

Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices - Slovakia

Please cite as:	Cedefop (2023). Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices - Slovakia. CareersNet national records. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/inventory-lifelong-guidance-systems-and-practices-slovakia
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Introduction

Lifelong (career) guidance services in Slovakia are mainly accessible within:

- the education system (services provided by schools and external school facilities)
- public employment services (local labour offices coordinated by the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family).

In both of these sectors the system is currently undergoing major developments. The main driver for reforms in the educational sector is the effort to make the system more inclusive and accessible for pupils and students with special needs. In the employment sector, the public employment services are the main provider of lifelong guidance for unemployed people, mainly through ESF-funded projects targeting vulnerable groups (long-term unemployed, NEETs) and focusing on the development of career management skills.

Professional associations, non-governmental organisations, autonomous regions and private providers play an increasingly important role in the lifelong system, notably in training and networking of counsellors, quality assurance and provision of services to vulnerable target groups.

Some systemic challenges remain to be solved: lack of coordination and strategic leadership, sustainability of funding, gaps in services provision for employed, older adults and other vulnerable groups (e.g. people with disabilities). These issues are in the focus of the National strategy of lifelong learning and guidance 2021-2030 and different initiatives funded through the Recovery and Resilience Plan.

Coordination and collaboration among stakeholders

Lifelong guidance initiatives are administered mainly by two ministries: the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family and the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport. Other public institutions under their auspices are usually involved in the operational management and the delivery of career guidance services, namely:

- Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (Ústredie práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny) is the public body responsible for the administration of state-provided employment services through 46 local PES offices. [The Act No 5/2004 on employment services](#) provides a legal basis for lifelong guidance provision for unemployed and employed adults.
- State Institute of Vocational Education (Štátny inštitút odborného vzdelávania) coordinates projects related to vocational education (national qualification frameworks, Europass), guidance for young people in dual vocational system, national system of recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning,
- Research Institute of Child Psychology and Pathopsychology (Výskumný ústav detskej psychológie a patopsychológie) is responsible for the methodological coordination of the network of Centres of pedagogical and psychological counselling and prevention (Centrum pedagogicko-psychologického poradenstva a prevencie) that provide guidance to pupils in primary (basic) and secondary education and support and coordinate guidance services in schools.

The institutional collaboration between these actors is not specifically formalised and is organised on an ad-hoc basis in relation to different projects or legislative initiatives. The coordination of different initiatives is assured through mandatory inter-ministerial and stakeholders' validation processes in the preparation phase of ESF-funded projects. However, there is no legal or institutional framework for long-term strategic coordination and collaboration of national, regional and local stakeholders.

Other actors such as regional administrations, private providers, non-governmental organisations, professional associations can also be involved in lifelong guidance provision. In 2011, the National Lifelong Guidance Forum (Národné poradenské fórum) was set up as a result of a collaboration between the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family and the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport. It effectively ceased its operations after the end of the related project in 2015.

The National Strategy of lifelong learning and guidance 2021-2030 (Stratégia celoživotného vzdelávania a poradenstva na roky 2021-2030) foresees the reactivation of the National Guidance Forum. The strategy also foresees a stronger involvement of the regions in organising career guidance provision. The Autonomous region of Banská Bystrica has already been implementing an EU-funded project that created a network of regional career centres that support career counsellors at primary and secondary schools and promote cooperation between schools and local enterprises at regional level (currently one such centre is operating in each of the 13 districts of the region).

The informal networking of career guidance counsellors and stakeholders is facilitated by the professional associations ([Association for Career Guidance and Career Development](#)) and relevant EU networks operating in Slovakia (Euroguidance centre, EPALE, Europass) through regular training events and nation-wide initiatives such as the [National Career Guidance Award](#) or [Careers Week](#).

Sources

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Access to guidance

Employment sector

The Act on employment services No. 5/2004 constitutes the legal framework for the provision of lifelong guidance services. It stipulates the provision of two level services:

- information and advising services (provision of information and professional advice on the requirements of different occupations and employment and training opportunities).
- professional counselling services aimed at “influencing the decision-making and behaviour of the job seeker” through evaluation of the competences, diagnosing obstacles for employment and development of an individual action plan.

These services are freely accessible to jobseekers and employed adults, although, in reality, career guidance services are not actively promoted and employed adults need to register at the labour office to use the services and very rarely use them. (ÚPSVaR, 2022).

Information and advising services are also provided by the labour offices to schools, usually as information-focused group interventions that are complementary to the services provided internally by schools or externally by the centres of pedagogical and psychological counselling and prevention. The scope of school-related activities of the public employment services is however very marginal - 1500 pupils and students received the service in 2021 (ÚPSVaR, 2022).

The capacities of the lifelong guidance services have increased since 2015 owing to the implementation of different national (ESF-funded) projects targeting specific areas (e.g. less economically developed regions) and target groups (e.g. long-term unemployed, NEETs). Accessibility of lifelong guidance services therefore varies in time, as the number of counsellors depends heavily on currently running projects. As of 2021, 161 internal counsellors at 46 local PES offices have been involved in the delivery of both levels of services (ÚPSVaR, 2022).

Guidance services are also provided by private companies, counsellors and coaches. Professional associations maintain a list of providers (<https://rozvojkariery.sk/poradcovia/>) or broker a contact between a potential client and a provider (<https://alkp.sk/ponukame/karierneho-poradcu/>). There is currently no supply or demand side public support for these services.

Education sector

The provision of guidance services in the educational sector is regulated by the Act no. 245/2008 on Education and Training and the Act no. 138/2019 on teaching staff and professional staff. They outline the mission of the Centres of pedagogical and psychological counselling and prevention (together with other more specific regulatory texts) and define the roles of the school personnel in the provision and coordination of career guidance. Over 80 regional centres are currently operating in Slovakia, providing wider services, such as psychological counselling, special pedagogical activity, speech therapy activity, socio-pedagogical activity as well as career counselling for children from birth to completion of vocational training. This system is currently undergoing a reform partly supported by a related national project [From standardisation of the consulting system and prevention to inclusion and success in the labour market](#) with the objective of increasing social inclusiveness of the educational system and clearly defining the standards for the delivery of guidance services at schools and centres. The project also involves capacity building activities in career guidance (training of staff, recruiting career counsellors, improving cooperation with schools).

