![OCCAY logo - Online Career Counselling Academy]

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PR1 - OCCAY Self-assessment grid and needs analysis of digital skills

Executive Summary

Erasmus+: KA2 - Cooperation Partnerships | VET

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The project

The COVID-19 pandemic and its measures to prevent further spreading of the virus had and have a massive impact on counselling in career guidance, on the respective institutions as well as on counsellors and counselees across Europe. They have been forced to convert their mostly face-to-face services to a digital setting quasi overnight. Unfortunately, online career guidance was not integrated as a natural part in the range of services before the crisis. After being more than a year in emergency procedures, the necessity of its application has considerably changed. Standard tools made their way into the counselling but missing an integrated and demand-orientated career counselling profile.

Nonetheless, institutions and individuals collected some positive experiences in mostly unstructured and unguided circumstances through a more flexible service design in distance career guidance. Now, institutions and individuals look for guidance, appropriate tools and structured vocational education and providing transparency and transferability in application for a hybrid career counselling concept. It is the time to structurally integrate last year's experiences and take career guidance to the next level: an umbrella strategy to upskill digital skills on processes and tools is needed. Facing the variety of challenges, OCCAY attempts therefore to be an inclusive and modular offer at the same time:

(A) It serves VET institutions providing a tailor-made benchmark system to assess the digital literacy of their counsellors and integrating the digital literacy enhancement strategically within the quality management by a guideline recommendation for a local, regional, national, or even European harmonization.

(B) It serves the individual counsellor by offering with the OCCAY Hybrid Course a demand-orientated tool based on ECVET for European transferability and knowledge transfer and with the OCCAY Platform for Online Career Guidance an innovative all-in-one counselling tool.

(C) All this is encircled with a policy recommendation targeting decision-makers in institutions/organization, public administration, and politics dealing with career guidance to support dissemination, openness, and integration of OCCAY.

The OCCAY's goals coincide with the Digital Education Action Plan of the European Commission, as OCCAY will be (1) an inclusive and modular instrument with its learnings from the Covid-19 pandemic and (2) make one education and training fit for the digital age.

In order to do so, OCCAY will develop the following results:

- **R1 - OCCAY Self-assessment grid and needs analysis of digital skills:** A self-assessment grid on digital skills able to provide an extensive needs analysis to determine the status quo of digital skills in order to develop effective training materials and online consulting tools for career counsellors.
- **R2 - OCCAY Hybrid Flexi Course for career counsellors:** a modular system based on the digital competence framework (DigComp 2.0) with 72 units in sum.
- **R3 - OCCAY Platform for online career guidance:** an online platform which puts together 4 areas related to Online Counselling: 1. communication, 2. information, 3. work tools and 4. counselling tools.
- **R4 - OCCAY Strategy handbook for vocational and educational institutions:** A 30-pages handbook consisted of two parts: The development of a benchmarking procedures framework and a strategy handbook, thus stimulating the organizations to deal with unusual or even uncomfortable themes in their daily work (related always to the online working environment).
- **R5 - OCCAY Policy recommendation for hybrid career counselling on the decision-maker level:** A 10-pages structured recommendation supporting the holistic vocational education and training

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curricula for virtual consultancy by encouraging national financers and decision-makers international level (IAVEG), at EU (in Brussels) and EU agency level (e.g. CEDEFOP) to adopt OCCAY approach.

With its multi-level approach, OCCAY will involve different target groups in its project activities:

- 300 career counsellors testing the self-assessment grid (R1).
- 120 career counsellors participating in the OCCAY Hybrid Flexi Course (R2).
- 20 career counsellors using the potentialities and services of the OCCAY Platform for Online Career Guidance (R3)
- 96 managers and directors of vocational and educational institutions will participate to discuss the strategy handbook and the framework (R4)
- At least 12 European and national politicians as well as at least 12 policy makers will be involved in the development of the recommendations to decision-makers (R5)

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Executive Summary

The current document is an Executive Summary of the results of the **Project Result 1 - OCCAY Self-assessment grid and needs analysis of digital skills.** The main objective of this result was to to determine the status quo of digital skills in the countries involved by the project (Austria, Bulgaria, Germany and Italy) in order to develop effective training materials and online consulting tools for career counsellors.

