



An EU reference framework for lifelong guidance



18 guidelines for policy and systems development

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The **European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training** (Cedefop) is the European Union's reference centre for vocational education and training, skills and qualifications. We provide information, research, analyses and evidence on vocational education and training, skills and qualifications for policy-making in the EU Member States. Cedefop was originally established in 1975 by Council Regulation (EEC) No 337/75. This decision was repealed in 2019 by Regulation (EU) 2019/128 establishing Cedefop as a European Union Agency with a renewed mandate.

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Foreword

Today's world of work offers more opportunities for career development than ever before, but it also demands adaptability. Careers today are becoming longer, less linear, and increasingly diverse, making it harder for people to navigate a pathway that best combines their personal aspirations and emerging opportunities. A stronger push for lifelong skills development has increased the need for more high-quality career services in Europe. Such services would allow individuals to understand themselves better, identify and leverage their strengths, and learn how to navigate a rapidly changing world of work.

From a public policy perspective, this highlights the urgency of empowering individuals from an early age to identify their learning and career needs, stay informed about the labour market landscape changes and opportunities, update their skills, and accumulate qualifications that can be valued in the labour market, within and beyond one country. Employers should also be able to connect with talent and plan staff development in line with emerging trends and needs. To achieve this, effective and sustainable guidance systems should be designed with individual outcomes in mind, to support people of all ages in accessing the right career information, advice and guidance services. These guidance systems should be flexible enough to respond to changing contexts and evolving needs, while investing in the professional development of practitioners and in the creation and improvement of career guidance tools and resources.

Responding to these challenges, Cedefop has developed a comprehensive reference framework and a set of policy guidelines for stakeholder collaboration on developing policies and systems for lifelong guidance. The framework is particularly timely, as it comes shortly after the adoption of the Union of Skills strategy and directly supports its goals by promoting inclusive, learner-centred guidance systems that enable effective upskilling and reskilling. Cedefop's efforts in this field are grounded in years of experience. In 2005, the Agency published its first comprehensive guide to enhancing lifelong guidance, agreed upon by EU Member States as a reference framework for self-assessment and peer learning to improve guidance policies and practices. This was a pivotal work that informed the 2008 Council Resolution on integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning.

In 2015, building on these precedents, the EU-supported European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) developed its *Guidelines for lifelong guidance*, a document that has further contributed to strengthening the evidence base on the quality of career learning experiences across Europe. Since then, significant progress has been made at the national level, and Cedefop has consolidated its work in the field, notably through CareersNet, its network of independent experts for generating knowledge, supporting policy research, and collecting evidence for the development of lifelong guidance systems.

The updated guidelines have been shaped by the expertise of CareersNet experts, with the support of the European Commission, contributions from the European Training Foundation (ETF) and expertise of the International Labour Organization (ILO), from the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Inter-agency Working Group on Career Guidance (WGCG), from experts from the Finnish Institute for Educational Research (FIER), and input from the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). This work has built on the 2015 guidelines, while strengthening their strategic relevance.

- (a) The new guidelines still represent the only comprehensive EU-wide policy framework on lifelong guidance, providing a valuable tool intending to equip individuals at any age and stage of life with the skills to manage their careers.
- (b) They facilitate benchmarking, review, and improvements in guidance policies and systems. They offer reference points for all relevant sectors, taking into account varying national arrangements in relation to education, training, the labour market, and social inclusion.
- (c) The new guidelines feature improved integration across different sectors and policy areas, incorporat-

ing new priorities. They also approach social inclusion as a cross-cutting dimension that contributes to social equity aims.

We believe that this renewed framework can foster effective collaboration and mutual learning within and among countries in Europe and beyond, driving continuous improvement of guidance systems for the benefit of all. Checklists are provided for self-assessment, and the guidelines can be used together with Cedefop's [Inventory of lifelong guidance policies and practices](#). Above all, the framework aims to support all stakeholders in building more inclusive, effective, and future-proof guidance systems that benefit individuals, employers, and societies across Europe.

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Introduction

1.1. Setting the scene for policy and systems development

1.1.1. Lifelong guidance in the EU

Lifelong guidance ⁽¹⁾ as an umbrella concept has been defined in two resolutions (Council of the European Union, 2004, 2008). It refers to a range of activities throughout life that enable individuals at any age and at any stage of life to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/or used.

This overarching meaning makes space for related terms (educational and vocational guidance, etc.) and definitions to be used in policy according to national traditions and contexts. To facilitate EU and wider European cooperation and a common understanding based on shared meaning, the definition of lifelong guidance is compatible with terms used by other organisations and variations at the national level. It aligns with the activities of providers and the individual processes used with clients (service users or beneficiaries), with ‘systemic thinking’ shaping coherent and holistic lifelong guidance systems that aim to meet the information, advisory and guidance needs of the public (Kettunen et al., 2025; Vuorinen & Kettunen, 2022).