The Act on teaching staff and professional staff also defines the role of the career counsellor at schools and centres of counselling and prevention and required qualifications (**for more see the section <Training and qualifications>**). Government Regulation No 201/2019 specifies the working hours available for professional activities of the staff member with one or several of the roles specified in the Act (ranging from 1 to 5 hours reduction in the basic working hours, depending on the size and the type of school). There is no obligation for schools to have a career counsellor, however an increasing number of schools go beyond the legal provisions by hiring specialised staff members providing career guidance.

Sources

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Quality assurance

Although there is not a common cross-sectoral quality framework, several initiatives related to quality assurance were developed in the employment, private and educational sectors.

Education sector

The Research Institute of Child Psychology and Pathopsychology developed standards for career guidance and career education at schools and the Centres of pedagogical and psychological counselling and prevention within the national project [From standardisation of the consulting system and prevention to inclusion and success in the labour market](#). These standards have the goal of unifying existing practices in the educational sector and are currently (11/2022) in the process of being published by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and sport and will become mandatory. They describe the delivery and evaluation of group and individual services, as well as the process of mapping the needs of the school and pupils, planning career guidance and education services and activities, cooperation between schools, centres and other actors such as parents, employers and other schools.

Employment sector

The internal norm for the provision of professional counselling services in public employment offices contains a chapter on the quality requirements of the provided services, describing several criteria of the services :

- goals and principles (development of career management skills, importance of the working alliance with the client, minimum duration of the counselling interview),
- necessary material and staff for the provision of the service (availability of individual offices and rooms for group activities, requirement for initial qualification and continuous professional development of counsellors),
- cooperation with other departments of the labour office (promotion of the services inside the organisation) and compatibility of the service with other subsystems of the guidance system,

- criteria for the evaluation of the service (placement rate, development of career management skills, number of clients services were provided to).

These criteria can be controlled by the staff of the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, but no specific quality assurance and quality development procedures were elaborated internally to enforce these criteria.

Cross-sectoral quality assurance system

The Association for Career Guidance and Career Development developed a [quality assurance system](#) for individual counsellors and organisations providing guidance. This system was developed in a participative process involving partners from different sectors and was supported by partners from several countries through [Erasmus+ project](#). The quality assurance system is based on the following available tools:

- A self-assessment and evaluation tool for career counsellors to enable them determine the quality of the provided services;
- A mentoring program for career counsellors - based on a combination of self-assessment and evaluation approach;
- A quality self-assessment tool for organisations providing career guidance;
- A framework and procedures for developing the quality of career guidance services that will enable organisations to continually improve quality of services.
- A non-mandatory certification procedure was developed and it is managed by the Quality Development Committee of the Association, composed of professionals from various sectors

The [National strategy of lifelong learning and guidance 2021-2030](#) foresees the creation of national (cross-sectoral) quality standards and a system of accreditation for providers of career guidance and career counsellors. The quality standards should be implemented in 2023/2024 and should cover these areas at service level:

- Target-oriented planning and management
- Quality of career information and tools
- Contact with the world of work
- Qualification and training of staff
- Impartiality
- Active role of the client and development of career management skills
- Impact evaluation
- Quality management and continuous improvement

Sources

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Career management skills

Although there is no national career management skills (CMS) framework in Slovakia at the moment, several related programmes and initiatives can be identified both in the education and employment sector. [The National strategy for lifelong learning and guidance 2021-2030](#) foresees the creation of such a framework in 2023-2024.

Education sector

Career guidance and career education are not specifically mentioned in the national educational programmes, but their elements are included implicitly in some sections which refer to 'educational areas' of curricula (e.g. Man and the World of Work), 'transversal topics' (e.g. Personal and Social Development and Creation of project and presentation skills) or they are integrated into specific subject curricula such as Civic Education, Ethics, Technology etc. (SAAIC, 2012). Elements of career education are included into the curricula of the subject "Introduction to the world of work" which is offered (optionally) to the 3th and 4th grades of VET (upper-secondary) schools.

Performance and content standards related to career management skills within the national educational programmes for these subjects include the following topics:

- orientation in learning opportunities and work activities of selected professions;
- realistic vision of one's possibilities with regard to possible educational and career paths;
- identification of resources containing information on open vacancies, career and entrepreneurship opportunities;
- knowledge of available career guidance services;
- ability to present oneself in model situations (e.g. job interview), write a CV and motivation letter;
- ability to grasp the term 'income' (distinction between gross and net income), knowledge of different sources of income;
- ability to set career goals and develop an action plan (including educational and vocational training requirements).

A curricular reform of primary education, financed through the Recovery and Resilience Plan, is currently underway in Slovakia. In the draft materials, Career Education is defined as one of 3 key elements within the education area "Man and the world of work" alongside Technology and Entrepreneurship. The reform and new state curriculum should formalise expected learning outcomes and standards for career education in each education cycle (NIVaM, 2022).

The standards for the delivery of career guidance and education at schools explicitly focuses on the development of career management skills in three areas:

- self-exploration;
- career exploration;
- lifelong planning and managing of educational and career paths.

