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# ***The European Status for Career Service Provider Credentialing: Professionalism in European Union (EU) Guidance Policies***

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## **Introduction**

European Union (EU) member states have acknowledged the professionalization of career guidance services in different sectors as a priority within the guidance practice and policy development from 2000 to 2016. During the Irish EU presidency in 2004, the Council of Education Ministers adopted a first EU level resolution on lifelong guidance. The resolution defined lifelong guidance as “a range of activities that enables citizens of any age and at any point in their lives (lifelong) to identify their capacities, competencies and interests, to make meaningful educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competencies are learned and/or used (life wide)” (European Council, 2004, 2008). The resolution also invited member states to improve the initial and continuing training of career practitioners as well as “seek to ensure effective co-operation and co-ordination between providers of guidance at national, regional and local levels in the provision of guidance services and to build on and adapt existing structures and activities (networks, work groups, programs) related to the implementation of the resolution priorities” (European Commission, 2004, 2008).

Although citizens and the government both recognize the importance of lifelong guidance, a significant number of EU citizens do not have access to guidance. According to the Special Eurobarometer European Area of Skills and Qualifications, 45 % of respondents reported having had no access to guidance services (European Commission, 2014b). The EU established the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) in 2007 to assist EU member states in developing guidance policies and systems through European collaboration. Mutual policy learning among the ELGPN members revealed that several ministries at the national and regional levels share the development of guidance practices. However, differences exist in how individual EU member states construct their guidance provision and define professionalism in the field. Member states assign the responsibility of providing guidance not only to schools but also to external partners. These are mainly public guidance services, but also public employment services (PES), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private enterprises. The same country may invite several different service providers to cooperate in terms of education and guidance provision (European Commission, EACEA, Eurydice, & Cedefop, 2014).

According to Ertelt and Kraatz (2011) organizational models or reforms play a significant role by shaping the setting of guidance activities and the description of job profiles. It makes a difference whether the career guidance is regarded as a specialized service to be operated in separate organization or whether it is combined with other roles in an organization. In 2009, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training conducted a comprehensive study

on practitioner competencies and qualification routes in Europe and noted that career guidance exists in some countries as a specialist occupation requiring extensive and specific training, or guidance activities, are a subspecialism within another professional role (Cedefop, 2009). While career guidance is a subspecialism, the practitioners can define their role alongside that of a psychologist, teacher, or a labor-market administrator. The perspective of the prevailing delivery method illustrates a third distinction of the professionalism of career practitioners. Different models are in place, which include a psychological model, a pedagogical model, and a hybrid model (Zelloth, 2009). The psychological model largely relies on professional psychologists as key delivery agents (both in schools and in PES) and on psychological testing.

The European Commission Mutual Learning Program for Public Employment Services (PES), the PES to PES Dialogue program, identified that the skills and competencies of employment counselors are critical for achieving the goals of the European employment strategies (European Commission, 2014a). However, the studies have revealed variations in the entry requirements, competence profiles, and job profiles, as well as in the degree of the flexibility and autonomy of services across the countries. The service models, in which counselors must deal with a broad scope of clients (with the two prevailing groups being jobseekers and employers), determine generic job profiles for employment counselors. Moreover, the diversification of the job profiles depends largely on the operational PES structure, priority tasks, and activation strategy used in the country. A significant gap exists in relation to the professionalization of employment counselors' functions in the European Public Employment Services (Sienkiewicz, 2012).

The pedagogical model relies on a variety of delivery agents. It stresses the pedagogical aspects of the guidance process, for example, by integrating career education as a mainstream strategy in national curricula. Career education refers to a range of structured programs and activities that help students to link their learning to the acquisition of lifelong career management skills and employability skills. Career management skills (CMS) refers to a set of competencies that enable citizens at any age or state of development to manage their learning and work life paths (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, 2015c). Successful career education programs combine various working methods and a range of interventions in accordance with the needs and readiness of individual students and groups. To ensure success in this area, the entire school community (including the school head, teachers, and professional specialists) has the responsibility of providing guidance. In most countries, guidance provision is the task of a multi-disciplinary team consisting of different specialists. The education and training of the staff responsible for guidance vary significantly among countries due to a wide range of university courses for teachers and guidance specialists. An examination of the types of staff involved shows that distinction should be made between those who teach guidance in class, and those who support students in school but are not classroom based (European Commission, EACEA, Eurydice, & Cedefop, 2014).