Lifelong guidance enables individuals to experience meaningful careers and skills development that are orientated towards better outcomes and a better future. Evidence-based practices and systems are used to provide diverse activities to meet individual needs and to open doors to new opportunities. Activities can help equip people with the competences required to plan and successfully deploy, update, adjust and recognise their skills and needs in the context of realistic scenarios, to allow people to imagine the steps they need to take towards their preferred future. Following a strength-based and proactive approach, individual capacities are developed to better predict, and navigate the uncertainty, sudden shocks and unexpected changes. Meeting the increased demand for lifelong guidance services can also help societies to become more resilient and proactive in the face of change and crises, instead of only reactive.

Among the activities for individuals and groups are information provision, career (guidance) counselling, career education, competence assessment, support, teaching and acquisition of career management skills (CMS) (Council of the European Union, 2008; see [Annex 1, Glossary](#), and [guideline 1](#)). Worldwide, job clubs and fairs, and job-search and career-planning assistance, are common in the labour market sector, as are online/digital self-help activities related to occupations and tools for self-appraisal of interests and skills (Lai et al., 2025).

Why is lifelong guidance policy (and policy on lifelong guidance) important? Across the lifespan, lifelong guidance provided as a service can support individuals in accessing all types of learning and work opportunities and can be beneficial for mobility, which has long been recognised by the public and governments ⁽²⁾, both individually and collectively ⁽³⁾. Comprehensive inclusion measures can contribute to broad policy aims.

⁽¹⁾ ‘Lifelong guidance’ as an umbrella term is also used in its short form ‘guidance’, while ‘career guidance’ is used in some cases and can refer to guidance in a particular sector or setting (see [Annex 1, Glossary](#)).

⁽²⁾ European Pillar of Social Rights (European Parliament, Council of the European Union & European Commission, 2017). See also European Social Charter, Article 9 (1961, revised in 1996), and the International Labour Organization’s Human Resource Development Recommendation (1975, revised in 2004).

⁽³⁾ While several EU policies recognise the value and role of career development in decision-making in diverse contexts, the Council meeting of education ministers issued two resolutions in 2004 and 2008 that were explicit in highlighting the importance of the provision of career guidance throughout life and of links between the provisions.

Lifelong guidance can serve as a tool to support successful career transitions in Europe during a time when individuals are increasingly experiencing job- and career-related changes during their lifespan and when lifelong learning is becoming more prevalent in the EU (though adult learning participation is still uneven). People must manage the inevitable social risks through institutional arrangements and policies that promote flexibility and security (Schmid, 2017). In today's world, to ride the waves of change, it is more important than ever to acquire, as early as possible, the skills and competences required to successfully manage labour market complexity and uncertainty, the changing nature of work and non-linear employment patterns and to identify and access meaningful learning and development pathways throughout life.

New opportunities for individuals can also increase with greater awareness of guidance services, enabling learning and career development, particularly among individuals living in underserved or rural areas. Lifelong guidance is also a tool for improving individual and household well-being and a means for society and its economy to function smoothly, addressing the supply and demand sides of the labour market.

Internationally, lifelong guidance is widely seen as contributing to a range of public policy goals and individual outcomes (see Cedefop et al., 2022, 2025; ELGPN, 2015a).

- (a) **Education and training.** Participation and engagement in learning; retention and course completion; performance and achievement; progress to further learning and work, lifelong learning; upskilling and reskilling; and mobility.
- (b) **Labour market.** Participation in work; employability and job retention; income and salary potential; better balancing of labour market demand and supply; reduced time on unemployment benefit; engagement, work performance, satisfaction, motivation and productivity; employer investment in employee skills and career development; mobility and employment transitions; workplace learning; and workforce development.
- (c) **Social and cultural inclusion.** Social and economic integration of individuals and groups; social equity; reduction in long-term unemployment and poverty cycles; overcoming barriers to accessing learning and work; active ageing; and addressing policies on diversity, including gender, in all its forms.
- (d) **Social and economic development.** Returns from higher workforce participation, productivity; helping address skills mismatches and related challenges such as labour and skills shortages; and supporting the digital and green transitions and the broader sustainability of society through changed career patterns.

Lifelong guidance aims to enable the individual learner and guidance user to make the best, most reasonable decisions about further learning, work and life, and it therefore contributes to personal development and the acquisition of CMS.

Twenty years after political decisions were taken to boost lifelong guidance systems in Europe, to better integrate guidance into lifelong learning and to embed it in other policies (Cedefop, 2005), significant progress is still greatly needed. The uneven development of lifelong guidance systems makes it difficult to meet current policy and societal aims and, together with stakeholders and key partners, to jointly confront critical social, economic, environmental, geopolitical and other challenges. Although awareness is increasing, many people remain unaware of the range and purpose of guidance opportunities that do exist or they miss the chance to benefit due to difficulties with access, being unclear about what to expect or a lack of confidence in the value of the services, products, resources and/or activities (Cedefop et al., 2025).

Challenges and gaps remain in respect of the quality and quantity of guidance provisions and the lack of agreed-upon standards and professionalisation, including career education during schooling and career learning over the lifespan. Quality issues include inadequate access to training and continuous professional development for career practitioners and others providing guidance, particularly in the public sector. The diverse expectations among service users and stakeholders, such as employers

and trade unions, can also hamper improvements. With the complexity of the surrounding ecosystem and its diverse actors, progress takes time, and disruptions due to changes in government also slow development.

Despite the limitations, Europe can step up its progress in addressing common challenges, building on and reinforcing previous efforts and long-standing policies in the EU.

