission, 2014.

## 6.4. The European reference competence profile for PES and EURES counsellors

At European level, a tool exists describing the competences of PES counsellors and also of EURES counsellors providing guidance for mobile jobseekers in the EU: European reference competence profile for PES and EURES counsellors (European Commission, 2017a). It has been elaborated following a request by the Network of Heads of PES by an expert in cooperation with a PES working group. This framework is evidence-based, building upon a survey conducted among the members of the PES network in 2012. This had revealed a striking



discrepancy between a widely shared consensus on key tasks employment counsellors should carry out and the diversity of PES entry requirements and training concepts. The reference competence profile integrates lifelong guidance concepts and competence frameworks developed by other European and national initiatives (Kraatz, 2020). Following the structure of the Cedefop framework of 2009, the PES and EURES reference profile comprises three strands:

- (a) foundational competences;
- (b) client interaction competences;
- (c) supporting competences including system and technical competences.

Figure 1. **European Reference competence profile for PES counsellors (2014)**



Source: Author, based on European Commission (2014).

Consisting of 44 competences, mainly in the area of client interaction and employment counselling (25), the profile does not set one standard for all, but serves as a menu to choose from, adapting it to the recruitment strategy of a given PES. Focusing on a client- and resource-oriented enabling approach, it is compatible with the variety of activation approaches as it comprises modules on working with individual action plans and on managing the dual role of enabling clients and enforcing rules for activation to sanctioning. Given a general description of competences for each module, it can be used for designing training modules. The Benchlearning manual does not refer to this competence profile, despite it being developed four years before the publication of the former.



## 6.5. PES digital transformation and counsellor job enlargement

Digital transformation in PES has been progressing considerably during the last decade (see European Commission, 2017a); the experience of sudden confinement caused by the COVID-19 pandemic worked as a strong catalyst. According to a poll among 250 participants of the EU PES Network webinar PES strategies to support recovery after the COVID-19 crisis, most PES had set up remote appointments and new digital services. Four out of 10 PES representatives think that most of the changes will become permanent; three out of 10 consider that at least a few changes will be kept (Cedefop, 2019). A joint international survey produced by seven organisations and experts in career guidance and published by Cedefop among career guidance providers worldwide confirms this development toward digital transformation of services (Kraatz, 2018).

So-called digital-first strategies will gain importance in the future following the model of a number of PES who are recognised leaders in this respect (including VDAB-Belgium, Estonia, France and Sweden (see European Commission, 2017a; ICON Institute Public Sector and Walsh, 2020)). Consequently, the web platform is becoming the organisational face to the customer:

- (a) multifunctional platforms for career development function as a first access point and gateway. Increasingly designed in a process-oriented way, they are structured along key points of a client's journey (e.g. [Federal Employment Agency Germany](#), [Pôle Emploi](#)). At European level, the Commission is reshaping the [Europass platform](#) in a similar manner;
- (b) an increasing variety of self-help tools is in place to offer online services for skills-based matching of vacancies with jobseekers, for detecting skills gaps and training needs. Some platforms offer automated suggestions for jobs and learning using big-data analysis and artificial intelligence (AI). To prepare and complement the assessment of jobseekers by employment counsellors, several PES apply so-called 'statistical profiling', meaning that jobseekers are grouped by the intensity of support needed or the risk of long-term unemployment on the basis of a limited number of tested characteristics (such as age, qualification) using big-data analysis. Those job-ready and having sufficient digital skills, receive a recommendation to continue with online self-help tools (as in Estonia and Sweden), (Cedefop, 2019; Eurostat, 2020);
- (c) online information and contact points receive more in-depth support: if a client needs more information or counselling to solve specific problems,



additional links or click buttons provide a variety of interactive possibilities including the establishment of contact with a personal counsellor;  
(d) mobile apps make access easier and more flexible.

To conclude from this increasingly common way of working in the wider context of digital government strategies, counselling sessions are changing considerably, as many traditional counsellor tasks have been or are going to be automated. Regardless of these developments, human interaction remains crucial using a variety of digital channels (email, individual or group counselling using online video channels or chats) or offered on site (see Kraatz, Rübner and Weber, 2021, in this collection). As Pieterse (2020) puts it: 'While the internet is evolving into the backbone of service delivery in (digitally) more advanced countries, many traditional channels are not disappearing. Rather, different channels are finding very specific functions, often in conjunction with the online channels'.

Career counselling provided by practitioners is indispensable for two reasons in the context of unemployment services: the existence of a digital divide and the complexity of problems a share of unemployed individuals are facing.

The digital divide particularly affects those living in rural areas and those with lower education and digital skills levels, as well as some groups of migrants (ICON Institute Public Sector and Walsh, 2020; Kidwai and Sarwar, 2015). In 2019, only four out of 10 EU citizens (44%) used information from government websites during the previous 12 months. The percentage of Europeans using the internet for job search and applications is even lower (36% in Denmark and 6% in Romania). The joint international survey report cited, also found evidence that traditional channels such as telephone communication, can better reach some vulnerable clients across country settings (Kraatz, 2018). If not complemented by compensatory measures, digital transformation aggravates existing patterns of disadvantage and inequalities. In order to support vulnerable groups better, several PES have set up mobile labour offices or stations in other public buildings (e.g. libraries) to provide access to PCs and internet in remote/rural areas as well as assistance and training for those not having sufficient digital skills (Kraatz, 2020).

Many barriers jobseekers are facing are too complex to be solved by online self-help tools, including the traumatising effect that becoming unemployed has on psychological wellbeing and mental health (Gazier, 2020). For these clients, intensive employment counselling, or case management based on social work methods, is necessary to assess their personal situation in a holistic approach and to set up a tailored integration plan in cooperation with a network of other services.



Overall, these developments show that the job tasks of employment (and other) career guidance counsellors are becoming more demanding with increasing digitalisation through new technologies, and that job-ready and digitally skilled unemployed will increasingly rely on self-help tools (ICON Institute Public Sector; Fertig and Ziminiene, 2017; Institute for Employment and Research and Konle-Seidl, 2020). This implies an enlargement of job profiles requiring new knowledge, skills, and attitudes to:

- (a) guide a jobseeker through the increasing offer of digital information and self-help tools, to answer follow-up questions and to integrate the digital service offer consistently into the specific counselling session, with the objective of enabling her or him to manage this independently;
- (b) work with a client base shifting in its composition towards clients with more complex problems and needs.

Other developments contribute to growing needs. A number of PES are expanding service delivery to early intervention (contacting young people at risk of dropout in education) and prevention (workers threatened by unemployment or having been notified of dismissal), or to new target groups, particularly people with disabilities being inactive (European Commission, 2014, 2017b).

## 6.6. Rethinking competences and training in the digital context

Research on digital transformation of PES highlights that staff should be trained in using the new tools, both technical application together with professional content and as part of the counselling process (European Commission and Pieterse, 2017, p. 35; see also Kraatz, Rübner and Weber in this collection). Both the Benchlearning manual and the European reference competence profile incorporate digital transformation at a basic level, referring to the need to train staff for working in a context of blended service delivery:



**Box 3. Competences for blended service delivery in the digital context**

**Benchlearning framework:**

‘Ideally a PES combines different channels of service provision (blended services) and uses an integrated multichannel management to supply proper services via the proper channels to customers according to their needs and background. [...] All members of staff should be trained to put blended services into practice’.

European reference competence profile: ICT skills and ability to work in a context of blended service delivery:

- (a) acquire knowledge of and use basic ICT equipment and software, as well as service- and organisation-specific ICT equipment and software;
- (b) use Internet and online resources for the management of job placement offers and job search processes for their clients;
- (c) acquire knowledge and skills to provide blended services both to employees and job applicants, and effectively use internal recruitment systems and online recruitment tools and regularly acquire new skills in this area;
- (d) maintain contact with registered jobseekers and employers, and provide telephone/online job information and assistance.

Source: Cedefop, 2018.

The competence profile provides a set of basic digital competences for employment and other counsellors in PES. It could benefit from an update, given the increasing proportion of digital tools and services used and the greater impact on service that goes beyond using these tools.

However, the main challenge ahead for human resource development in PES may be of a more fundamental nature. Considering gradual automation of administrative tasks and of placement into jobs, the main reason to maintain physical PES will increasingly be the value employment counsellors add in terms of specific competences and professionalism: empathy, enabling, and counselling competences.

So far, this area of performance enablers has received less attention than others, judging from evidence from the PES Knowledge Centre. Although a PES toolkit Building career guidance and lifelong learning (Kraatz, 2017) includes a section on capacity building, the resource does not address the specific job profile of employment counsellors.

Future work related to digital transformation by the PES Network on human resource development for employment counsellors could consider several European sources and international research. These include, for example, the European self-assessment tool for digital competences, the DigCompSaT, to be launched in 2021 as part of the Europass platform, the Cedefop Handbook of ICT practices for guidance and career development (Hughes et al., 2016), and results



from the project [EmployID](#) on managing changing counsellor identities in times of digital transformation.

Research has provided evidence on the impact of guidance and staffing. Career guidance and coaching for labour market integration increase the sustainability of placement and widen the perspective of socially disadvantaged groups (Behncke; Frölich and Lechner, 2010; Caliendo; Schmidl and Uhlendorff, 2011). An aspect that is sometimes overlooked in the work with the unemployed is the important role systematic activation of informal social networks has for finding a job (Behncke; Frölich and Lechner, 2010); research also shows that employment effects are higher if an employment counsellor belongs to the same social group as the unemployed (Behncke; Frölich and Lechner, 2010).

## 6.7. Conclusions

During the last decade, the PES Network has produced a valuable knowledge base on career guidance and employment counselling in PES. The adoption of a common strategic PES Network vision and of a common framework for Benchlearning including employment counsellor tasks, digital change and staff professionalism can be considered milestones worldwide. Both will be revised in 2021 to take up developments related to labour markets, technologies, and PES strategic reflections. Analysis on digital transformation is at an advanced level, also covering aspects such as the digital divide and the need to maintain face-to-face guidance while specifying its changing role.

This article concludes that future service concepts for career guidance in PES in the European Union may undergo a double transformation. There are signs of a paradigm shift from the liberal two-track activation paradigm, combining support with the threat of sanctions, to one-track policies with a focus on active support. A strategic shift towards digital-first strategies and online self-help tools is taking place due to the increasing use of digital governance.

The impact of these changes on professional career guidance for the unemployed is two-fold: policies for active support alone facilitate professional career guidance in PES as counsellors do not need to switch between supportive client orientation inherent to career guidance and administrative monitoring/sanctioning. This would allow PES to concentrate in their HR strategies on equipping counsellors with the additional competences required to integrate digital technologies in the counselling process, addressing the needs of a client base shifting towards disadvantaged jobseekers facing complex barriers.

Against this background, the following topics may deserve further reflection and research:



- (a) what evidence exists in research on active labour market policies regarding the impact of face-to-face career guidance for unemployed individuals?
- (b) given the increasing role of quality employment counselling in times of digital transformation, what basic competences can be considered as necessary for all PES employment counsellors?
- (c) could a set of open-source European training modules for blended employment counselling based on an agreed set of competences provide efficiency gains, saving development costs?

There is evidence that quality career guidance helps compensate for social disadvantage by widening individual perspectives, and that the large majority of unemployed people are willing to work even if feeling depressed about their situation. This may serve as inspiration for discussing future PES priorities and strategies.

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## **PART II**



## CHAPTER 7.

# Career chat: the art of AI and the human interface in career development

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### 7.1. Introduction

The world has changed significantly in the last year. As a result of the global pandemic, societies everywhere have had to adapt in ways we could not have previously imagined. Unknown to most before 'lockdown', millions of people are now familiar with face masks, video conferencing, Zoom calls and Facebook to help connect with loved ones, simply to get together in communities for support or to adjust their working practices to fit into the 'new norm'. Technology is becoming even more ubiquitous. Digital growth, increased automation and artificial intelligence (AI) require people to be committed lifelong learners (ETF, 2020), thinking about their transferable skills, upgrading their skills or switching from at-risk sectors to remain in employment. Increasingly, careers support services are offering both digital and non-digital careers information, advice and guidance to a diverse range of clients. While evidence shows increased use of digital and social media, globally half of the world's population has no internet access (UNICEF, 2017). They are missing out on opportunities to find work, learn skills, save money, and access important services. Many individuals are already coping with issues such as loneliness, poverty or unemployment.

The impact of COVID-19 has resulted in rising levels of inequality, with lowest earners more likely to have been affected by the pandemic than those on the highest salaries (Joyce and Xu, 2020). A recent survey of 37 countries indicates that three in four households suffered declining income since the start of the pandemic, with 82% of poorer households affected (Save the Children, 2020). Global evidence shows economic disruption is being felt most acutely by young people (Fleming, 2020). As a result, there is a growing need to redouble efforts and avoid negative economic and social consequences, in relation to people, jobs, productivity and growth. Evidence shows health and wellbeing outcomes generally worsen with greater socioeconomic disadvantage (UNICEF, 2020). For those displaced from key sectors most affected by the pandemic, shift

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workers and new entrants to volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous labour markets, day and night access to trustworthy careers information, advice and guidance has become vital. Over the coming year(s) there is likely to be further demand for careers support services as individuals strive to adapt and prosper.

In this chapter, we discuss the new digital forms of careers support interventions and focus on the continuing importance of human intervention in the helping process. The first part explores practices and approaches currently central to careers support service design and delivery. We argue 'the bots' are coming and career development professionals need to embrace such developments and find ways to share designing and adding this to their expert repertoire of services. The second part discusses the art of 'career chat' conversations that harness big data, artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, labour market intelligence (LMI) and chatbots. This is both challenging and complex. We argue that the intersection between the use of such digital technology to produce 'bite-sized' careers information and advice, complemented by human professional careers guidance, is under-explored. The chapter considers how career guidance professionals can develop new insights and approaches in enabling individuals to access tailored careers support anytime of the day or night. We briefly discuss the need to pay careful attention to addressing bias, ethics and taking account of operational contexts. This is followed by illustration of a careers chatbot prototype, theoretically informed and jointly created with career guidance professionals, offering insight to a new digital form of blended approach. The third part outlines how a chatbot and human interface mode of delivery needs to be embedded in professional development and training. We consider the crucial importance of careers practitioners learning to transfer their professional skills and knowledge, working in harmony with AI innovation. This requires a new mentality, adaptability and resilience to deliver new modes of delivery. Upskilling and reskilling, particularly in digital competence, opportunity awareness and ethical considerations, are key considerations. So far, the training and competences of careers practitioners in the art of AI-driven careers support has been overlooked by policy-makers and leaders in the careers sector. Career chatbots hold equal promise for careers professionals and their clients; while the evidence-base is limited, the career development community has an exciting opportunity to stay ahead of the innovation curve.



## 7.2. Careers support services

In response to the social and economic impact of the pandemic, career guidance professionals have rapidly had to adapt and transform their service design and delivery arrangements. They have discovered more inclusive and innovative ways of using technology to good effect (Cedefop, 2020). Examples include distance and e-based careers policies and practices, delivered by telephone, online interviews 1:1 or in groups, webinar sessions, gaming, virtual career fairs and virtual work experience or internships. Each are designed to offer more personalised and interactive digital and non-digital support commonly referred to as ‘a blended approach’. These give rise to the potential of increases in self-directed learning that can potentially transform people’s lives. Careers services are often challenged when it comes to providing accessible and tailored support for people of all ages, particularly marginalised groups of clients or customers: migrants, ethnic minorities, low-skilled workers, those not in education, employment or training (NEET), or people involved in new forms of work (platform work, gig workers and the self-employed) (ETF, 2020).

There is a new blurring of the boundaries between and across traditional models of education and careers support for young people and adults. Zelloth (2014) produced a taxonomy of careers support models setting out different and clearly defined approaches to career guidance design and delivery: ‘the curriculum model’ (an ‘in school approach’), ‘the centre model’, ‘the individual model (specialist or semi-specialist)’ (both associated with ‘in school and out of school’ approaches) and ‘the virtual model’ (self-assistance and use of websites and web-based interactive programmes). In 2021, digital technologies have become ubiquitous and part of everyday life. Education has changed dramatically, with the distinctive rise of e-learning, with teaching undertaken remotely and on digital platforms. There are, however, challenges to overcome. Some students without reliable internet access and/or technology struggle to participate in digital learning. Li and Lalani (2020) states that ‘while some believe that the unplanned and rapid move to online learning – with no training, insufficient bandwidth, and little preparation – will result in a poor user experience that is un conducive to sustained growth, others believe that a new hybrid model of education will emerge’. Careers support activities are also changing in new working environments. Digital technologies are deeply intertwined with human activities. These should not be considered as objects or end points of human actions. Instead, digital spaces create opportunities for constant interaction between humans and non-humans.



### 7.3. Applying the art of artificial intelligence

Rapid expansion of technology using devices like smartphones, apps, tablets and wearables (e.g., smart watches) enables new methods of learning about careers (Attwell and Hughes, 2019). A thousand years ago when the Chinese invented Suanpan – one of the first forms of a calculator – humankind witnessed the birth of cognitive augmentation: tools that help humans to think faster and do complex counting that cannot be done easily by the brain alone (Abbass, 2019). Today machine learning focuses on the development of computer programmes that can access data and use them to learn for themselves. This is an application of artificial intelligence (AI) that provides systems the ability to learn automatically and improve from experience without being explicitly programmed. However, biases are often encoded in new AI and machine learning systems, which in turn amplifies inequality.

Crawford (2017) outlines two kinds of harms that can arise from AI bias. First, ‘allocation harms’ occur when a system allocates opportunities or resources to certain groups, or withholds them; for example, if bias caused job applications continually to deny applications to women or disabled people. An allocation harm can range from a small but significant and systematic difference in treatment to complete denial of a particular service. Second, ‘representational harms’ occur when systems reinforce discrimination against some groups because of identity markers such as race, class or beliefs. To mitigate this, ethics and the principle of nonmaleficence should be firmly enshrined in career development professional training, in particular in the creation of career chatbots.

We live in an age of conversations powered by artificial intelligence (AI). From customer service chatbots embedded in online banking or insurance systems to bots that help individuals meditate on their health and wellbeing. In reality, new conversational interfaces are becoming part of our everyday lives. The introduction of chatbots in careers support services is, so far, globally underdeveloped. Yet, societal and technological changes require new forms of reaching out to young people and adults using digital approaches. For careers support services, understanding how best to use open data sets in this context, to capture evolving labour market trends and career trajectories, is vital.

Use of big open data sets, including national and local labour market trends, salaries and job prospects, has proved challenging in many countries (Řihová, 2016). This is further accentuated by the shock of the pandemic in key sectors, which means an overreliance on traditional forecasting methods using historical data only is no longer sufficient. Instead, innovative approaches and transparent quality standards in the use of AI and LMI data are now required. This will help rebuild knowledge and understanding of rapidly changing labour markets and the



evolving opportunity structure in the years ahead. Governments can perform a key role in this regard. New application programme interfaces (APIs) are emerging which facilitate the easy transfer of more relevant local, regional and national data into mobile and other portable devices; an example is government-funded course data within the UK 'LMI for All' initiative. Beyond this, there exists an exciting opportunity for crowdsourcing local LMI data from practitioners in local community settings. AI-based systems rely on good quality data to learn and get smarter in responding accurately to the end-user. However, AI and LMI remain largely under-researched in careers support services (Akkok, Hughes and Bekiaridis, 2020; Bright, 2015). National systems function differently, with differing funding mechanisms, but much can be learned from innovative work in this regard.

Web-based interactive systems use internet technologies to deliver information and services to users or other information systems/applications in an interactive way. They offer information on occupations and learning opportunities, combined with assessments of personal skills and attitudes. Many include the possibility of creating personal portfolios detailing skills, qualifications, experiences and aspirations. They can contain matching engines, linking personal traits and skills to advertised vacancies and allowing people to draft their CVs and apply for jobs (Cedefop, 2019). Yet there are inherent dangers in the application of algorithms: legitimate concerns that those lacking digital skills will get left behind, alongside technologists and/or innovators designing bots largely in the absence of career development specialist knowledge or expertise (Hughes et al., 2021).

Career development professionals have a major role to play in co-creating career chatbots and embedding this within their 'toolkit' of professional practice. Chatbots, backed by machine-learning technology, can automate customer services by determining how to resolve a problem based on knowledge of the topic and the process involved. If the 'AI worker' cannot answer a question, he/she will alert a human colleague, observe the following interaction and learn how to respond to comparable questions in the future. The use of chatbots can help companies with various tasks, including scheduling meetings, helping salespeople access customer-relationship management (CRM) information, managing to-do lists, and reporting on key business metrics. The use of chatbots has strengths and weaknesses. For example, clear privacy policies regarding collecting, analysing and using the data should be issued. The chatbots can take the jobs of people currently working in customer services. AI-driven programmes have a huge potential providing they can get better at understanding language contextually. Not all services can be offered by a chat-based dialogue. A chatbot can help to solve a problem better, get to the market faster or improve someone's



experience. For example, the chatbot called Joy (2016), aims to track mental health by asking you once a day how you are and analysing the results, as well as offering stress tips. Or Acebot, which is useful at the workplace to manage expenses, keep track of to-do lists, quickly poll colleagues and handle a range of other digital office tasks (Dredge, 2016).

Chatbots have potential uses in career guidance. A chatbot system is able to respond to repetitive and typical questions and can improve the efficiency of a career-guidance service, allowing the practitioners to focus on the in-depth counselling of their clients. In South Korea, a chatbot system was developed in 2019 for the public employment services (ICCDPP, 2019). In UK-England, NESTA (2020) – an innovation foundation – and the Department for Education (DfE) set a national ‘CareerTech Challenge’ through a prize competition on innovative uses or sources of LMI to improve careers information, advice and/or guidance. The original goal was to drive innovation in careers support services for adults, particularly those whose jobs were at risk due to automation prior to the pandemic.

An example includes ‘CiCi – the powerhouse that supports your career™’, one of 20 national finalists designed with input from professionally trained careers and employability advisers<sup>(40)</sup>. This theoretically informed prototype chatbot, currently being tried out in practice, combines AI and NLP to translate bite-sized careers information and advice to adults in three major cities, accessible throughout the day and night. The development is testing the boundaries between online careers information and advice and professional career guidance, delivered locally by qualified careers and employability specialists. In particular, can the bot be trained using AI to learn its own limitations and to know when to refer the user to a careers professional? With permission granted by the client, can the chatbot share information in advance of a careers interview, so that the person does not have to repeat what they have done already in their career search? Such an approach can potentially strengthen the way people learn to access and make better use of online careers information and advice. There is the reassurance to the individual user of professional support available locally, if needed. The chatbot also enables practitioners to have an added tool to work effectively with their clients and concentrate their specialist skills on those most in need.

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<sup>(40)</sup> Dr Hughes leads an innovation team working on the development of CiCi – <https://careerchat.uk/>



## 7.4. The human interface in career development

These latest innovations hold promise in helping provide clients with tailored and targeted careers information and advice, but we argue that holistic careers guidance and personalised support will require some form of skilful human intervention. Cedefop (2019) suggests this certainly applies to complex and deeply social activities like counselling. Human presence, and contact when helping individuals, can positively affect healthy levels of the neurotransmitter dopamine in an individual's system (Hambly and Bomford, 2019). This can contribute to increased motivation and energy, as well as coordinating functions within many higher brain regions, and can decrease chronic anxiety states through activation of the attachment system. Moreover, the majority of communication is non-verbal, documenting research that 55% of communication pertaining to feelings and attitude is conveyed through facial expressions (with 7% conveyed vocally, and 38% by how things are said) (Hanley et al., 2017).

