

OCCAY

Online Career Counselling Academy



PR5 - POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

on streamlining digitalisation in career guidance and counselling

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The given Recommendations are addressed to the representatives of public authorities in the European Union member states who are responsible for the development of policies and strategic documents regulating the field of career guidance and counselling. The Recommendations are meant to facilitate the incorporation of digital solutions in the everyday practice of career counsellors and contribute to the professionalization of guidance practitioners in the context of digital skills.

The suggested areas of intervention are the following:

Priority area 1: Provide legal framework and funding for the systemic integration of ICT into career guidance and counselling

Priority area 2: Introduce mechanisms for collecting evidence base and quality assurance

Priority area 3: Promote further development of infrastructure and the use of modern technologies

Priority area 4: Ensure access to comprehensive labour market information

Priority area 5: Promote cooperation between stakeholders and streamline coordination efforts

Priority area 6: Ensure the professionalisation of career counsellors through standardisation and targeted educational measures

Priority area 7: Create incentives for career service providers to take change management measures

The Recommendations are a result of joint work of the OCCAY project consortium. OCCAY, or Online Career Counselling Academy, is an Erasmus+ funded project, implemented by KARBON Consulting GmbH (Austria), Volkshochschule im Landkreis Cham e.V. (Germany), bFlow Webdesign (Austria), Centro per lo Sviluppo Creativo "Danilo Dolci" (Italy) and the Business Foundation for Education (Bulgaria). The project helps career counsellors to estimate and improve their digital skills, to navigate the digital world with confidence and provide professional online career consulting.

I. INTRODUCTION

The role of career guidance and counselling services in the life of individuals and society at large cannot be underestimated. Career support contributes to individual self-fulfilment; helps citizens develop career management skills and other competences through upskilling and reskilling; enhances clients' ability to make informed decisions about their career paths based on available labour market and occupational information; enables individuals to manage the transition between education, employment and unemployment, and many more.

The steadily growing role of technology in career guidance and counselling became obvious even before the arrival of the pandemic. The trend towards digital transformation in guidance has its roots in multiple social and economic developments: rapid technological advances, changing labour market needs, disappearing and emerging jobs, new forms of work (such as distance working), growing mobility of the workforce, and others. The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced those trends and prompted the transformation of guidance services as most career counsellors had to switch from face-to-face or hybrid services to distance delivery.

Apart from that, over the last decades, career guidance and counselling has seen a shift from supplier-driven approach based mostly on the provision of career information to a demand-driven, or citizen-centred, approach based on active support, collaboration and individualisation.

In this sense, technology can be seen as a tool to enhance the quality and relevance of guidance services and to improve their accessibility as they help to reach out to the persons who cannot take advantage of face-to-face services for any reason.

Despite the booming number and formats of distance service delivery, the landscape of online guidance services still remains quite fragmented. Furthermore, digital transition requires the revision of the role of career counsellors and redesign of guidance provision in a systemic manner.

Such transformation necessitates holistic and comprehensive measures at different levels and in various fields – in the first place, steady commitment on the side of policy makers reflected in comprehensive and coherent strategies, legal frameworks and recommendations. This consideration laid the groundwork for the development of the given Policy Recommendations.

II. CONTEXT OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The development of the Recommendations was informed by the needs analysis conducted by the OCCAY project consortium among career guidance counsellors in Austria, Germany, Italy and Bulgaria¹.

The needs analysis was conducted in two phases. At the first stage, 440 career counsellors evaluated their own level of digital proficiency by applying the OCCAY Self-Assessment Grid; the results of the self-assessment were collated into a report outlining the key gaps in the digital skills of respondents. At the second stage, the partners conducted a series of focus groups with 39 participants from among career practitioners. The results of self-assessment and the feedback collected during the focus groups provided an insight into the challenges that career guidance counsellors faced after the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic, identified knowledge gaps and support needed; they formed evidence base for the development of the Recommendations.

The key conclusions from the needs analysis were further discussed with practitioners (employees of public employment services, private career counsellors, representatives of VET institutions) during an expert round table conducted Brussels in May 2023. The participants

¹ The report with the results of the needs analysis is available under the following link: <https://occay.eu/self-assessment-grid/>.



provided their perspectives and insights on the topic of digital transformation in career guidance and counselling.