The hybrid model is a combination of the psychological and pedagogical models. This model can be either a transitional pathway from the psychological model to the pedagogical model, or a relatively stable and traditional system. This implies that the competencies and qualifications of career practitioners need to be reflected in the light of the individual,

organizational, and societal expectations associated with the national features of the guidance model.

The previous examples indicate a clear variance in the range of the depth of career practitioners' guidance practices and training in EU member states. In the process of developing the New Skills Agenda for Europe, the European Commission (2016) sought to gather statistical data on the credentialing of guidance practitioners at the member state level. However, the feedback was incomplete; member states were unable to provide feedback in a consistent way due to variation in structures and practices. Cedefop (2009) conducted the most recent overview of the different options for the training provision. Yet, there are some certain commonalities of coherent and consistent services and thus the training and qualifications of career practitioners were included as one key theme in the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network work programs from 2007 to 2015. The following sections summarize the main findings from that period.

### **Professionalism in National Guidance Policies**

Evidence exists that the training and competence of career guidance staff make an essential contribution to the development of high-quality career guidance services, which are essential in meeting the needs of national populations and furthering EU strategic aims (Hooley, 2014; European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, 2012; Cedefop, 2011, 2009). Already in 2005, the EU member states agreed that the professionalism and qualifications of service providers constitute one of the five quality meta-criteria for national guidance systems.

The recently emerged policy attention to career guidance has led to a significant increase in the interest in the development training programs for career practitioners. However, current training provision has been diverse and has reflected the nature of national guidance delivery systems. The diversity is partly a result of various initiatives that have been driven at the government level by policy and legislative changes instigated by individual higher education sectors or specific research and development projects. Norway and Scotland are concrete examples where national strategies have been a catalyst for specialized higher education training programs for career practitioners (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, 2015b; Ertelt & Kraatz, 2011).

The training may have been mandatory or optional, might have been systematic or ad hoc, and may have ranged at any level from short uncertified courses to master's degree at any level. The attention placed on the professionalism of career professionals has raised the following question in the member states: What is sufficient training for career practitioners in terms of both the level and the extent of the specialized study of career guidance theory and methods? The current trend is toward more specialized training in the higher education sector and evidence suggests that the equivalent of one year of full-time higher education training would be an appropriate benchmark for the minimum level and extent of specialized study for professionalism (Cedefop, 2009).

Although differences exist across the member states in promoting the professionalism of career practitioners, there are five different ways of identifying practitioner competencies as part of national guidance policies. These include features such as legislation, licensing arrangements, quality standards, accreditation, and the registers of practitioners.

Table 1

*National Approaches in Promoting Professionalism of Career Practitioners*

National approach in promoting professionalism	Description of the measures, country examples
Legislation	Qualification requirements for school guidance counselors and vocational psychologists (Finland) Certifications for career practitioner titles (Iceland) Qualification requirements of career practitioners in PES (Slovakia) Detailed minimum teacher-vocational counselor qualifications (Poland)
Licensing	Licenses for vocational counselors in PES (Poland)
Quality Standards	Occupational standards for professionals (Latvia) Standards and professional requirements for diagnostic evaluation and guidance (Portugal)
Accreditation	Use of international accreditation frameworks (such as in Bulgaria, Greece, Romania)
Professional registers of practitioners	Regulation by professional bodies linked to quality standards and license or professional register developments (in Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom)

According to Ertelt and Kraatz (2011), legislation is the most powerful instrument to achieve a high level of professionalization, but there has been considerable resistance in many countries to take this route. Today, structured co-operation in lifelong guidance policy development has raised awareness on professionalism of career practitioners and put more emphasis on legally defined qualification requirements.

In Finland careers information, guidance and counselling services are provided mainly by two established publicly funded systems. In comprehensive and upper secondary level education, adequate career education and guidance is a legally defined student entitlement and a compulsory subject with specific time allocation in students' timetables. In higher education institutes guidance and counselling services vary in quantity and quality. Schools have full-time school counsellors with legally defined competencies and qualifications. Either a Master's degree in school counselling or a 60 ECTS postgraduate diploma is required. According to their work contract, the practitioners are annually obliged to attend continuous professional development events.

The Finnish National Agency for Education draws up the national core curricula, which

give guidelines for institutional plans on the delivery of career education and guidance in school settings. The working methods include individual discussions with focus on personal issues, small group guidance, whole classroom activities, project work and site visits. The student progress is monitored during the education and in the transition phases to further studies by means of co-operation between teachers and school counselors, and, if necessary by means of co-operation with other professionals. In the employment sector, the guidance and counseling services of the Employment and Economic Development Offices are based on three service lines and are mainly targeted at clients outside the education and training institutions. The qualifications of the vocational psychologists are defined in legislation (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network 2015b, 2015c).