1.1.2. Policy background – a time of rapid change and uncertainty

Demographic shifts and the twin digital and green transitions, with quickly evolving technologies and the push for further advancing sustainability in Europe, bring both challenges and opportunities for individual careers and for systems that enable and support career development. Policy needs to proactively assure the prosperity and well-being of all individuals and of the EU while effectively responding to the changing needs of society and striving to shape future outcomes.

In the political guidelines for the European Commission for 2024–2029, President von der Leyen called for a new action plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and for ‘more investment in people and their skills’ and to embed ‘lifelong learning into education and careers’. Labour productivity and innovation are key concerns, while it is important to ensure that nobody is excluded and that the European social model is firmly in place. This is particularly true in the context of the divisive geopolitical turmoil and crises affecting Europe, including existential threats, and those that may be ahead.

Managing individual, economic, sectoral and social transitions is a significant challenge facing the EU and, together with other policy measures and stakeholders, lifelong guidance can help strengthen societal resilience.

The Draghi report (Draghi, 2024) asserts that the EU ‘will have to ensure the best use of its available skills while keeping the social fabric intact’ (p. 15), which implies a critical role for both social and economic rights. In addition, guidance throughout the lifespan and other complementary measures linked to lifelong learning and career development are also crucial. The Letta report (Letta, 2024) on the single market also reaffirms the strategic role of skills policy and the integration of vocational education and training (VET) and skills policy into industrial and competitiveness strategies.

The European Pillar of Social Rights (European Commission. Secretariat-General, 2017) and its action plan (European Commission. Directorate-General (DG) for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2021), which focus on achieving a fairer and more inclusive Europe, emphasise the need to create quality jobs that meet the needs of the digital and green transitions. Principles 1 and 4 refer to the right to education, training and lifelong learning and to active support for employment, respectively. As a target, the European Pillar of Social Rights aims for at least 60 % of all adults to be participating in training every year by 2030, anticipating that, with suitable opportunities, people will acquire the right skills for the jobs of today. It also places importance on equal opportunities, addressing needs at all stages of life and reducing poverty. The forthcoming [action plan](#) aims to go further and help EU Member States in reaching their headline targets.

Strengthening previous policy, the Herning Declaration (Council of the European Union & Danish Presidency, 2025), previously the Osnabrück Declaration, which referred to the importance of career guidance within a culture of lifelong learning, emphasises the need to create flexible learning pathways, increase the attractiveness of vocational programmes and appreciates the role of career guidance. This relates to ensuring appropriate levels of basic skills and promoting sound policies that foster high-quality education and training without overlooking equity and equality.

Lifelong guidance supports these policy initiatives and aims across and within multiple sectors. It is a policy in its own right with established priorities at the EU level ⁽⁴⁾, which are also mentioned across several EU policies and named in legislation. Free and easily accessible services that are provided early, including career education, can help increase awareness of the EU tools, platforms and initiatives for supporting learning and careers, mobility and transparency.

⁽⁴⁾ The 2008 Council Resolution provided the impetus for countries to reinforce their guidance systems by prioritising quality assurance, CMS acquisition, coordination and cooperation at different levels (Council of the European Union, [2008](#)).

European public employment services (PES) play a vital role in the lifelong guidance ecosystem by offering support for career development and skills acquisition throughout an individual's working life. PES also act as transition management agencies in many Member States (European Commission. DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion et al., 2017; 2021) see also [Decision \(EU\) 2020/1782](#) and the PES Network strategy).

Numerous EU initiatives and policy documents mention career guidance and career development ⁽⁵⁾. Involving social partners and the private sector in addressing policies on labour shortages and skills demands is important from individual, collective and social perspectives and underlines the need for the wide participation of social actors in the ecosystem. The use of feedback from stakeholders, including individual service users and career practitioners, is key to the improvement of the systems.

Despite mounting pressure for more consistent investment in guidance systems, Europe needs to continue making progress towards achieving interconnected, coordinated and holistic guidance policies that match the ambitions of the 'Union of Skills' (European Commission, 2024).

Exploiting the opportunity provided by the 'Union of Skills' strategy, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) strategy (Cedefop, 2025a) lays the foundation for lifelong guidance to support the policy aims of VET and skills development, aiming to not only meet but move beyond the current challenges through committed actions. The supply of high-quality guidance provisions will be pivotal, as will helping individuals to have the capacity to navigate learning and career pathways and transitions, to remain aware and proactive in relation to social and employment rights and opportunities, and to find and remain in meaningful work.

1.1.3. Cedefop's role in defining a joint global vision

At the global level, the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) Inter-agency Working Group on Career Guidance (WGCG) ⁽⁶⁾ furthers a joint working vision for career guidance and career development, advocating for sustained investment. The group draws on synergies and common challenges among the different constituencies and stakeholders.

The WGCG has agreed on a common definition of career guidance as follows: 'the services which help people of any age to acquire and develop the capacity to manage their careers (CMS) and to make the educational, training and occupational choices and decisions that are meaningful for them over a lifetime'.