The helping relationship in different modes, such as face-to-face contact, allows for an attachment relationship to develop. A 'therapeutic' presence is often at the forefront of career guidance/counselling and involves practitioners being fully in the moment on a multitude of levels, both physically and relationally. Having the physical presence of the helping professional (a career guidance or career counselling professional) can add value to the client experience. For example, Geller et al. (2002) in her work on assessing the impact of therapist presence emphasises the integral role of coordinated, reciprocal rhythmic patterns of movement, vocalisation and gesture through face-to-face contact. She argues this allows for practitioners to be fully present in providing the client with an attuned responsiveness, based on a kinaesthetic and emotional sensing. It also supports one's own intuition and skill and the relationship between (ibid).

A systematic review of comparative studies on the interactional differences between telephone and face-to-face psychological interventions (Irvine et al., 2020) confirms a blended approach is necessary for effective practice. When differentiated careers service delivery is taken into consideration, depending on the individuals' level of readiness for career decision-making, a dynamic suite of approaches is required to meet the diversity of individuals and their unique set of circumstances. For example, people with high readiness often make the best use of self-help services (resource rooms, websites, social media and networking), while those with moderate readiness may need brief staff-assisted services, and individuals with low readiness often benefit more from individual case-managed services (Sampson et al., 2000). In some cases, their digital skills may be insufficient to access or use web platforms, labour market information may be difficult to find and interpret, and users may simply have questions which are not



answered by the available content. To deliver a holistic provision means this should take account of the individual and their circumstances, providing a personalised service that is supported by multi-channel delivery mechanisms (Barnes et al., 2020).

Self-directed online services tend to be of less use to people with relatively low levels of skills and knowledge. Their digital skills may be insufficient to use the web platforms, career information may be difficult to find and interpret, and users may simply have questions which are not answered by available content. Many people need qualified guidance practitioner assistance to make the most of these digital tools. A common strategy is to rationalise support through a combination of digital and non-digital channels (Amar et al., 2020). The right combination of channels depends on users' needs, which are usually progressively assessed to adjust the support they receive. Further, investing in workforce digital capabilities and thinking about how best to connect with clients both online and offline requires careers support services around the world to embrace innovative digital approaches.

## 7.5. Professionalisation matters

The role of trained and qualified careers guidance practitioners has changed as the pace of delivery in using digital approaches has accelerated since COVID-19 (Cedefop, 2020). Guidance professionals' work has transformed; many are adopting a different mind-set and approach. The application of technology-rich methods and the skills required to blend career interventions for holistic service provision present both opportunities and challenges. Career practitioners are in a position to develop new skills alongside other human support services such as mental health specialists, public employment service work coaches and youth workers that could serve different target groups in a wide range of settings, including multicultural contexts. Together, professionals have an opportunity to co-design careers and wellbeing services and learn how best to target and personalise their services accordingly. Sharing big data sets and identifying local needs and trends is paramount. This approach brings in the importance of the social context and tailoring the intervention to the specific needs of the target groups and the local demands of employability.

The COVID-19 pandemic suddenly caused an increase in unemployment, occupational shifting, and a change of job content and mental health concerns. In such a situation, the role of career guidance professional is to help people to find solutions to this modern crisis. Well trained and qualified career-guidance advisers should also be able easily to refer clients to other appropriate services,



mental-health organisations or welfare support. Virtual solutions should be jointly explored, developed and adopted by schools, counselling and guidance centres, public employment services (PES) and universities. Digital educational solutions based on AI and other learning analytics techniques should be designed and implemented in the near future.

It is time to reflect on the role digital technology should have in the future of education, training, employment and career guidance, not only as a solution that enables the continuance of services during such a pandemic, but also, as example, for the personalisation of learning/career guidance. AI-powered systems could have helped teachers, students and parents, employers and unemployed people navigate the range of digital learning resources out there if they had been more available and ready to use. This pandemic has shown that training and preparing the school/PES's counsellors to undertake their work online is absolutely necessary. Practitioners need to be willing to revise their strategies and to help develop technology-rich methods (Cedefop, 2019).

Practitioners should be well-prepared for their role of 'keeping hope alive and affirming the dignity of their clients' (Herr, 1997): supporting young people in tackling career confusion<sup>(41)</sup>, dealing with a higher diversity of clients (disadvantaged young people, older workers, migrants, adults involved in new forms of work), implementing more individualised service provision, introducing the sustainability dimension, developing clients' transversal skills for the future, or making more use of new technologies in career guidance.

Holistic careers guidance or counselling requires some form of skilful human intervention; this has implications for the professionalisation of the career guidance workforce. Overall, a dynamic suite of approaches and tools are required to meet the diversity of individuals and their unique set of circumstances. The bots are coming and careers professionals need to embrace such developments, including new approaches to sourcing labour market intelligence, to help guidance career conversations with clients. Professionalisation of the careers workforce must include finding ways of co-design and using chatbots, and adding this to the practitioner expert repertoire of support services. Career chatbots hold equal promise for careers professionals and their clients: while the evidence-base is limited, the career development community has an exciting opportunity to engage and stay ahead of the innovation curve.

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<sup>(41)</sup> Career confusion can be defined as the individual's lack of self-awareness, opportunity awareness, level of confidence and/or knowledge in knowing how to make decisions for career development.



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## CHAPTER 8.

# Labour market management skills among career practitioners: tackling increasing complexity

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### 8.1. Introduction <sup>(43)</sup>

One of the world-famous quotes of Winston S. Churchill is that 'I only believe in statistics that I doctored myself.' With his sarcastic dry humour, he expressed the opinion of many: statistics, and labour statistics, figures and the relationships between data sets are unknown to many. Conflicting statistical details that make it harder to interpret the information presented can be seen daily, such as in ubiquitous social media used by ordinary citizens. Yet, lifelong career guidance practitioners cannot be among those without adequate competences in understanding and interpreting labour market information and statistics and their production because career guidance systems and services mobilise these resources to support users. In arguing for increased attention to the current challenges faced, this chapter's points of departure are that these competences surrounding LMI, and, in particular, relevant statistics and databases, are critical in career guidance. Several points are presented about labour market statistics which career guidance systems and service development, as well as guidance practitioners, could usefully incorporate into the knowledge of practice. Two main themes are discussed: the nature of modern labour markets, and new ways of analysing labour market databases. Also presented is the context surrounding career guidance and its provision and practice, and the special role that trained career practitioners play in relation to the labour market and their clients.

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## 8.2. Modern labour markets, large-scale databases, and contemporary lifelong guidance

Both modern labour markets and the methods of analysing databases have strong impacts on the quality of lifelong guidance practice, as well as the design and implementation of service delivery. Beyond the frontline service delivery, the design and development of lifelong guidance policies, systems and services also need to take these issues into consideration. There are a range of issues within the first theme concerning the nature of modern labour markets. The second concerns new ways of analysing large statistical databases, which are an unprecedented historical development now facilitated by global internet networks that contain billions of personal data, nowadays referred as the 'big data revolution'. This concerns both qualitative and quantitative information.

These new large databases are navigated using data mining, which provides access to customer profile types in diverse fields, from online grocery and travel habits to labour market relevant data. This also means that entities such as corporations and government can potentially access extensive individual, family and community data (Harari, 2018) <sup>(44)</sup>. The positive side of this data-rich environment is that career guidance services in employment and education institutions can support and follow-up on individuals' career choices over the lifespan, like never before. Career information was also never as accessible for citizens as in the 21st century, yet intentionally or accidentally manipulated information (fake news) was also never so widely spread. Social media is a powerful tool for information management, but these platforms also maintain 'tribal or cultural cognition' (Kahan, 2015), often with fragmented career information that is professionally uncontrolled while certain closed social media groups maintain their own interpretations about careers. Closed groups, as in the tribal age, are often built around emotions rather than scientifically controlled facts. In the age of the internet, anyone can act as a publishing house or run a YouTube channel, and the reality of online career information can be challenged too. Some historians (Finchelstein, 2020) argue that these 'echo chambers' create new types of alternative realities which cannot be challenged via intellectual and democratic dialogues.

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<sup>(44)</sup> Harari refers to this extensive access to data as 'hacking'.



### 8.3. Updating career practitioner core competences to provide quality services

Career information is often fragmented or professionally uncontrolled in that it can be freely uploaded and spread by users/citizens. The community of career practitioners, classified as belonging to occupational fields from vocational guidance to life coaching, is small in any country if we compare to professional communities of social workers, teachers, or other human development professionals. Trained career professionals are not the only group active in lifelong guidance: several other professions, such as teachers, psychologists, mentors and social workers, also deliver certain elements of career guidance services. Nevertheless, what makes career guidance practitioners unique is their special relationship with career information and its management, including labour market and occupational information. Bassot (2012), using a constructivist approach, alluded to career guidance as a bridge between society and individuals: the 'bridging role' of career guidance between childhood and adulthood, between school and the labour market, and between jobs. This requires practical but professionally well-established knowledge and application of labour economics related intelligence. However, this knowledge and skill are usually weak elements of the initial and continuous training and professional development of career guidance professionals. Understanding the ever-changing nature of the labour market and labour market analysis are especially important for career guidance professionals, so they can protect their clients from 'being hacked' by modern marketing of education, training, and labour market opportunities. For example, student recruitment is based more on the economic interest of education institutions rather than a career guidance service based on assessment of the users' needs.

*Professionalising career guidance* (Cedefop, 2009), presents labour market and occupational knowledge as essential for guidance practice, but only lists elements of these two knowledge types. Attention is directed to public employment services (PES) professionals without specifying the details of the professional competences required for understanding and applying labour market information in the guidance process (ibid., 2009:43) by career counsellors and case workers. This would include career guidance professionals becoming aware of the limitations of labour market information and understanding the process nature of labour markets rather than seeing them as static. Modern career guidance theories (Leung, 2008) and practices also acknowledge the role of the environment, including labour market settings, but often describe the guidance process without recognising economics, and labour economics in particular, as a core competence of professionals. If users are to gain from the guidance



process, career counsellors must do more than signal labour market information to clients by using occupational databases, for example. They must be professionally capable of discussing and explaining the content of these data sets.

Based on these pressing arguments about the nature of modern labour markets, and new ways of analysing labour market statistical databases, there are several issues surrounding the provision of labour market information during the career guidance process that should inform the work of guidance practitioners and that require more attention from guidance practitioners and service managers (Moreno da Fonseca, 2016).

#### 8.4. The changing nature of modern transitional labour markets

Labour markets are complex, pulsing, changeable structures and there is no career guidance without a proper understanding of their nature. Labour markets are more processes than static systems. Human beings as factors of production, represent the labour supply (Black, 1997). Navigating through super complex and changeable phenomena throughout the lifespan requires supporting systems such as career guidance services, information, and lifelong guidance systems, designed and built around citizens to empower them.

According to the Oxford Dictionary of Economics 'labour markets are processes by which workers and employers are brought into contact, and wages and conditions of work are decided' (Black, 1997). The hours and conditions of work, and the rules about hiring and firing, are frequently subject to legal regulation. Much of the labour market, however, does not involve formal institutions or negotiations. From the perspective of lifelong guidance, the most important feature of labour markets are the individual's jobs and occupations, which are also connected with their lifestyles. When people choose a career or enter into an employment contract, this decision is also about a way of life, a life-changing personal decision. As a personal decision or in the absence of a decision-making opportunity, such as no local or regional job opportunities, this is always a value-driven issue. It is not only a rational decision based on personal equilibrium (a balance between working and leisure times) as the early (A. Smith, F. Hayek) and contemporary laissez-fair (neoliberalist) economists (M. Friedman) suggested.

Labour markets are different in their nature from capital or commodity markets. Regardless of the growing numbers involved in labour migration and in distance working, people mainly seek opportunities in local markets.



Consequently, general labour market information about occupations, learning pathways, trends, and prognoses, about wages and living standards, have a relatively limited value in the counselling/career educating process in local settings. Therefore, authors from the career guidance field commonly propose the personal customisation of such information (Sultana and Watts, 2006). The biggest practical question remains: how can this be done?

Since the turn of the 19th century, wage labour (paid employment) (Greer, 1985) became the primary model of capitalism. Career information, including labour market information, became a determining element of career guidance and education. 'Labour market information (LMI) represents a core component of the knowledge required for career development interventions. It distinguishes the work of career development practitioners from other kinds of helping' occupations (Bimrose, 2020). According to [Cedefop's LMI toolkit](#), labour market information and intelligence tells you about the workplace or labour market and describes its condition, past and present, as well as future projections. It clarifies where work opportunities are increasing or decreasing, what occupations exist, study pathways towards occupations and what is required, how to find or change a job, or progress in a career <sup>(45)</sup>. The theory and practice of career guidance uses the outcomes of labour market research but this cross-disciplinary linkage (between psychology, pedagogy and economics) could be further developed so knowledge about the labour market could be more deeply embedded and integrated into the policy, theory and practice of career guidance. Career guidance theory has been largely shaped by psychologists during its 100-year history but, guidance as such is truly a cross- and interdisciplinary area of study. Without the integration of knowledge and research from pedagogy, psychology, sociology, law, history and economics, our understanding of career decision-making, behaviour, and development would remain very limited.

The development of 'career information', which includes labour market and occupational information, already has a long history dating back to the beginning of early industrialisation. It has developed alongside occupational standards and these standards regularly need to be updated due to the industrial revolutions. Chain revolutions have been reshaping the relationship between people and their jobs throughout human history (Borbély-Pecze, 2020). The Technological Revolution (1870-1914), also known as the second industrial revolution, led to the development of methods for the manufacturing of interchangeable parts, the collapse of the guild system, and the professionalisation of the labour force. For the first time in human history, fundamental skills (such as reading, writing, basic

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<sup>(45)</sup> See Cedefop webpage on [resources for guidance](#).



math skills), a basic ability usually considered necessary for competent functioning in society (APA online dictionary) became a workplace requirement and thus also became an economic necessity for making a living. Modern vocational education and training, adult education, and career guidance/education, born during the second industrial revolution, are based on these changes.

However, the taxonomy of the world of work (occupational standards) has become increasingly complex since the early decades of the 20th century. For example, during the second Kondratieff-cycle, the steel industry reshaped the world of work (Kondratieff and Stolper, 1935). Additionally, life expectancy and the duration of working life increased during the 20th century at a faster rate than previously. Therefore, relationships between people and their jobs are not static but dynamic and even volatile in the 21st century. Labour market volatility is forcing people to spend their (free) time even more practically. 'We are personally responsible for reducing (job) insecurity, which we solve by working tirelessly on our applicability' (Frayne, 2015). Skill-biased technological changes overrun the traditional skillsets learned through vocational education and training; and often micro-skills play a determining role (Autor; Levy and Murnane, 2003). These are buzzwords that counsellors may know and share with their clients.

#### **8.4.1. The concept and the reality of the transitional labour markets**

Also of interest to career practitioners is the concept of 'labour market transition', another fashionable term at present. It means that lifetime jobs/employment are no longer available in the labour market. Individuals who remain in the same occupation long-term need to move between employers, employment forms or project-based, fix-term engagements. According to EUROSTAT-LFS (labour force survey), labour market transitions 'show the movements of individuals between the labour market statuses of employment, unemployment and economic inactivity'. The concept of the transitional labour market (TLM) (Brzinsky-Fay, 2010) was originally used to mean youth entry into the labour market after the 1970's oil shocks, while later the TLM concept was extended to the full lifespan; the youth labour market entry issue is now called school-to-work (STW) transition (Bradley and Nguyen, 2003) reflecting the lack of stable lifetime employment or a market of stable employers in today's labour market. In a longitudinal study, the US Bureau of Labour Statistics reported that the average worker will experience 12 job/career changes during their lifespan (US Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2017). The comprehensive concept of the transitional labour market is based in the idea that people change jobs and occupations (European Commission, 2019), and are also living longer. This phenomenon is often described as a desirable need of the individual career-builder and literature often



links this to the psychological needs of the millennials (born between 1981-1996) or with Generation Z (born between 1997-2012) (Howe and Strauss, 2000). Also included is the changing nature of the demand side of the labour market and the shrinking lifespan of companies, including the huge number of micro, small and medium enterprises. 'The average lifespan of a company listed in the S&P 500 index of leading USA companies has decreased by more than 50 years in the last century, from 67 years in the 1920s to just 15 years today.' (INNOSIGHT, 2018). Thus, the interoperation of the TLM concept is attributed to the psychological needs of the new generations but also to the economic reality of the companies.

#### 8.4.2. Labour market trends always based on cycles

Knowledge of cycles affecting the labour market is also labour market information that is useful for practitioners serving clients. Schumpeter (1939) and Kondratieff (1935) were first to explain that modern capitalism works in business and economic cycles (called the Kuznets swing or cycle). This means that there are peaks and deep depressions in modern economies on an average of every 15 to 20 years. For example, it is useful to revisit the unemployment rate during the 2008-09 global crisis and compare it with 2020-21 and COVID-19. The visualisation of data, such as for the stock market, helps us to understand the peaks (in this case negative) observable within a single decade.

Figure 1. Total unemployment rate in the OECD countries



Source: OECD (2020).



Individuals and families, despite the fact they are instructed to be responsible for career and their own life-design, are a part of a social-economic structure and part of the general labour market, unless they leave collective society and live in isolation. Unequal growth of household incomes aside, the average working lifespan during the 21st century, implies that each of us will be a victim of three to five economic depressions and may benefit from the same number of economic/ labour market peaks. Therefore, poor integration into the labour market (PINE) is partly based in individual or household decision-making, but also a circumstance of the overall labour market situation. From the career professional's perspective, it is highly relevant to understand the business cycles of modern labour markets and when we are experiencing peaks or depressions. A prognosis about a lifetime career investment during a peak could be as false as a prognosis provided during a depression.

#### **8.4.3. Automation and robotisation do not necessarily kill jobs**

Since industrial robots already work in the production line, there is continued public discussion about the end of human labour and the start of the workless society. In a historical perspective, this is the same discussion, even with a similar emotional volume, as in the Luddite movement during the early 19th century England. The main aim of the movement was to destroy the (steam) machines that were being blamed for high unemployment (Kirkpatrick, 1995). We observed the same fears during different industrial revolutions, but humans managed to navigate through different shifting occupational fields.

The Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Union recently investigated automation, finding that 'even though the share of low-skilled workers declined over the analysed period (1995-2015), there is no evidence that industrial robots contributed to this trend. [...] The use of industrial robots is positively correlated with total employment [...] robots might not replace jobs as a whole but only certain tasks' (Klenert; Fernandez-Macias and Anton, 2020). Cedefop (2020) research found that the average rate of decline due to automation was just -2% during the time period 2008-18.

From the career professional's point of view, the most relevant message here is that internal occupational standards and job advertisements will undergo continuous changes as joint human-machine task fulfilment reshapes the content of occupations. For example, spelling and translation can be done by robots, but it may not mean the end of the book editor as an occupation. It may only mean



that career guidance tools which are widely used (e.g. Holland-hexagon) <sup>(46)</sup> need to be adapted to the new occupational circumstances as the skills, attitudes and interest profile of the jobs of tomorrow undergo change (Ratcheva; Leopold and Zahidi, 2020).

## 8.5. Changing available data and their management

### 8.5.1. Traditional survey-based labour market information

Although there are plenty of discussions about artificial intelligence (AI) and big data, the reality is that most of the existing labour market data sets used by guidance professionals have been built using traditional survey-based methodologies. This fact has important implications for the quality and usability of data in moving forward. As the Committee on Techniques for the Enhancement of Human Performance pointed out two decades ago, ‘Shifting from a backward-looking to a forward-looking system that will aid decision-makers in designing work structures will also require occupational analysts to consider the human resource and organisational practices needed to support alternative ways of structuring work’ (National Research Council, 1999). The International Labour Organization (ILO) based labour force survey (LFS) is a good example of a data set based on traditional survey-based data collection. Employment and unemployment figures circulated in the daily news and maintained by Eurostat and used in the Cedefop skills forecast, are all (or partly) based on LFS data. Labour economists are aware of the limitations of LFS data, but most guidance professionals may not be. The LFS was built before comprehensive administrative data became available from many countries but still has been used as a primary international data set for comparison. As it is based on representative sampling, there are not enough items for analysis at certain territorial levels: LFS usually provide statistics at NUTS level 2 only. This cannot be properly used for local labour market prognosis (at NUTS 3/county and 4/local levels).

In several countries, public employment services conduct employer surveys but these often use non-representative sampling. The results might not be reliable or can be misleading for those who are not aware of sampling methods.

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<sup>(46)</sup> American psychologist John L. Holland (1919-2008) created a hexagonal model showing the relationship between personality types and environments. The Holland codes or the Holland occupational themes (RIASEC) refer to a theory of careers and vocational choice (based upon personality types) that was initially developed by Holland.



Another limitation of this type of survey methodology used in producing labour market information is the level of accuracy. Data are collected from individuals/households or companies through interviews or questionnaires, and the responses are difficult to validate. The respondents answer what they believe to be true or not, at the time the data is collected. For example, a representative of a household may claim that there are no jobseekers in the family without knowing if this is true or not. Firms are interviewed about future hiring plans, but these plans can be changed, postponed, or rewritten. Outcomes of these surveys are always retrospective, based in a reference period in the past, not the present or the certain future, and the further we look, the more uncertainty is revealed. Occupational data based on single occupations, as opposed to a branch of occupations or aggregated data, also tend to have greater instability. Single occupation analysis is based on even smaller samples, so reliability is very low. Most labour market prognosis systems use aggregated ISCO (International Standard Classification of Occupations) data, and not the available few hundred occupations set in [ISCO-08](#); the reason is that sampling numbers are usually low in survey-based data sets such as the LFS. The small number of observations is thus aggregated into larger occupational groups, thus increasing the reliability of the analysis. The implications for guidance professionals discussing the outlooks for certain occupations with clients or when clients use online self-help career outlook tools, is that they are not seeing the outlook of a stand-alone occupation but the prognosis of a branch of occupations. Aggregations of taxonomies are discussed below in more detail.

These methodological aspects of survey-based data are important for guidance professionals to be aware of during practice. The visualisation of data may look impressive, but the background content needs to be viewed with caution considering associated limitations.

#### **8.5.2. Aggregations in labour market taxonomies**

Occupational standards were traditionally developed for national or international labour market statistical purposes, not for labour market matching or for career guidance. In the EU, the introduction of the ESCO (multilingual classification of European skills, competences, qualifications and occupations) may change this during the coming years as it features single competences, not only occupations.

Currently, most career practitioners during career counselling/career education processes use occupational taxonomies such as ISCO and the national/regional versions of it. ISCO also provides a clear statistical structure for labour market prognosis and it is still the primary tool to identify labour market bottlenecks or surpluses (Schellenberg et al., 2016). ISCO-based reports and



data sets are frequently used by career professionals as well. While career practitioners use this data, it is also important to know that **ISCO** was designed by the ILO in the 1940-50's for international comparative labour statistical purposes, not for labour market mediation or career guidance purposes. It masks important differences because it aggregates bigger occupational groups as the integral elements of every aggregation, and it adopts a generic, horizontal statistical approach. It works relatively well in major group I (managers) and II (professionals), but is much less usable in major groups III and IV <sup>(47)</sup> because the differences between four-digit occupations in those groups are minor or irrelevant in the job market or in the learning pathways.