If the practitioner competencies are not explicitly included in national guidance policies, a common model of professionalism is the use of national competence frameworks. These can operate on a national level (as in Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom) or regionally (as in Belgium and Italy).

In Germany, the National Guidance Forum has developed a bottom-up quality concept for educational and vocational guidance. This national concept comprises commonly accepted quality standards for service provision, a competence profile for career practitioners and a quality development framework for organizations to activate and integrate both the individual perspectives of staff members and the perspective of the organization in the development process. On this basis, the organizations and individual practitioners have autonomy to identify developmental goals and success factors, initiate activities for improvement, reflect and evaluate the results and learning experience (National Guidance Forum in Education, Career, and Employment, 2016).

Some countries operate sectorally, with professional bodies or training organizations defining the competencies (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, 2015b). These kinds of national competence frameworks are softer ways to promote professionalism, presuming they find the support of decision-makers in institutions having responsibilities in the service provision (Ertelt & Kraatz, 2011).

### **Professionalizing Career Guidance through European Level Competence Frameworks**

The EU has funded several development projects that have defined practitioner competence frameworks. These can be applied in national contexts in accordance with national policies or accreditation mechanisms. The competence frameworks intend to offer a generic description that incorporates all the activities needed to deliver coherent career guidance services nationally or regionally. They provide a working tool to support guidance practitioners and policymakers in developing national and sectoral frameworks, quality-assurance tools and professional standards. Member states can pilot and validate the frameworks in cross-border or wider European networks, and they can enhance them through further cooperative projects.

### **Cedefop Competence Framework for Career Practitioners**

The Cedefop examined practitioner competencies and qualification routes and made a

proposal for a European framework. The definition of competence takes into account both the ethical and reflective practice and includes: (i) cognitive competence involving the use of theory and concepts, as well as informal tacit knowledge gained experientially; (ii) functional competence (skills or know-how), those things a person should be able to do he or she is functioning in a given area of work, learning, or social activity; (iii) personal competence involving knowing how to conduct oneself in a specific situation; and (iv) ethical competence involving the possession of certain personal and professional values. It represents an integrative model of competence, which permits the identification of the aspects of self-direction and reflective practice, including the important capability for professional development from novice to expert over time (Cedefop, 2009).

The Cedefop competence framework for career guidance practitioners (2009) comprises three sections: foundation competencies, client-interaction competencies, and supporting competencies.

- **The foundation competencies** describe the abilities, skills, and knowledge that should pervade all the professional activities of career guidance practitioners. These statements do not reflect stand-alone activities but rather are the essential foundation of personal skills, values, and ethical approaches. Practitioners should exhibit these in all the activities undertaken with or for the users of career guidance services. Foundation competencies are most closely related to ethical and personal competencies that involve the possession of certain and professional values as well as an awareness of how to conduct oneself in specific situations.
- **Client-interaction competencies** cover those actions that are prominent and visible to service users. They cover activities where clients themselves are likely to be directly involved, through conversation or participation in groups, via communication technologies, or via supported access to other services and facilities. Client activities do not always occur in face-to-face situations, and the introduction to this section encourages attention to the differences that arise when services are provided at a distance through various media.
- **Supporting competencies** describe a range of additional activities that are needed to support career guidance practitioners in their work with service users. They relate to the development of the service offered, to career guidance practitioners' management of their own roles, and to how they reach out in geographical and professional communities.

Table 2

*The Cedefop Competence Framework for Career Practitioners*

Section	Competencies
Practitioner Skills and Values	1. Foundation Competencies
	1.1 Ethical practice
	1.2 Recognize and respond to clients' diverse needs
	1.3 Integrate theory and research into practice
	1.4 Develop one's own capabilities and understand any limitations
	1.5 Communication and facilitation skills
Working with Clients	1.6 Information and computer technologies
	2. Client-Interaction Competencies
	2.1 Undertake career development activities
	2.2 Enable access to information
	2.3 Conduct and enable assessment
	2.4 Develop and deliver career learning programs
Systems	2.5 Make referrals and provide advocacy
	2.6 Facilitative entry into learning and work
	3. Supporting Competencies
	3.1 Manage opportunity information services
	3.2 Operate within networks and build partnerships
	3.3 Manage own caseload and maintain user records
	3.4 Design strategies for career development
3.5 Engage with stakeholders	
3.6 Engage own caseload and maintain user records	
3.7 Update own skills and knowledge	