The joint vision (Cedefop et al., 2025) stresses that career guidance can assist people in reflecting on their ambitions, interests, qualifications, skills and talents and in relating this knowledge about who they are to who they might become in life and work. The agencies place importance within career guidance on addressing differences and inequalities in a holistic manner, noting that this will increase its value, because individuals, families and communities differ in the extent to which they are able to visualise and plan for their future.

A 'career' is defined as 'peoples' pathways through life, learning and work as well as the way that they understand those pathways and accord them meaning'. Rather than 'the hierarchical progression through formal occupations', it is a way of 'thinking about the journey' (ILO, 2024).

Long-standing European expert and policy networks promote and advance the role and quality of

⁽⁵⁾ See, for example, EU legislation and documentation on the following topics: [pathways to school success](#), [the reinforced Youth Guarantee](#), [the European skills agenda](#), [upskilling pathways](#), [the recommendation on individual learning accounts](#), [the strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities](#), [the pact for skills](#), [the European Green Deal](#), [the Digital Decade](#), [the recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials](#) and [the recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning](#), as well as linked guidelines on validation (Cedefop, 2023d). The [European quality assurance reference framework for vocational education and training](#) includes career guidance provision as a potential reference indicator.

⁽⁶⁾ In 2025, the WGCG comprised Cedefop, the European Commission (including the PES network), the European Training Foundation (ETF), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In addition, the WGCG has received input from and has had project-based partnerships with independent actors in the field, including the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG) and the International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy (ICCDPP).

lifelong guidance through cooperation and peer exchange involving Member States and non-EU countries, as well as exchanges between the networks. Cedefop's CareersNet brings together independent experts in lifelong guidance and career development as national contact points inside and outside of the EU to build knowledge jointly, engage in peer learning, support Cedefop's tool development, cooperate on systems analysis and gap identification, promote and improve learning and careers in Europe, and collect, analyse and share evidence around policy and systems development.

The European Commission coordinates the Euroguidance Network, which provides national resource and information centres in 34 European countries. The Euroguidance Network collects, disseminates, and exchanges information on national approaches to career guidance, sharing project results, innovative working methods and best practices. Its main target group is guidance practitioners in education and employment who provide information and guidance on studying abroad to people seeking advice. It also helps the guidance community develop its skills and promotes national and international guidance practitioner networking by organising seminars, training, and study visits.

1.1.4. Policy and administrative responsibility for lifelong guidance

Lifelong guidance is normally a shared policy and administrative responsibility of ministries and other actors, at the national and regional levels. New actors in the guidance ecosystem can also transform the wider governance landscape. The continuous updates of Cedefop's [inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices](#), from 2020 to the present, provide independent insights and evidence of how countries organise and govern their guidance systems, including the extent of change over time, interconnectedness and the decentralised or market-based arrangements found in some countries.

The ministries or authorities typically involved in policy and administration include those of education and skills, higher education and research, vocational training, employment, youth, social affairs and health, adult learning and, more recently, agencies related to digitalisation and to ICT. Many Member States have established national councils or forums (or similar structures) for, or including, lifelong guidance policy and systems development (Cedefop, 2008a). These and joint administrative units/committees, national expert groups and/or cross-ministerial working groups aim to ensure sustainable cooperation and shared governance on lifelong guidance issues.

The present structure and content of the framework and guidelines reflect the shared nature of policy and administrative responsibility and the diverse ways in which guidance systems are organised. Accordingly, there are policy guidelines that address the issues that are common (transversal) to all policy-relevant ministries or equivalent bodies, and there are guidelines (sectoral or related to social inclusion/exclusion) that may fall under the responsibility of some individual ministries or several ministries or equivalent bodies where there are shared responsibilities.

Administrative responsibility for the development and delivery of lifelong guidance services and tools can also be devolved by ministries to regions, organisations and institutions, etc. Some providers, such as the PES, outsource guidance activities.

1.2. Aims of the new framework and guidelines

The first set of guidelines, on which the new guidelines were built (ELGPN, 2015a), drew on various efforts, including the common aims and principles for lifelong guidance provision agreed upon by the Member States at the time (Cedefop, 2005). These guidelines were based on collective underpinning work, international reviews and best (policy and system) practices.

The new framework furthers the work while remaining aligned with the previous guidelines. The new framework has the following aims:

- (a) to improve the quality and efficacy of the career learning experience of all individuals. They contribute to improving the consistency of such experience across the relevant sectors, where guidance is

- to be provided in and across the education, training, employment (labour market), youth and social service, inclusion and other sectors, including civil-society contexts (third sector). They also contribute to strengthening the quality of services, tools, resources, products and activities. They help create coherent policies and strengthen both guidance systems and those institutions or entities where guidance is embedded;
- (b) to provide a reference guide for policymakers to identify the policy dimensions to be considered when deciding on lifelong guidance services and products in a variety of settings and across different sectors;
 - (c) to act as a source of common reference points, knowledge, expertise and assistance for Member States (and other countries), EU neighbourhood countries and regions to enable self-review and improvement, peer review and external reviews;
 - (d) to support dialogue/exchange and mutual policy learning by providing inspiration at the national and international levels. The new guidelines are intended to add value to a country's policies and systems while recognising existing differences among and within countries and where guidance is embedded in or integrated into other policies;
 - (e) to enable countries to respond coherently to common challenges in relevant sectors and areas and within the relevant strategies, such as those focused on lifelong skills development across many policies, by facilitating the exchange of learning and experiences.