### **8.5.3. Artificial intelligence and big data offer a different view**

Our societies have been moving closer to Web 4.0 and leaving the semantic Web 3.0 environment: '(Web 4.0) services will be autonomous, proactive, content-exploring, self-learning, collaborative, and content-generating agents based on fully matured semantic and reasoning technologies as well as AI.' (Murugesan, 2010). The opportunity to use data lakes, where different data sets can be moulded into a single data market, will soon provide a situation where survey-based, pre-defined research will look outdated. For example, Cedefop's (2019) online job vacancy (OVATE) portals analysis is moving in this direction. However, it is also important to note that, for the time being, AI LMI related activities are still going to be based on existing labour market/occupational taxonomies and building a machine-learning-based new taxonomy is the next step (Mezzanzanica and Mercorio, 2019). Even the European skills, competences, qualifications and occupations (ESCO) taxonomy, based on skill, attitude and competences as its smallest building blocks, has the potential to be upgraded by big data and AI. It is not clear how the ESCO taxonomy will look after this upgrade in 2030 and beyond. The use of AI and big data is an emerging practice in the field of labour market information, already adopted in certain segments of the market but far from being a general approach at the moment. From the perspective of career professional practice, it is important to distinguish between structured taxonomies and AI 'fished' artificial data sets.

A new report published by the European Commission (Barnes et al., 2020) based on extensive interviews with guidance experts, highlighted the relevance of AI in future career guidance practice and service delivery and the importance

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<sup>(47)</sup> Major group III refers to technicians and associate professionals, Major group IV is about clerical support workers (ILO, 2012). Both groups have several occupations where the identification of the certain professionals belonging to these groups is volatile.



of its joint development and application: 'If ICT and artificial intelligence (AI) are to be used effectively in guidance, the guidance community should be engaged in how it is developed and used'. (p.50). Several current promising developments (such as within the Swedish PES and VDAB, and the Flemish PES (European Commission, 2018)) can be noted that signal bringing the application of LMI to the next level and away from expert-predefined static taxonomies. This includes the development of data lakes, new AI-based competence frameworks for human resource development, labour market mediation and for career guidance services. Artificial Intelligence combined with data lakes have the capability to recognise patterns that humans cannot. Much before the internet and AI this was the original aim of the paper-based French taxonomy tool, *Répertoire Opérationnel des Métiers et des Emplois* (ROME). The ROME classification is very elaborate. It features additional concepts like activities and work environments; it has an extensive skill/competence dimension and is not based on ISCO. Accordingly, ROME is a forerunner of the ESCO. It also constitutes a very relevant tool for guidance professionals as the building blocks of the taxonomy are competences and not occupations. Competence-based taxonomies provide a better (temporary) connection between jobs and humans in the transitional labour market. This fact makes competence-based taxonomies a powerful guidance tool for the future.

#### **8.5.4. Survey data: not administrative data nor big data**

It is important to highlight the differences between survey-based data, big data, and administrative data, especially if they may be combined when used for guidance practice. Survey data, due to time and implementation costs, are not likely to reveal a complete pattern, so their use and limitations in the guidance process and in decision-making must be very clear to both counsellor and client/user.

Administrative data, which have already replaced the census in many countries, could provide a more comprehensive view, but with their own limitations in terms of applicable national regulations or data storage capacities. Big data refers to large amounts of data produced at high speed from many sources of different types. Big data analytics aim at the identification of efficiencies applicable to a wide range of sectors and occupations, leading to innovative new products and services, greater competitiveness and, in turn, economic growth (Cedefop, 2018).

Once big data is used (accommodating privacy issues such as GDPR) career guidance/teaching will be very different from what we know now. For example, as Google can track users via Google maps, now our careers can be and will be tracked in the future. Microsoft and Cisco have been working with



LinkedIn data to identify the global needs for micro-credentials based on the skills profile of the LIN users (using data from both sides, individual and companies). Based on our online jobseeking activities, company websites visited, CVs sent, it is possible that our career-readiness profile or our intention to change jobs will be obvious from big data even before it is noticed in our immediate environment (by our colleagues or superiors). It resembles what happened with the increased popularity of the smart health watch in health care and insurance or the use of big data and AI during the last COVID-19 lockdown to model the spread of the epidemic weeks in advance. This has opened a new chapter in the career counsellors' code of ethics and practice, as a certain element of the career guidance service process can and will be replaced by AI.

## 8.6. Conclusion

The current technological revolutions have been reshaping societies, labour markets, and our everyday lives. The accumulation of these changes is rapid and requires strong adaptation from all of us. Lifelong guidance and guidance professionals are not exceptions. Career professionals and theorists have been discussing the role of personal resilience and individual empowerment for as long as the profession has existed.

Labour markets are more processes than static structures and any career guidance activity is meaningful only if the intervention has an effect at the labour market. These effects can often be observed at the individual or household level (changing jobs, enrolment in new training, better wellbeing at work, subjective satisfaction with a career) but the dynamism is always there as the dynamically changing individual/family/community meet with the changing labour market. Lifelong guidance, as a system and as a service, needs to engage and continuously interact with the labour market in a way that was not necessary before. During the 20th century, occupational status was a static trait for most individuals, which is less of a reality now and increasingly less typical in the future.

The risk for lifelong guidance as a discipline and as a profession is not to recognise the new dynamism of society and the new nature of careers. There is an opportunity for guidance professionals to gain a much better and deeper understanding of society, including labour market trends and transformations, so they can support clients in continuous career decision-making throughout the lifespan.

A detailed understanding of labour market data sets and analysis is an essential, additional component of the training and continuous professional



development of career guidance professionals. This is an area of study and competence where most European career guidance training curricula have room to develop. Since Cedefop's the last publication (2009) on competences of career guidance professionals, the Network for Innovation in Career Guidance and Counselling in Europe (NICE) (Schiersmann, et al., 2012) collected robust evidence from across Europe about academic career guidance and counselling study courses and programmes. Reviewing this work shows that labour market skills play an integrative role in lifelong guidance. The International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance global competence framework for guidance practitioners was also reviewed (IAEVG, 2018), but the labour economics and data science parts of career counsellor training curricula were not explicitly mentioned in any of these developments. This issue is in need of immediate attention to prepare and protect both the end-users (clients) and guidance professionals.

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## CHAPTER 9.

# A context-resonant quality framework for continuous career guidance professionalisation: the case of Norway

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### 9.1. Introduction

Career guidance plays a vital role in rapidly changing employment markets and in supporting people in their navigation of transitions between education and employment, across their lifespan. As a recent Norwegian official report states ‘Norwegian society will face many significant challenges in the coming years. Access to high-quality career guidance services is crucial in times when change is necessary, and transitions are ongoing.’ (Ministry of Education and Research of Norway, 2016).

Norway is engaged in a long-term and systematic project to develop its career guidance system. The project encompasses the creation of a national quality framework for lifelong career guidance, further development of national digital career guidance services, and legislation concerning career guidance services for adults and newly arrived immigrants. The development of this career guidance system was given focus in 2014 following the OECD’s (2014) skills action report. The report recommended that Norway should apply a whole-of-government approach to establishing a comprehensive career guidance system covering all stages of lifelong learning and providing high quality services.

In this chapter, the focus is on the importance of interrelatedness between the national quality framework and the further development of the digital career guidance service.

The development of the quality framework builds on the lessons learned by other countries <sup>(49)</sup> (Hooley, 2019). This framework also draws on quality and quality assurance research and reviews in career guidance (Hooley and Rice, 2018). The primary objective of the quality framework is to strengthen quality and professionalism in career guidance. This is to be achieved through a cross-sectoral and transversal tool for quality development and management, useful

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<sup>(49)</sup> The study is based on six case studies of quality in career guidance in Australia, England, Germany, the Netherlands, Scotland and South Korea.



both in the field of practice and in governance at national and regional levels. The framework includes recommendations related to four main areas concerning quality assurance and quality development of career guidance: what defines good and ethical practice; what competences do career practitioners need; what should the learning outcome of lifelong guidance be; how can we know that what we do is high quality (Haug et al., 2019). A digital platform was released in October 2020, including a description of the components of the four areas in the framework and associated resources (research articles on different quality topics, recommended tools for practitioners concerning how to provide ethical practice and self-evaluation tools for service providers and individuals in connection to the recommended competence standards). A self-evaluation tool for systematic quality assurance is scheduled for launched in January 2021.

As a parallel process, a new comprehensive National digital career guidance service was launched in autumn 2020 (Kompetanse Norge, 2021). This includes digital guidance, self-help services and information concerning learning and occupational opportunities. As with the framework, it builds on experiences (e.g. Jochumsen, 2020) and recommendations (e.g. Cedefop, 2018) from other countries. Skills Norway, the Norwegian directorate for skills policy, leads both the work on digital career guidance and the national framework.

In this chapter, I use the establishment of the digital career guidance service as a case to exemplify the need for a so-called context-resonant quality framework in the achievement of high quality in career guidance. I will focus on how to utilise the context-resonant quality framework in the creation of a national digital career guidance service. I will describe the concept of integrated guidance and career learning through digital interaction as two examples of how the quality framework can increase the quality and consistency of the digital service. In the concluding section, I will focus on possibilities, challenging issues, and next stepping-stones in the development of professional career guidance in Norway.

## 9.2. The national digital guidance service

Guidance and learning increasingly takes place in diverse settings. ICT is becoming more embedded (Barnes et al., 2020) and ICT is being increasingly used in career guidance and counselling all around the world (Jochumsen, 2020). Activities increasingly take place across all or part of the internet (European Commission, 2020), and the current pandemic increases progress towards a digital turn (Hooley, 2020). Until 2020, the main resource for digital career guidance in Norway was [utdanning.no](https://utdanning.no): this is the official Norwegian national education and career portal. It contains an overview of the education available in



Norway and around 600 career descriptions. Education and career information have been developed in close collaboration with relevant institutions, such as education providers and professional bodies. Utdanning.no also contains interviews with professionals and students, course descriptions and articles, all being designed to help prospective students select an education and a career.

The main goal of the new National digital career guidance service was to contribute with quality-assured, publicly funded guidance, accessible for all adult citizens (Skills Norway, 2020). The project addresses four important areas accomplished by the end of 2020:

- (a) further development of utdanning.no into a national portal for education and career information;
- (b) establishment of a technical solution for a new chat and telephone guidance service (Kompetanse Norge, n.d.);
- (c) establishment of operational organisation for the national guidance service on chat and telephone;
- (d) competence development of supervisors to promote the service, the professional anchoring, and the quality assurance of the service.

### 9.3. Context matters in defining quality

The Oxford dictionary defines quality as ‘the standard of something as measured against other things of a similar kind; the degree of excellence of something’. Hooley and Rice (2018) describe quality assurance in career development as ‘a range of techniques that can be used to ensure consistency in the way that activities are approached and that can potentially also be used to ensure fidelity of practice to policy’ (p.2). However, quality and quality assurance are not uncontested terms in career guidance. As quoted by Sultana (2020, p.10): ‘Context matters when it comes to thinking through the meaning and relevance of career guidance as a social practice’. Context as a concept relates to both geographic, political, cultural, and societal features. Further, it relates to a given time in history, and specific characteristics at that given time. Finally, the context influences how we understand career development (Hooley and Rice, 2018). Generally, but certainly in times of crises, there is a drive towards answers to the question ‘what works’, also in the case of career guidance (Hooley, 2020). This implies a drive to find examples of the best and most easily accessible practices that are relevant to the current situation and is driven by a desire to develop systems and procedures that take into account the complexities and diversities of our communities. How issues of quality are conceptualised and addressed in the



field of career guidance varies across different countries and contexts for policy and practice (Hooley and Rice, 2018).

An awareness of the need to ground career guidance approaches in the specificities of economic, social and cultural realities is needed to secure that the action taken resonates with the specific issues in a given context (Sultana, 2020). This implies that before a quality framework can be fully utilised, in this case as a resource for the development of the digital guidance service, it must be adjusted and customised according to the given contexts. Therefore, the defining of quality in career guidance needs to be contextualised. Such contextualisation is framed as context-resonance (McMahon; Watson and Patton, 2014). It implies taking a framework in context perspective that considers complexity and avoids oversimplification of societal structures and mechanisms that potentially affect the usefulness of it.

#### 9.4. Developing a context-resonant quality framework

Given the argumentation that 'context matters', an important decision is to choose an appropriate approach for a new framework (Bimrose; Hughes and Collin, 2006). Hooley and Rice (2018) propose four approaches to quality assurance in career guidance:

- (a) Regulatory approaches that focus on legal requirements imposed on providers as a means of improving quality;
- (b) advisory approaches that describe what quality looks like for providers, and may include exemplars of good practice for them to follow;
- (c) organic approaches that view quality as being defined by the provider and the professional;
- (d) competitive approaches view quality as being driven by customer responses.

Mixed economies, social democratic politics, high levels of taxation, welfare provision, a commitment to gender equality, to social cohesion and to limiting income inequality and differences between social classes (Marklund, 2017) are, according to a recent publication (Haug et al., 2020), the features of ideological similarity of what is sometimes referred to as the Nordic model. Haug et al. (2020) describe the overarching characterisation of Nordic career guidance as being framed by the four 'COs' (context, community, co-construction and collaboration). The four COs describe the key values and approaches that underpin career guidance in the Nordic countries. The four 'COs' implies:

- (a) the acknowledgement of career and career guidance as embedded in context;
- (b) community as important resource for career guidance;



- (c) co-construction as the defining professional approach to career guidance;
- (d) collaboration between policy, research, and practice across the Nordic countries as the usual way in which career guidance is developed and managed.

This description applies to the Norwegian context despite the differences between the Nordic region countries.

The creation and the published version of the [Norwegian framework](#) can be seen as advisory, when viewed in the light of the typology of different frameworks. It is built collaboratively through the involvement of different stakeholder perspectives, and is created through a collaboration of policy, research, and practice. The version launched consists of practice and policy suggestions, not regulations. It does, however, provide recommendations for relevant foci for ethics, competences, and outcomes, but leaves final customisation and adaption to the different sectors. Career guidance in Norway has, until recently, been focused on supporting people in their career decisions. There has, however, been increasing focus on what citizens learn from taking part in career guidance and career education. The learning of career competences has, through this evolution, become a central element in descriptions of preferred outcomes in the framework.

## 9.5. Framework contribution to the national digital guidance service

I focus, in this section, on the use of the context resonant quality framework in the creation of the National digital career guidance service. I describe the concept of integrated guidance, and of career learning through digital interaction. I present these as two examples that show how the quality framework can increase the quality and consistency of the digital service.

### 9.5.1. The concept of integrated guidance

It is argued that the professional identity of career guidance practitioners needs to be transformed such that it is brought into line with technological development (Bimrose and Brown, 2019). Vigurs and colleagues (Vigurs; Everitt and Staunton, 2017) also argue that digital career support is most effective when it is focused on the context within which it is to be used, and where its usage is supported by face to-face and professional interventions. This finding moves the field away from a sterile debate that pits online careers provision against face-to-face provision, to a discussion of how the required degree of integration between different modes of provision can be achieved. An official report (Ministry of



Education and Research of Norway, 2016) introduced, for the Norwegian case, the concept of integrated guidance to secure a comprehensive service. This concept was continued in the quality framework and in the National digital guidance service as an underpinning principle.

Integrated guidance seeks to combine career guidance that is delivered through different modalities (face-to-face, by telephone, online) in such a way that the whole is more than the sum of the parts. Whilst the conception of career guidance as a multi-modal, diverse, but connected, set of interventions is not new (OECD, 2004), current policy support for career guidance in Norway, as well as the country's high level of digital engagement and adoption, means that it offers fertile ground for the development of new ideas such as integrated guidance (Bakke; Haug and Hooley, 2018). Questions such as 'what is the role of digital guidance in the comprehensive system' and 'how should the digital and face-to-face service cooperate' are therefore important in the joint creation of a sector specific quality assurance system for national digital career guidance. The concept of integrated guidance also highlights the need for cross-sectoral cooperation, in both the development and provision of the service.

#### **9.5.2. Career learning as the main outcome**

Career guidance in Norway has, in recent years, been strongly influenced by a focus on career learning. This draws on the work of Law (1996) and other international theorists. This perspective has been further developed in Norwegian literature, which has placed career learning at the centre of Norway's approach to career guidance (Haug, 2018). Career learning is a main feature in the national quality framework represented by the model Career learning in context. This model builds on several principles, (e.g. Haug et al., 2019):

- (a) pinpoint and reflect on the different contextual conditions that influence career learning;
- (b) discuss the role of the professional 'career learner';
- (c) an open understanding of the competences a participant (client) in a career learning process needs or wants;
- (d) pinpoint freedom of choice for the guidance practitioner concerning which methods and approaches to use in the guiding process;
- (e) describe five areas of exploration and learning unlike the more usual representation of career competences (or career management skills) through matrix models (Hooley et al., 2013).

Individuals, by basing their exploring and learning on competence areas, can develop the career competences that are important in their situation. Competence areas are not end-competences or specific learning outcomes.



They are open, general topics that are relevant to the development of career competences. They are also built on an oxymoron (a figure of speech in which two words with opposing meaning are used intentionally for effect). The two-word pairs are used to illustrate the dilemmas and tensions that can arise, which can have an impact upon a person in their setting out to address life, learning and work in times of change and transition. The exploration and learning areas are widely applicable. The word pair 'change and stability' is, however, particularly relevant in the present pandemic situation. It invites reflection on how changes in a person's life or environment can alter their premises for choice, and the analysis of previous changes and how they were addressed. It also invites the person to look for stable elements in their life and environment.

Practitioners are invited to reflect on how a career learning focus can be incorporated into a digital career guidance service, such as in chat communication with citizens. This sits well with the idea of transforming career guidance from a purely labour-market information service to a shared creative process (Kettunen and Sampson, 2019). Further, there is awareness of the potential pitfall for digital services that they tend to be built on generalised content, which can have a negative effect on the learning benefits for the individual, and for usage of the tool. An example of this is the publication of CV templates that are not sufficient for all positions and individual backgrounds. The simplification of complex problems always risks oversimplification and a reduction in significance (Jochumsen, 2020).

## 9.6. Ways forward: concluding reflections

Hooley (2019) argues that quality systems tend, instead of being designed at the outset, to evolve over time. Systems that can evolve and include multiple stakeholder involvement, can lead to richer and more sustainable quality systems. Additional documentation and translation for different sectors and settings may be needed for the framework to become relevant and easy to use. Norway has taken the first steps towards a comprehensive system for career guidance, with integration of both digital and face-to-face approaches. Recent international research reveals that challenges in implementing ICT in career services for all include various issues: inadequate access to ICT; inadequate access to information; inadequate skills and competences; and inadequate integration (Kettunen and Sampson, 2019). It can be argued that Norway has strong quality-assured systems and platforms for LMI and for education information. Professionalisation, however, is still in the start phase, particularly digital guidance with career learning as a preferred outcome. It is also known that



counsellors' perceptions of technology and their prejudices limit the use of digital tools in guidance situations. This prevents them from producing their own creative plans with technology integrated in them (Sampson; Kettunen and Vuorinen, 2019).

A quality system cannot just be a framework that is written down (Hooley, 2019). If it is going to have an impact, both on an individual and societal level:

- (a) it needs to be implemented and governed carefully;
- (b) it should build on lessons learned from other countries and theoretical contributions on the complexity of quality as concept;
- (c) it should be combined with a sustained awareness of the need to be context resonant for national, regional and local characteristics;
- (d) further development should be based on shared creation of measures.

Considerations of these aspects is pivotal for future development of quality in Norwegian career guidance. As argued in this chapter, much of this is accomplished already at a structural or system level through the parallel development and implementation process coordinated by Skills Norway and the interconnectedness between the national framework and the digital service. That said, Peter Senge, the famous theoretician on organisational development, is quoted saying 'people do not resist change, they resist being changed'. Therefore, changes and further development of the career guidance services without involvement and ownership from those affected by the changes are difficult or even impossible to achieve.

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## **PART III**



## CHAPTER 10.

# Social and emotional skills in career guidance: a Romanian school counsellor guide

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### 10.1. Importance of social and emotional skills in the 21st century

This chapter argues that social and emotional skills (SEL) are relevant for school-based career guidance and counselling. It presents the results of an initiative in Romania in 2020 where a guide for school counsellors was developed based on an SEL approach to counselling for students in primary and secondary education.

Social and emotional skills are the subject of interdisciplinary research and many terms are used to describe them and their broader conceptual frameworks. Terminology also differs across countries, time, and research and social contexts (Kankaraš and Suarez-Alvarez, 2019). Social and emotional learning (SEL) was introduced by the Fetzer Group in 1994, as a conceptual framework to promote the social, emotional and academic competence of young people and to coordinate school-family-community programming to address those educational goals (Weissberg et al., 2017). SEL is defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) as ‘the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions’ (Niemi, 2020).

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Social and emotional skills are also seen as crucial components of the 21st century and employability skills (De Fruyt; Wille and John, 2015; Trilling and Fadel, 2009), because they are important for an individual's personal and career development, and being able to contribute productively to society (Kankaraš and Suarez-Alvarez, 2019; National Academy of Sciences, 2012). Studies have demonstrated that people who choose a career that aligns with their personal and vocational values tend to experience a higher level of happiness, satisfaction with life and career, and to have high work performance (Hartung and Taber, 2008; O'Brien, 2003). Other research (Proyer, 2012) showed that the types of vocational personality proposed by John Holland<sup>(51)</sup> are related to certain positive character traits. Positive psychology emphasises the importance of this match and the choice of a career in which the person can use her/his strengths, abilities, and interests with positive effects on wellbeing and work performance.

Other skills and competences used in different policy fields and social contexts are related and share commonalities with social and emotional skills: non-cognitive skills, soft skills, transversal skills (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2013), life skills (Sala et al., 2020), core competences, and career management skills (ELGPN, 2012). There is a lack of consensus on the use of the terminology and they are used differently according to context. They are not yet systematically assessed, and more large-scale international research and impact studies on SEL impact are needed (Kankaraš and Suarez-Alvarez, 2019). Interest in these types of traits and skills is on the increase among policy-makers, researchers, and different categories of practitioners. Kankaraš and Suarez-Alvarez examined the predictive values of individual social and emotional skills and brought solid arguments on the value of these in relation to the broad set of life outcomes in education, conduct, health and personal wellbeing.

Some of these competences are fundamental in European policy documents, as evidenced in the European Union's Council recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning. It acknowledged a set of non-cognitive skills for three of its eight key competences: personal, social and learning to learn competence, citizenship competence and entrepreneurship competence (Council of the European Union, 2018). The 'personal, social and learning to learn competence', is defined as: 'the ability to reflect upon oneself, effectively manage time and information, work with others in a constructive way, remain resilient and manage one's own learning and career. It includes the ability to cope with uncertainty and complexity, learn to learn, support one's physical

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<sup>(51)</sup> John Holland (1919-2008) classified the types as: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (RIASEC).



and emotional wellbeing, to maintain physical and mental health, and to be able to lead a health-conscious, future-oriented life, empathise and manage conflict in an inclusive and supportive context (ibid.).’