Finally, strategic documents, policy guidelines and research papers published by the European Commission, CEDEFOP, OECD, ILO and others were analysed; they largely corroborated the key findings from the needs analysis and the round table discussion. These were rendered into specific recommendations for policy-makers in the European member states provided in §3 *Implications for policy-makers in EU member states* and divided into respective *Priority Areas*. Additionally, Annex 1 contains recommendations for the countries of the OCCAY partnership (Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, and Italy).

III. BENEFITS OF ICT FOR CAREER COUNSELLING PRACTICE AND SOCIETY AT LARGE

Holistic and systematic implementation of digital solutions in guidance services can bring benefits for all parties: they can facilitate the everyday work of career counsellors, broaden the possibilities for their clients, and contribute to the economic development of a specific country by improving career prospects of its citizens.

On an operational level (i.e. in relation to the everyday practice of career counsellors), modern technology offers the following opportunities:

- (1) Digital tools can be used to establish and maintain contact with clients, thus supporting face-to-face interaction;
- (2) ICT can serve as a means of information provision, content development and actual delivery of counselling services;
- (3) Digital technology can be used for administrative purposes, such as creation of a client's record, data storage, referrals;
- (4) Information and communication technologies facilitate the collection of statistical data and aggregation of labour market information;
- (5) Technology can serve the purpose of self-promotion and raising awareness about the services of a career counsellor;
- (6) ICT facilitates self-help and self-service through automated solutions (for example, self-assessment tools or provision of career information);
- (7) Digital tools can spur collaborative career exploration and co-careering, i.e. exchange of expertise and co-construction of career-related knowledge among community members.

On a wider scale, in the context of benefits for counsellors, their clients and society at large, digital solutions offer the following benefits:

- (1) Information and communication technologies waive time and space constraints raising the accessibility to and effectiveness of guidance services;
- (2) Digitalisation offers a plethora of methods in providing counselling services, especially in terms of content development and use of audio-visual tools;
- (3) Digital technology allows for creation of more high-quality, comprehensive and user-centric services based on the actual needs of clients;
- (4) The use of ICT in career provision leads to lower costs and improved cost-effectiveness of services;
- (5) Information and communication technology holds a great integrative potential: it can serve as a tool for creating synergies between services, information exchange and facilitation



transition between education, employment and unemployment, validation of non-formally and informally acquired skills;

- (6) Digital technology has the potential to broaden the access to career development services for vulnerable groups, such as residents of remote areas or persons with limited mobility.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY-MAKERS IN EU MEMBER STATES

Taking into account the importance of developing citizens' digital skills for the competitiveness of European economies and the benefits that technology-assisted career service provision brings, the OCCAY project consortium invites the Member States to consider the implementation of the following measures:

PRIORITY AREA 1: PROVIDE LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND FUNDING FOR THE SYSTEMIC INTEGRATION OF ICT INTO CAREER GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

Legal provisions underpin the work of all professionals, including career guidance counsellors. Addressing the integration of ICT in guidance services in legal documents, policies and frameworks may streamline this process at the level of practitioners.

Therefore, EU member states are invited to consider the following:

- (1) Public bodies should undertake strategic leadership in the development/adaptation of lifelong guidance policies in the context of digitalisation to overcome policy fragmentation and duplication of efforts;
- (2) The integration of information and communication technology in career guidance and counselling should be treated within a wider e-governance context to ensure the coherence of services;
- (3) ICT-based career services should be integrated into and regulated by national quality assurance systems;
- (4) Comprehensive and systematic integration of technology in career counselling requires cross-sectoral agreement on a ministerial level and a jointly developed conceptual framework for the delivery of computer- and Internet-based guidance services;
- (5) These agreements and frameworks should be further expanded in development plans outlining involved stakeholders, their commitments and responsibilities, resources available and other provisions;
- (6) Integration of information and communication technologies in career guidance and counselling requires investments in infrastructure and technical support, upskilling of guidance practitioners and broadening public access to online services;
- (7) Due to the limited amount of funding, decision on investments should be based on the proven effectiveness of selected digital tools and services;
- (8) Public bodies and other authorities should provide clear cyber security guidelines for career guidance provision, including instructions on safe management of private data, protection of hard- and software, data encryption, use of cloud services, and others.

PRIORITY AREA 2: INTRODUCE MECHANISMS FOR COLLECTING EVIDENCE BASE AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

The purpose of reviewing lifelong guidance policies in the context of digital transformation is to modernise career counselling practices and to improve access to relevant and high-quality service.