Employment sector

In 2016, public employment services developed a framework of employability skills that are used to operationalise the outcomes of the counselling services. The framework is used to identify clients' needs, individualise the service and verify the progress the client achieved in counselling. The structure of the framework is inspired by the [CMS framework for Scotland](#), but the items were elaborated in collaboration with counsellors in PES. It contains the following items:

A: Identity and motivation

- A.1 Is able to maintain autonomous job search activity (at least 1 activity per week)
- A.2 Understands the importance of work for leading a balanced and meaningful life
- A.3 Is able to list his/her professional interests/preferred activities

- A.4 Is able to list his/her life and work values

B: Strengths / potential

- B.1 Is able to describe his/her strengths
- B.2 Is able to prepare relevant documents for job search (motivation letter, CV)
- B.3 Is able to list educational opportunities that would increase his/her chances on the labour market
- B.4 Is able to use the job search portal, including the automatic agent

C: Horizons and planning

- C.1 Knows what he/she has to do to get a job (action plan)
- C.2 Is able to justify the choice of jobs he/she would like to pursue
- C.3 Knows occupations in a targeted professional field that would correspond to his/her interests, skills, and personality strengths
- C.4 Is able to follow job vacancies from at least two different specific sources

D: Networks and relationships

- D.1 Is able to effectively conduct a job interview
- D.2 Is able to effectively address a potential employer - in person or by phone
- D.3 Knows people who work in a targeted occupation or targeted professional field
- D.4 Contacted employers in the region personally in the last month (including supported employment, e.g. in the public sector)

In 2019 an online tool was created and the framework is used in every project-funded counselling programme provided by the labour office and by external providers of career guidance services for the labour office.

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Evidence, monitoring and assessment

Currently, there is no body or mechanism in place that would enable monitoring and evaluation of career guidance across sectors. Therefore, there is a clear lack of evidence on the effectiveness and social impact of career guidance in Slovakia. Both monitoring and evaluation are performed within each sector or by the guidance providers themselves. The assessment of effectiveness has been traditionally measured against the predefined operational goals and indicators which usually focus on immediate effects of career interventions (e.g. getting employed, enrolment in studies, signing up for re-skilling course etc.). The use of more sophisticated qualitative approaches that would enable assessment of long-term impacts on clients is rare.

In 2019, the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family introduced a monitoring mechanism based on the employability skills framework to measure the effectiveness of counselling services provided by public employment services. This framework contains descriptors of 16 outcomes which are formulated as skills (see the section <Career management skills>). The framework is used at the beginning of the counselling process to identify clients' needs and to personalise the service. During the closing interview of the guidance process, the checklist is verified again and the achieved progress is evaluated by the counsellor and the job-seeker. The results of the self-assessment are traced for all job-seekers participating in these activities, however, the data were not made publicly available and so far were not exploited in a structured manner to provide evidence of the effectiveness of the services.

The notion of monitoring and assessment of the effectiveness is included in the quality standard of the Association for Career Guidance and Career Development (see the section <Quality Assurance>), that leads guidance providers to clearly define the objectives and outcomes of their services as well as effective mechanisms for monitoring their effectiveness. The newly adopted [Strategy of lifelong learning and guidance 2021-2030](#) seeks to introduce new evaluation mechanisms based on tracking clients' progress over time.

Sources

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Career information, ICT in guidance

There are no specific policies or legal framework which support the delivery of career information and lifelong guidance services via ICT tools.

In the employment sector, the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family funded the development of the portal [Internet Labour Market Guide](#) (ISTP - Internetový sprievodca trhom práce) which is run by an external provider. The portal provides information on vacancies and available training courses, occupational cards from the [National Occupation Framework](#) (Národná sústava povolání) as well as the possibility of creating a personal profile (including a CV), match it with suitable occupations and job vacancies and directly apply online. The portal also contains videos and news from different professional sectors. A specific section of the portal is dedicated to pupils and students with the possibility to search for secondary and tertiary initial education opportunities. Study programmes are linked to the occupational cards presenting employment prospects at graduation. In 2022, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family announced a launch of a new public portal of job vacancies (<https://www.sluzbyzamestnanosti.gov.sk/>) and ceased cooperation between the ISTP portal and PES offices. The ISTP portal will continue to operate nonetheless.

The [National Occupation Framework](#) is defined by Act No. 5/2004 on employment services as a nationwide, unified information system describing standard labour market requirements for individual occupations in terms of professional skills and competences. It also contains information about the current trends and sectoral strategies for the development of human resources, elaborated and updated by sectoral councils funded in a national project [Sectorally oriented innovations](#) that ran until December 2022. The [Slovak Qualification Framework](#) (SKKR) and the National Qualifications Register were created as a result of the ESF project “The creation of the National Qualifications System” and were officially established in 2017. 330 NQS qualifications were pre-selected and 330 assessment manuals are under elaboration to facilitate recognition of prior learning piloted within the ESF national project [System of validation of qualifications](#).

Several private portals about work, employment and job vacancies exist, the largest of which are [www.profesia.sk](#) and [www.kariera.sk](#). These also propose a dedicated section with tips about writing CVs, motivation letters, job interviews, labour law and others.

Labour market information for students and adults is also provided by the state funded portal [Labour trends](#) (Trendy práce) launched in 2019. The portal presents data from graduate tracking (labour market outcomes by educational sector and by region) and the current trends on the labour market (prognosis of the employment outlook in different sectors and regions, labour market slack). These data are combined and prospects for different occupations are presented on a 4-dimensional scale (salary potential, current employment rate of the graduates in the corresponding field, overall current employment rate of the graduates and prospects of the occupation in 5 years perspective).

In the educational sector, [KomposyT](#) is an online portal used by school counsellors, which provides a comprehensive counselling service in the field of educational guidance and prevention, as well as support for parents and students seeking information about counselling services, educational programmes, current trends on the labour market. It offers self-evaluation tools for pupils and students. The portal was developed and is managed by the Research Institute of Child Psychology and Pathopsychology (Výskumný ústav detskej psychológie a patopsychológie). The public part of the online portal provides a wide range of information on educational guidance and labour market, including multimedia resources such as videos about occupations and pedagogical games. About 30 different assessment tests are also included in the portal for career counsellors.

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Training and qualifications

The profession of career practitioners is not regulated by Slovak law and, in reality, it is still seen as a function rather than an occupation in its own right. The only requirement for career guidance practitioners in the educational sector and the public employment services is to hold a Master's degree, preferably in human or social sciences. Therefore, career practitioners have various qualifications and academic backgrounds (e.g. psychology, pedagogy, social sciences, adult education, human resources) and usually hold multiple positions simultaneously (e.g. counsellors, psychologists, teachers and teaching assistants, social workers etc.).

