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CHAPTER 2.

Identifying standards for career professionalism

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2.1. Introduction

Policy approaches supporting acquisition and professional development of career practitioner ⁽⁸⁾ 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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⁽⁸⁾ 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 ⁽⁹⁾. 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) ⁽¹⁰⁾.

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

⁽⁹⁾ See Kraatz, Rübner and Weber (2021) in this collection.

⁽¹⁰⁾ 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) ⁽¹¹⁾. 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).

⁽¹¹⁾ 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, C. 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) ⁽¹²⁾ (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

⁽¹²⁾ 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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