The Entrepreneurship competence framework (EntreComp) includes non-cognitive skills such as creativity, taking initiative, perseverance, and the ability to work collaboratively (Chernyshenko, 2018; Bacigalupo et al., 2016).

This chapter first presents the wider field of social and emotional skills and SEL learning, followed by a look at the SEL framework and relevant activities. These ideas are then applied and illustrated through describing an initiative in Romania involving the creation of an innovative school guide for school counsellors, including SEL programmes and activities.

## 10.2. Life competences and social emotional skills

The European Framework for personal, social and learning to learn key competence considers such competences as ones which apply to all spheres of life, and which can be gained through formal, informal, and non-formal education. The aim of the LifeComp conceptual framework is to establish a shared understanding, and a common language on these three related competence areas. Each has three competences: self-regulation, flexibility, wellbeing (personal area); empathy, communication, collaboration (social area); growth mindset, critical thinking, and managing learning (learning to learn area) (Sala et al., 2020).

Chernyshenko, Kankaraš and Drasgow (2018) analysed the nature and structure of social and emotional skills, their development, malleability, and factors that influence them, their cross-cultural comparability, and their relevance for a wide range of educational, economic and life outcomes. The study showed that social and emotional skills have a demonstrable relevance for a wide range of educational, work and life outcomes: educational attainment and educational success; employment outcomes such as income and job performance; quality of life outcomes such as life satisfaction, happiness, and health; societal relevance, such as civil participation, social cohesion, crime and safety, and environmental awareness (Chernyshenko; Kankaraš and Drasgow, 2018).

Other studies highlighted the importance of identifying and explaining for policy-makers, educators, parents, students and the business community the relationship between social and emotional skills and the skills today’s employers seek in the workplace (Yoder et al., 2020a). However, the authors note there is no clear alignment between the social and emotional skills developed in the education system and workforce skills (ibid.).



Social and emotional skills are becoming increasingly critical to helping individuals develop the competences needed to become employable. The EU labour market is already demanding more non-cognitive and digital skills, and specifically a combination of both. Almost all the occupations that have expanded in recent years are either professionals or service and commercial managers who require a combination of ICT use and non-cognitive skills, such as dealing with customers and teams (Gonzalez Vazquez et al., 2019).

There is some evidence that jobs requiring a combination of digital and social and emotional/non-cognitive/soft skills are better paid (Gonzalez Vazquez et al., 2019). The skill most sought by European employers is 'adaptability to change', mentioned in three out of four vacancy notices in a sample of over 30 million vacancies (Cedefop, 2019). Survey analysis of the skills that employers seek in the United States found that employers are continually identifying communication and interpersonal skills, self-management skills, the ability to collaborate or work in teams, problem-solving skills, and integrity or the ability to make ethical decisions as the most sought-after skills in the workplace. Cappelli and Tavis (2018) highlighted the importance of advanced technical skills, social emotional learning (SEL) skills and career management skills (CMS). It is also important to understand the ways individuals use key SEL skills in preparation for and within their working-life. The pandemic experience suggests that we need to reset our priorities and respect limits: individuals are asked more than ever to exercise social and emotional competences (Yoder et al., 2020b).

### 10.3. SEL concepts and framework

CASEL (2020) <sup>(52)</sup> defines SEL as encompassing five interdependent sets of cognitive, affective and behavioural skills: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Together, these skills form a framework.

Often, development of SEL skills for students in school is a crucial benchmark that must be reached to help improve other college and career readiness skills. For example, self-management and responsible decision-making are essential to higher-order thinking skills, such as critical thinking and problem solving. Social awareness and relationship skills are an important precursor to the development of employability skills, such as teamwork, collaboration, and effective communication (Dymnicki; Sambolt and Kidron, 2013). These five skills

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<sup>(52)</sup> See <https://casel.org> for a detailed description of each of the five sets of skills and the framework.



can be taught in many ways and in different spaces (adapted to each classroom and/or school context). They should provide a 'foundation for better adjustment and academic performance as reflected in more positive social behaviours, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved test scores and grades' (Greenberg et al., 2003).

Students with good self-management skills use impulse control and goal setting in their academic learning. For relationship skills, communication and relationship building are important in the academic setting. All individuals need social skills and social awareness to interact with different managers and work environments, as well as self-management skills to engage in lifelong learning. In the workplace, self-management includes strategic planning and reliability. Listening skills and conflict resolution are also important. In schools, it is important to create a favourable SEL instruction and classroom climate, to develop school-wide culture, practices, and policies, to create authentic partnerships and aligned learning opportunities. Career-guidance activities in schools, universities, public employment services, companies, and other settings should focus on the development of social and emotional learning (SEL) skills.

#### 10.4. SEL programmes and activities

Career guidance programmes and services should change their focus from supporting both younger and working age individuals to making appropriate career decisions on helping them to develop decision-making, proactive and resiliency skills (Solberg, 2017). These changes require a rethinking of some current practices and introducing innovative ways of delivering and ensuring training and support for career development professionals to innovate and develop their practice (ICCDPP, 2019).

SEL can be seen as a way to engage the young in 'career readiness'; however, a better understanding of how SEL can help students to be college and career ready is needed. A framework which aligns with the College and career development organiser<sup>(53)</sup> was developed in the U.S.A. by the National High School Center (Dymnicki; Sambolt and Kidron, 2013; National Academy of Sciences, 2012).

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<sup>(53)</sup> The College and career development organiser was created by the National High School Centre with the aim to synthesise and organise the field of college and career readiness initiatives. The organiser can be used to map the efforts of State education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) as well as other organisations devoted to researching and providing support for college and career readiness.



The COVID-19 pandemic has also shown us that it is essential for countries to create the conditions for districts and schools to support SEL development. There is a risk that the development and wellbeing of young children and young people is being undermined during the crisis and they may not receive the critical supports they need. They have had to adjust to major changes in everyday life, such as physical distancing and home confinement, but their families may also struggle to meet their basic physical and emotional needs. Rates of poverty, unemployment, parental mental health problems and substance abuse, child abuse and neglect, and intimate partner violence tend to rise during disasters (Bartlett and Vivrette, 2020).

Various studies have investigated the role of SEL in public policy and which approaches are most effective in different contexts relevant to school-based career guidance. In the Committee for Children-CASEL analysis of all 50 US States' COVID-19 response plans, 38 American States were found to make reference to SEL or student wellbeing. Some States provided a clear definition of SEL (and distinguished it from mental health) and emphasised the development of social and emotional skills in their COVID-19 response plans (Yoder et al., 2020c).

Based on the review of States' responses, the following six recommendations were identified: communicate SEL as important for all students at school and adults in the community; define and coordinate SEL and mental health supports; disseminate SEL practices; provide professional learning and support for adult SEL competences, capacities, and wellness; leverage data for continuous improvement; encourage use of funds (Yoder et al., 2020c).

Durlak et al. (2011) found that the most effective SEL programmes were those that incorporated four elements represented by the acronym SAFE:

- (a) sequenced activities that led in a coordinated and connected way to skills;
- (b) active forms of learning;
- (c) focus on developing one or more social and emotional skills;
- (d) explicit targeting of specific skills.

Cefai and Cavioni (2013), based on the results of 317 studies involving 324 303 elementary school children, argue that SEL programmes implemented by teachers improve children's behaviour, attitudes, and academic results.

More research on SEL and better assessment instruments and approaches are needed to measure impact and to provide valuable insights for policy and for practitioners, to offer new opportunities to develop solid evidence-based programmes and activities.



### 10.5. Fostering SEL skills in career guidance practice

Global challenges require new ways of thinking and innovative approaches to redesigning the services and activities of career guidance. Practitioners should be better prepared in implementing more individualised service provision, developing social and emotional skills of their clients and making use of new technologies. This pandemic has shown us that training and preparing school-based career guidance for SEL teaching and development are necessary. For example, school counsellors should be well prepared to support students in conditions of increased rates of poverty, unemployment, parental mental health problems and substance abuse, child abuse and neglect (Bartlett and Vivrette, 2020). The Aspen Institute (2020), an influential US non-profit, recommends that relevant training courses for school personnel are online, interactive and address topics such as:

- (a) assessing and addressing stress and trauma among students and teachers;
- (b) establishing healthy learning environments infused with supportive, nurturing relationships, with separate courses for early childhood, elementary, and secondary students and settings;
- (c) embedding healing practices into the daily routines of schools and classes;
- (d) integrating academic content and social-emotional support.

The Institute also makes several recommendations about SEL that are applicable to school-based career guidance (Aspen Institute, 2020):

- (a) practitioners in the field of psychology should be able to identify and address the stress and trauma that students and young people have experienced during school and office closing;
- (b) promising practices should be highlighted, and funds and other resources, used for implementation;
- (c) practitioners should be engaged to help develop resources and provide templates to track student engagement during distance learning (logins, contacts with teachers and/or counsellors, participation in class activities, assignments);
- (d) practitioners need to be prepared to offer support for all young people for nurturing relationships, sense of safety and belonging, and group healing; to offer targeted interventions where needed; and to manage referrals to community health and mental-health services.



## 10.6. Romanian SEL guide for school counsellors

A guide for school counsellors, with examples of SEL activities and programmes for students from primary and secondary education levels, was developed in Romania in 2020 at the request of the Ministry of Education and Research. In May, the Ministry invited the National Centre for Policies and Evaluation in Education (NCPEE), the Unit of Research in Education, to prepare a tool to support practitioners and students to manage distance learning during the pandemic. It responded to the need for innovative approaches to redesign career guidance services and to develop communities of practice.

In June 2020, a national call was launched by the NCPEE for the 42 county centres for educational resources and assistance (CERAs) to prepare and send examples of SEL programmes and activities, according to their understanding of SEL. By the end of June, 268 examples of SEL programmes and activities had been collected and 132 examples of these were selected for the guide (Table 1). Theoretical chapters were included. In September 2020, three volumes for elementary school, middle school and high school and VET school, accordingly, were published on the website of the Ministry of Education and Research.

Prior to this initiative, school counsellors in the 42 centres had already participated in a conference organised by Euroguidance and the Institute of Educational Sciences in 2019, on SEL methods and concepts. The counsellors had also received the SEL model and conceptual background to aid their selection of programmes. Workshops offered during the conference were structured on the five dimensions of the CASEL framework: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision. After the conference, a publication was prepared containing examples of SEL reflection journals of Romanian school counsellors and experts in career guidance (Andrei, 2021).

The resulting guide in the three volumes of 665 pages is the first collection of practices for Romanian school counsellors, systematised based on the internationally recognised CASEL framework. All the programmes and activities included in the guide are presented based on two common templates: one for the presentation of the programme and another for the activity. The guide has practical tools, such as student worksheets. Almost all the suggested activities/programmes included in the guide are designed and implemented by school counsellors, adapted to the Romanian setting and using local resources (Andrei, 2020).



Table 1. **Programmes and activities in the guide for school counsellors**

|   | Total number | Programmes | Activities |
|---|--------------|------------|------------|
| Total number                              | 132          | 37         | 95         |
| Elementary school (Primary)               | 26           | 8          | 18         |
| Middle school (Lower secondary)           | 58           | 14         | 44         |
| High school/ VET school (Upper secondary) | 48           | 15         | 33         |

Source: Author.

### 10.7. Analysis of the counsellor guide

The programmes and activities (Table 1) in the guide for the three school levels were analysed in relation to the SEL framework and concepts as applied to school-based career guidance. The results of this analysis are briefly summarised below, in lists according to the relevant school levels/types (also corresponding to the three volumes). This includes specific skills students should acquire in relation to the SEL approach, teaching and learning methods and activities, teaching programme themes and objectives. Brief information on an evaluation of the activities is included <sup>(54)</sup>.

All contents pertaining to implemented programmes and activities in each respective volume were selected for analysis. The content was coded according to the sections of the two templates (programme and activity presentation).

The templates of SEL programme and activity presentation included sections common to both or specific to programmes or activities: title, who runs the programme or activity (school counsellor, teams of school counsellor and tutor/ advisory teacher/other teachers), SEL area/s covered, aim and objectives, modalities of implementation (face to face, online, blended), duration, evaluation modalities, resources needed (human, financial), author/team of authors, contact data, references, etc.

For the purposes of this publication, only a few sections analysed in the guide are presented: skills/competences involved, themes covered, objectives of programmes or activities, methods used at different education levels, evaluation modalities and impact.

The guide contains, in addition to activities that can take place face-to-face under normal conditions, those that take place online or in hybrid format, supporting school counsellors and teachers during the health crisis. At

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<sup>(54)</sup> Further information and the original guide for school counsellors are available in Romanian.



elementary school level, two SEL activities can be delivered online and six can be delivered in a blended format. Activities address stress management, empathy, communication and relationship skills, and healthy behaviours.

At middle school level, four SEL programmes have an online component, 23 activities can be delivered online and three, can be delivered in a blended format. Programmes and activities address management of emotions, communication and relationship skills, decision-making, self-awareness, personal management, stress management, social awareness, relationship and communication skills, and assertiveness.

At high school and VET school level, three SEL programs have an online component, 12 activities can be delivered online and three, can be delivered in a blended format. These programmes and activities address self-awareness, management of emotions, decision-making, personal management, management of crisis, culture of kindness, dealing with difficulties in interpersonal relationships, communication and relationship skills, preventing bullying, and decision-making.

#### **10.7.1. Programmes and activities for elementary pupils (age 6-10)**

The activities proposed for elementary education focused on the following skills in relation to the CASEL dimensions (Goia, 2020):

- (a) self-awareness: recognising and naming one's own and others' emotions in relation to different situations; understanding how emotions influence behaviour; identifying their own resources, strengths; promoting positive attitudes;
- (b) personal management: emotion management, stress management, solving problems, anger management, growth mentality, self-determination, transforming challenges in opportunities;
- (c) social awareness: developing empathy; promoting self-confidence and respect for others, acceptance and appreciation of diversity, cooperation;
- (d) relationship and communication skills: communication, interpersonal knowledge, developing the skills of appropriate relationships with others, friendship, prevention and combating bullying, conflict prevention and resolution;
- (e) decision-making: ability to solve problems, healthy behaviours.

Among the methods used during SEL activities for elementary school pupils, the following were mentioned: games, contests, role-playing, case study, analysis of stories, comics or film sequences, art-creative methods (drawing, collage, dance), the use of riddles, puzzles, use of various worksheets, mindfulness exercises, storytelling, practical activities and homework with parents, forum



theatre, discussions, explanation, brainstorming, and exercises (relaxation, problem solving).

SEL activities were evaluated using diverse methods: questionnaire, discussion with stakeholders (students/teachers/parents), systematic observation, use of portfolio, evaluation between colleagues, reflection questions, and self-assessment.

Impact of the SEL activities for elementary education students was evaluated through discussions with teachers and observing student behaviour.

#### **10.7.2. Programmes and activities for lower secondary students (age 11-14)**

The main themes presented in the SEL programmes for lower secondary education students were (Andrei and Scoda, 2020):

- (a) student awareness of own emotional states and identification of coping mechanisms, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- (b) stress management and preparing students for exams;
- (c) prevention and reduction of bullying in the school environment (for students: building respect and self-confidence, assertive communication, bullying management, constructive expression of emotions and needs, conflict resolution, identifying positive and negative group influences, practising responsibility; psycho-pedagogical assistance provided to teachers for the management of situations of violence in the classroom and counselling provided to students' victims/aggressors and parents);
- (d) preventing and resolving conflicts in the school environment by promoting some prosocial behaviours and healthy interpersonal relationships;
- (e) supporting and developing independent living skills for students whose parents work and live abroad and reducing the negative consequences of parents' migration by involving these students in groups of emotional support (composed of students from higher classes, teachers, school counsellors), extra-curricular activities, including trips, theatre, painting, and literature;
- (f) facilitating the integration of students with special educational needs in mainstream education by employing the following SEL skills: personal management (e.g. managing one's emotions), social awareness (e.g. developing tolerance, non-discrimination, acceptance), relationship and communication skills (e.g. stimulating cooperation). Among the activities implemented for students are: discussions in the classroom with special needs adults who are actively employed; writing letters to peers using the knowledge acquired.

Methods used in the activities for lower secondary students included:



- (a) experiential learning: exercise, role play, case study, project, methods of art-creative (making drawings, collages, posters);
- (b) social and communication learning: storytelling, discussion, panel discussion, conversation, argumentative debate;
- (c) reflective learning: introspection, reflection, problematisation, portfolio;
- (d) computer-assisted learning: exercise, simulation, educational game.

Impact is measured based on the following indicators:

- (a) number of times students participated in the programme;
- (b) reduction in the number of conflicts between students;
- (c) reduction in the number of bullying incidents;
- (d) better management of students' emotions and behaviours;
- (e) favourable school evolution by obtaining better academic outcomes.

#### **10.7.3. Programmes and activities for upper secondary students (age 15-18)**

The objectives of SEL programmes for upper secondary education students are (Tibu, 2020):

- (a) prevention of risk behaviours, acquiring better ways to control emotions and to reduce anxiety in adolescence;
- (b) development of socio-emotional skills (emotion management, empathy, healthy relationships);
- (c) promoting mental health;
- (d) preventing school dropout among VET students (self-awareness, awareness of own strengths and weaknesses, emotion management, stress management, assertiveness, adequate attitudes towards group pressure);
- (e) facilitating the school adaptation of students in the first year of high school;
- (f) developing student capacity for leadership.

Additional objectives of SEL activities for upper secondary education students are (Botnariuc, 2020):

- (a) self-knowledge, developing a realistic self-image;
- (b) awareness of the relationship between thoughts and emotions;
- (c) awareness of personal potential and responsibility in cultivating it;
- (d) improvement of self-image by reference to social models;
- (e) personal management in stressful situations, crisis;
- (f) development of attitudes and behaviours appropriate to self-promotion of physical and mental health;
- (g) promoting a culture of kindness among students.



## 10.8. Conclusions and further recommendations

The school counsellor guide highlights the importance assigned to developing the socio-emotional skills of students, both as a factor in ensuring the wellbeing of students and improving school performance and subsequent socio-professional success. These factors relate to student careers in the wider sense. The SEL practices included in the guide show the use of active learning-teaching practices, extra-curricular activities, the engagement of family and community, inclusion of social and emotional skill in the school curriculum, and assessment of student learning. Practices are designed so that students are involved in active learning and encouraged to reflect on the meaning and relevance of the learning material, interact with teachers, and learn from and engage with real-life examples related to content. The practices are undertaken by school counsellors alone or in teams with teachers. Some of the activities proposed are designed for online delivery.

The large number of contributions received across the country (268) in a short period of time indicated the great interest of school counsellors in carrying out SEL programmes and activities, some of which were designed and implemented for students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Another positive aspect was that many involved the parents and local community.

SEL skills are crucial during the crisis, marked by uncertainties and major change in the lives of students and the school. This resource offers support and ideas for school counsellors in designing, conducting, and evaluating counselling programmes and activities. It facilitates communication, mutual learning, exchange of ideas and good practices among Romanian school counsellors, teachers, and other key actors, also suggesting more community partners. It contributes to the school counsellors' understanding of SEL practices, and identifies needs for improvement and innovation in the Romanian education system.

Through this experience it is possible to derive several policy recommendations to enhance the quality of career guidance in schools. First, although there are some valuable digital counselling tools in Romania, with open or certain access restrictions, their diversity and quantity are still limited. This could be improved, through further development of school counselling. Innovation is also needed in current practices through provision of initial and continuing training on SEL for school counsellors and teachers, so that digital tools can support the guidance process (Goia, Botnariuc, & Andrei, 2020).

Some systematic programmes and activities for the development of students' socio-emotional skills should also be an immediate strategic policy measure in the Romanian education system. Appropriate resources need to be



allocated to support piloting, implementation, rigorous assessment, and measurement of the impact of skills development programmes for students at all levels. Future education reforms should take the latest developments in SEL into consideration. It is also important to underline that more research is needed on what practices might enhance positive social and emotional skills development and under what conditions these practices should be implemented to support students best.

The objectives of SEL programmes and activities must be more clearly articulated, implementation more closely monitored and the results accurately measured. The school counsellor SEL guide provided policy-makers, school counsellors, education practitioners, parents and researchers with a more comprehensive knowledge-base on where and how to improve systems, policies and practices for better support to students' social and emotional skills development.

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## CHAPTER 11.

# An international dimension for improved capacity building of guidance professionals

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### 11.1. Introduction

Globalisation, digitalisation, and demographic changes are creating an increasingly diverse and interconnected world. The current pandemic has shown that we are more dependent on each other than ever. In such a world, it is important to offer individuals good opportunities for developing their ability to see themselves in an international context, make international comparisons, and engage in meaningful learning for their future. Here, career guidance support is needed to encourage individuals to seize the opportunities available within periods of learning abroad.

This chapter discusses the need to ensure an international dimension in the context of the updated competences and training of career guidance practitioners. The aim is twofold: to improve the career guidance practitioner's ability to provide mobility guidance for their clients; and to support the guidance practitioner's own competence development through international exchange and cooperation. Considering rapidly changing labour markets and the constantly growing free movement of people across borders, global competences and intercultural understanding become essential components of skills needed both at individual and community levels. At European level, the importance of international exchange and learning mobility for skills development have long been emphasised (Council of the European Union, 2011; European Parliament, 2018). The role of guidance professionals in providing mobility guidance to help clients understand learning mobility and its value for career development is crucial, even if its promotion has not always enabled movement of guidance practitioners themselves across Member States (Cedefop, 2009).

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Key concepts used in the chapter are the international dimension in guidance, learning mobility and mobility guidance:

- (a) the international dimension in career guidance refers to the ability of guidance practitioners to assist their clients towards periods of meaningful and high-quality international learning mobility. It is also related to strengthening international cooperation in lifelong guidance and encouraging the exchange between stakeholders in guidance research, policy, and practice;
- (b) learning mobility means physical international mobility organised for education and competence development in formal or non-formal settings. However, in practice, a much wider potential is now also seen, such as taking part in international exchange from home;
- (c) mobility guidance refers to the support offered by guidance practitioners during the different stages before, during and after a cross-border mobility period of their clients.

These ideas and concepts are discussed, then followed by an example of professional development and training aimed at developing needed competences among guidance practitioners. Special focus is on similarities and differences in education and training provision and policy for practitioners in Estonia, France, and Sweden. Three Euroguidance training offers are compared.

## 11.2. Learning mobility for skills development

New demands are emerging in education and employment. Many of the jobs of tomorrow are unknown, others have recently been created. Certain basic needs do not change, but the way they are met is changing, driven by technological innovation, societal change, and environmental constraints. The adaptation of skills to this new environment, and hence the role of education, initial and continuing training in a lifelong learning perspective, are essential (Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, 2020).