The [National Register of Occupations](#) presented one of the first attempts to establish common competence standards for career practitioners. It distinguishes 3 types of occupations related to career guidance:

- Career consultant gathers and provides career information (e.g. job and learning opportunities, required skills and competences) and administrative assistance (e.g. submitting an application for studies and a job application, drafting a CV and cover letter)
- Career counsellor is well versed in the labour market developments and trends; uses modern career guidance techniques and methods; provides individual and group counselling with the aim of helping clients to make autonomous and responsible career decisions.
- Career specialist is tasked with the design, management and monitoring of career guidance services.

This classification is, however, very rarely used in real practice as each organisation/sector tends to use its own customary terminology.

Currently, there is no fully-fledged academic programme and the formal education in career guidance is therefore limited to optional courses within broader academic programmes (e.g. psychology, social work, adult education). The last accredited academic programme oriented specifically at career guidance (Psychological and career counselling for individuals with disabilities) was offered by the Faculty of Education of the Comenius University in Bratislava until the academic year 2020/2021.

The lack of formal (academic) training is partly compensated by the professional associations and educational institutions that run courses (both accredited and unaccredited) in career guidance. The scope, extent and quality of these courses differ as they are connected to existing quality and training standards (e.g. [NICE Handbook](#)) to various extents, if at all. Among the most prominent providers of such courses are [Association for Career Guidance and Career Development](#), [Association of Lecturers and Career Counsellors](#) and a private company [Kariérny poradca](#).

Specialised education in career guidance is also provided by the public institutions as part of the adaptation “on-the-job” training. The Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family provides initial training in basic counselling skills to newly hired professional counsellors. Research Institute of Child Psychology and Pathopsychology (VÚDPaP) launched in 2020 two training programmes in career education and career guidance within the national project from standardisation of the consulting system and prevention to inclusion and success in the labour market: 1) [Innovative elements in career education and guidance at schools](#) (for career counsellors at schools); 2) [Innovations in career education and career guidance](#) (for career counsellors at centres of pedagogical and psychological counselling and prevention). Both training programmes are based on holistic approach and multidisciplinary and lead learners to embracing new creative methods in career guidance provision and developing competences in areas such as planning, relationship building or critical reflection.

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Funding career guidance

Since the career guidance is deemed a cross-sectoral policy area, there is no separate budget line in the state budget.

Schools are financed from the state and municipality budgets on a per capita basis (number of pupils) according to the [Act 597/2003 on financing primary schools, secondary schools and school facilities](#). Public employment services are financed from the state budget, although more targeted active labour market policies and projects (e.g. national project [Individualised counselling for disadvantaged job-seekers](#)) have been financed from the European Social Fund.

The European Social Fund (ESF) has been a key funding mechanism for developing career guidance infrastructure in Slovakia. For instance, projects resulting in the introduction of a dual vocational education and training system, development of national registers of occupations and qualifications, launch of an educational and career portal [KomposyT](#), introduction of quality [standards](#) into the system of educational counselling were all ESF-funded.

There is also a growing trend in self-funded career guidance services provided by private counsellors (individuals rather than organisations).

Source

- Act 597/2003 on financing primary schools, secondary schools and school facilities. <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2003/597/20220102>

Career guidance for school pupils

Career guidance provision for school pupils is regulated by the Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on education and training ([School Act](#)) which specifies the role of educational counselling: carrying out counselling in dealing with personal, learning, professional and social needs of pupils, and career guidance (§ 134). In the [catalogue of support measures](#) by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, career guidance is one of the 4 general support measures that should be provided in schools and external school facilities to all pupils (MŠVVaŠ, 2022).

Educational counsellors are appointed at all primary (basic) and secondary schools and they deal with a variety of educational, psychological and social issues. However, educational counsellors do not provide these services on a full-time basis as they are also teachers with other responsibilities on top of educational counselling. Upon the appointment into the role of educational counsellors, their standard teaching time is reduced by a certain number of hours depending on the size and type of the school ([Annex 5 to the Government Regulation No. 201/2019](#)).

The work of educational counsellors may be supported by other school professionals such as school psychologists, special and social pedagogues. In 2019, a new position of “career counsellor” was introduced into the Slovak education system. Unlike the position of an educational counsellor, a career counsellor is only an optional position and it is up to respective school management whether to appoint a career counsellor or not. According to the [Act No. 138/2019 Coll. on pedagogical and professional staff](#) (§ 26), with the aim of aligning pupil’s career development with individual traits and interests, a career counsellor is tasked with:

- Performing diagnostics of pupil’s traits and interests,
- Coordinating provision and exchange of information among pupils, their legal representatives, upper secondary schools and universities on labour market needs,
- Providing information and consultancy, individual and group career guidance for pupils and their legal representatives,
- Supervising career guidance activities at schools and school facilities,
- Cooperating with institutions in charge of coordination of vocational education and training, employers, regional upper secondary schools and universities.

School guidance personnel work closely with external school facilities, Centres of pedagogical and psychological counselling and prevention (Centrá pedagogicko-psychologického poradenstva a prevencie), which are run and administered by regional school administrations. It is stipulated in the School Act that the responsibility of the counselling and prevention system lies in optimising pupil’s learning, psychological, social and career development from birth until completion of training and labour market entry. The centres provide in-house career guidance (primarily diagnostics) to pupils, but also frequent local schools to carry out career interventions. In addition, they are tasked with methodological support and coordination of educational and career counsellors at schools in their respective districts.