This reference framework is addressed to policymakers responsible for guidance and career development issues in the education, training, employment (labour market), youth, social inclusion (social services) and other fields, and to social partners and guidance service providers across sectors including those providing career education. The policy issues included are common or relevant to the various sectors and public–private partnership arrangements. This includes providers of information, guidance and advisory services working in the private sector.

They are also of interest to individual beneficiaries (learners, users, clients and customers) of all ages, as they can help individuals to understand what to expect of the lifelong guidance services, tools, products, resources and activities.

1.2.1. Scope of the framework and approach

The reference framework provides policy advice and information that covers the provision of lifelong guidance over the lifespan across multiple sectors and is relevant for personal development. The framework is applicable regardless of the mode of provision and/or delivery (online, in person, distance services, etc.). The framework is based on certain operational principles (Box 1) and is not specific to individual countries or practice cases.

Despite continuous changes in guidance service delivery, particularly with evolving technology in the field, the framework intends to retain the focus on stable elements and be general enough to remain current but also be forward-looking.

Lists of items are avoided where possible (e.g. guidance methods, target users and ICT and other tools), as the basis for selection would need to be clear. In the case of target users, universal coverage is encouraged. Some groups are more susceptible to experiencing disadvantage or discrimination, but all possible groups with any profiles cannot be anticipated. Populations also vary by country, and there may always be more user profiles and demands from new groups including those with greater advantages or resources.

The language used in the guidelines aims to be accessible to the intended readers and according to the topic. In some cases, however, technical terms or field concepts are used. To aid understanding, a working glossary is included (see [Annex 1, Glossary](#)), which is neither exhaustive nor a stand-alone glossary to be used separately.

Box 1. Operational principles for lifelong guidance provision

The reference framework is supported by underlying operational principles ⁽⁷⁾.

- (a) **User-centred.** Publicly funded lifelong guidance services and products exist to serve individuals and groups, comprising all members of the public. Such services and products are accessible, without discrimination, in a flexible and secure manner, allowing for the personalisation of services. Individuals and groups play a key role in their design and evaluation.
- (b) **Holistic, inclusive approach.** Publicly funded lifelong guidance services and products recognise the life experience, life stage, diversity (including gender) and social and economic circumstances of individuals.
- (c) **Ease and equity of access.** Individuals can access publicly funded lifelong guidance services and products through multi-channel service delivery (face to face, letter, phone, email, internet, etc.), allowing for a universal design approach. All individuals have access to the same level of services according to their needs and circumstances. Equitable access to services is ensured, and comparable standards in service delivery for all is maintained, particularly vulnerable individuals and groups, to prevent potential disparities or segregated service contexts, particularly in decentralised and market-based systems. This contributes to fair and just transitions and to more sustainable societies with greener and digital economies.
- (d) **Transparency.** Users and other stakeholders are made aware of and understand the nature of the lifelong guidance services and products provided, the processes and procedures involved and the rationale behind these.
- (e) **Individual and group differences in CMS.** Policies on publicly funded lifelong guidance services and products recognise that individuals, groups and communities differ in their capacity to manage their learning and work pathways in their level of CMS. Policies support service users to become competent at planning and managing their learning and work paths and the transitions therein.
- (f) **Stakeholder participation and openness.** All stakeholders participate in the development of policies and systems for lifelong guidance and are willing to share knowledge (e.g. strategies, methods, concepts, tools and policy evaluations), consider shared funding arrangements and stimulate debate in order to advance knowledge and improve problem-solving at the EU, national, regional and local levels.
- (g) **Efficiency and effectiveness.** Publicly funded lifelong guidance services and products are able to demonstrate their added value and return on investment to governments and the public at large.
- (h) **Evidence-based policy development.** The best available research evidence including policy evaluation is continuously incorporated into policy debates and decisions on lifelong guidance policy and systems development.
- (i) **Outcome and impact focused.** Policies support and promote learning, employment and economic and social outcomes from lifelong guidance activities.
- (j) **Professionalisation of services and tools.** Lifelong guidance services and tools (in any media form or format) are developed and implemented in accordance with national or other relevant standards. Staff who perform lifelong guidance activities have the required professional knowledge, competence and qualifications.
- (k) **Integrated policy approach.** Policies on lifelong guidance are an integral part of education, training, employment, youth, social and other policies (e.g. skills). While lifelong guidance is also treated as a self-standing area of policy with general and specific quality standards, the coherence of lifelong guidance policies and service provision is also supported in each sector and setting.
- (l) **Continuous improvement.** Policies on lifelong guidance should be based on a continuous feedback cycle, including data and evidence collection, use and application, informing decisions on service improvement.

⁽⁷⁾ Adapted from the operational principles in the first set of guidelines (ELGPN, 2015a).

1.3. Structure and methodology

1.3.1. Structure and presentation of the guidelines

Based on the idea that coherent and holistic lifelong guidance systems should meet the information, advisory and guidance needs of the public, the reference framework is presented in two main, interconnected sections with specific guidelines (Table 1). Accordingly, this structure also reflects the similarities and diversity of institutional arrangements across countries.