Today, every job has an international dimension. Although the scope of some roles is local, the nature of our multicultural communities, international supply chains and global economic connections require individuals to be equipped with core international competences. These competences include interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds, the capacity to adapt and learn from their environment, and the self-confidence to thrive in the 21st century workplace (Potts, 2020). Global competences discussed by the OECD are linked to the international dimension and defined as the capacity to examine local, global and intercultural issues, to understand and appreciate the



perspectives and world views of others, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective wellbeing and sustainable development (OECD, 2018). In addition to international and global competences, smart use of ICT has become one of the main success factors for raising the competitiveness of every economic sector. As a catalyst of change, ICT has a strong impact on personal wellbeing and possibilities to access guidance services and engage in international exchange (Government of the Republic of Estonia, 2018).

Evidence from research indicates that learning abroad contributes to the development of these competences. Learning mobility is not just a means of acquiring 'intercultural skills', it also contributes to the development of personal competence, including creativity, independence, flexibility and entrepreneurship (Simons et al., 2013). In addition, according to some studies, people with international experience have a reduced risk of long-term unemployment, generally earn higher wages, and have more responsibilities in their working lives than those who do not (Brandenburg; Berghoff and Taboadela, 2014; CSN, 2017; European Commission, 2019).

Finnish research revealed that whereas language skills, cultural knowledge and tolerance are generally known by employers who consider international experience as important in recruitment, they also valued an additional three so-called hidden but important competences: productivity, adaptation, and curiosity (CIMO, 2014).

Populism and nationalism are emerging in many countries along with the development of globalisation (Swedish Trade Union Confederation, 2018). As a counterweight, cross-border learning mobility expands people's choices for shaping their careers and supports self-fulfilment. It helps to mitigate stereotyping and support taking a broader view of the world (Gramberg and Rammo, 2020; Pérez-Karlsson, 2014). Exposure to a different life in another country can be an important part of an individual's journey to personal growth and professional development (Launikari, 2019). This applies to both guidance practitioners and their clients.

### 11.3. Impact of mobility guidance provision

Pro-active guidance towards mobility – mobility guidance – can encourage individuals to take hold of the opportunities available within a period of learning abroad (Swedish Council for Higher Education, 2018). It has the potential to assist transformative learning, seeing learning in exposure to difference



(Kristensen, 2014). Three dimensions of mobility guidance provision can be identified in connection with current European developments:

- (a) increasing the volume of learning mobility. The German presidency of the Council and the European Parliament's negotiating team secured a provisional deal on the Erasmus+ programme for the period 2021-27. The increased budget will potentially provide mobility opportunities to many more individuals than in the current programme (European Commission, 2018). With career guidance support, more people will be able to access opportunities to go abroad for learning, expanding the population's ability to become global citizens;
- (b) enhancing the quality of the learning process. For example, guidance can provide learners abroad with capacity to increase the reflexive learning outcome. The phases of guidance support before, during and after an experience abroad can create loops of understanding that will increase the effect of the learning experience (Kristensen, 2014);
- (c) compensatory aspects. How do we ensure that more people with fewer opportunities can take part in this unique type of learning that is essential for the future? Such learning must be equally distributed. Regarding learning abroad as a kind of career capital makes it crucial to even out the score for disadvantaged groups (European Commission, 2018; Swedish Council for Higher Education, 2019).

Learning mobility has the best impact only when it is well prepared and meaningful. Both education institutions and career professionals can encourage people to use international opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills; to help them plan the learning mobility period; to guide them to reliable information sources and institutions and consciously to use what has been learned for their future working-life and self-realisation (Rammo, 2020).

#### 11.4. European and national contexts for mobility guidance

Do guidance practitioners really have a role in providing mobility guidance? The 2008 Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies concluded that 'The enlargement of the European Union has increased the potential for mobility in education and training, as well as in the labour market, thereby creating the need to prepare Union citizens to develop their learning and professional pathways in a broader geographical context' (Council of the European Union, 2008). In its study on professional standards for career practitioners in 2009, Cedefop identified mobility in a general sense as an



emerging issue in training, and included it as an item in the client-interaction area of its competence framework (Cedefop, 2009). The new Europass Decision is another formal link between career guidance and mobility. The decision calls for 'guidance for learning mobility' to support career management and upskilling across Europe (European Parliament, 2018).

Competence frameworks developed by career guidance professional associations also acknowledge the international dimension of guidance as part of the professional profile of guidance practitioners, which also relates to practices in mobility guidance. For example, the NICE network states that 'supporting students in identifying [...] career options internationally' is something that guidance practitioners 'should be well prepared for' (Schiersmann et al., 2012) and the IAEVG framework for practitioner competences refers to information for those going abroad as 'specialised competences' (IAEVG, 2018).

At national level in the three country contexts for Estonia, France and Sweden, the link between career guidance and mobility is visible in various ways: as a directly given task for guidance professionals, or as an indirect task due to the national frameworks for education and skills supply. For example, one of the objectives for the degree programme in career guidance in Sweden, specified in legislation, is that the guidance student 'must [...] demonstrate knowledge of education, working life and societal developments both nationally and internationally' (SFS 1993:100). The Estonian career management skills model identifies a special competence to '[u]nderstand how the general trends and changes in the world of work both globally and in the Estonian economic environment affect his or her career' (Innove, 2017). French guidance practitioners have to relate to a regulatory framework, which specifies that the European and international mobility of students is an effective educational investment for the development of key competences, employability, growth and social inclusion, as well as the strengthening of self-esteem and civic values of tolerance and mutual understanding (MENESR; DGESCO and DEI, 2016).

### 11.5. Training routes and professional development in the three countries

The rapid changes that we are facing put considerable pressure on career guidance professionals. According to an EU study on lifelong guidance, there is a key role in supporting citizens and workers to ensure they are aware of the opportunities available in new economic sectors, new jobs and activities, and reskilling opportunities (Barnes et al., 2020).



This leads to an increased need for competence development among guidance practitioners, to be able to offer high quality services. Educational choices, skills needs and career prospects become more and more complicated to manage. Guidance professionals must adjust fast, learn new skills, and rethink their roles; as an example, dealing with people with different cultural backgrounds is becoming increasingly important. Due to digitalisation, they are also expected to handle larger and more complex ranges of information in their work (Estonian Qualifications Authority, 2018).

Cedefop's Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices (2020a, 2020b, 2020c) <sup>(58)</sup> includes information on how training routes, qualifications and capacity building for the guidance profession differ across European countries such as Estonia, France, and Sweden. In Estonia, most practitioners have a background as psychologists, teachers, youth or social workers and there is no specific full academic qualification in career guidance. A master level course (60 ECTS) is available from the Institute of Psychology, University of Tartu, and targeted CPD is on offer. Further, the national occupational qualification system is set up for career guidance practitioners to support the development, assessment, and recognition of occupational competences (Euroguidance Estonia, 2020) (also see Rammo, in this collection). In France, guidance practitioners who work for the Ministry of Education must have a master degree in psychology. A compulsory additional postgraduate training from one of eight different universities is required (MENESR, 2017). Training for guidance practitioners in Sweden is offered as undergraduate academic education, leading to a bachelor degree in career guidance. A master degree is also available.

The situation in reference to further training opportunities for guidance practitioners is similar across the three countries. Those that exist are offered irregularly and often in connection to certain projects or driven from the organisational perspective, such as in PES, other national agencies, trade-unions, and professional associations. The National Union of Teachers in Sweden concludes in a recent report that those 'who are to provide guidance to others about studies and professions must have the opportunity to keep updated with the latest information about the labour market and study paths'. The report states that guidance practitioner opportunities for regular competence development should be guaranteed, which was not the case at the time: only 37% of guidance professionals reported receiving sufficient competence development (Swedish National Union of Teachers, 2020). Estonian guidance

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<sup>(58)</sup> See: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/inventory-lifelong-guidance-systems-and-practices>



stakeholders similarly concluded that capacity building of career guidance professionals is an important area for improvement. While progress can be seen in PES, career guidance practitioner competence development in education institutions and in the private sector needs significantly more attention (Psience, 2020). In France, career practitioners have had an individual right to training since 2017, which enables competence development. There is still a lack of continuing education and training offers even though the regions, as well as trade union organisations, are setting up some opportunities to strengthen and update practitioner skills (*Bulletin officiel* No 44, 1.12.2011).

### 11.6. Guidance practitioners' interests in international learning and mobility guidance

One competence area where the needs of career guidance professionals are clear is the international dimension in guidance, which is directly related to the provision of mobility guidance for clients. For example, guidance practitioners in Sweden were invited to rate their needs in a 2016 survey. Among a large number of listed competence areas, 'studies and work in other countries' came second (Ungdomsbarometern, 2016). Estonian research shows that international cooperation supports the practitioner's professional development and enables the introduction of good practices from other countries (Tamm and Vaade, 2019). A European-level Euroguidance stakeholder survey also confirmed this need among guidance professionals: almost half of the respondents identified international learning mobility opportunities for educators and guidance professionals as a main area for future competence development (Goia and Tibu, 2020).

Looking at whether national training meets these needs, the international dimension of guidance is invisible in the reference legislative text for initial training in France (MENESR, 2017). However, guidance professionals are trained to deal with mobility issues in different ways, depending on their target audience. The Euroguidance network in France offers courses that are integrated into the initial training for education professionals but also as further training. In Sweden, the international dimension in guidance is usually not covered in the initial academic training programmes. Similar to France, however, Euroguidance Sweden contributes to developing guidance competences for learning mobility in Sweden both as part of initial training and as further training courses (Euroguidance Sweden, 2015). Euroguidance Estonia contributes to the development of practitioner competences through the exchange of innovative practices between countries, and in relation to multiculturalism and international



mobility (Euroguidance Estonia, 2020) (see further information on e-courses below).

In terms of content for mobility guidance provision, Nordic Euroguidance coordinators have developed a grid for the guidance counsellor's 'international capital' needed in improving the quality of learning mobility (Launikari et al., 2020):

- (a) awareness of and belief in the benefits and added value of international mobility for individuals and society;
- (b) showcase mobility as social capital;
- (c) knowledge of various preparations needed for the client to take the next step throughout the mobility process;
- (d) awareness of the need to compensate for unequal background;
- (e) linking mobility to the development of career management skills.

### 11.7. Training offers with an international dimension

National Euroguidance centres have a unique role in developing competences for learning mobility and contributing to the general competence-development of the guidance community (mostly practitioners but also experts and decision-makers), through international exchange and cooperation. At the top of the list of activities are capacity building initiatives, including training offers, seminars, peer-learning events, study visits and conferences. Considering current circumstances during the pandemic, countries have adapted their approaches to the digital context. Accordingly, the focus is here given to online courses for mobility guidance and international peer learning for practitioners.

#### 11.7.1. Online courses <sup>(59)</sup>

For several years, the Euroguidance centres in Estonia, France and Sweden have provided e-courses for the competence development of practitioners related to the international dimension in guidance provision. Sweden launched the development in 2016 (Euroguidance course in mobility guidance (*Euroguidance kurs i Ivägledning*)) <sup>(60)</sup>, followed by Estonia in 2017 (Multiculturalism, learning and work mobility (*Multikultuursus, õpi- ja tööränne*)) and France in 2018 (Dinamo (*Découvrir INformer Accompagner la Mobilité en Orientation*)). All follow the principle of continuous improvement, where learner and/or expert feedback is

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<sup>(59)</sup> See Annex 1 for an overview of the three courses, accordingly.

<sup>(60)</sup> <https://www.uhr.se/syv/infor-en-utlandsvistelse/aktuellt-inom-det-internationella-vagledningsomradet/distanskurs-i-ivagledning-varen-2021/>



regularly monitored, and updates implemented as necessary. When the curriculum was first developed, a needs analysis confirmed that, while mobility is increasing along with its potential importance in personal career development, guidance professionals lack sufficient confidence, information, knowledge, and experience with mobility guidance to support their clients. To ensure easy access and flexibility for practitioners, an online solution was a natural development for all the three countries. As the courses are based on national needs, there are similarities and differences when it comes to aims, structure, volume, learning outcomes and specific target groups.

All three courses share the same aim of encouraging active mobility guidance and cover both international learning and job mobility (see Annex 1). However, driven by the wider partnership, the Estonian approach is broader, also covering multiculturalism. This is also reflected in the larger volume of courses. While participants in the French course are expected to contribute eight hours of their time, with no time-limits, participants in Sweden spend about 21 hours over six weeks, and those in Estonia dedicate 104 academic hours (4 ECTS) during a four-month period.

The Swedish course mainly targets guidance professionals in the wider community in secondary and higher education settings, whereas the French approach addresses guidance professionals both in the education and employment sectors. The Estonian course is offered to any practitioner who wants to gain knowledge for working with individual clients interested in working or studying abroad, or with new arrivals who will learn or work in Estonia. Basic counselling skills are required for the Estonian course but university students (in training) are also admitted. However, most of the participants are guidance professionals from both the public and private sectors. In Sweden and France, participants are required to have relevant employment experience as guidance practitioners or international coordinators and an associated academic degree.

All courses use a mix of teaching-learning methodologies, featuring both individual and group exercises, theoretical and practical elements, with material including illustrations, videos, concrete cases, and other varied resources. So far, all countries have only offered online learning but in 2020, in response to participant requests, the Estonian courses introduced a blended mode with webinars and on-site seminars.

Besides contributing to the acquisition of knowledge of mobility, participation in distance learning also provides the learners with hands-on experience in using digital tools. Since information is mostly offered online and, usually, quite fragmented among different agencies and web solutions, practitioners need to have a good understanding of relevant digital resources.



Course feedback confirms that the courses are highly valued and that learners see the benefit of online tools. Practitioner self-evaluation of learning outcomes, prior to and after the course, showed a clear progression of knowledge and competences among the participants in all three countries. In Sweden, the results in all courses show a clear movement from rather low rates before the course to higher rated knowledge afterwards in three areas: mobility for skills development, existing international opportunities, and the content of mobility guidance. One-hour in-depth telephone interviews with a sample of French participants enabled an evaluation of the user experience of the platform, the relevance of the content and the progress of knowledge. The French professionals all expressed their satisfaction and were positive that knowledge acquired would be used for their client's benefit. The Estonian results also showed a significant rise in competence development, confirming that participants were able to expand their understanding related to international learning and work mobility, and multiculturalism more broadly. They reportedly gained knowledge for working with outgoing and incoming clients. Further, the participants in all three countries recommended the courses for others in the guidance community, and partners have accordingly decided on future training offers.

Participants generally valued the content of the courses highly. The exchange of practices with the other participants and the opportunity to analyse their work in depth was also appreciated. The French participants who completed the courses receive a digital badge issued by Euroguidance France, while those in Estonia receive a digital certificate from either by University of Tartu or Tallinn University, and those in Sweden obtain a digital certificate from the Swedish Council of Higher Education, signed by Euroguidance Sweden.

The France-based DINAMO mobility training module has been validated by the Ministry of Education and will be accessible on a national training platform [M@gistère](#) for all teachers and education staff engaged in guidance activities. The platform includes online training courses for ministry staff (teachers, guidance counsellors, head teachers). The Estonian e-course – awarded a national e-course quality label – was recently included in an academic training programme as an elective subject at Tartu University.

Many of those in Sweden who have completed the mobility guidance training course reported using their certificates when applying for jobs but, when engaging in their annual individual development and salary discussions with employers, there is currently no published information or systematic evaluation on these processes. Participants also undergo self-assessments on completion of the course.



### 11.7.2. Peer-learning and mobility for professionals

International cooperation is an additional resource that enables professionals to reflect on their daily work, find new solutions and develop professionally. Peer learning needs to be strengthened: 'International exchange and cooperation between guidance professionals contributes to the development of their competences by providing opportunities to study guidance methods and practices in other countries and opens up possibilities for project cooperation between guidance services' (Barnes et al., 2020). This includes becoming more motivated and better at providing mobility guidance services (Ahlroos and Eensalu, 2014).

Peer learning can be defined as the acquisition of knowledge and skills through active help and support between peers or 'twin peers' (Topping, 2005). It plays a crucial role in initial and continuing training, both in face-to-face and virtual learning environments and in international learning mobility.

The Euroguidance network has for years facilitated international exchange and cooperation between guidance practitioners in different countries through the organisation of international conferences, seminars, and study visits. Academia, for example, is a European study exchange project set up by guidance practitioners in 1995. More than 2000 guidance professionals have participated in these exchanges, sharing experiences, raising awareness of good practices, and facilitating the creation of new networks supported by European mobility grants. Participants benefit from learning outcomes that will have an impact on their practice. Estonian researchers report that a large proportion of practitioners who have participated in international learning mobility abroad confirm they use new methods in their daily work (Tamm and Vaade, 2019). Since the beginning of the pandemic, virtual and blended learning has been experimented with in Estonia, giving an important role to new technologies; an example is the first-ever eAcademia virtual mobility event (Gramberg and Rammo, 2020).

## 11.8. Conclusions

Constantly changing society demands a systematic assessment of guidance practitioners' needs for capacity building, both within initial and further training. However, current training systems do not seem to meet the needs for regular competence development, nor do they acknowledge the international dimension in guidance.

In this chapter we have shown that international competences are crucial for the career development of individuals, and why guidance professionals should support their clients in the development of these competences. Active mobility



guidance can potentially increase the numbers of mobile individuals and improve the quality of their learning process.

Competence frameworks developed by professional guidance associations acknowledge the international dimension of guidance as part of the professional profile of guidance practitioners; the link between guidance and mobility is visible in national frameworks and legislation for education. Still, many guidance practitioners do not know how to deal with mobility guidance in their daily work and there is a need for competence development in the field. In a rapidly changing and globalising society, modernised capacity building for career guidance professionals should be on the agenda. We have illustrated this through a comparison of three online courses that provide knowledge, inspiration, and exchange of experiences in the area.

However, future research is needed to see how the national frameworks for competences and the initial training of guidance practitioners can be further developed to include an international dimension. This should cover guidance service delivery related to international mobility for learning and work, and also the guidance practitioner's own competence building through international exchange with colleagues from other countries. This would strengthen the quality of guidance services and ensure that the training of professionals is in line with the developments and expectations of society.

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Annex 1. Comparison of Euroguidance e-courses in Estonia, France and Sweden

| COUNTRY           | Estonia  | France  | Sweden  |
|-------------------|--|---|---|
| NAME AND VOLUME   | Multiculturalism, learning and work mobility ( <i>Multikultuursus, õpi- ja tööränne</i> ), 104 academic hours (4 ECTS)   | Dinamo ( <i>Découvrir INformer Accompagner la Mobilité en Orientation</i> ), 12 hours (*)   | Euroguidance course in mobility guidance ( <i>Euroguidance kurs i Ivägledning</i> ), 21 hours (**)  |
| AIM               | The course provides an opportunity to expand understanding related to international mobility and multiculturalism, and to gain knowledge for working with people who want to go to study or work abroad, and who have come to Estonia from abroad and need further career guidance.  | Dinamo reinforces the skills of guidance professionals in terms of international mobility and contributes to the development and promotion of lifelong mobility.  | The purpose of the course is to contribute to proactive guidance about international mobility, to make more pupils and students seize the opportunity, and to raise the quality of their mobility experience.   |
| LEARNING OUTCOMES | <p>The graduate will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>understand the value of learning and work mobility and its potential for career development;</li> <li>be aware of the various opportunities for international mobility and is ready to provide guidance on this subject;</li> <li>be able to support individuals in matters related to mobility, including motivating, preparing, supporting throughout the mobility and return;</li> <li>be aware of multiculturalism, including the peculiarities of different cultures and the diversity of values, and is able to advise clients with different cultural backgrounds on studying and working in Estonia.</li> </ul> | <p>The users of the platform will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>become aware of the added value of mobility for the purpose of professional integration and career development;</li> <li>be aware of the different forms of mobility (studies, employment, gap year, etc.);</li> <li>improve their knowledge of European mobility tools;</li> <li>improve their knowledge of mobility for specific groups such as people with disabilities, apprentices, etc.;</li> <li>learn how to use the resources of the Euroguidance website</li> <li>understand the issues at stake in a mobility guidance interview.</li> </ul> | <p>The participant will gain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>general knowledge about international mobility and its benefits;</li> <li>specific knowledge about different opportunities for studies, practical training, and work in other countries;</li> <li>understanding of the possible guidance interventions in relation to the whole mobility process;</li> <li>awareness of various tools and information sources that can facilitate the work;</li> <li>understanding of how mobility guidance can be part of the regular guidance work.</li> </ul> |

(\*) [www.euroguidance-formation.org](http://www.euroguidance-formation.org)

(\*\*) <https://www.uhr.se/syv/infor-en-utlandsvistelse/aktuellt-inom-det-internationella-vagledningsomradet/distanskurs-i-ivagledning-varen-2021/>



## CHAPTER 12.

# Strategic competence and the transformative role of ICT in lifelong guidance

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## 12.1. Introduction

At European Union level, lifelong guidance is acknowledged as a shared policy responsibility across the fields of education, training, youth, employment, and social affairs. A number of European case studies and reviews strongly indicate that the demand for guidance far exceeds the supply of services and that citizens' needs cannot be met by relying exclusively on traditional forms (e.g. Barns et al., 2020; ELGPN, 2010; Zelloth, 2009). No service provider, professional group or organisation can alone respond to the increasing needs of more diverse client groups. A growing number of countries are linking lifelong guidance with lifelong learning and providing continuity between different sectors in policy development and service delivery. The Estonian EU Presidency 2017 Conclusions on lifelong guidance also note that widening access to coherent services in an effective way necessitates policy coherence, partnerships, LMI sharing, service professionalisation, and service integration.

Technological upheaval is profoundly affecting the provision of guidance and inspiring alliances among new and existing partners and services. Despite the increasing use of ICT-based career services in many countries, the success of these provisions varies significantly from country to country (e.g. Barns et al., 2020; Kettunen & Sampson, 2019; Kettunen, Vuorinen & Ruusuvirta, 2016). In developing national career information and resources, practitioners and policy-makers alike must identify any gaps in their current knowledge to develop a more advanced understanding of how ICT can improve guidance services. This understanding is fundamental to the development and successful implementation of existing and emerging technologies in guidance services. If ICT is viewed

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solely as an information delivery channel, or if the development of tools for diverse user groups remains fragmented, technology's full potential cannot be exploited in pursuing integrated service delivery or formulating lifelong guidance policies (Kettunen et al., 2016). Increased synergies among actors and stakeholders at national, regional, and local levels is needed to ensure a common vision, leadership support, and a strategic path for the successful implementation of existing and emerging technologies in guidance services (Kettunen & Sampson, 2019).

While the importance and utility of career guidance and counselling are generally acknowledged by societies around the world, retaining the quality of practice is challenging in service delivery environments where practitioners are under pressure to achieve more for less (Barnes et al., 2020). In decentralised administrations, or in contexts without legislation for career guidance, service providers have considerable autonomy in how they deliver and organise lifelong guidance (LLG) services for their users. This implies that career practitioners need to have opportunities to share their experiences and mentor others. National competence frameworks for practitioners provide a common model for promoting professionalism in a decentralised administrative structure (Barnes et al., 2020), and the European Union has funded a number of projects that have developed competence frameworks (e.g. Cedefop 2009), job profiles (e.g. European Commission, 2014) and standards (e.g. Schiersmann et al., 2016) for career practitioners. International professional associations (e.g. IAEVG, 2018; NCDA, 2009) provide competence frameworks, which can be applied at national or regional levels. Most of the frameworks consist of occupational descriptions for different types of career practitioners, encapsulating practitioners' roles and main tasks in specific settings or with specific user groups. They also link theories, questions of knowledge, values, attitudes and skills to their overall meaning for practitioner performance (Niles, Vuorinen & Siwiec, 2019).