The system of counselling and prevention shall undergo a restructuring as of 2023. The centres of pedagogical and psychological counselling and prevention will be renamed to Centres of counselling and prevention (Centrá poradenstva a prevencie). They will provide multidisciplinary and inclusive counselling services to all pupils. Specialised centres of counselling and prevention (Špecializované centrá poradenstva a prevencie) will deal only with pupils with specific forms of disabilities. In addition, a 5-level model will be introduced into the system of educational counselling and prevention:

- First level: pedagogical diagnosis, educational and career guidance, prevention (carried out by pedagogues and school professionals);
- Second level: crisis intervention, re-education, methodological support to other pedagogues and legal representatives (carried out by school professionals in cooperation with centres of counselling and prevention);
- Third level: diagnosis, therapy, rehabilitation and re-education, methodological support and supervision of pedagogues and school professionals (carried out by professionals at centres of counselling and prevention);
- Fourth level: specialised professional activities, differential diagnosis, ensuring special compensation and teaching aids (carried out by professional at centres of counselling and prevention);
- Fifth level: highly specialised diagnosis and therapy, professional activities towards kids below 5 years old (carried out by professionals at specialised centres of counselling and prevention).

Sources

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- Act No. 138/2019 Coll. on pedagogical and professional staff. <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2019/138/20190901.html>
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Guidance for VET participants

Vocational education and training (VET) has been traditionally one of the main pillars of the Slovak education system. In comparison to EU average, Slovakia has a relatively high share of VET graduates. In 2020, 68% of secondary education students in Slovakia graduated from VET (Cedefop, 2021).

Career guidance for VET participants is regulated by the [Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on education and training](#) (see the section <Career guidance for pupils>). It is provided mainly by educational counsellors (mandatory position for each VET school) and other (optional) professional staff (i.e. career counsellors, school psychologists, special and social pedagogues). They provide vocational guidance and career information to VET students in the form of individual and group sessions, arrangement of apprenticeships and visits to local employers, participation in study/job fairs. VET guidance professionals are supported in their work by the local centres of pedagogical and psychological counselling and prevention (diagnostics, career interventions) and local public employment offices (preventive guidance, vocational orientation, provision of labour market information).

In 2015, a dual system was introduced into the VET system in Slovakia in order to support attractiveness of VET, reduce labour shortages and make the VET system more labour market-driven. The dual system was embedded into the [Act No. 61/2015 on vocational education and training](#) and further supported by an ESF-funded national project [Dual education](#) which was implemented by the [State Institute of Vocational Education](#) (Štátny inštitút odborného vzdelávania). The dual VET system allows distribution of responsibilities for the vocational education and training of students between upper secondary vocational schools and enterprises based on the contractual agreement. Students participating in the dual system attend vocational education at VET school and practical training at the premises of an enterprise. In 2022, the State Vocational Education Institute (ŠIOV) created a network of contact centres in each of the 8 autonomous regions to promote learning opportunities within the dual education and two regional [talent centres](#) that provide pupils with more specialised career services (e.g. mapping of competencies and skills, career exploration activities, presentation on labour market trends and employment outlook).

Sources

- Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on education and training. <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2008/245/20150901.html>
- Act No. 61/2015 on vocational education and training. <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2015/61/>
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- Vantuch, J.; Jelinkova, D. (2019). Vocational education and training in Europe: Slovakia. Cedefop ReferNet VET in Europe reports 2018. https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/Vocational_Education_Training_Europe_Slovakia_2018_Cedefop_ReferNet.pdf

Guidance for higher education students

The duty of each university to provide free-of-charge guidance services is laid down by the [Act No. 131/2002 Coll. on Higher Education](#). This law entitles every student for “information and counselling services related to their studies and the opportunities for graduates to put their knowledge and skills into practice” (§ 70j).

Amendment to this law adopted in 2022 further specifies that the counselling is provided “with the aim of improving well-being of students and their motivation towards studies, dealing with problems that could prevent them from completing their studies, and helping them to enter the labour market”. These services should comprise psychological counselling, career guidance and effective learning support and should be delivered by specialised counselling centres set up by universities or their respective faculties.

Most Slovak universities have their own counselling centres, but the scope of their services varies greatly depending on their financial and human capacities and the support from the management. Moreover, due to the academic autonomy and the lack of common quality standards, each counselling centre arranges counselling services differently. These services usually take the form of individual or group counselling, some counselling centres organise their own study/career fairs or run a database of relevant internships and vacancies.

[University Counselling Centre of the Pavol Jozef Safarik University](#) in Košice has been one of the most active counselling centres in Slovakia since its establishment in 2013. It provides complex services comprising psychological, social, legal, effective learning and career counselling and support to students with special educational needs (for more information about career support to HEI students see the section <Career guidance for special needs and disabled>). In addition to these services, the centre runs a platform of employers (Career Club), organises regular job fairs (Career Days) and training events aimed at developing students’ career management skills.

Other active counselling centres which provide career guidance in some form include [Career Centre of the Matej Bel University](#) in Banská Bystrica, [Student Centre of the Constantine the Philosopher University](#) in Nitra, [Counselling Centre of the Catholic University](#) in Ružomberok, [Counselling and Career Centre of the University of Žilina](#) and the [Career Centre of the University of Economics](#) in Bratislava.

Source

- Act No. 131/2002 Coll. on Higher Education. https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2002/131/vyhlasene_znenie.html

Guidance for adult learners

National project of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport “Further education and counselling for adults as a tool for better employability on the labour market” (2013 - 2018) established a network of 25 guidance centres for adult learners. These centres provided information on available project-funded training courses. The centres also promoted these training opportunities to companies and enterprises. Most of the centres were shut down after the end of the project and without sustainable funding mechanisms all ceased functioning by 2018.

In 2022, public employment services can fund training of employed adults in occupations experiencing shortages in the labour market and in the fields of digitisation, automation and green economy (National project [Don't lose your job, get trained](#)). Employed adults interested in this project can ask the labour office for a counselling interview to help them identify their training needs and choose an appropriate training course. The results of this project are not available yet.

[The National strategy of lifelong learning and guidance 2021-2030](#) foresees the creation of a network of regional lifelong learning and guidance centres under the administration of 8 autonomous regions.