- (a) **Transversal guidelines** represent well-known policy areas that are common to and shape lifelong guidance in the EU and are considered essential for the quality, professionalisation and continuous development of lifelong guidance policies and systems.
- (b) **Sectoral guidelines** represent the lifelong guidance that is provided in both education and training contexts and in the labour market (employment) in different sectors and for a wide variety of students, learners and service users, including informally. They are considered together to indicate and further shape the close relationship between these main sectors and contexts, including outside the context of public policies and services. The main profiles of the target users are imagined based on the context of each sectoral guideline, recognising that not all categories can be predicted in advance, and characteristics of individuals, and their needs, are treated as unique when applied to service delivery.
- (c) **Social inclusion (exclusion) guidelines (dimensional)** are included in the other guidelines as a dimension to consider, because (i) a universal approach is required across the transversal policy areas and (ii) social inclusion (exclusion) (involving people of various ages and in diverse circumstances) is integral across all policy fields and sectors. This dimension is included so as not to overlook how guidance contributes to integration and equity policy aims.

Guideline 16, addressing lifelong guidance for older adults, is included among the sectoral guidelines (Table 1), but its content is slightly different; it not only implies users at a certain life stage but also relates to a demographic category (age) and so depends on an individual's own experience of ageing but also their objective membership in an age group. It is considered as part of the 'third age' stage of a person's career.

This structure is also reflected in Cedefop's [inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices](#) and the two products can be used together. The latter features examples of national policies and practices, as well as time-limited projects that span the whole system. This helps with monitoring system developments and supporting peer learning within and across countries.

Table 1. Lifelong guidance framework structure

Transversal guidelines (nine guidelines)	Sectoral guidelines (seven guidelines)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Career management skills (2) Access to lifelong guidance (3) Assuring the quality of lifelong guidance (4) Evidence-based systems and policy development (5) Governance and strategic leadership: cooperation and coordination (6) Career information in lifelong guidance (7) Professionalism in lifelong guidance (8) Funding lifelong guidance services (9) ICT in lifelong guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (10) Lifelong guidance for school pupils and students (11) Lifelong guidance for learners in VET (12) Lifelong guidance for higher education students (13) Lifelong guidance for adult learners (14) Lifelong guidance for workers (15) Lifelong guidance for the unemployed (16) Lifelong guidance for older adults
Social inclusion dimension (two guidelines)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (17) Lifelong guidance for young people at risk (18) Lifelong guidance for vulnerable groups 	

Source: Cedefop, based on ELGPN (2015a).

Each guideline has four parts: (a) a definition of the content, (b) an explanation of why it is important (the rationale), (c) a description of good practice (elements of good or ideal lifelong guidance policies and systems) and (d) resources for policymakers (bibliography and additional reading). Resources common to many or several guidelines are repeated as needed. Additional sources are included in the 'References' section, where readers can also expand their knowledge.

Given the intentions of the framework (see Section 1.2, 'Aims of the new framework and guidelines'), the bulleted elements in part (c) of each guideline ('Good practice') – which can be used as checklists for review, dialogue with stakeholders, inspiration or benchmarking – are not prescriptive or representative of any particular country/system or region. The lists can be used in national guidance forums or to review where guidance is embedded. Further guidelines for the decision-making process among stakeholders) and an adaptation of the elements to the relevant levels and to the national, regional and local contexts may be required (an online, user-friendly version of the checklists is planned).

There are strong links between some of the guidelines, for example between [guideline 8](#) (funding) and [guideline 4](#) (evidence-based systems and policy development) and between [guideline 3](#) (ensuring quality) and [guideline 7](#) (professionalism in lifelong guidance). Some content is overlapping or complementary (e.g. in [guidelines 11](#) and [13](#)). Understanding these connections allows readers, primarily at the national or regional level and depending on institutional set up, to visualise connections between the transversal guidelines' components and how to combine several guidelines for national sector review purposes, etc.

1.3.2. Further considerations on the use of the framework

The guidelines serve as reference points across and within the main policy sectors but can also be used to develop other related or emerging fields for social policy, such as skills, digitalisation, environmental considerations or social sustainability.

Stakeholders may, for example, select one (or more) guideline(s) (e.g. [guideline 11](#) on VET) and examine how their existing policy on lifelong guidance provision (in initial vocational education and training (IVET) and continuing vocational education and training (CVET)) compares with elements of good policies and systems described in the relevant guideline. Cross-references are inserted within each guideline to indicate the interconnections and relationship with other guidelines, which also demonstrates the value of the cross-sectoral approach.

To further signpost the connections between the sectoral guidelines and the transversal guidelines, the 'Good practice' sections in each of the sectoral guidelines are grouped by each transversal guideline.

1.3.3. Development of the new framework

The present framework acknowledges and builds on the guidelines for the development of lifelong guidance systems and policies (ELGPN, 2015a). Therefore, it builds on the original sources and accumulated work of those guidelines, including the prior cooperation efforts and system reviews of international and European organisations and the experts contracted ⁽⁸⁾.

The 2015 guidelines also followed the Council resolutions of 2004 and 2008, calling for continued strengthening of European cooperation in systems and policy development and addressed the priorities of relevant EU policy frameworks and other key precedents (Cedefop, 2005).