Thus, under this result, in order to have a clear understanding of the status quo of the digital skills and of target needs, OCCAY developed:

1. **A self-assessment grid** according to DigComp 2.0, allowing to understand the level of digital skills of career cousellors on the 5 areas of DigComp, with the objective of reaching 375 people of the target. The tool overcome its expectations, achieving **440 career counsellors** in all the implementing countries.

2. **Two focus groups of 6 persons each** (involving career counsellors, managers of VET institutions, clients and other relevant stakeholders) in order to include several perspectives in the needs assessment. Also in this case, instead of reaching 24 people, partners successfully involved **39 people**, allowing to gather both contents and perspectives from the different profiles taken into consideration by the project bid.

Here below, the main results are summarized. For further information, please, check the complete report on the project website: www.occay.eu.

Results of Self-Assessment Grid

Through an online self-assessment questionnaire developed within the partnership (https://occay.eu/self-assessment-grid-test/, it can be found in 4 languages – English, German, Bulgarian, Italian), 440 career counsellors self-assessed their digital skills on the 5 areas of competences defined by the DigComp Framework:

- ❑ Information and data literacy
- ❑ Communication and collaboration
- ❑ Digital content creation
- ❑ Safety
- ❑ Problem Solving

The questionnaire provides a final score, based on the score on each above-mentioned areas (for a total of 500 points – 100/area). Based on the final score – expressed in percentage -, career cousellors' profile were assigned to 3 different profiles:

- ▪ Beginner level (0 – 49)
- ▪ Intermediate level (50 – 74)
- ▪ Excellent level (75 – 100)

According to the self-assessment grid, 304 out of 440 Italian, Bulgarian, Austrian and German career counsellors self-**assessed themselves as intermediate** with regards to their digital skills at work. 75 rated themselves as Beginners while 48 only as Excellent. The **average score was in fact of 60 out of 100** (and the "intermediate" range was between 50 and 75), with Austrians scoring the highest score (62), followed by Bulgarians (61), Italians and Germans (59).

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Participants' average score (out of 100)
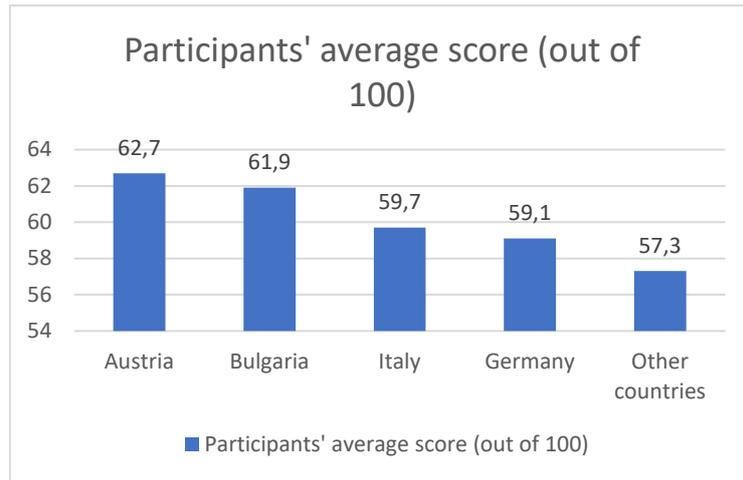
At national level, the main results were the following:

Italy

Austria
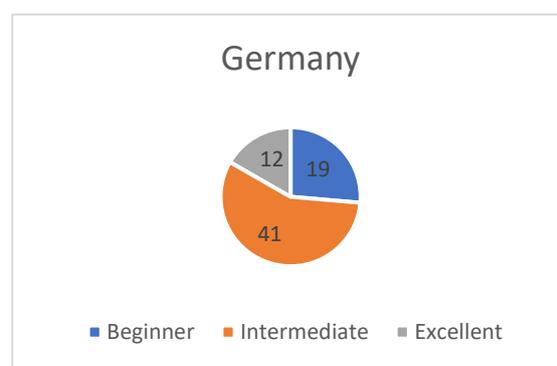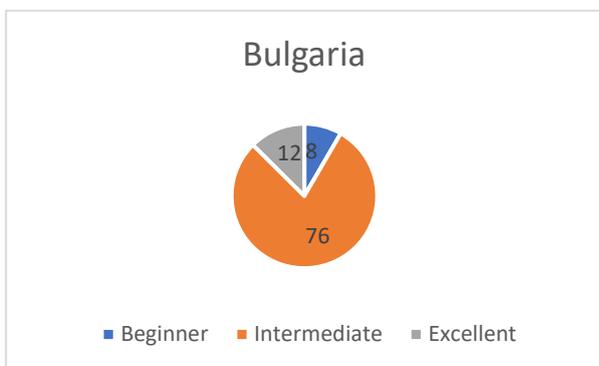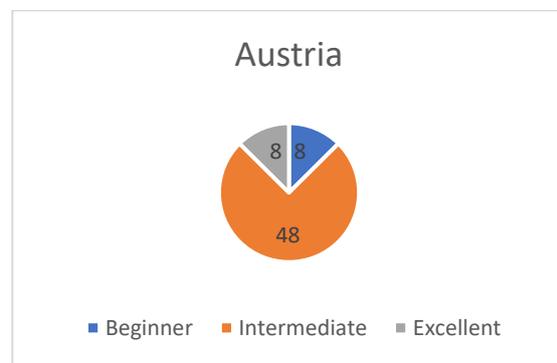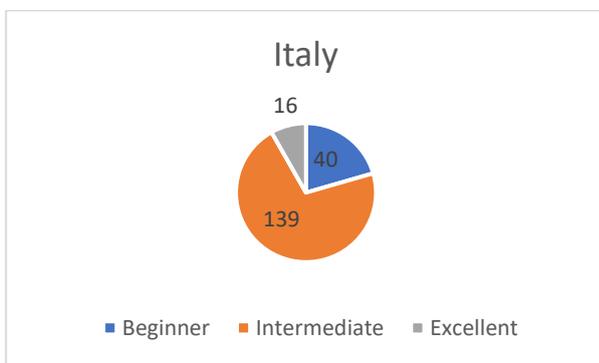
Bulgaria

Germany

As it is clearly shown by the graphs, the Intermediate level is the one which is on average the most common result of the analysis among all the countries, going from a minimum of 57% of the German respondents to the 79% of the Bulgarian ones. At the same time, the largest percentage of Beginner level has been identified in Germany, with the 26% of the respondents, whilst the minimum percentage has been in Bulgaria (8%). The largest percentage of "Excellent" is in Germany, with 13% of the respondents with this final result.

Regarding the area of competences on which career counsellors self-assessed as Excellent, the **Communication and Collaboration** section is the one with the highest average score (76 out of 100). While they rated themselves as intermediate with regards to **Problem Solving** (61), **Information and data literacy** and **Digital Content Creation** (58). Lastly, they assessed their knowledge of digital **Safety** as beginners (48).

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Competences' average score (out of 100)
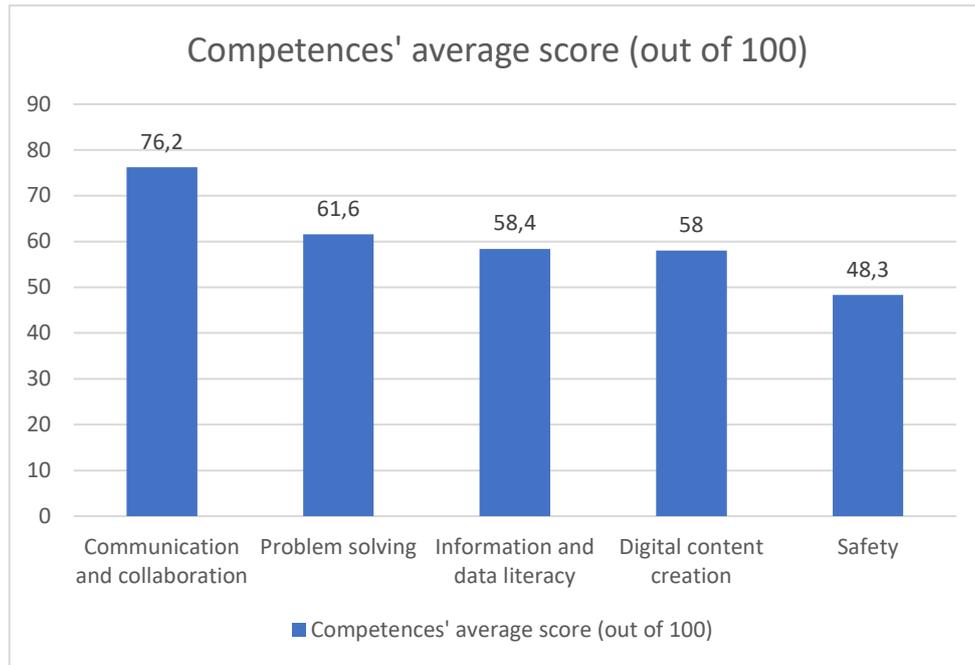
The following table summarizes for each area of competences the country with the highest and lowest average score:

Area of competences	Country with highest average score	Country with the lowest average score
Information and Data Literacy	*Austria*	*Bulgaria*
Communication and Collaboration	*Italy*	*Germany*
Digital Content Creation	*Austria*	*Italy*
Safety	*Austria*	*Bulgaria*
Problem Solving	*Bulgaria*	*Italy*

This can be a crucial suggestion for the national implementation for some countries, thus deepening some topics compared to others given the lack of skills and/or awareness on certain areas of the DigComp at national level.

Focus groups' Results

The self-assessment findings reflect the observations registered during the focus groups held in Austria, Italy, Bulgaria and Germany with 31 professionals and 8 clients. Participants in the focus groups considered online supervision of clients' progress as difficult. They expressed the desire to learn how to upskill clients' digital literacy, and learn which platforms are used by their audience.

Focus groups revealed knowledge gaps within the grid's categories that scored intermediate and beginner scores (*Safety*, *Digital Content Creation* and *Information and data literacy*): counsellors feel behind with netiquette, data security requirements, online presentation skills and assessment of clients' needs. They also shared their willingness to improve their knowledge of data storage, interactive exercises for career planning, gamification and content creation (video presentations, mind maps, infographics, etc.)

Participants' needs emerged from the focus groups:

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- How to combine traditional (face-to-face) with online guidance – good practices and cases
- How to organize webinars / group trainings with clients – for example on career planning, job application, etc.
- How to organize an online campaign and promote yourself to clients
- How to upskill clients' digital literacy and meet their language in virtual contexts
- How to take care of themselves – more physical activity; resilience/ stress management, mental health care and burnout prevention.
- How to network for sharing cases and peer supervision –related to online counselling.
- Learning which **platforms are used by the audience** (e.g., young vs. elderly people) which are most effective for promotion and relevant for job-searching purposes etc.
- **Netiquette** – how to effectively communicate and present yourself in the digital environment – to clients, to colleagues, to employers, etc.
- Skills related to **legislation** of online services provision, ethical standards, online payment of services, data security requirements and data protection of clients.
- Better online **presentation skills**, holding the attention of the audience online and establishing a trustworthy relationship with the clients in the virtual environment.
- Adequately **assessing clients' needs** in the counseling process.
- Having a repository of online training and assessment tools and interactive exercises for career planning, gamification, etc.
- Training on **digital skills** - video creation, videos, video presentations, creating online career guidance instruments and tools; mind maps, infographics, etc.
- **Skills related to using Zoom, MS office and Teams** for online group sessions and events – e.g., inviting users, administrating the event, creating breakout rooms, using interactive tools for collecting feedback and input from participants, etc.

Learning styles preferred by focus groups' participants:

- **Learning by doing:** Practice-related cases, interactive exercises and methods, peer to peer learning/ support/ supervision, case studies
- **Presentation of content:** Visualization over bulky texts; Content to be served in "small snacks" not in huge modules and presentations, which require a lot of time – so that counsellors can visit the platform and learn in their free time
- **Flexible learning design:** Address the different needs and learning preferences of counsellors, allow flexibility and choice by having a "menu" from which to choose what you need to learn
- **Teach by example:** integrate more attractive and diverse digital tools; game-based approaches (quizzes, escape room approaches, etc.)
- **Additional resources** – pool of creative, innovative online tools and resources, quizzes, games, videos, podcasts, live questions etc.

These results are necessary for shaping and setting priorities for the Project Result 2 - *OCCAY Hybrid Flexi Course for career counsellors*. Data from focus groups and the self-assessment grid in fact represent the basis for a practical and interactive Hybrid Flexi Course. As participants themselves have stated, an efficient course for career counsellors should include practice-related cases, interactive exercises and methods and peer-to-peer learning/support/ supervision. It should allow flexibility and integrate more attractive and diverse digital tools as well as game-based approaches. In other terms it has to be a pool of creative and innovative online tools and resources.

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