Source

- Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport (2022). Stratégia celoživotného vzdelávania a poradenstva na roky 2021 – 2030 [Strategy of lifelong learning and guidance 2021-2030]. <https://www.minedu.sk/data/att/22182.pdf>

Guidance for the employed

Employed adults are legally eligible for careers guidance services provided by the employment services in line with the [Act No. 5/2004 on employment services](#). Since employed adults are not the main target group of the public employment services, very little promotion is done towards them and these services are practically not used (ÚPSVaR, 2022).

Other guidance services for employed adults are provided by private institutions and associations. The Association for Career Guidance and Career Development maintains a list of providers that are members of the association sorted by region and expertise on the [website](#) of the Association. These services are paid and there is no funding support by the state for the employed to finance the use of these services.

Sources

- Act No. 5/2004 on employment services. <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2004/5/20220401>
- ÚPSVaR (2022). Vyhodnotenie AOTP za rok 2021. Available at: https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/buxus/docs/SSZ/OAOTP/Vyhodnotenie_AOTP/Vyhodnotenie_AOTP_za_rok_2021.pdf

Guidance for unemployed adults

Public employment services are the largest provider of guidance services for adults in Slovakia. Based on the [Act 5/2004 on employment services](#), 46 regional branches of the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family operating throughout the country provide two levels of lifelong guidance:

- information and advising services (provision of information and professional advice on the requirements of different occupations, on employment and training opportunities).
- professional counselling services aimed at “influencing the decision-making and behaviour of the job seeker” through evaluation of the competences, diagnosing obstacles for employment and development of an individual action plan.

As of 2021, there were 162 internal counsellors providing these services (ÚPSVaR, 2022). However, through different national projects targeting specific areas (less economically developed regions) and target groups (long-term unemployed, NEETs), the number of the counsellors providing guidance services as well as the number of jobseekers that received them increased significantly during the period 2016 - 2020. The delivery of guidance services was interrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic despite the investment into the digitalisation of tools and training of counsellors. New national projects integrating guidance services for disadvantaged job seekers were launched in 2022 (National project “[Individualised counselling for disadvantaged jobseekers](#)” with the recruitment of 92 new counsellors, National project “[Activation of disadvantaged jobseekers](#)” integrating guidance and training). The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family also published a [call for projects](#) for the provision of career guidance to inactive citizens in December 2021.

In 2018, an experiment was launched in several regional branches with the objective of developing a 360-degree approach of the services and improving the collaboration between different positions within the labour office around individual roles of every jobseeker. Since 2022 labour offices are going through an internal reorganisation in which previously existing separate counselling departments (Departments of counselling and training) and professional counsellors are integrated into a larger organisational unit (Section of active labour market policies) with the objective of better coordinating with other available services and measures.

Counsellors follow internal methodological guidelines and can provide a range of services based on jobseekers’ needs (individual interviews, workshops, assessment and development centre, skills audit). A common framework for the evaluation of clients’ progress in the development of their employability skills is used in guidance programmes (see the section [Career management skills](#)). In 2019, a [project of provision of the skills audit \(“bilancia kompetencií”\) by external providers](#) was launched and this service was provided to approximately 11000 jobseekers before the outbreak of the pandemic (ÚPSVaR, 2021).

PES counsellors dealing with low-skilled adults were also supported by the [BLUESS project](#) (funded through the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation) which resulted in the creation of a basic skills framework and guidelines for counsellors on evaluating and developing basic skills of low-skilled adults.

The newly adopted Strategy of lifelong learning and guidance 2021-2030 stipulates further development of guidance services provided by the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, mainly through ESF-funded national projects.

Sources

- Act No. 5/2004 on employment services. <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2004/5/20220401>
- ÚPSVaR (2022). Vyhodnotenie AOTP za rok 2021. https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/buxus/docs/SSZ/OAOTP/Vyhodnotenie_AOTP/Vyhodnotenie_AOTP_za_rok_2021.pdf
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- ÚPSVaR (2020). Vyhodnotenie AOTP za rok 2019. https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/statistiky/aktivne-opatrenia-tp-statistiky/aktivne-opatrenia-trhu-prace-2019.html?page_id=1008248
- Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport (2022). Stratégia celoživotného vzdelávania a poradenstva na roky 2021 - 2030 [Strategy of lifelong learning and guidance 2021-2030]. <https://www.minedu.sk/data/att/22182.pdf>

Guidance for older adults

No specific policies or guidance services for this target group exist. Active labour market policies for this target group consist almost exclusively of subsidised employment. Older adults registered at the labour office (employed or unemployed) can use professional counselling services available at the 46 regional branches of the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. Some initiatives are developed by the non-profit sector, such as [Aptet n.o.](#), [Teamwork for a Better Future](#) (Spoluprácou pre lepšiu budúcnosť) and the [Slovak Association for Age Management](#) that provide guidance services for older adults.

The National programme of active ageing for 2021 - 2030 foresees the creation of free guidance services for older adults by self-governing regions and municipalities starting from 2022.

Source

- National programme of active ageing for 2021 - 2030 <https://www.employment.gov.sk/files/sk/ministerstvo/rada-vlady-slovenskej-republiky-prava-seniorov-prisposobovanie-verejnych-politik-procesu-starnutia-populacie/narodny-program-aktivneho-starnutia-roky-2014-2020/narodny-program-aktivneho-starnutia-roky-2021-2030.pdf>

Guidance for early leavers

The proportion of Early School Leavers (ESL) was traditionally very low and Slovakia used to be one of the best performing EU countries in this area. The situation, however, changed in 2009 since when the share of early school leavers has been steadily rising. In 2021, early leavers represented 7,8% of the population aged 18-24 (European Commission, 2022). Since this phenomenon is closely linked with poverty and social exclusion, the share is highest in less developed regions of the country with higher unemployment rates and higher representation of marginalised (Roma) communities.

Career guidance and career interventions provided within the education sector (i.e. at schools and at centres of pedagogical and psychological counselling and prevention) deal primarily with dropout prevention. Once a pupil or a student decides to leave formal education, the offer of specialised career services is limited. Main state-provided compensation measures are: a) second chance education courses which enable early leavers to complete lower-secondary level of education (ISCED 2A); and b) vocational training (F-type study programmes) provided by VET schools which enable dropouts from lower secondary general education to achieve lower secondary vocational education (ISCED 2C). However, second chance programmes are not complemented with any tailor-made career guidance services (Vantuch, Jelinkova, 2019).