Before adopting new or revising existing policies, initiating infrastructure projects or making funding decisions, the EU member states have to take the following measures:

- (1) initiate research and evaluation to collect solid evidence base that should underlie the decision-making process;
- (2) analyse the readiness of career guidance to integrate digital solutions by assessing existing infrastructure, evaluating the skills and attitudes of practitioners and identifying existing gaps in current knowledge;
- (3) collect data on the current guidance practices and the level of embeddedness of digital tools in career counselling services;
- (4) map existing technology-assisted career counselling practices and collect robust evidence about their impacts;
- (5) initiate the development of common guidelines and quality criteria for the provision of ICT-based guidance services within a broader national system of quality assurance;
- (6) introduce minimum monitoring standards to analyse the outcomes and impact of technology-based career development interventions on a regular basis.

PRIORITY AREA 3: PROMOTE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE USE OF MODERN TECHNOLOGIES

Effective ICT-based career development interventions rely heavily on a sound technical infrastructure; they may be further enhanced through the use of modern technologies (artificial intelligence, big data, block chain, gamification and virtual reality tools).

In the view of the constant technological progress, the EU member states are encouraged to:

- (1) enhance the development and improvement of ICT infrastructure needed to deliver hybrid or online counselling services in an effective manner, whilst paying special attention to infrastructure security and protection;
- (2) create conditions for raising Internet accessibility and broadening access to computers, tablets and mobile phones for the users of career counselling services (in educational institutions, public employment services, libraries, etc.);
- (3) promote public-private partnerships to facilitate infrastructure development and broaden access to equipment;
- (4) support the use of artificial intelligence in and for guidance services bearing in mind that the quality of underlying data might be poor and that the algorithms underpinning AI may be subject to biases and context deficiency;
- (5) consider the use of block chain technology to enable individuals take full control over their personal information and to promote decentralised governance solutions;
- (6) promote the use of gamification elements for developing career management skills, conducting work simulations and other purposes, which is especially relevant for young audiences;
- (7) support the use of virtual reality and enhanced reality tools in pedagogical settings and guidance provision;
- (8) take advantage of big and open data to collect information about existing online/hybrid career counselling services and collect evidence of their effectiveness.

PRIORITY AREA 4: ENSURE ACCESS TO COMPREHENSIVE LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION

To provide high-quality career counselling services, guidance practitioners should have access to up-to-date and comprehensive labour market information including current labour market demands and forecasted trends.

In this context, the EU member states have to strive for:

- (1) assuming a user-centered approach towards presenting labour market information online;
- (2) providing open access labour market information that is presented in an appealing way, accessible and easy to use;
- (3) supporting the inclusion of forward-looking information based on skills forecasts or consultations with experts;
- (4) complementing conventional survey-based methodologies for collecting labour market information with modern technologies, such as artificial intelligence, having in mind their limitations and engaging practitioners in the development of such tools.

PRIORITY AREA 5: PROMOTE COOPERATION BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS AND STREAMLINE COORDINATION EFFORTS

Overcoming fragmentation and creation of uniform approaches towards technology-based guidance services requires joint actions of various stakeholders. In this connection, the EU member states are encouraged to:

- (1) initiate a dialogue on rethinking the role and purpose of lifelong guidance in the context of digitalisation, and engage a broad range of stakeholders in this discussion – public administration, service providers, social partners and civil society;
- (2) ensure the commitment of key ministries and agencies, and promote intergovernmental cooperation on the development and implementation of relevant measures;
- (3) streamline the clear division of roles, tasks and responsibilities in the development, implementation and monitoring of relevant measures;
- (4) encourage coordination and cooperation in the provision of career services at national, regional and local level and set up effective arrangements for communication and exchange;
- (5) promote cross-sector partnerships among public, private and third sectors;
- (6) enhance synergies between tools, practices and stakeholders;
- (7) explore the interoperability potential of existing career development systems, application interfaces and standards;
- (8) encourage information sharing and data exchange across services taking into account privacy issues;
- (9) promote the exchange of best practices on technology-assisted career guidance to avoid “reinvention of the wheel”;
- (10) emphasize the role of municipalities and public employment services in coordinating efforts of guidance stakeholders on a local level;
- (11) engage international agencies and donor organisations in formulating policies and systems development, promoting stakeholder cooperation, providing technical assistance and financial support, boosting research on guidance.