The main driver of the development of most international competence frameworks has been the question of what support individual citizens need. Wider tasks that are related, for example, to the coordination of guidance services are perceived as being beyond what should reasonably be expected from all career practitioners (e.g. Schiersmann et al., 2016). However, transformation of lifelong guidance towards collective and group-based activities is a process engaging many actors, various interests, and multiple layers (Nykänen, Saukkonen & Vuorinen, 2012). Career practitioners should be able to cope with more complex situations and operate adequately in potentially contradictory roles. In addition to competences involving working with clients – especially given the lack of binding legislation or national quality frameworks for guidance in most EU Member States (Barnes et al., 2020) – practitioners must



more strongly emphasise strategic competences that enable them to define their new roles and tasks in multi-professional networks, both within organisations and at the interfaces of service providers (Vuorinen & Kettunen, 2017).

To sum up, inconsistency in legislation and growing autonomy imply that career practitioners need competences in creating an understanding of which national and local actors should be involved (and how) in the design and delivery of guidance services. Mintzberg (1995) defines this kind of strategic thinking as 'seeing': seeing ahead and behind, seeing above and below, seeing beside and beyond, and seeing it through.

Strategic thinking takes an expansive view of career guidance and counselling, with three pairs of opposing perspectives and one overarching one (Mintzberg, 1995). Seeing 'ahead' reflects the future-oriented perspective of all guidance processes. At the same time, we must be aware of the evolution of career guidance services, so seeing 'behind' provides an opposing perspective to maintain a strategic view. To understand the locus of career services between different sectors, it is necessary to see oneself 'from above' and to discern the underlying principles by looking 'from below'. To build cross-sectoral partnerships in the design and implementation of career services, practitioners need to find collaborators by 'seeing beside', and they must 'see beyond' the current provision to foster innovation. After reflecting on these different perspectives, it is possible to 'see it through' and understand the underpinnings and key features of the career guidance system and define the necessary preconditions for consistent, coherent service delivery.

## 12.2. Four perspectives on strategic competences

In strengthening career practitioners' strategic competences, for developing relationships and partnerships with key stakeholders to establish a sustainable mandate for career services in decentralised contexts, it is crucial to apply strategic thinking as 'seeing' and to pay greater attention to the four perspectives below, connected to multi-professional guidance service delivery (Figure 1). Widening perspectives beyond one's individual practice enables practitioners to position guidance services and themselves as service providers in an interface between different sectors and discipliners. This broader understanding of the systemic nature of career services contributes to the effective and efficient use of ICT in guidance and counselling (Kettunen & Sampson, 2019).



Figure 1. **Diverse perspectives on networked multi-professional guidance services**



Source: Nykänen Karjalainen, M., Vuorinen, R., & Pöyliö, 2007.

### User perspective

Career professionals perceive an individual's learning path as a continuum and a chain of interfaces between training and working life. In various transition phases, individuals use different career services from different organisations. From an individual perspective, career services are perceived as an activity that crosses organisational boundaries and may be patchy and fragmented. When experts plan career services, users are not necessarily asked what kind of services they need; but, when career services are understood as a user's entitlement, individuals become better aware of what services exist and what they can expect from them. This urges service providers to shift their view from the supplier perspective to the user perspective and their focus from helping to enabling. This requires service providers to 'see beyond' the supplier perspective and to create new measures to obtain a better understanding of the needs of diverse user groups and their readiness for career development. This changes the operational boundaries of organisations and challenges them to 'see beside' to produce knowledge together and learn regionally and organisationally (Nykänen et al., 2007, 2012).

### Staff perspective

In cross-sectoral networks, guidance services are provided at multi-professional interfaces with other practitioners or organisations, in a learning space, and have



to be able to provide a rationale for their existence, their knowledge and juridical position (Nykänen et al., 2012; Nykänen, 2011). A multi-professional network is a mechanism of coordination, organisation, and collaboration. It is important from the viewpoint of referral to services, availability and fit that staff members in different organisations know what services others provide. Together, the practitioners solve problems, create knowledge and innovations, and acquire resources. They participate both in the coordination of their network and in its management tasks (Nykänen, 2011). Ideally, this work allocation and coordination approach comes close to the concept of distributed leadership (Gronn, 2008).

### **Organisation perspective**

The organisational perspective refers to the planning, coordinating and implementation of guidance services within an organisation. Within an organisation responsible for career services, practitioners with different job profiles cooperate in multi-professional teams, such as in community centres, one-stop-shops, a distributed centre (no co-location location) or via online platforms. Multi-professional cooperation supports mutual trust and reduces isolation and unnecessary competition for clients and resources. Cooperation can be extended to cover planning the division of labour, eliminating overlapping duties, agreeing on the core activities of the services, and producing joint guidance materials, as well as improving the activities of guidance providers. The division of labour and shared responsibility together include how guidance services are implemented, planned, and coordinated within and between organisations and administrators at national, regional, and organisational levels (Nykänen, 2011).

### **Regional/national perspective**

The regional/national perspective refers to formal or informal inter-organisational networks of guidance providers from different government sectors across the fields of education, training, youth, employment, and social affairs policy. Cedefop (2020) provides evidence of national-level efforts to increase collaboration among professionals and involve new actors in guidance provision. According to Barnes et al. (2020), effective and multi-directional communication needs strengthening as it has a pivotal role in securing maximum impact of LLG services and facilitating leadership and cooperation. In practice, the capacity of networks to produce innovations has to do with 'seeing through' and with the creation of structures and relationships, leadership, expertise, and the envisioning of entire processes. Technology can bring together a range of



relevant partners to provide coordinated and seamless specialised service throughout an individual's life.

At regional and local levels, the structures for cooperation need to be established in accordance with local conditions, but local networks with multi-organisational structures often have contradictory aims and goals due to their operational cultures, mandates, and internal administrative statutory arrangements. Often, there are different perceptions of the key concepts, features and underlying principles of career guidance. In providing career services, organisations from different sectors may find themselves in competition for the same limited resources (ELGPN, 2010).

Municipalities and local public employment service (PES) offices are increasingly important in coordinating guidance stakeholders, illustrating the need for career practitioners to engage in multi-layered, multi-administrative regional strategic work. The practitioners should more often 'look beyond' and cross the boundaries between different sectors to collaborate in creating shared knowledge and solutions in complex problem-solving situations. This is crucial in, for example, outreach strategies, validation of skills, enterprise-based career learning activities and flexible training offers leading to qualifications. It is also important that when working with individuals, practitioners connect career issues into wider life contexts. From this perspective, 'seeing beyond' includes understanding and knowledge of how clients can finance learning, which programmes are available or should be promoted for financial and non-financial support for learning. Such jointly formed knowledge overcomes sectoral protectionism, promotes the efficiency of investments and increases the potential for solving problems that a single individual or professional group cannot tackle (Engeström, 2004; Kettunen, 2021; McGuire, 2006; Nykänen, 2011).

Further, an important area of this strategic competence is guidance personnel's exploratory reflection on their own activity and subsequent evaluation of the services (Nykänen, 2010). Practitioners should be able to apply the basic theories of career development and should also be able to interpret the nature and quality of their relationships with clients and the premises for career development. Wider reflection focuses on the content of career services and the education system, working life and wider community as a context for career services. Strategic thinking empowers practitioners to take responsibility for changing their work through pilots or development projects: in which settings and contexts it is relevant and feasible to use ICT and to promote synergies in the strategic planning of the services; which are the internal and external networks where guidance expertise could be utilised? Only changes in doing can promote changes in seeing. These two approaches are interwoven and embedded in each other, and they emerge simultaneously.



### 12.3. Conclusions

Existing international competence frameworks have references to how career practitioners need to intervene in social systems and community development. The references aim to design, implement and evaluate interventions to address the needs of user groups, not directly to strategic transformation of the guidance services (e.g. IAEVG, 2018; Schiersmann et al., 2016). Practitioners are encouraged to contact stakeholders, approach existing networks, and build new ones. They are expected to be competent in engaging in societal debate about the purposes of career guidance and counselling and to advocate on behalf of people seeking support in career-related issues (Schiersmann et al., 2016).

The IAEVG (2018) and Cedefop (2009) competence frameworks include attempts to promote strategic thinking in career services by encouraging collaboration between community partners. To demonstrate this specialised competence, practitioners are encouraged to work with the local community to analyse human and material resources and use them effectively according to a community needs assessment. The European reference competence profile for PES and European Employment Services (EURES) counsellors (European Commission, 2014) follows the Cedefop competence areas but includes strategic thinking in dealing with the use of ICT in the service provision.

Transforming career guidance services to improve access and address social equity in accordance with constant changes in society make it necessary to employ a stronger systemic approach in developing proactive lifelong guidance services in all sectors (ELGPN, 2015). Transdisciplinary collaboration entails a shift from traditional expert services and established networks to a dynamic combination of independent and communal ways of working (Kettunen and Felt, 2020). Key elements of practitioners' strategic competences are needed to develop, implement, and evaluate policies and action plans to address economic, social, educational and employment goals of the community (IAEVG, 2018).

To exploit the full potential of existing and emerging technologies, career practitioners must understand the broader goal of career services and collaborate with partners, system developers and policy-makers in the design and delivery of services and in the evaluation of their impact and effectiveness. This early involvement in multi-actor collaboration should take place in public administrations, between members of different public bodies, and amongst private partners. This requires understanding of how theoretical frameworks could inform a jointly determined vision of existing ICT-based career services and how these frameworks can be embedded in the design of and effective integration of such services (Kettunen & Sampson, 2019). The diverse



perspectives on networked multi-professional guidance services presented here offer one such example.

These new strategic competences should be part of initial practitioner training programmes of and continuous professional development in all settings, but they become even more crucial in countries that are increasing their market-based service providers in accordance with liberal regimes (Moreno da Fonseca, 2015). According to Barnes et al. (2020), strategic competence is particularly important in decentralised contexts where practitioners are very much on their own and lack organisational support.

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## **PART IV**



## CHAPTER 13.

# Enhancing practitioners' skills to work in the digital context

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### 13.1. Introduction

The role that digital technologies can play has come under the spotlight during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even prior to the pandemic, the use of digital technologies was an emerging, strategic priority within the field. The growing consensus around the increasingly essential role of information and communication technology (ICT) in the career service sector is evidenced in a number of policy documents, case studies and reviews (Cedefop, 2011; Cedefop et al., 2020; Council of the European Union, 2004, 2008; Data Europa, 2014; OECD, 2004a, 2004b). As demand for services continues to grow, we need continually to review and improve our service delivery modes and mechanisms in a cost-effective manner. Technology provides opportunities to extend services, especially services aimed to reach those in remote locations or homebound due to disabilities. Individuals who prefer written, rather than spoken communication, or those having limiting disabilities, may also benefit from online services. To maximise these opportunities and support for those with weak digital skills or less experience with digital guidance services, it is important to ensure that career practitioners are equipped with the requisite ICT competences.

'Digitalisation' is a generic term for the digital transformation of all sectors based on large-scale adoption of existing and emerging digital technologies; these technologies are the tools through which digitalisation will occur (Randall and Berlina, 2019). Some of these technologies already exist and have been adopted to varying degrees; others exist but are yet to be adopted at large scale. In this article, ICT refers to the products, infrastructure and electronic content that support lifelong guidance policy and service delivery. These interactive services, resources and tools are designed and developed for citizens, and their use, in turn, informs their design. ICT also refers to the digital competency required to use technology in a career development context (ELGPN, 2015). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the skills and competences required for the use of ICT

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(including social media) in guidance were often considered secondary and are therefore poorly developed in initial and continuing training (Barnes et al., 2020; Kettunen, & Vuorinen, 2020; Cedefop, 2009, 2018; European Commission, 2014). It has become evident that, within professional training programmes, the role and use of ICT in guidance and counselling are dealt with very differently. A closer look at this issue has shown that most programmes do not teach the use of ICT in a professional context.

To contribute to the current discussion and improve the training of career professionals, this chapter describes the design and content of an international, jointly developed ICT training programme for guidance and counselling practitioners. Content development for the course drew on the latest phenomenographic research exploring career practitioner conceptions of social media and 'competency' <sup>(64)</sup> for social media in career services (Kettunen, 2017). Phenomenographic studies help to improve practice by exploring variations in participants' experiences of the phenomenon in question, which are revealed by the dimensions of variations that highlight the differences between the conceptions (Akerlind, 2008). From an educational point of view, such studies also reveal what is needed to gain a more complex understanding of the topic in question.

The training programme described was jointly designed and delivered by the Finnish Institute for Educational Research (FI), Malmö University (SE), eVejledning (DK) and the University of Iceland (IS). The partners involved have extensive experience in training and research in the use of ICT in the guidance and counselling field, and they support and work with practitioners both in Nordic countries and internationally. Their complementary competences, experience, knowledge, and skills encompass higher education (SE/IS), practical applications (DK), research (FI) and private practice (SE) specifically within career guidance. The course is open to degree-seeking students and experienced practitioners from various settings, as it exposes them to situations that challenge them to see and reflect on the variation in the potential uses of technology in career guidance and counselling. Those who *successfully complete the course are awarded five ECTS credits*.

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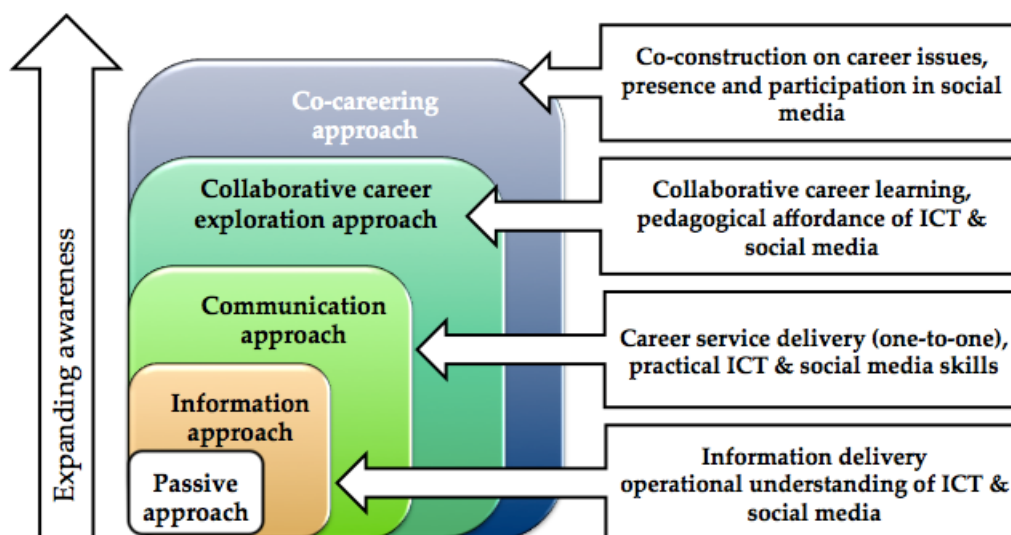
<sup>(64)</sup> While competence is the ability to do a particular task, competency concerns the underlying characteristics which allow a person to perform well in a variety of situations (e.g. Trotter & Ellison, 2001, p. 36). The term competency is used throughout the text to refer to the combination of relevant attributes that underpin successful professional performance (Moore, Cheng, & Dainty, 2002; Woodruffe, 1991).



## 13.2. From information delivery to co-careering

Kettunen (2017) established an empirically derived evidence-based foundation for the development of international training programmes for guidance and counselling practitioners. This foundation considers the fact that ICT is used both on a self-help basis (e.g. self-directed use of career resources and service) and as part of face-to-face service in physical settings and distance service delivery via ICT. The results revealed five general approaches to social media and competency for social media (for details about the study results, see Kettunen, 2017). These encompass a passive approach and information-centred, communication-centred, collaborative career exploration and co-careering approaches (see Figure 1). Co-careering refers to the shared expertise and meaningful construction on career issues among community members (Kettunen, 2017, p. 41). This foundation offers a basis and establishes a continuum on which to work, resulting in the provision of training and opportunities to experiment more broadly and practice with ICT and social media. Specific practitioner competences addressed during the course include proficiency in locating, evaluating and using online content; being a versatile and thoughtful writer; being able to generate and sustain engaging and constructive online discussion; and creating a visible and trusted online presence (Kettunen et al., 2020; Kettunen; Sampson and Vuorinen, 2015).

Figure 1. **Five general approaches to ICT and social media in guidance**



Source: Based on J. Kettunen et al., 2017, p.48.



Emphasis was also placed on interventions that foster collaborative learning among peer group members (Kettunen; Sampson and Vuorinen, 2015) to support career learning and development. Throughout the course, the use of ICT in guidance and counselling was linked to ethical issues (such as accuracy and validity of recourses, confidentiality, and user privacy). Peterson and colleagues (2008) cognitive information-processing approach was used to illustrate how theory can be deployed to guide ICT-based career counselling and guidance practice.

The course underlying teaching and learning philosophy is grounded in social constructivist (Brown; Collins and Duguid, 1989) and sociocultural theories (Säljö, 1975). These concepts informed decisions on how to organise the training and the employment of a student-centred approach and problem-based or case-based 21st century learning principles for professional education. In this view, learning is a situated process within a community of mutually supportive learners, and research-based knowledge is linked to practice through hands-on training and empirical examples provided by instructors and participants. The course assigned great importance to experimentation and collaboration in interactive workshops to increase knowhow, adopting a goal-oriented approach based on the sequence theory/application discussion. Building on this idea, teaching invokes the central idea of constructivism: learners as constructors of meaning (Mason and Watson, 2005).

To demonstrate how the course was implemented based on the continuum from information delivery to co-careering, each of these approaches is described in the next sections. Compared to the other more proactive stances in the model, the term 'passive approach' implies that successful integration of ICT in guidance services depends not only on the skills or technical facilities available but also on practitioners' willingness to accept the changes that new technology may bring to service delivery.

### 13.3. Delivering information

The most common use of ICT in guidance is the dissemination of career information. The course seeks to augment students' ability to identify and evaluate online career information and resources and to teach them how to use these tools creatively to meet client needs. To improve information delivery capability, the teaching focused on media and information literacy: proficiency in locating, evaluating and using online content. Participants shared career information and online resources and described how these are used (or could best be used) in professional practice. Using real-world examples, the goal of



these exercises was to illustrate how the multiple types and sources of available information could be utilised to enhance career services. Participants also worked with case examples to develop their awareness of potential sources of invalidity in social media-based career information, specifically the occupational, educational, training and employment information developed and disseminated by users of that information (Sampson et al., 2018). Potential sources of invalidity include intentional bias (with or without profit motive), unintentional bias, restricted range of experience, out-of-date information, popularity bias, similarity bias, and context deficiency (for more detailed information, see Sampson et al., 2018). Examples of software evaluation criteria (NCDA, 1991) were distributed and discussed in small groups. Participants reviewed and shared their observations regarding the assigned sections under the following headings: programme information, career development process, interaction, technical aspects of the software and materials, and support. These activities were designed to increase participant awareness of existing criteria, as well as their ability to identify and evaluate online career information and resources.

#### 13.4. One-to-one communication

The course aimed to expand students' ability to use ICT for one-to-one communication. This communication can be synchronous (in real time) or asynchronous (involving a delay). Training was provided in text-based communication using email and chat, as these are the most commonly used forms of communication in guidance service provision. The training focused on online writing; examples of authentic and anonymised text-based email cases were distributed, and participants analysed these in groups, discussing the emotions expressed in the written material and the questions raised. After discussing how best to address the case, they worked together to formulate a written response. The aim of these exercises was to highlight the potential for empathetic responses and summarisation in a written context. The exercises also afforded opportunities for participants to develop their understanding and skills in providing guidance and counselling in written form. For instance, to convey their intentions and engage the client, practitioners must be able to draw on guidance and counselling skills that include paraphrasing, clarifying, summarising, empathising, sharing observations, supporting, open-ended questioning and reassuring (Amundson, 2003).

To broaden their knowledge and use of chat (synchronous communication in written form) in professional practice, the course included an introduction to Danish eGuidance and the associated 4C model of communication, which



involves four phases: contact, contract, communication, and conclusion. The contact phase seeks to establish and maintain a good relationship with the client. The contract phase seeks to define together the focal issue of the virtual guidance session in collaboration with the client. In the communication phase, the counsellor processes the information received from the client and attempts to put the issue in perspective. Finally, in the conclusion phase, the counsellor provides information and/or instructions regarding the focal issue as defined during the contract phase and assesses the client's readiness to act.

The course activities encouraged participants to reflect on chat as a medium for guidance and counselling and on any possible differences in how chat is used across various countries. Based on examples of authentic and anonymised chat, they also used the 4C model to identify the different phases, noting parts that functioned well and less well and how chat functions in a guidance and counselling context. Participants also gained direct experience in chatting; working in pairs, one played the client and contacted the other student (as the counsellor) with a personal dilemma. In each phase, the 4C model was used to equip the eGuidance practitioner with concrete questions and phrases. By switching roles, participants gained experience in experimenting with chat as both a counsellor and a client in a professional context.

### 13.5. Collaborative career exploration

In collaborative career exploration, knowledge is shared in purposefully designed online spaces among individuals and practitioners as they work towards common learning goals, such as understanding the question at hand or solving a problem. The teaching addressed participants' skills and knowledge in devising interventions to foster collaborative career exploration through online discourse. This focused on practitioners' ability to design a space that integrates self-directed materials with interactive communication and knowledge of methods, techniques and activities to improve participation and interaction in online discourse and to foster peer group collaboration in career learning (Kettunen, 2017). A five-stage model of structured learning activities (Salmon, 2011) was introduced as a means of building interaction and participation. The model includes social interaction, motivation and learning by using digital tools. The first two stages of Salmon's model seek to acclimatise the learner to the online environment and to develop a supportive social context. In the third stage (information exchange), learners interact with course materials and online activities and exchange further resources. In the fourth stage (knowledge construction), learners work collaboratively, sharing ideas, posing problems, and



challenging each other in the spirit of inquiry. Here, the practitioner facilitates the continuing learning process by asking questions, enhancing discussion, and motivating and encouraging learners. The final stage (development) invites participants to take responsibility for and reflect on their own learning.

Throughout the course, learners used an online learning platform based on this model to gain experience of collaborative career exploration and to develop a practical understanding of methods for improving participation and interaction in online discourse. Participants gained direct experience in instructor-facilitated as well as peer-facilitated online discourse through activities such as virtual meetings: addressing a case scenario involving an ethical dilemma by defining key issues, identifying ideal resolutions, and brainstorming practical strategies in small groups. Discussion and group reflection processes were audio- and video-recorded and shared among participants, allowing everyone to have access to their own and peer group reflections to encourage whole group discussion. In addition to its collaborative aspect, the exercise allowed participants to experience using video conferencing/communication, which is gradually becoming the new normal in shaping the way we communicate, learn and work.