Some kind of career support is provided by social workers, community service organisations and non-governmental organisations that work with marginalised (Roma) communities. They provide wider social and legal support either directly in the field or in community centres. *Človek v ohrození* (People in Peril) is a Slovak NGO that runs multiple community centres in socially excluded areas that provide upskilling programmes (including career guidance) to young Roma people who dropped out of compulsory formal education.

Sources

- European Commission (2022). 2022 European Semester: Country Report – Slovakia. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/2022-european-semester-country-report-slovakia_en
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Guidance for NEET

No specific national guidance services exist currently for this target group. Several ESF-funded national projects and funding opportunities for guidance and training providers were linked to the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, most of them focused on the demand-side of the labour market (providing subsidies for employers for providing internships, hiring and mentoring young people). During 2017-2018 the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family employed 50 counsellors providing specialised 30-hours guidance programme for young people registered as jobseekers, but the increase in capacity was not extended beyond the duration of the corresponding national project *Restart for young people* (Reštart pre mladých). However, these programmes are not available for people not registered as jobseekers at the labour office.

Since 2015, Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family has also implemented several projects that combine job subsidies and funding for an internal mentor within the company that facilitates the job integration of NEETs. The latest project *Grab your chance* (Chyt sa svojej šance) started in October 2021 and will fund these support measures for NEETs until December 2023.

In 2017, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family also published a *call for the provision of career guidance and training for NEETs*. Projects aimed at identifying NEETs, assisting them in registering at the labour office and/or facilitating their placement in the labour market. 18 projects were implemented by associations, NGOs and companies.

The Autonomous region of Banská Bystrica launched a social enterprise (*Podnik medzitru práce*). 45 NEETs from the Roma community are provided transitional employment in the enterprise, career guidance and employability training with the objective of finding a job on the labour market in the medium and long term. The region also launched 7 youth centres "*Your space*" that provide career guidance, psychological counselling and coaching for NEETs. The centres are co-funded by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family as a pilot project with the potential of establishing these centres in other regions.

Source

- Vantuch, J.; Jelínková, D. (2018). Guidance and outreach for inactive and unemployed – Slovakia. Cedefop ReferNet thematic perspectives series. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/guidance-and-outreach-inactive-and-unemployed-slovakia>

Guidance for young people at risk

Centres of pedagogical and psychological counselling and prevention ("Centrum pedagogicko-psychologického poradenstva a prevencie") in cooperation with schools assure the prevention and early detection of young people at risk of drop-out. The prevention system is being reinforced thanks to a national project "*From standardisation of the consulting system and prevention to inclusion and success in the labour market*"

Several standards and manuals for the work of the school special pedagogue, social pedagogue, career counsellor, therapeutic pedagogue and school psychologist were created in the project, as well as an organisational framework the cooperation of the multidisciplinary teams of these professionals at schools and at the centre. The project also implemented capacity building activities: training and supervision was provided to **1718 professionals** and new career counsellors and coordinators were recruited in all regions.

Sources

- Research Institute for Child Psychology and Pathopsychology (2022). From standardization of the consulting system and prevention to inclusion and success in the labor market. <https://www.euroguidance.eu/from-standardization-of-the-consulting-system-and-prevention-to-inclusion-and-success-in-the-labor-market>
- Research Institute for Child Psychology and Pathopsychology (2022). Štandardizáciou systému poradenstva a prevencie k inklúzii a úspešnosti na trhu práce („NP Štandardy“) [Standardization of the system of counselling and prevention for inclusion and success in the labour market ("NP Standards")]. <https://vudpap.sk/podporme-cinnosti-vudpap/projekty-vudpap/np-standardy/>

Guidance for persons with disabilities

Education sector

The *School Act* grants all pupils with special educational needs (SEN) right for education and learning support which reflects their individual needs (§ 144). Learning and career development of pupils with disabilities is facilitated by educational counsellors (mandatory for each primary and secondary school) and auxiliary school staff such as school special pedagogues and school psychologists. These

positions are mandatory at special schools as well as in all regular primary and secondary schools that educate more than 20 pupils with disabilities. School staff is supported in this task by psychologists at external centres of counselling and prevention (CPaP) and specialised centres of counselling and prevention (ŠCPaP) that provide diagnostics and targeted interventions to pupils with disabilities.

At the tertiary level of education, students with specific needs are according to [The Act 131/2022 on Higher Education](#) (§ 100) entitled for support services which include ensuring use of special teaching aids and educational approaches. Based on the Act on Higher Education, there should be a coordinator for students with specific needs at each Slovak university. Coordinators are tasked with identification of students with specific needs, assessment of their needs, provision of information and consultancy with regards to students with specific needs to other higher education departments and employees, and provision of targeted counselling to students with specific needs. In delivering these tasks, coordinators receive methodological support by special pedagogical departments established within two Slovak public universities: 1) Comenius University in Bratislava ([Support Centre for Students with Specific Needs](#)); and 2) Technical University of Košice ([Barrier-free Centre](#)).

In addition, better inclusion of learners with special educational needs is addressed in the Recovery and Resilience Plan (component 6: [Availability, development and quality of inclusive education at all levels](#)). One of the goals in this area is to introduce a vertical model of support measures into the education system. Support measures should comprise:

- General support measures - applied in all schools (initial prevention, psychological and career guidance, strengthening of individualisation in education);
- Targeted support measures - applied for pupils with special educational needs, depending on the identified obstacles in access to education and learning (special pedagogical support and intervention, strengthening the teaching of some subjects, increased pedagogical support);
- Specific support measures - applied to pupils and students with severe forms of disability (substantial adaptation of the curriculum, intervention by specialists, use of communication systems for students with hearing impairments, Braille etc.).