PRIORITY AREA 6: ENSURE THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF CAREER COUNSELLORS THROUGH STANDARDISATION AND TARGETED EDUCATIONAL MEASURES

Since career guidance counsellors come into direct contact with clients, it is of utmost importance that they possess the digital skills needed to ensure the high quality and effectiveness of online or hybrid guidance services.

In this context, policy makers are urged to:

- (1) initiate the development of competence standards, common qualifications or other reference frameworks for careers counsellors as regards digital skills or, if such standards are already available, revise them with a view to recent technological developments and new trends in lifelong guidance;
- (2) make sure that digital competences are adequately addressed in initial education and training, continuous professional development, and in-service or work-place training. These should:
 - (i) be assessed and accredited against quality assurance standards on a national level;
 - (ii) be delivered through various channels: face-to-face, blended and online;
 - (iii) cover the following competences, among other things:
 - overview of existing technologies and their effects on the methodology of delivering guidance services;
 - combining conventional face-to-face services with distance delivery formats;
 - rules of online communication;
 - technology-assisted assessment of clients' needs;
 - tools for information management, data storage, online communication and collaboration, content creation, supervision of client's progress;
 - selection and interpretation of labour market and occupational information provided online;
 - using technology for self-marketing (e.g., establishing social media presence) and broadening the client base, including the use of data analytics;
 - overcoming technical problems;
 - supporting clients in the use of digital tools.
 - (iv) address the subject of cyber security in a proper manner: career counsellors should be regularly upskilled on data security and privacy issues, including data encryption, password management, antivirus software etc.;
- (3) adopt legal regulations prescribing annual professional development measures for career counsellors in the context of digitalisation;
- (4) foster a "learning-to-learn" attitude encouraging career guidance counsellors to regularly reflect on their digital proficiency and take measures to cover existing knowledge gaps.

PRIORITY AREA 7: CREATE INCENTIVES FOR CAREER SERVICE PROVIDERS TO TAKE CHANGE MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The needs analysis conducted at the initial stage of OCCAY project showed that career counsellors received insufficient support from their employers during the pandemic. The management of organisations focused mostly on providing the technical set-up, but offered little assistance in regard to training or overcoming technical difficulties.



Seamless integration of information and communication technologies in counselling practices requires steady commitment from senior management – therefore, the EU member states are encouraged to create incentives (including financial ones) for career providers to take consistent change management measures, including but not limited to:

- (1) assuming a systematic approach and developing a comprehensive strategy for the integration of digital technologies in everyday operation and guidance services;
- (2) providing institutional framework for hybrid and distance service provision (e.g., regulations for home office, data protection);
- (3) providing high-quality technical infrastructure and technical support;
- (4) developing and adopting a comprehensive cybersecurity strategy covering measures from technical maintenance of equipment to safe handling of clients' personal data;
- (5) assessing the digital proficiency of newly employed and current staff members and offering regular upskilling measures, including peer-learning and mentoring opportunities;
- (6) involving practitioners in decision-making regarding the selection of digital tools and regular evaluation of ICT-based career services.

V. OCCAY APPROACH TO LIFELONG GUIDANCE AND CAREER SERVICES

As mentioned above, informed decision-making should be based on the mapping of existing hybrid and/or online career guidance services and analysis of their relevance and effectiveness.

In this sense, the OCCAY initiative can serve as an example how improving the digital skills of career counsellors and incorporation of technology in guidance services may be addressed in a comprehensive and holistic way:

- (1) The Self-Assessment Grid developed based on the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp) aims to help career counsellors assess the level of their digital proficiency in five areas: Information and Data Literacy, Communication and Collaboration, Digital Content Creation, Safety, and Problem-Solving. The tool includes real-life work scenarios and specific self-assessment questions that should help users identify and address existing gaps in digital skills.
- (2) The Hybrid Flexi-Course aims to equip career counsellors with the digital skills needed to deliver online or blended guidance services in a most effective way. The course has a modular structure and covers a variety of topics from communication and collaboration tools to online counselling and digital health literacy.
- (3) The Online Counselling Tool is a digital solution that is tailored to the needs of distance career counselling. This bespoke tool covers four areas in the counselling process that are needed to make the collaboration between the counsellor and the client successful: communication, information, work tools, and counselling tools. The tool is intuitive to use and compliant with data protection rules.
- (4) The OCCAY Strategy Handbook for Vocational and Educational Organisations aims to help career providers develop a sound change management strategy to incorporate digital technologies and online guidance services in their practice.