### 13.6. Co-careering

Social media use has become a daily practice for many career practitioners in facilitating co-careering which refers to the shared expertise and meaningful construction on career issues among community members (Kettunen, 2017, p. 41). To develop relevant student co-careering skills and understanding, the training focused on how to create and express a visible and trusted online presence, as well as questions of ethical practice in social media, including accuracy and validity of resources, professional boundaries and issues of confidentiality and privacy. To begin, the concept of co-careering was introduced and discussed, and examples were provided of how different clients might use social media to explore occupational, educational and employment issues with others, including friends, personal acquaintances and even individuals with whom no personal relationship exists. Participants worked through the examples, identifying the phases in which co-careering occurred. Emphasis was placed on more conscious engagement with online communities where meanings and understandings are co-constructed, and empirical examples referred to strategies for operationalising a visible and trusted online presence in professional practice.

The key to success in social media is to establish clear goals and ensure that actions work to achieve them (Rutledge, 2010). Building a reliable and authentic image within relevant communities requires a mindful online presence



and monitoring and actively updating one's online profiles, grounded in a practical understanding of how this presence is conveyed to others. Strategies to operationalise a visible and trusted online presence (Sampson, Kettunen, and Vuorinen, 2020) were explored and discussed in terms of practitioner need to monitor social media posts within their organisations to:

- (a) respond to requests for information or services;
- (b) recommend resources and services that fit individual characteristics and needs, following up as appropriate;
- (c) exploit opportunities for co-careering among community members that their organisation serves, identifying and responding to teachable moments;
- (d) participate in social media sites maintained by their organisation by answering questions or requests, recommending resources and services as appropriate, marketing their organisation and other sources of assistance, and engaging in co-careering as opportunities emerge.

In exploring social media engagement tactics, participants crafted social media posts that would encourage interaction. The aim was to illustrate co-careering and to reflect on one's own future practice in this regard.

### 13.7. Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about new needs for digital services and increased the demand for existing ones. New methods of access to guidance services are offering opportunities to address people's needs and expectations. However, one of the issues facing policy-makers is the increased need to develop the skills and competences of the practitioners and managers of guidance centres/services. Career practitioners' capacity building is crucial for the successful integration of ICT in careers practice, and there is an urgent need for both the pre-service and in-service training curricula to be updated to include this knowledge. This jointly developed international course provides a concrete model for bridging the skills gap in career practitioners' initial and continuing training using a research-based framework (Kettunen, 2017) for ICT competence development. This training will raise the professional profile and standards of career practitioners and other staff involved in guidance activities by enabling them to respond more effectively to the needs and expectations of both citizens and policy-makers (Council of the European Union, 2008). This would likely lead to improved coordination and cooperation between stakeholders in the use of new and emerging technologies for easier access to lifelong guidance and information through diverse and innovative service delivery.



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## CHAPTER 14.

# Career practice education and training in Portugal: challenges during the pandemic

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### 14.1. Career practice after COVID-19: the use of ICT

As in many other countries, in Portugal, the COVID-19 crisis led to the declaration of a state of emergency, specifically from 18 March to September 2020. A set of preventive public health measures were implemented: schools were closed and other departments, including public employment services, reduced face-to-face activity. All services had to reorganise their activities to adapt to the new reality, including career guidance across sectors: before the pandemic, most career interventions were delivered face-to-face but this was no longer possible. Information and communication technologies (ICT) have been considered as an available alternative resource for crisis intervention in a variety of domains (Ribeiro et al., 2020). In recent years, the provision of remote career interventions, with the support of telephone, computer, internet-based technologies and social media networks, has become an alternative. Access to specialised interventions by a greater number of individuals is one of the advantages demonstrated (Kettunen; Sampson and Vuorinen, 2017; Sampson; Kettunen and Vuorinen, 2020). It is also a way of blurring geographic distance or mitigating factors associated with other types of constraint (Sampson; Kettunen and Vuorinen, 2020), similar to those experienced during the pandemic. In addition to these aspects, social networks are the choice for youth interaction, which can increase the motivation and adaptation of students to ICT-based interventions (Vigurs; Everitt and Staunton, 2017).

It is useful to understand better to what extent, as future guidance professionals, psychologists' initial training prepares them to use ICT in career guidance interventions. This chapter presents findings from our study, including a review of the training pathways and existing curricula to prepare career

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counsellors in Portugal. We explore the topic through responses from different relevant groups: official bodies responsible for training in this field; employed career guidance practitioners; and undergraduate psychology students looking ahead at the role of digital skills in their future careers. The objectives of the enquiry, methods and results of these procedures are presented, with particular emphasis given to the challenges professionals faced during the pandemic and the role of ICT and practitioners' digital skills.

## 14.2. Career counselling practitioner training in ICT

The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced in Portugal the need for strategies that allow schools and other institutions to continue maintaining their advice and support intervention systems for beneficiaries. The use and implementation of computer and internet-based services is gradually being considered as one alternative, to cope with the challenges. However, these strategies must be guided by scientific and ethical criteria, by the proficient use of ICT by practising psychologists providing career guidance, as well as by the mastery of technical specificities associated with remote intervention (Ordem dos Psicólogos Portugueses, 2016). Despite the recognition that remote services are a reality accelerated by the pandemic, the study of ICT-based career interventions as a learning content is not a part of the higher education training curricula in psychology (Cordeiro et al., 2018). This means the career counsellors do not have any formal initial training in using ICT in providing career guidance; what could be done to open new horizons?

Guided by this concern, we conducted a study with four main objectives:

- (a) to know how career counsellors operating in different sectors faced the challenges associated with institutional lockdown and teleworking;
- (b) to understand the value that career counsellors assign to digital skills in their work;
- (c) to understand the extent to which their initial training included digital skills;
- (d) to understand how professionals and those responsible for training are addressing the gaps in this area.

Various methods were used to collect data and address these objectives. We analysed relevant higher-education training curricula in the discipline of psychology, followed by brief semi-structured interviews with those responsible for the initial training of psychologists. We also carried out an online survey targeting career counsellors from public and private education and employment sectors, and an equivalent survey for psychology students in higher education programmes. The results of each of these steps are summarised below.



### 14.3. Training pathways for career counsellors

Career guidance and counselling activities in Portugal are carried out by psychologists. The main reason for this option is the assumption that activation and support for career development should take place in the context of the activation of psychological development in general (Campos, 1980; Pelletier; Noiseux and Bujold, 1974; Vondracek; Ford and Porfeli, 2014). Assistance to career construction is conceived within the broader framework of helping people to elaborate and execute a life project in all dimensions. It consists of specialised help in the process of identity construction and career self-regulation. The focus is on supporting career decision-making, but also on coping with transitions, and in preparing individuals for the working role in a variety of contexts: in school as a student, at home in the specifics of domestic tasks, during working life, or even as a volunteer in the community. In this context, the dichotomy between information provision and guidance or counselling, or between educational and vocational guidance, no longer makes sense. The different modalities of career intervention - self-administered activities, information, class interventions, career self-management workshops, individual or group counselling, career development programmes, consultations with parents, teachers, employers – are part of the same psychological intervention strategy. This psychological intervention can be more or less broad, in terms of goals and activities, depending on the context in which the professional operates, client needs, and the resources available. Depending on the case, the psychologist may use one, several, or even all types of intervention.

It is also understood that the role of a career counsellor is distinct from that of teachers, trainer(s), family member(s), colleagues, mentor(s) or even employer(s). Careers counsellors must differentiate themselves from these other profiles with educational, relational or labour responsibility, because the mission of career counsellors is to support clients' identity construction in the context of a specialised helping relationship based on the presence of the same professional throughout the whole process (Campos, 1980; Guichard, 2004; Savickas, 2019; Savickas et al., 2010). However, teachers, trainers, relatives, colleagues and friends, and even mentors and employers, can be multiple and coexist in the same temporal space (Campos, 1976; 1980). Without denying the importance of all these other agents, since they play a role in shaping and informing intentional environments for the career development of all citizens, psychologists specialised in vocational psychology and career development have the necessary conditions to help, and to be better translator-interpreters, of individuals' multiple relationships and conflicts in the educational, formative and occupational contexts in which their careers are embedded. They can also help and catalyse



the relationships between the various educational, relational, and working contexts in which individuals move, as well as institutional and government policies, creating or improving conditions for the career development of all individuals, at any stage in life.

With this career services conception in mind, Portuguese career counsellors operate in schools, colleges, employment centres and vocational training institutions, companies, human resources agencies, clinics, and community projects <sup>(68)</sup>. In its more recent historical development, the training pathways of psychologists working in career guidance, has followed two main routes <sup>(69)</sup>. The first precedes the establishment of the Bologna process (Bologna Process Committee, 1999) in Portuguese higher education, and the creation of the Portuguese Psychologists' Association in 2008. Professionals working in the field who followed this pathway have at least a degree in psychology, corresponding to five years of higher education. The degree in psychology has a one-year internship in a professional context, supervised by a university lecturer and a more experienced psychologist working in the internship context. In the access to jobs involving career counsellor tasks, priority is given to hiring psychology graduates with a curricular internship in school and educational psychology, counselling and human development, or work and organisational psychology. This is because of the greater attention given to the career problems and techniques of career intervention in these areas, when compared with other practical training areas (Presidência do Conselho de Ministros, 2020).

The second training path, currently the only available option for new aspiring psychologists, follows the regulations of the Portuguese Psychologists' Association, with the entry into force of its statutes, in 2010, updating Law No 57/2008 (4 September) and finally revised in Law No 138/2015 (7 September). The regulation of the profession stipulates that aspiring psychologists must meet three conditions:

- (a) have a higher education degree (bachelor) in psychology, equivalent to 180 ECTS;
- (b) have a higher education degree (master) in psychology, equivalent to 120 ECTS;

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<sup>(68)</sup> In the school context, all practitioners are qualified psychologists. Practitioners working in PES could have a background in psychology or sociology and may have completed a nine month course in career guidance.

<sup>(69)</sup> Also see under quality assurance, training and qualifications in the inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices in Portugal (Cedefop, 2020).



- (c) complete one year of supervised practice, corresponding to 60 ECTS, in one of three defined areas of expertise: clinical and health psychology, educational psychology, or work, social and organisational psychology (Ordem dos Psicólogos Portugueses, 2016).

These regulations were defined in accordance with the European diploma in psychology (EUROPsy), which, in turn, is in line with the curriculum reorganisation brought by the Bologna process. This means the initial degree in psychology now amounts to three years of study, and can be directly linked to a two-year master programme, leading to an integrated master in psychology; alternatively, it may require the enrolment of the student in a new, non-integrated master course in psychology.

#### 14.4. Psychology curricula for career practice

The analysis of almost 90 higher education psychology curricula in Portugal indicates that the reality of education and training for career practice in the country remains close to what was reported in the Cordeiro et al. (2018) study. Their analysis of the prevalence of designated career psychology curriculum units, as with our findings, revealed the lack of programme content focused on the use of ICT in career interventions.

Cordeiro et al. (2018) identified 89 higher education psychology programmes from 31 institutions throughout the country, distributed over the three cycles of studies including undergraduate, master and PhD. From these, 26 are degrees (29.2%), eight of which are from public higher education institutions and 18 from private ones; five are integrated master degrees (5.6%), four in public institutions and one in a private college; the remaining masters ( $n=47$ ; 52.8%) are non-integrated, from 17 public institutions and 30 private ones. In the third cycle of studies, there are 11 doctoral programs in psychology (12.4%), nine in public institutions, and two in private ones. With respect to career development and counselling topics, Cordeiro et al. (2018) found that, of the 26 degrees in psychology, only three offered curriculum units in career psychology; all the integrated master degrees in psychology contain curriculum units of career psychology; from the 47 master degrees in psychology, only 12 included the teaching of career psychology; and, from the 11 PhD programmes identified, only one presents curriculum units in career psychology. The teaching of ICT-based career interventions is minimal or even non-existent, in these programmes (see below).



## 14.5. Responses from professors in initial training

In a second phase, we conducted a brief interview with five professors responsible for career psychology programmes at three public universities (Lisbon, Évora and Algarve). When asked whether career counsellors training in their institution included ICT use their work, different answers were given, presented in Table 1. Two of the university interviewees considered that the use of ICT for psychological interventions was not a priority; the third signals the presence of a unit on psychological assessment and counselling in which ICT is somehow approached.

Table 1. **ICT in counsellor training in three public university career psychology programmes (two interview questions)**

|                       | Question 1:<br>Is ICT included in the<br>programme?   | Question 2:<br>What do you plan on doing<br>next?  |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| University of Évora   | Not directly - these skills are acquired throughout the course (undergraduate and master), within the scope of several curricular units.  | 'The pandemic situation gave rise to a greater concern with the psychological intervention carried out digitally and the various CUs seek to include these issues in their classes (since March 2021).'  |
| University of Lisboa  | Does not include. Digital competences are the responsibility of each one and the training and development of these competences are carried out outside the curriculum structure (e.g. extracurricular training).  | 'I think it has to be. But be careful! There is a risk of distorting the essence of the psychological relationship - listening to the other and giving a useful sense to guidance and counselling.'  |
| University of Algarve | 'Yes, the master degree in educational psychology offers an optional course unit – internet psychology and psycho-pedagogical processes – whose main objective is to envisage a current comprehensive approach to research carried out within the scope of psychology and the use of social software technologies.' | 'It has been a concern to focus these themes on issues related to psychological assessment and counselling, the use of online psychological assessment instruments and, in general, forms of psychological intervention and monitoring / counselling through the use of digital technologies.' |

Source: Authors.

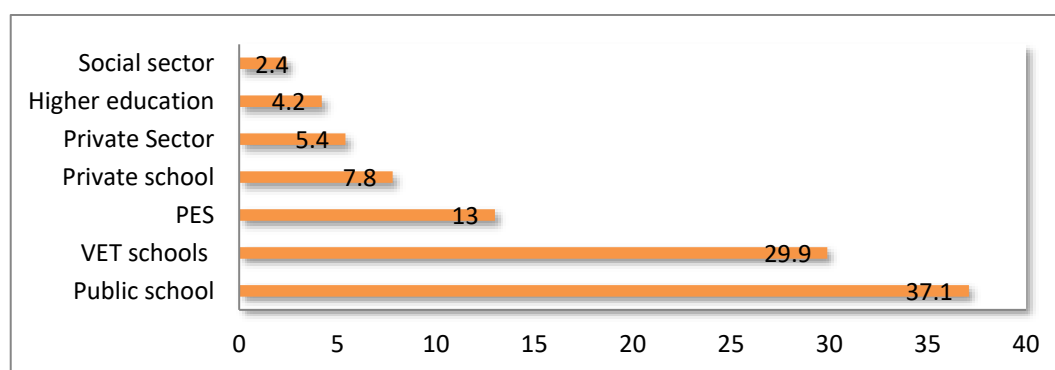


## 14.6. Responses from career practitioners and students

In the third phase of the research, a survey was conducted and a total of 168 practitioners responded from different settings in the public, private, and civil society sectors. Aspects addressed in the survey included the sector of activity; duration of service in guidance and career development and guidance; tools and strategies to continue the activity with the target audiences with whom they worked; difficulties experienced; and importance of digital skills for professional development.

Most practitioners worked in public schools. Others provided guidance in various settings (in descending order): vocational education schools, public employment services (PES), private schools, companies (private sector), higher education and the social sector.

Figure 1. **Respondents' (guidance practitioner) sector of professional activity (%)**



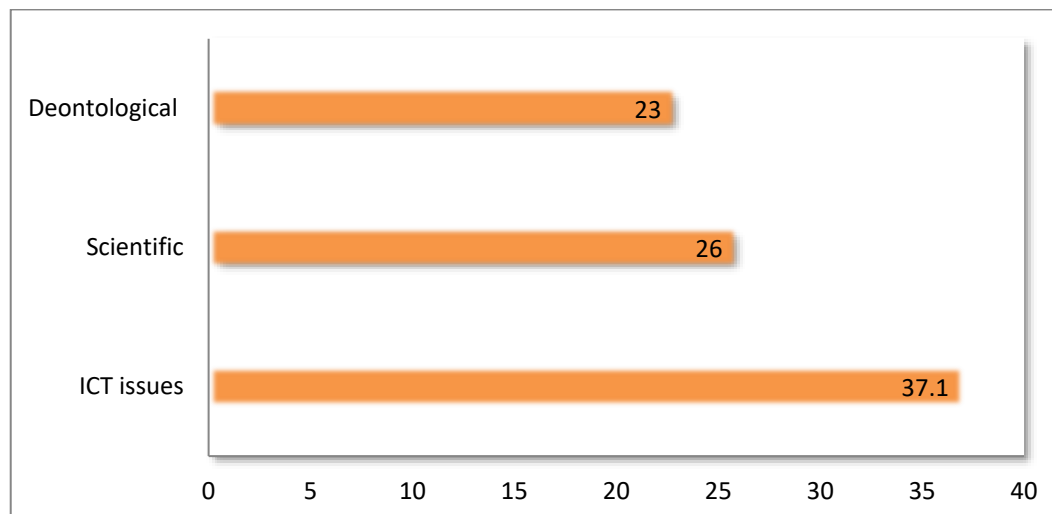
Source: Authors.

Most of the practitioners had been working as career counsellors for more than 10 years (66%), and smaller proportions for six to 10 years (10.2%), one to five years (16.9%), and a small group for less than one year (6.6%).

When asked about the difficulties experienced during lockdown, the major difficulties respondents noted, in descending order, were: the use of ICT in itself; technical-scientific issues such as group management; online psychological assessment and lack of career measures adapted to remote intervention; and deontological (ethical) issues.



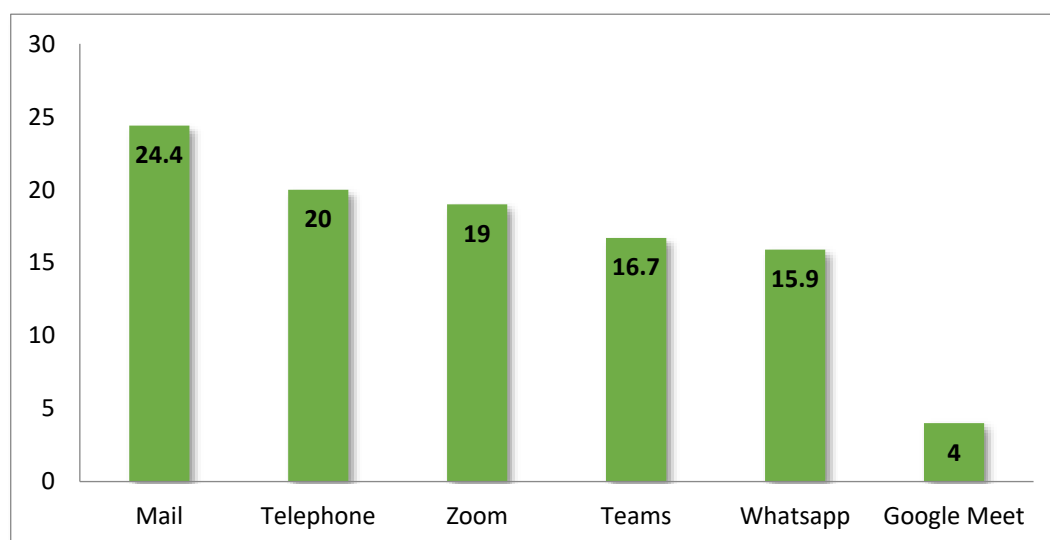
Figure 2. Difficulties experienced by practitioners during lockdown (%)



Source: Authors.

With respect to the digital/remote communication tools practitioners used to interact with their target audience, the responses indicated that email, telephone, and Zoom were the most used.

Figure 3. Digital/remote tools practitioners found useful under lockdown (%)



Source: Authors.

Respondents were also asked about to what extent they found digital skills useful for their work and professional development. The responses were mostly positive. All of them considered digital skills to be extremely useful (56.9%), very useful (34.7%) or useful (7.8%), with only a few who did not value them.

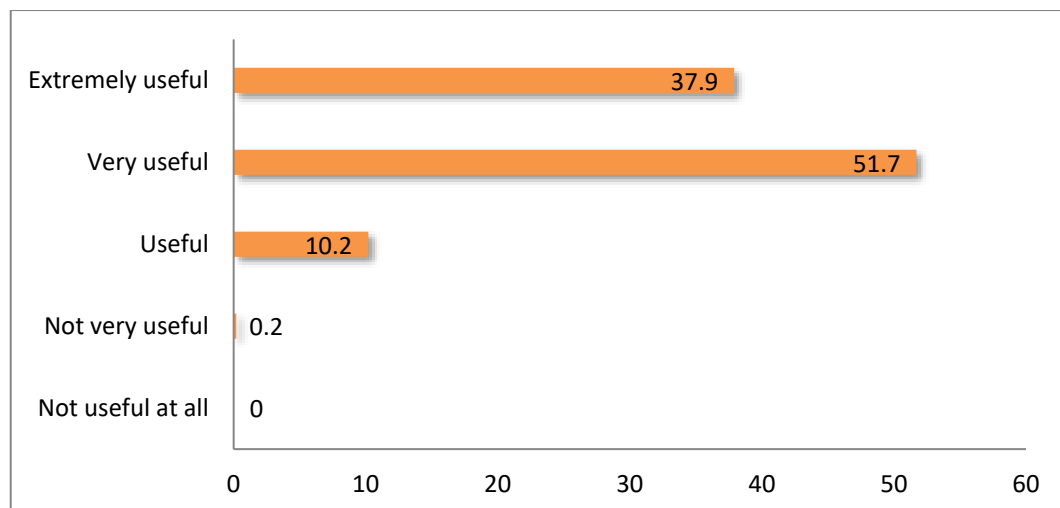


In the survey conducted with psychology students, the sample included 29 students from the relevant master and PhD programmes. Three similar questions were posed in relation to their training and future occupation: 'Does your training address digital skills?' (yes/no); 'What kind of digital-related contents do you want included in the curriculum?'; and 'To what extent do you find digital skills useful for your future work?'.

Of these respondents, in slight contrast to the previous finding on whether digital skills and ICT in guidance delivery is covered in career guidance training curricula, 34% of psychology students replied that their training did address digital skills (outside of their higher education programmes/curriculum) <sup>(70)</sup>, while 66% reported that these skills were not covered.

Referring back to the three types of difficulties practitioner-respondents faced during lockdown in Figure 2 (deontological, scientific, and ICT-related), psychology students similarly responded that contents pertaining to ICT were the most preferred dimensions of digital contents needing to be included in the training curriculum, followed by contents with scientific (34%), and deontological dimensions (24%). In the same way that practitioners responded positively to the usefulness of digital skills for providing career guidance, the largest proportion of students answered that these skills would be extremely (37.9%) or very useful (51.7%), while only about 10% found them useful.

Figure 4. **Usefulness of digital skills for students' future occupation (%)**



Source: Authors.

<sup>(70)</sup> [Training courses in digital skills](#) were provided by the Portuguese Psychologists' Association, as well as [webinars](#) and guidelines for psychology services delivery mediated by ICT.



## 14.7. Summary and conclusions

The study addressed four questions presented at the start of the chapter in relation to the challenges faced by career practitioners during lockdown: the value they assign to digital skills in their work and training, and to what extent training pathways include content related to ICT and practitioner digital skills. Professionals responsible for training also responded on the existing training and any gaps in training provision.