**European Reference Competence Profile for PES and EURES Counselors**

The PES to PES Dialogue program revealed that, in many countries, a shift has taken place in the roles of PES, which originally functioned as more passive and administrative authorities. The counseling and guidance elements of the job of employment counselors were recently strengthened, leading to a job profile that is now a combination of a broker, counselor, social worker, and administrator. This differentiation of tasks requires a broad range of interdisciplinary knowledge comprising both theoretical foundations (with psychological knowledge being more important in relation to career guidance counselors) and a profound knowledge of the labor market situation and trends, placement, integration and active labor market policies (Sienkiewicz, 2013).

As the national structure of PES strongly influences the division of work of PES employees, and as the job profiles of career practitioners influence the competency requirements for the practitioners' positions, the PES to PES Dialogue program noted that the possibilities to standardize the competence profiles of career practitioners in PES are limited. However, the program concluded that it seems possible to define a certain minimum standard of services based



on a set of core competencies with a distinction between general and country/service-specific competencies. This core competence profile should become a focal point of all skills-related activities for the practitioners, such as: the (i) recruitment of the practitioners; (ii) training and development of practitioners; (iii) career planning of practitioners; and (iv) assessment and competence gap analysis of practitioners based on their core competencies.

A competency-based perspective in the work of practitioners could improve the development paths of the career practitioners themselves and allow for the better structuring of career paths and for creating possibilities for on-the-job training as well. In 2014, the European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) launched a European reference competence profile for PES and European Employment Services (EURES) counselors. This profile follows the three Cedefop (2009) competence areas defined earlier but has slightly different elements.

- **Foundational competencies** represent general practitioners' characteristics and skills that are relevant to several different tasks and situations. Thus, they should be required from all employment counselors, disregarding possible differences in corresponding roles or performed tasks (for example the specific groups of clients that counselors usually deal with, such as the young unemployed or long-term unemployed).
- **Client interaction competencies** (working with jobseekers and employers) represent the broadest area of competencies, clearly linked to the major tasks that employment counselors perform daily.
- **Supportive competencies** (systems and technical) represent both competencies for dealing with the technological aspects of the work (information and communication technology, ICT) as well as service- and country-specific competencies.

The aim was to consider the scope and diversity of tasks that employment counselors deal with. These tasks require a comprehensive set of competencies to help public employment services to achieve the European PES 2020 mission and to transform them into activation- and client-oriented transition agencies working closely with employers and playing a leading role in partnerships (European Commission, 2014a).

### **NICE European Competence Standards for Career Professionals**

The network for innovation in career guidance and counseling in Europe (NICE) consortium members compiled one of the latest project-based competence frameworks was compiled by NICE consortium members from 2009 to 2015 (Network for Innovation in Career Guidance and Counseling in Europe, 2016). This EU-funded network consisted of academics from 30 countries and 46 higher education institutions that specialize in career guidance and counseling training and research in Europe. Their mission was to “promote professionalism and excellence in career guidance and counseling” (Network for Innovation in Career Guidance and Counseling in Europe, 2016). In 2012, the network published a handbook in which it identified common points of reference that could facilitate the establishing of degree programs in the field and inform curriculum design. These reference points were elaborated to a proposal for European Competence Standards as a shared agreement on the minimum level of competence needed to perform professional tasks in the field of career guidance and counseling. The aim was not to replace any national qualification standards or benchmarks and there are no formal obligations

for their introduction on a national level. The standards act as a voluntary framework for participating members, which they can apply in developing training programs for career practitioners or in mutual recognition of qualifications and prior learning in the field.

The NICE network proposed six professional roles that it believes constitute the professional identity of career practitioners (Network for Innovation in Career Guidance and Counseling in Europe, 2016). The network acknowledged that, in providing services, the practitioners should be able to switch among these professional roles, sometimes combining them and sometimes focusing on an adequate role based on the unique needs of their clients, and they should combine the different roles in meaningful ways. The central role of the career guidance and counseling professional incorporates the following five professional roles:

- **The career counselor** supports people in making sense of the situations they are experiencing, working through issues toward solutions, making difficult career decisions, and realizing personal change.
- **The career educator** supports people in developing their career management skills/competencies, which they need for career-related learning and development.
- **The career assessment and information expert** supports people in attaining relevant information about themselves, the labor market, and educational or vocational options depending on their individual information needs.
- **The social systems intervener** supports people and organizations in designing and developing adequate pathways.
- **The career service manager** ensures the quality of the service provision.