Thus, OCCAY solutions address various levels starting from digital competences of individual career counsellors to strategic and infrastructural changes in organisations needed to ensure effective integration of digital tools.



VI. FURTHER REMARKS

- (1) The efforts to systemically introduce digital tools in career guidance services may face the resistance of certain career practitioners who believe that face-to-face activities should remain central to career counselling.

Therefore, all policy-making efforts should be accompanied by awareness-raising campaigns highlighting the benefits of ICT for career services. Practitioners should recognise the transversal character of digital skills for career guidance and embrace the changes in service delivery.

- (2) The citizens can only fully take advantage of the online or blended career services, if they themselves possess relevant digital skills. While career counsellors can assist their clients in the use of digital tools to a certain extent, the responsibility to develop citizens' digital skills from the earliest age possible lies in the domain of the education and training system.

In this sense, policy makers should further promote the implementation of strategic documents on enhancing the provision of digital skills in education and training, such as Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027², Digital Compass³, Digital Decade policy programme 2030⁴, Digital Competence Framework for Citizens and others, and encourage the localisation of specific provisions starting from a micro-level.

- (3) Although the integration of digital solutions may significantly increase the flexibility of career guidance services and broaden the access to new target groups, these may also serve as a cause of exclusion since certain population groups (residents of remote areas, persons with low literacy and digital skills, vulnerable people) may fall prey to the digital divide.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the measures on the integration of digital services in career guidance developed by policy-makers (be it legal frameworks, funding schemes or infrastructure projects) are underpinned by the principles of equitable access and social inclusion.

VII. CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic increased the urgency to complement traditional career guidance with digital solutions. It is not yet clear whether conventional career counselling can be fully substituted by technology-based practices. First, non-systematic digital transformation carries the risks of reproducing disadvantage and inequality. Secondly, comprehensive career guidance requires not only transmission of information through face-to-face or online interaction, but also skilful human intervention where career counsellors bring in empathy, creativity, enthusiasm and the ability to empower their clients.

Therefore, the prevalent assumption is that in the future career guidance services will be provided in a hybrid, or blended, form. In this sense, technology should be seen as a supplement and a tool to extend human potential that allows for creation of accessible, flexible and individualised guidance services.

² COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS. Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 Resetting education and training for the digital age. COM(2020) 624 final

³ COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS. 2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade. COM(2021) 118 final

⁴ DECISION (EU) 2022/2481 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 14 December 2022 establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030.



Integration of digital solutions into all aspects of service delivery requires consistent efforts of various stakeholders. Guidance practitioners themselves should regularly improve their technical fluency and digital competences to work effectively in the context of blended service delivery. Existing guidance systems require further adaptation – primarily, development of technical infrastructure and provision of equipment, which requires adequate funding. Finally, coherent integration of technological solutions in lifelong guidance requires policy coherence, multilevel partnerships and exchange of information.

Annex 1. Country-specific recommendations

Austria

In Austria, it is advised that the following measures be taken at policy level:

- (1) Review the Austrian National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (LLL:2020) and update it by incorporating the digital dimension in all five key priorities contained therein;
- (2) Update the Lifelong Guidance Strategy and school-specific guidance concepts by incorporating the digital dimension in all aspects of counselling practice;
- (3) Revise existing quality assurance systems (such as External quality assurance procedures for provider-neutral career guidance in Austria, minimum standards for public employment services, and others) by incorporating the digital dimension;
- (4) Initiate programmes on monitoring of existing guidance services (both face-to-face and online) and collection of evidence to assess their effectiveness;
- (5) Consider the development of a competence model for digital skills of career guidance counsellors (a competence model for digital skills for educators Digi.kompP may serve as an example);
- (6) Incorporate digital skills in basic and further teacher training, internal training provided by public employment services and social partners, as well as other qualification programmes for career counsellors;
- (7) Encourage the use of digital technology for the creation of proactive, low-threshold online and/or hybrid counselling services for different target groups, especially educationally disadvantaged persons;
- (8) Disseminate information and raise awareness about the online services provided by the Public Employment Service Austria to ensure broader uptake by citizens (such as eAMS-accounts, eJob-Room, application „alle jobs“ and others);

Bulgaria

The OCCAY partnership urges the public authorities in Bulgaria to take the following steps:

- (1) Develop and put into action a specific national strategy for the development of the career guidance system as a whole, and of the digital career guidance services in particular;
- (2) Establish a sustainable multilevel structure for governance of lifelong guidance services that coordinates more effectively the efforts of institutions and stakeholders engaged in career guidance policies (Ministry of Education, Employment Agency, National Agency for Vocational Education and Training, Euroguidance Bulgaria);
- (3) Encourage public authorities and other decision-makers to take advantage of peer learning, study visits and expert networking to research evidence of good practices and current developments on a European and global level in making use of technologies;
- (4) Assess the digital skills and needs for support of staff engaged in career guidance services and offer accessible targeted continuous development training on applying digital resources (including free quality online training opportunities);
- (5) Allocate adequate funding for digital equipment, staff training, and digital resources;
- (6) Promote the development and use of quality digital resources in career guidance such as skills assessment, labour market information, career planning tools, open educational resources, gamified tools and platforms, etc.;
- (7) Initiate and support the revision of the curricula used to train career guidance professionals on a national level, by adding specific standards related to digital literacy and



ensuring that initial and continuous vocational training addresses topics such as data security, Industry 4.0, emerging jobs, digitization, the skillset for the future, digital innovations in career guidance and their ethical implication;

- (8) Improve the digital skills of career guidance practitioners and digitalisation of career services offered by the Public Employment Agency, schools, universities, youth services and other providers;
- (9) Invest in the digital skills of citizens as a whole.

Germany

It is suggested to take the following measures to enhance career counselling services in Germany:

- (1) Consider developing a law on lifelong guidance where online and/or hybrid counselling services comprise an integral part of everyday guidance practice;
- (2) Take up leadership on the creation of a nationwide, cross-sectoral working group including the representatives of federal ministries, states, Federal Employment Agency, associations of guidance providers, educational institutions, trade unions, chambers of commerce and trade, etc. to streamline the provision of guidance services in offline and online settings and professionalization of career counsellors as regards digital skills;
- (3) Review existing legal acts regulating educational and vocational guidance (such as Vocational Training Act, Skills Development Opportunity Act, Social Code Books and others) to emphasize citizens' entitlement to online and/or hybrid counselling services;
- (4) Revise existing competence profiles and quality standards by incorporating digital competence as an integral part of career counsellors' skills-set, and provision of digital and/or hybrid services alongside with face-to-face ones – for public employment services, educational institutions (schools, VET institutions, universities), municipal providers, and chambers:
 - in case of PES, the following guiding documents could be revised: Guidance Concept of the Federal Employment Agency and Lifelong Guidance Manual;
 - for other guidance providers, the updated Beratunsqualität concept, BeQu (including quality standards, competence profile and quality development framework) of the National Guidance Forum for Education, Career and Employment could become a reference document;
- (5) Establish minimum requirements regarding digital proficiency of guidance counsellors (both in public and private sector) and ensure the provision of relevant upskilling training offers;
- (6) Consider developing uniform quality assurance standards for the provision of guidance services in online and/or hybrid formats;
- (7) Explore and develop technical solutions to enhance the synergies between existing data banks, online guidance platforms and other supporting resources, which will ensure the continuity of services and simplify the navigation around the guidance market by end-users;
- (8) Explore the possibility of using digital technology to create more synergies between guidance, validation and partial qualifications;
- (9) Promote the development of digital skills as a part of vocational competence and a means to enable professional advancement – both for career guidance counsellors and citizens, in general (especially those with low level of education and qualification);
- (10) Further invest in the development of technical infrastructure.



Italy

In Italy, the following actions are highly recommended at policy level:

- (1) Build synergies between private and public efforts in career guidance to maximise the effects of investments in digital transition and avoid overlapping between funding programmes;
- (2) Ensure that digital services for matching employers and prospective employees (such as MyAnPal) provide low-threshold access for persons with poor digital skills in order to raise the effectiveness of such services;
- (3) Conduct regular assessment of career counsellors' digital skills and broaden the range of flexible and tailored training offers to improve those;
- (4) Strengthen existing networks and enhance the interaction and exchange of knowledge between various stakeholders in order to avoid the fragmentation of efforts and harmonise the provision of counselling services at all levels and in all sectors;
- (5) Consider general changes on the labour market and take advantage of the European developments and programmes by making them available for career counsellors;
- (6) Promote the development of digital skills among both young people and adults in the spirit of lifelong learning and lifelong guidance approach.

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