The current proposed framework was created through a collegial process, drawing heavily on Cedefop resources and collaboration with key individuals. This includes the support and views of Cedefop's CareersNet independent experts (see [Annex 2](#) for the list of experts active during the relevant period) in lifelong guidance and career development and the opinions of other individuals who generously contributed (see 'Acknowledgements') up to the final stages.

An eclectic approach was adopted to the underpinning of the collected knowledge and practices (policies and systems) reviewed for the framework. Content was also considered from Cedefop's [inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices](#). It is also informed and strengthened by numerous EU policy documents and sources, facilitated through the support of the European Commission's DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, including its PES Network (Secretariat).

Several steps involving diverse actors were taken to develop the framework, with the development commencing at the fifth annual CareersNet meeting and continuing until the summer of 2025 (see [Annex 3](#)).

⁽⁸⁾ Several of the organisations that carried out this previous work are represented in the current TVET WGCG (i.e. the European Commission, the ETF, the ILO, the OECD, UNESCO and the World Bank), as is Cedefop. These organisations collaborated on the guidance advocacy activities and products referred to in this framework. The international associations IAEVG and ICCDPP contributed to the WGCG activities.

Transversal guidelines

Guideline 1: Career management skills

Definition

Career management skills (CMS) refer to a set of career competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes) that enable individuals at any age or stage of development to proactively manage their careers, learning and work life paths, and career development ⁽⁹⁾. Through continuously pursuing their ongoing career development, individuals can respond to and shape their worlds in the context of the pace of change and uncertainty. CMS are therefore a central concept for lifelong guidance and support for their acquisition needs to be integrated into relevant policies. This moves guidance beyond information provision towards empowerment. The lifelong acquisition of CMS for all has been prioritised by the Council of the European Union (Council of the European Union, 2008), and the concept has subsequently been reinforced in diverse EU policies. CMS can be viewed as being at the core of the personal, social and learning-to-learn competences (Council of the European Union, 2018; ELGPN, 2014a; Sala et al., 2020). CMS include the ability to act, make well-informed decisions and choices, and manage dilemmas, crises and tensions associated with changes in life, learning and work. Although the skill sets constituting CMS can vary across countries and socioeconomic contexts, there is shared understanding of CMS, as these competences can be acquired at different life stages and in different ‘careering’ ⁽¹⁰⁾ contexts. The concept should be represented in dedicated frameworks and/or as part of other suitable frameworks. Key EU policy documents, national reference frameworks and tools in diverse contexts may refer to CMS using other terms (e.g. entrepreneurship or financial education) that have similar meanings and diverse aims ⁽¹¹⁾.

The knowledge, skills and attitudes related to CMS combine personal, learning and career management and include broad skills for gaining a wider critical understanding of social and economic contexts, ethics, etc. They thus need to be adapted to the careering context. Examples of personal management include self-knowledge of one’s capacities and interests, critical thinking, self-evaluation, social skills, flexibility and planning. Examples of learning management include participation and engagement with formal, informal and non-formal learning. This involves understanding the relationship between self, learning and work and interactions with the social environment and surrounding social and economic systems, especially acquisition of wider knowledge about the labour market and society for exploiting opportunities in the community and beyond. It also involves coping with barriers encountered in achieving personal goals and making decisions. Examples of career management include sourcing, evaluating and analysing information, in different modes and channels, about learning and decent work opportunities and their requirements, as well as risk-taking, ethics, labour market information and skills intelligence. It also involves relating this information to one’s self-knowledge, making meaningful career decisions and transitions, and career identity formation (see [guideline 6](#)). This also includes acknowledging and respecting others, collaborative career learning and co-constructing career-related knowledge with others for mutual benefit (ILO, 2021). CMS include balancing life, learning and work roles throughout life, as well as persistence and resilience in maintaining a positive attitude in challenging situations.

⁽⁹⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): ‘Career’ and ‘Career development’.

⁽¹⁰⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): ‘Careering’.

⁽¹¹⁾ See, for example, Cedefop ([2023a](#)) and ESCO Member States Working Group ([2021](#)).

CMS can be learned and develop over the lifespan, including early in schooling, with different expectations of competence mastery at particular stages ⁽¹²⁾. Some of these skills are generic across life situations; others are specific to learning, work identity formation and decision-making. The monitoring and reviewing of progress on one's learning and acquisition of CMS helps individuals to act and create meaningful and sustainable personal solutions to challenges and opportunities.

Why it is important

The teaching, development and acquisition of CMS in formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts can contribute to various aspects: participation in and engagement with learning; learning performance and progression; progression to work and through working life, as well as further learning such as upskilling and reskilling; enhancing and maintaining individual employability in the face of labour market change; and development of career identity or changes in personal aspirations.

For individuals, CMS contribute to personal, learning, career and work progression, as well as prosperity and employability, adaptability ⁽¹³⁾ and social inclusion. They also increase awareness of the context in which change takes place.

CMS provide individuals with a focus for achievement and enable them to identify the strategies and tasks that are necessary to achieve their goals. Particularly for individuals and groups outside the labour market, the development and acquisition of CMS contribute to their personal development, workforce integration, social inclusion, active citizenship and dignity. Strengthening CMS can help in reducing long-term unemployment and poverty cycles and generally promotes educational, social and economic (re)integration for all groups.