As a basis for the definition of competence standards, the network defined a typology of tasks that describe the concrete activities of career practitioners in different settings (Network for Innovation in Career Guidance and Counseling in Europe, 2016). This framework distinguishes careers advisors who offer immediate advice and basic career support next to their primary professions, career professionals who are fully dedicated to career guidance and counseling for individuals and groups focused on complex career challenges, and career specialists, who offer highly specialized services related to complex career challenges, leadership, research, and development in career guidance and counseling.

The proposed competence standards offer a list of measurable competence descriptions that correspond both to the above mentioned six professional roles and to the tasks as defined for the three types of career practitioners. The competencies also provide a foundation for identifying the contents of a curriculum that can inform the development of career guidance and counseling degree programs, references to teaching and learning methods, and references to assessment methods (Network for Innovation in Career Guidance and Counseling in Europe, 2016.)

### **The European Career Guidance Certificate (ECGC)**

The European Career Guidance Certificate (ECGC) was developed from 2007 through 2009 with partners from seven EU member states. This project compiled outcomes of two previous similar projects into one standardized certification system to acknowledge the formally or non-formally acquired knowledge, skills, and competencies of career counselors. This

certificate distinguished four superior competence categories: (i) education and career; (ii) counseling practice; and (iii) personality and (iv) ICT skills. The ECGC is certified with 60 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) points and is compatible with existing training offers. The ECTS is a tool of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) for making studies and courses more transparent. ECTS credits express the volume of learning based on the defined learning outcomes and their associated workload. 60 ECTS credits are allocated to the learning outcomes and associated workload of a full-time academic year or its equivalent (European Commission, 2015) Course attendance is not compulsory for obtaining the certificate, as it is based on practical experience and completed specific continuing training (Cedefop, 2011).

### **The Competence Frameworks and National Guidance Policy Development**

The previously introduced competence frameworks have been developed at the European level, and they encapsulate the main tasks that career practitioners need to provide in each country. As countries have autonomy in the design of the services the frameworks need to be reflected and customized in accordance with available resources, cultural and sectoral conditions, and applicable standards and codes. The Cedefop study (2009) suggests that the frameworks can play an important role in shaping the training provision or national qualification systems, but they also offer a common ground for dialogue among policy-makers, training providers, service providers, and other key stakeholders as professional associations.

The organizations delivering guidance services could use frameworks in defining their scope of services and how standards are set for staff performance in their different roles and functions. The professional associations can create an assessment framework to underpin a system of membership entitlement or to align qualification requirements to facilitate the mobility of career practitioners across sectors. Policymakers can use the framework to plan and review existing career guidance services to determine if they meet existing needs or national policy goals. At all levels, the framework provides tools for assessing the quality and overall effectiveness of the services (Cedefop, 2009).

The ELGPN Quality Assurance Framework (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, 2015b) includes examples of criteria and indicators that can inform national quality assurance as well as evidence-based lifelong guidance practice and policy development in different sectors. The criteria include evidence underpinning recognized qualifications, recruitment practices according to recognized competence profiles, engagement in continuing professional development, and membership in professional associations. Indicators refer to qualification levels and sector requirements, participation in continuing professional development, a percentage of practitioners signed to a professional code of ethics, and memberships of professional associations.

A recent example of the national level adaptation of the outcomes of European co-operation is the Program Recognition Framework for Guidance and Counseling in Ireland (Department of Education and Skills, 2016). This is a new measure for promoting professionalism, and the framework sets out criteria and guidelines for an initial training program that intends for its program graduates to work in guidance services under the remit of national governmental authorities across the educational and labor market sectors. The intention is that

the framework will enable the training providers of initial counselor training programs to design and deliver career education curricula and sets of learning experiences to equip graduates with the necessary skills and competencies to design and provide quality services in diverse contexts for diverse client groups. The programs leading to qualifications should meet the minimum level of 60 ECTS in guidance and should normally be delivered over one year full-time or two years part-time. The eight areas of competence that should be addressed by program providers seeking recognition from the Department of Education and Skills for their program in guidance counseling are:

- Guidance theory and professional practice;
- Counseling skills in a guidance context;
- Labor market, learning and career-related information;
- Teaching and learning: design, delivery, and evaluation of programs/learning experiences;
- Psychometric testing: Graduates should be eligible to join the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) register for guidance counselors;
- Communicating, collaborating and networking;
- Research and evidence-informed practice; and
- Leading and managing the guidance service.