Employment sector

According to the [Act No. 5/2004 on employment services](#), all citizens have the right to work regardless of their social origin or disability (§ 14). Local public employment offices (úradý práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny) are obliged to administer an internal database of job-seekers with disabilities, mark vacancies suitable for job-seekers with disabilities in the national [job portal](#), publish a list of sheltered workshops in their respective districts and oversee a compliance of employers (with over 20 employees) with the obligation to employ people with disabilities (at least 3,2% of the total number of employees). One of the PES measures to increase employability of job-seekers with disabilities is subsidising creation of sheltered workshops (chránené dielne). These workshops provide employment to job-seekers with disabilities who would otherwise have difficulties entering the labour market. Another measure of PES towards employability of job-seekers with disabilities is to subsidise their job retention.

In 2021, a company [Profesia](#) which runs the largest online (private) job portal in Slovakia, developed a practical handbook on employing people with disabilities with practical tips and recommendations for both the employers and people with disabilities. The handbook falls under the company's CSR (corporate social responsibility) project [Helping from the Heart](#) (Výpomoc so srdcom) which also included studies and surveys on labour market integration of people with disabilities and promotional campaigns to raise public awareness about employing people with disabilities.

Projects with the aim of improving employability of people with disabilities are also implemented by civic associations such as [National Council of Citizens with Disabilities](#) or [Association for helping people with mental disabilities](#).

In addition, the commitment to systematically support employability of people with disabilities through active labour market policies and supported employment mechanisms is also stipulated in the [National Program for the Development of Living Conditions of Persons with Disabilities for 2021-2030](#).

Sources

- Act No. 131/2002 Coll. on Higher Education. https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2002/131/vyhlasene_znenie.html
- Act No. 5/2004 on employment services. <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2004/5/20220401>
- Act No. 245/2008 on education and training. <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2008/245/20150901.html>
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Guidance for immigrants

Since Slovakia had not been a traditional destination country for refugees in the past, career guidance services for refugees are not widely established and developed yet. The main providers of the tailor-made career support to refugees in Slovakia have been non-governmental organisations, charitable organisations and local branches of international humanitarian organisations (e.g. [International Organization for Migration, Human Rights League](#)). They provide counselling services comprising career, psychological, social and legal aspects.

[Mareena](#) is a Slovak NGO that provides complex support (including career guidance) to refugees, people in need of international protection and foreigners living in Slovakia. The organisation organises regular community events, trainings and webinars, and administers a large network of volunteers (Slovak professionals) who accompany refugees and foreigners through the process of social and labour market integration. Mareena also launches regular social media campaigns to promote the positive image of refugees and foreigners living in Slovakia (Euroguidance Slovakia, 2020).

In the wake of the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and inflow of refugees to Slovakia, public employment services launched [two projects](#) aimed at facilitating labour market integration of refugees through individualised counselling (needs analysis and provision of personalised labour market information), provision of training and volunteering opportunities and subsidised employment. Moreover, other public institutions and professional associations in Slovakia produced numerous guidelines and training materials on how to provide targeted career counselling to people and children fleeing the war in Ukraine.

Sources

- Euroguidance Slovakia (2020). The National Career Guidance Awards 2020: Compendium of award-winning contributions from Slovakia, Czechia, Hungary, Latvia and the Republic of Serbia. Bratislava: Slovak Academic Association for International Cooperation. Available at: <https://www.euroguidance.sk/document/publikacie/44.pdf>

Guidance for other groups

Slovakia has a long-term issue with social inclusion and labour market integration of Roma people living in marginalised communities. Young people from these communities often face multiple barriers and struggle with integrating into the formal education system. This often leads to their wrongful placement in special schools (due to supposed learning difficulties) or them dropping out of the formal education. Compensation measures for early leavers are described in the section <Career guidance for early leavers>.

In April 2021, the Slovak government adopted [Strategy of equality, inclusion and participation of Roma people until 2030](#) (Stratégia rovnosti, inklúzie a participácie Rómov do roku 2030) and related [Action Plan](#) to achieve the objectives stated therein. The Action Plan foresees launch of training for career counsellors working with marginalised Roma communities, provision of specialised career interventions at Orientation Centres and career guidance programmes at schools to members of marginalised Roma communities.

Moreover, career support to this target group is provided by social enterprises, community service centres and non-governmental organisations. They provide wider social and legal support either directly in the field or in community centres. The most prominent actors in this field include NGO [Človek v ohrození](#) (People in Peril) and [ETP Slovensko](#).

The Recovery and Resilience plan (component 6: [Availability, development and quality of inclusive education at all levels](#)) foresees introduction of several support measures to ensure better inclusion of young people from marginalised Roma communities such as increasing number of professionals at schools and external school facilities (Centres of counselling and prevention, Specialised centres of counselling and prevention), strengthening multidisciplinary approach, introducing professional standards into the system of counselling and prevention, and financing early childhood care schemes in the marginalised communities to tackle generational poverty.

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Gender-based policies

Gender-based policies traditionally fall under the authority of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. In 2021, the Ministry put forward a renewed [National Strategy for equality between women and men and equal opportunities in the Slovak Republic for years 2021-2027](#) in reaction to the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025. This national strategic material identifies 8 priority areas with regards to promoting gender equality and fairness of opportunities. As far as career guidance is concerned, the most relevant area is “Education, Science and Research” which calls for reducing gender stereotypes in accessing educational and career paths through specialised training programmes and career interventions.

Important work in this area was done within the national project [Gender Equality Institute](#) (2009-2014) which produced several methodology materials and guidelines on gender sensitive career guidance (e.g. “5 steps towards gender sensitive career guidance - guidelines”). Another important actor has been the Institute for Labour and Family Research. The Institute implemented a national project [Prevention and Elimination of Gender Discrimination](#) which resulted in the creation of a series of papers and guidelines that can be found on the online platform www.totojrovnost.eu.

However, despite the existence of these strategic and methodology materials, gender-sensitive career guidance is a virtually unexplored area of practice in Slovakia.

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