Career guidance and counselling activities in Portugal are most often carried out by psychologists. The main reason for this option is the assumption that activation and support for career development should take place in the context of the activation of psychological development in general. The pandemic has brought about changes in the ways in which interventions are made available, bringing a strong increase in interventions at a distance. Despite the digital skills gap, the career professionals tried to adapt, during the confinement phase, using alternative ways of making interventions available. The study found that to face these common challenges among colleagues, self-training and the use of recommendations produced by the Portuguese Psychologists' Association were the most used strategies. Different ways of interacting were employed including more traditional channels like telephone and email, but also platforms like Zoom and Teams.

According to interviews during this study, the clients stayed engaged; in some situations the number of absences was even reduced. This happened in PES as well as in schools and VET institutions. Even those working with children or young people under the age of 18 did not report finding any resistance/difficulties on the part of parents or guardians. The major difficulties evidenced by the practitioners were the use of ICT in itself; this was followed by technical-scientific issues such as group management, online psychological assessment, lack of career measures adapted to remote intervention, and deontological (ethical) issues. Digital skills were valued and considered as an added value for counselling activity and professional development by career counsellors from different sectors. Despite the fact that the most of those who answered the survey had been working for many years, and did not belong to the generation of digital natives, the responses were mostly positive: most of the practitioners considered digital skills to be extremely important or important, with only a few who did not value their use. The students surveyed responded in a similar fashion.

Both students and those in charge of training, recognised that the curricula of the courses that enable students to enter the occupation of career counsellor do not include digital skills. From the 11 PhD programmes identified, only one



offered units in career psychology. According to those interviewed, only one master degree in educational psychology offers a relevant optional course unit - internet psychology and psycho-pedagogical processes - whose main objective is to envisage a current comprehensive approach to research carried out within the scope of psychology and the use of social software technologies.

The teaching of ICT-based career interventions seems to be minimal, or even non-existent, in Portuguese psychology curricula. Some of those interviewed who were responsible for the training of career counsellors recognised the need for curricula to include digital skills but have doubts about the full advantages of ICT-based interventions, especially regarding the risk of dehumanising the support relationship.

Given the current digitalisation context, the advances in research and practice in the use of ICT in career guidance and counselling, and the results of the study briefly presented in this chapter, lead us to conclude with three main points: it is no longer possible to disregard the use of ICT and social media when providing guidance interventions; practitioners are aware of this new reality despite the lack of relevant content in their training programmes; and it is important to consider integrating these learning contents in the career psychology training curricula.

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## CHAPTER 15.

# Career guidance in the digital context: trends in Germany

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### 15.1. Introduction

Professionalism and training of career guidance practitioners in Germany takes place in a specific, historically anchored institutional setting attributing a strong role to the Public Employment Service (PES) Germany, the Bundesagentur für Arbeit (BA) (Federal Employment Agency) (PES Germany). After legal reform ended its monopoly of vocational guidance and job placement in the 1990s, the landscape of career guidance provision for educational and vocational choices, employment and social inclusion became more diverse. The regions (States) are responsible for major areas of educational guidance, municipalities offer guidance with a focus on adult learning, universities have set up their own career services, private providers offer career guidance and coaching, and contracted services support vulnerable groups with in-depth guidance for social inclusion (Cedefop, 2020; Schiersmann and Weber, 2013). Given the federalised system in education and shared responsibilities with municipalities in labour market integration, no national binding legal requirements exist for qualification in career guidance. Digitalisation of services has been triggered by contact restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, transforming guidance delivery (NFB, 2021) in a country that is not among the forerunners in Europe regarding digital government (European Commission, 2019).

As the article shows, the increasingly digital context is altering the concept of professional guidance provision towards 'career guidance plus digital', yielding changes in the training of guidance counsellors in Germany. Following an overview of trends in training paths, this article analyses recent developments in

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Germany with a view to changing job profiles and training responses in times of accelerating digital transformation.

## 15.2. Diversification and increasing professionalisation

Contrasting with a legally based obligation for the PES Germany to offer career guidance corresponding to the needs of the counselees (including consultancy for employers), the qualification of career guidance counsellors is not legally regulated in Germany. As result, the diverse array of recruitment requirements to enter service as career guidance counsellor mirrors the broad landscape of providers, with numerous practitioners working in the field not always having a specific qualification. Nevertheless, encouraging trends towards increasing professionalism can be observed since the mid-2000s.

Traditionally, vocational guidance practitioners at the PES Germany had to complete a tertiary-level-qualification dedicated to career guidance comprising intensive training in counselling, while employment counsellors completed a separate dedicated track. Two categories of career guidance counsellors operate in the PES Germany: vocational guidance practitioners offering career guidance for young people and so-called 'placement officers' offering guidance and mediation services for the unemployed. The picture changed when PES Germany integrated private-sector approaches to human resource management, triggered by the focus on New public management, and underwent major organisational reform (2002) to become a service- and client-oriented agency. In line with the Bologna process aim to make qualifications more comparable across Europe, Germany adjusted its qualification, creating two bachelor programmes for PES specialist staff in 200; this applies to both vocational guidance practitioners and employment counsellors as well as other specialists. At the same time, the new Bachelor courses introduced at the PES university (University of Applied Labour Studies, German Federal Employment Agency) strengthened professional guidance and counselling for employment counsellors adding a new track for guidance counsellors for social inclusion (case managers, such as employment counsellors working with clients with multiple problems). Recruitment became more flexible and access paths more varied for all staff. Vocational guidance counsellors and employment counsellors, for example, are recruited externally from various backgrounds and through internal promotion and further training (Kraatz, 2011).

During the last decade, training for all career guidance services provided by PES Germany has been streamlined, strengthening client-oriented guidance and counselling with the objective of enabling clients to take informed decisions and



to implement them. A common, research-based counselling concept provides the basis for this as an elaboration of certain common key principles and fundamental differences in respect to objectives, job tasks and counselling processes.

Issued in 2010, this counselling concept can be considered a milestone for ensuring a coherent guidance offer given diverse recruitment channels. It has been used to train more than 30 000 practitioners and team leaders. An updated version will be published soon (Box 1):

**Box 1. Counselling concept of the German PES**

The updated version will have five central objectives:

- (a) to define counselling for different life stages and situations as a central service of the PES in dynamic working environments;
- (b) to create transparency for internal and external stakeholders about the foundation of counselling in the PES;
- (c) to provide practitioners with an updated and consolidated well-founded framework as well as an easily accessible inventory of counselling methods and techniques;
- (d) to further develop success criteria and quality standards of counselling;
- (e) to create an up-to-date professional basis for the development of detailed counselling concepts and training units.

The main features of counselling are based on key elements and principles of action, particularly client orientation, a constructive working relationship, integration of process and professional perspectives, expertise, and counselling competence to develop solutions. The counselling approach focuses on establishing and maintaining a respectful and appreciative communication. It is resource- and solution-oriented and guided by principles of ensuring reflexivity and transparency during the whole process.

The counselling concept distinguishes between two basic formats, plus one under development:

- (a) counselling for orientation and decision-making, which helps young people and adults to identify their vocational goals, interests, qualifications and abilities and supports the decision-making process;
- (b) counselling accompanying integration, which assists jobseekers in the development of integration strategies and their implementation;
- (c) as a third counselling perspective, holistic employment-oriented counselling is being further developed to support people in complex life situations to enable return to the labour market and social inclusion.

*Source: Rübner and Weber (2021).*

This concept provides the basis for all training for professionals, with counselling tasks in the BA, and takes account of specific features of the different settings (vocational guidance for orientation, case management and employment



counselling for labour market integration). The updated and reviewed version will also strengthen digital counselling.

Looking beyond PES Germany, a trend towards an increasing offer in tertiary-level qualifications and continuing education in career guidance can be observed. A study by Schiersmann and Weber (2016) identified 21 master courses in addition to the two bachelor programmes described above, and one master programme at the PES university. Standards for education quality have been included in legally binding regional standards. Since the early 2000s, the initiative of the RQZ (regional qualification centres for educational guidance and skills development) has provided continuing education for practitioners combining an academic approach with a strong practice orientation, resulting in a certificate of advanced studies: 15 ECTS (NQF 6).

However, this positive trend in terms of availability of training for guidance in the context of developing quality standards is thwarted by a number of structural factors not always favourable for investing in training of human resources. Examples of challenges are the prevalence of project-based financing (ESF projects or State projects) affecting sustainability, a lack of regulation, the diversity of quality management and quality assurance across the guidance provision landscape, and considerable staff volatility due to fixed-term contracts.

### 15.3. Digital transformation of career guidance in PES Germany

Digitalisation strategies for career guidance can vary greatly in nature and scope. To be able to assess where PES Germany stands in this process and what development steps are planned, three strategic areas can be examined, guided by the question of whether career guidance is provided with or without the intervention by a counsellor:

- (a) digital self-service tools, without intervention by a counsellor, including a wide range of tools increasingly integrated in multifunctional platforms such as information databases, online self-assessments, and job portals. These different offers can also be embedded in a process-oriented approach for different topics and concerns (career orientation, return, further education (Kraatz, 2021)). In the future, a further distinction is likely to become increasingly important for digital offers: the distinction between AI and non-AI-supported services;
- (b) online guidance and counselling means that the practitioner interacts with clients via digital media, such as email, chat or video. These differ by their temporal structuring (synchronous/asynchronous), their form of



communication (written/oral) and the number of clients addressed (individuals/groups) (Engelhardt, 2018). Social media open up peer-oriented approaches that can be initiated or accompanied by counsellors (Sampson, Kettunen and Vuorinen, 2020);

- (c) digitally enriched face-to-face counselling is a component of digital strategies increasingly integrating digital self-service tools in the concrete counselling session. For example, to enable mobile face-to-face counselling in different locations, practitioners need appropriate hardware and software equipment (such as tablets, digital guidance tools). For practical implementation, it is crucial that they have enough opportunities and competences to integrate the digital resources into their counselling practice (see Section 4).

On the basis of these three strategic areas, it is possible to assess the status and the planned further development of digital guidance and counselling services in the German PES, divided into two target groups: young people (14-24 years) and adults (see Table 1).

Table 1. **Status and planned development of digital guidance and counselling services in the German PES**

| Strategic areas                    | Specific approaches   | Youth   | Adults   |
|------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Digital self-service               | Information<br>Online self-assessment<br>Search<br>Administration | national+<br>national+<br>national+<br>NA     | national+<br>piloting*<br>national+<br>national+ |
| Online guidance and counselling    | Video<br>Email<br>Social media                                    | piloting*<br>explorative(*)<br>explorative(*) | piloting*<br>explorative(*)<br>explorative(*)    |
| Digitally enriched f2f counselling | Extended hardware<br>Digital tools                                | piloting*<br>explorative(*)                   | NA<br>NA   |

NB: National+ = Available nationally in all German *Länder*, NA/ = not available, Piloting\* = practices that are nationwide in introduction/piloting, Explorative(\*) = there are local initiatives or exploratory studies not on national scale

Source: Authors.

Looking at the state of digitalisation, PES Germany has put a broad range of digital self-service tools in place. In recent years, it has revamped its careers portal, strengthening a process-oriented and problem-solving presentation and integrating the related information and databases (Cedefop, 2020). Examples are the [careers orientation platforms for young people](#) and for [adults](#) as well as the [job platform](#) for jobseekers and unemployed together with strengthened e-administration.



In the other two areas, online and digitally enriched guidance and counselling, the PES is currently in a phase of intensive development, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the related contact restrictions. While the decision for nationwide introduction has already been adopted in some areas (e. g., video guidance, hardware equipment for classroom events), in other areas new approaches are being piloted at local level, partly supported by implementation studies (such as use of social media to offer peer counselling). In 2021, the focus of the German PES will be on the gradual piloting, evaluation and subsequent rolling-out of video counselling. In the current pilot phase, three target groups are addressed: young people, people with disabilities and the long-term unemployed (Bundesagentur für Arbeit – BA, 2020).

The German PES continues to consider personal face-to-face counselling on the site as a central reference point for supporting and accompanying its clients. In times of digitalisation, this comprises assisting them in selecting, accessing, and using good quality ICT applications that are appropriate for their needs (Sampson, Kettunen and Vuorinen, 2020). This raises the question of how digital offers and tools are included in the counselling session. According to content analysis of counselling sessions carried out in 2015, digital self-services were used in 60 percent of all sessions, mainly to improve information search or to inform the clients about tools and applications (Rübner, 2017). However, the study found only a few examples in which counsellors systematically analysed young people's experiences with their internet search. Online tools were also rarely used to support the counselling process (Box 2).

**Box 2. Exploring a digital tool as part of the counselling session**

In an explorative field study (Rübner and Höft, 2019) counsellors for young people were equipped with a tablet computer with access to an online self-assessment tool. The tool measures the career choice readiness of young people based on their reference group. Clients were asked to conduct, shortly before or during the counselling session, the five-minute self-assessment on the tablet. The results were visualised by the tool for different dimensions of career choice readiness (for example information and decision). The results were then discussed during the meeting and helped to deepen specific questions. Personal counselling can particularly help clients with a low level of readiness to make an autonomous choice and use of information and ICT resources (Sampson, Kettunen & Vuorinen, 2020). The overall promising results of this field study support the idea of integrating additional digital tools more systematically into counselling and guidance services, not only into one-on-one but also into group settings.

*Source: Rübner and Höft (2019).*

Taking up results from this analysis, PES Germany will integrate digital counselling as a cross-sectional task in its updated counselling concept (Box 1).



#### 15.4. Digital dimension for career guidance training in Germany

The evidence presented above demonstrates the need to adjust training concepts for career guidance counsellors: the set of traditional career guidance competences has to be complemented by integrating the digital dimension (Kraatz, 2021). As developments in the PES Germany show, rethinking the concept of career guidance and counselling is work in progress. Most training offers are of a more technical nature, covering the general use of new programmes or IT-tools, not how to systematically integrate these into work with clients.

An analysis of the current offers for staff training available at the internal learning platform World of learning (*BA-Lernwelt*) of the Federal Employment Agency shows that the topic of digitalisation is being addressed. Using the keyword 'digitalisation', a search resulted in 86 training offers. However, hardly any training offers are dedicated to the provision of digital guidance services or to the integration of digital tools into the counselling session or service. Of the offers that are linked to the keyword 'digitalisation', the majority (48) focus on non-digital topics like law or face-to-face communication without a prominent digital component; eleven contain knowledge on organisation or leadership; eight comprise digitalisation in the world of work; six focus on 'learning' in the digital space; nine focus on digital administration (using digital programmes or instruments); three focus on software and digital tools for guidance practitioners; and two focus on how to work with digital media resources.

Looking at the training concepts of other career guidance providers in Germany confirms this finding. The focus of training on digital competences tends to be on the use of individual tools. The creation of digital resources by career guidance counsellors, such as digital marketing or digital presence in social-media or shaping a digital environment for their services (e. g. digital classrooms for group-guidance or group-information), is a topic to be developed in the future. While increasingly relevant for independent career guidance counsellors, the creation of digital resources by counsellors working in an organisation needs further analysis on how to embed these into the organisational strategy and processes. Overall, coherent integration of the digital transformation into guidance services, concepts and training remains a task for the future.



#### **15.4.1. Shaping new training approaches for counselling in the digital context**

The debate on digitalisation is neither new nor is it restricted to career guidance. It should be discussed in the broader focus on digital skills for all people (European Commission, 2016; OECD, 2005) and integrate knowledge from neighbouring professions. For example, one field to learn from is psycho-social counselling, where more than 20 years of discussion on digitalisation of services resulted in a body of publications on competences for and quality of digital services (Chester and Glass, 2006; Eichenberg and Kühne, 2014; Reindl, 2018).

To conclude from this research, digital competences for career guidance counsellors comprise three levels:

- (a) basic digital literacy: technical skills to handle, create and adapt technology, understand how technology changes the way we interact, understand how technology can be used to accomplish broader goals, incorporate technology in an active dialogue with the environment (European Commission, 2016; see also OECD, 2005);
- (b) specific digital skills for the context of career guidance: e. g., handling of digital applications in client administration, use of digital communication tools, platforms, tests, working in the digital space (European Commission, 2014; NICE et al., 2016);
- (c) skills in blended or integrated, client-oriented guidance service in a multi-channel environment including advanced digital skills for specific guidance settings, e. g. content creation for social media, use of AI (European Commission, 2014; Kettunen; Sampson and Vuorinen, 2015; Sampson, Kettunen and Vuorinen, 2020). An integrated service model and processes set up by management is a prerequisite for such services (see Kraatz, 2021, in this volume).

Transversal competences and the work on attitudes are also necessary, including a 'learning-to-learn' attitude and reflexivity: continuous self-reflection with a view to own mindset, behaviour and adaptability to new circumstances (OECD, 2005; Schiersmann et al., 2012). In addition to training, appropriate management is required attributing effective value to the face-to-face or digital forms of personal guidance and providing the necessary resources like digital knowledge management, hardware, and software.

#### **15.4.2. Integrating the digital dimension: the HdBA certification programme**

Researchers at the PES university are currently reviewing and updating the counselling concept (Box 1) to integrate the digital dimension systematically in a process-oriented perspective, with a focus on counselling sessions (Rübner M.



and Weber, forthcoming). Digital guidance competences will be considered as transversal competences forming the basis for professional service.

Further, a team at PES University in cooperation with specialists at the Federal Employment Agency launched in 2020 academic training for up to 6000 guidance practitioners based on an agreed competence framework (Weber, 2020a). All participants are employees of the PES and career practitioners, working either with young people and adults in career orientation or with people with disabilities. The learning programme is embedded into and related to daily work situations. It includes strong elements of self-directed learning for training participants, use of technology in a blended-learning process and professional supervision. Learning is tailored to practitioners' individual needs, starting with a self-assessment of existing competences and setting goals for the individual learning process (Weber, 2020b). Digital competences are part of the curriculum and will be trained through intensive use of digital elements throughout all learning modules.

One of the training modules focuses explicitly on digital career guidance and counselling (CGC) competences helping learners to achieve the following key learning outcome: the career guidance counsellor is able to work in different career guidance formats and settings (e. g., blended-counselling, digital guidance, guidance supported by digital and social media). The table below gives a rough overview of the knowledge, abilities and attitudes forming the basis of the training module, which will be issued by the end of 2021.

Table 2. **Module on digital competences for Career guidance counselling (CGC)**

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>Knowledge</b> | <p>The career guidance counsellor knows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• digitalisation as trend and challenge in the world of work</li> <li>• digital media and tools and the possibilities of digital CGC services</li> <li>• digital and analogue forms of information and knowledge management, especially in/with social media (internal and external)</li> </ul> |
| <b>Ability</b>   | <p>The CGC practitioner is able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• deal competently with digital media in different CGC formats (online communication, group-situation, social media)</li> <li>• apply different digital instruments/tools to deliver CGC (creation, application, supporting clients with technical issues)</li> </ul>                                |



|          |   |
|----------|---|
| Attitude | <p>The CGC practitioner is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• open to digital change and critically examines the opportunities and risks</li><li>• prepared to adapt own actions to different situations/settings</li><li>• prepared to reflect on own CGC services and their effects in different contexts</li></ul> |
|----------|---|

Source: Authors.

To conclude, the implementation of digital media in career guidance in the German PES is developing. The COVID-19 situation significantly intensified efforts (see Kraatz, 2021, in this volume). Training modules may support this development. Such offers need to overcome a specific challenge: many career guidance practitioners in Germany are not keen on digitalisation, seeing a part of their traditional tasks replaced by self-service tools (and increasingly by artificial intelligence), especially in relation to information provision. It will be crucial, therefore, to create the conditions for career guidance counsellors to transform reluctance into a forward-looking attitude thinking 'beyond the either/or' (NICE et al., 2016; OECD, 2005). Supporting future-oriented professionalism with a focus on quality, competent guidance and counselling will foster both clients' career management skills and wider social justice, if sufficient supporting measures are provided to compensate for social disadvantage. Professional guidance is a prerequisite independent from the channel of delivery, online or offline or both.

## 15.5. Conclusions

Which lessons can be learned from recent developments in Germany? Professionalisation of career guidance has been advancing in Germany during the last decade, including career guidance for unemployed individuals. PES Germany elaborated a counselling concept based on common core principles and techniques while specifying the content for specific objectives: orientation/decision-making and labour market integration including for clients with multiple barriers. It would be interesting to test core elements of these concepts in other contexts or other countries. More than 20 master courses provide the opportunity for a tertiary-level qualification in career guidance. Digital transformation in the PES Germany has involved considerable widespread use of digital self-service tools, and increasingly, video-counselling.

Overall, digitalisation has created new training needs for career guidance counsellors working in the diverse guidance settings in Germany. Evidence from research has shown that the online experience needs to be more coherently integrated into counselling processes.



We therefore suggest considering the following points:

- (a) going beyond the technical issues of digital forms of guidance: it is important that the introduction of a new digital form of guidance does not focus exclusively on technical issues and data protection, but that other aspects are also considered in the design phase and during implementation: For which clients and which topics is the new digital form of guidance suitable? How do clients and practitioners respond? Which additional qualifications are required? What is the added value of a new digital tool for guidance provision? The introduction of new technologies into operational processes should therefore be backed up by science and research;
- (b) exploring the contribution of career guidance to coping with the risks of digital transformation of the world of work: not only is guidance becoming digitalised, but the world of work as a whole, and in this context a further 'flexibilisation' of employment, employment biographies and life arrangements, is taking place, which can be accompanied and supported by (digital) guidance;
- (c) strengthening blended counselling approaches: it is important that digital services are not limited to information provision and isolated tools for specific groups. It might be more promising to integrate the use of ICT systematically into existing lifelong guidance services and at the same time to adapt guidance services to ICT (ELGPN, 2015). Interdepartmental coordination and strategies are required, within institutions and between the different providers of lifelong career guidance. Digital PES services should be part of a broader, coherent national e-government strategy (NFB, 2021; Sampson, Kettunen and Vuorinen, 2020);
- (d) designing training programmes for students in training and for guidance professionals: we assume that the professionals of today and of tomorrow are a heterogeneous group regarding their interest, knowledge and experience in digital media and ICT. Rethinking professionalism of career guidance in the digital context means redesigning training programmes for students in training and also concepts of continuous professional development for practitioners, with a clear idea of how to address the different individual needs. Setting goals for the individual learning-path and peer work in teams close to practice are relevant (Weber, 2020b). A didactic design that allows transfer from training to practice integrating reflexive elements could make training not only more effective, but also more attractive for participants.



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# DIGITAL TRANSITIONS IN LIFELONG GUIDANCE: RETHINKING CAREERS PRACTITIONER PROFESSIONALISM

A CareersNet expert collection

This collection is a step towards updating Cedefop's work on professionalising career guidance since the publication of *Professionalising career guidance: practitioner competences and qualification routes in Europe* over 10 years ago. The current papers consist of diverse authored contributions from independent CareersNet guidance experts and contributors to Cedefop's 2020 CareersNet meeting. Changing career guidance delivery and career learning contexts, responding to widespread labour market changes and digital transformation of services, lead to new challenges, developments, and opportunities. Papers focus on the broad theme of professionalising the career guidance workforce and the particular competences fit for the digital and wider societal context. Not all authors place direct focus on technology-related themes. Attention is also paid to developments prior to, surrounding, or triggered by, the pandemic crisis. Theoretical/conceptual and overview papers are included, while several present illustrations of standards in national/regional guidance systems or particular training or service developments.

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