### **Future Perspectives**

In the EU member states career practitioners are working alongside with several other intermediaries in public, private and voluntary sectors. Many parallel competence frameworks exist to draw upon for shared professional development. Yet, the ELGPN has identified competence areas that need to be developed in response to the emerging policy and practice challenges (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, 2015b).

Taking in the relevance of career management skills as an explicit key competence in lifelong learning to better cope with continuous restructuring of the labor market, the practitioner competencies linked to the development of CMS for citizens is one of the areas which has remained under-developed in the national frameworks (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, 2015b). The ELGPN suggests, that the all initial training of guidance practitioners should include the theoretical background and methodologies of CMS development and how to integrate the CMS teaching in their practice. The practitioners should also develop their own career plans and assess their own CMS during their own training, to avoid the risk they do something they do not understand or do not believe in themselves (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, 2015a). In PES setting a related competence is needed among practitioners who are working their clients in developing an individual action plan to promote employability or transition back to labor market.

Guidance provision is changing due to a wide range of political and practical goals whose implementation is a responsibility of dynamic cross-administrative and multi-professional networks. In these networks, guidance work must be performed at their multi-professional interfaces, in a learning space. No service provider or organization can alone meet the needs of diverse client groups, and new forms of dynamics and relationships emerge on different levels of guidance, in working with clients, as a process between organizations, and in public policies in guidance (Nykänen, Saukkonen, & Vuorinen, 2012).

Another emerging form of service delivery is the concept of the one-stop-shop, which unites under a single roof multi-professional, low-threshold services for various client groups (Moreno da Fonseca, 2015). A further challenge for networking is connected to increasing demand for transnational mobility, because labor shortages in certain sectors have triggered international recruitment and need for more comprehensive career guidance services for integration including family members (Ertelt & Kraatz, 2011).

This transformation towards collective and group-based activities is a process engaging many actors, various interests, and multiple layers, and it requires a stronger emphasis on strategic competencies that enable practitioners to define their new role and tasks within multi-professional networks both inside organizations and in the interfaces of these service providers. Career practitioners in PES settings or in a specialized integration services should be able to cope with more complex situations and to adequately operate in contradictory roles for support and potential sanctions related to active labor market measures (Ertelt & Kraatz, 2011). Further work is also needed on evaluating outcomes from different forms of guidance and counseling interventions to inform consistent evidence-based practice and policy development (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, 2015b).

A key future challenge is the extent to which the practitioner competence frameworks consider the use of new technology and skill intelligence and information for making better career choices. Recent research indicates how European countries are positioned along a continuum ranging from unexploited to strategic in exploiting the potential of ICT for career services (Kettunen, Vuorinen, & Ruusuvirta, 2016). The exponentially increasing use of ICT across the career services sector has placed an increasing demand upon career practitioners' ability to be innovative and to take advantage of and fashion novel career service delivery formats with online technologies. The use of social media has increased dramatically in recent years, resulting in the urgent need to modernize services and to expand the understanding of practitioners of the potential of new technologies (Kettunen, Sampson, & Vuorinen, 2015). To consider the usefulness and potential of existing and emerging technologies, it is essential that career practitioners be appropriately trained in this area (Osborn, Dikel, & Sampson, 2011) and for both the pre-service and in-service training curricula to be updated to include this knowledge. It is also very likely that practitioners working in this area need to be trained differently than for the traditional face-to-face service mode (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2013). Success in developing competency for ICT in career services requires a dynamic combination of interwoven cognitive, social, emotional, and ethical factors (Kettunen et al., 2015).

The provision of career services is a public interest that transcends education, training, employment and social inclusion at the national and EU level. However, in the lack of binding legislation or national quality frameworks in most of the countries, it is difficult for individual practitioners to orient oneself to existing parallel competence frameworks and make one's own decision about pursuing further training or education. The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (2015c) has agreed that the professionalization of services and tools remains one of the key operational principles for lifelong guidance provision in the future. Cedefop (2011) suggested, that in the future, guidance practitioner qualifications should be placed in national qualification frameworks and be based on learning outcomes to improve the transparency of

qualifications across countries. Citizens need to have confidence that the services are offered by staff who have the required professional knowledge, competence and qualifications. Certification and credentialing become even more crucial in countries that are increasing their market-based service providers in accordance with liberal regimes (Moreno da Fonseca, 2015; Ertelt & Kraatz, 2011). Qualifications in lifelong guidance ensure that the minimum standards of learning can be achieved.

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