CMS contribute to workforce development and productivity, competitiveness, adaptability and resilience, mobility and enterprise performance. CMS advance social justice and equity by empowering individuals and groups to recognise and overcome barriers based on gender, ethnicity, age, disability or social class, as well as institutional barriers to learning and work. CMS are especially valuable in diverse social exclusion contexts (e.g. stereotyping, discrimination and low social capital) and for individuals who have particular difficulties in accessing and understanding about learning and work (see [guidelines 17](#) and [18](#)).

Effective operationalisation of CMS (a) makes it possible to design lifelong guidance services and actions according to the levels of readiness and needs of different user groups and different contexts, (b) helps define the services to be provided and the required skills of the professionals who are expected to provide the services and (c) is integral to a monitoring and evaluation framework and part of national lifelong guidance strategies.

A national CMS framework with functional descriptions of the acquisition of CMS as an explicit competence area allows institutions to effectively plan career learning interventions and guidance services. It allows policymakers to map and track the role of the different stakeholders involved in the provision of lifelong guidance and related services with the aim of creating a strategic network with clear and shared roles and missions.

The clarification of CMS concepts in terms of expected learning or other outcomes and in frameworks helps articulate the relationship with other concepts, frameworks and skill sets that may be complementary or refer to similar competences and skills, even those with different aims/purposes.

⁽¹²⁾ In the school sector, CMS can be developed in collective (class/group) settings or individually and using existing or emerging technologies that broaden users' access to services, tools, resources, products and activities. Career education can be provided as a specific career learning programme in the formal curriculum (e.g. as a subject), a thematic aspect across the curriculum (integrated into all subjects/activities), a formal cross-curricular approach (a dedicated topic in all subjects) or an extracurricular activity (outside the formal programme) (see [Annex 1, Glossary](#)).

⁽¹³⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Career adaptability'.

Good practice

Policies and systems that:

- create the conditions for the empowerment of all individuals and groups to acquire learning outcomes linked to CMS that enable them to navigate and act within an ever-changing society and its labour market;
- consider the context and frameworks for learning CMS (culture, education, training, retraining, curricula, labour market and their relevant teaching and learning traditions) and encourage using the benefits of diversity for enhancing CMS learning;
- provide further training to trainers and to career practitioners and other relevant staff ⁽¹⁴⁾ according to standards that ensure their effectiveness in assisting individuals and groups to acquire CMS;
- facilitate a wide use of methodologies, tools (including digital) and required skills to communicate and support the learning of CMS by users;
- support the development of a CMS framework that outlines the competences that an individual needs to be able to effectively manage their work and life roles and career decisions from a long-term perspective according to the developmental stage of the individual and their level of (career) readiness ⁽¹⁵⁾, depending on the context, related to differentiation of service delivery (Sampson et al., 2023);
- promote the development and use of national frameworks that describe CMS in terms of the learning outcomes that can be achieved at different moments and in different situations throughout the lifespan. Promote the development and use of national frameworks that define and connect the processes of reflection and learning through which CMS can be acquired by individuals;
- support the formative evaluation and assessment of the outcomes of CMS-related teaching and training;
- connect the formative evaluation ⁽¹⁶⁾ and assessment outcomes of CMS-related activities, including teaching and training across contexts (sectors) within the national lifelong guidance systems and policies and/or as part of quality (assurance) frameworks. This is relevant both at the individual level and for overall quality assurance;
- support the teaching and acquisition of CMS in all education and training settings, using different formats and schedules according to the context, either as part of specialised education programmes or as cross-curricular competences. Activities can be developed throughout schooling, in connection with career learning that accompanies the development of other key competences for lifelong learning, in relation to decision-making and at transition points;
- integrate and continue CMS early in career education in schooling as a preventative measure to empower young people;
- support the teaching and acquisition of CMS by the public employment service within its user groups (European Commission. DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion et al., 2017, 2022; European Network of Public Employment Services, 2021) and embed this in labour market programmes, employment promotion initiatives and social protection programmes to strengthen the cross-policy dimension of guidance;
- facilitate school-to-work connections and transitions, ensure generational turnover, stimulate access for people to the world of work and to the training courses offered. Prevent and reduce early school-leaving and disengagement, including by providing support in connection with economic inactivity and unemployment, also for individuals at risk during diverse economic and social downturns and crises (see [guidelines 17](#) and [18](#));
- support the acquisition of CMS leading to, and within, work-based learning and dual systems and

⁽¹⁴⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Career practitioner' (this is the shortened form for 'career guidance practitioner'). 'Other staff' refers to those for whom the conduct of career guidance activities is a secondary or minor part of their official function. Support staff and teachers are examples of other staff.

⁽¹⁵⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): '(Career) readiness'.

⁽¹⁶⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Formative evaluation'.

- apprenticeships. This will assist in the learning process, in workplace integration and specialisation, and in the personal career progression of workers of all ages;
- encourage the design of work-related activities and career learning within and outside school environments, with the direct involvement of external experts and professionals from enterprises and workplaces;
 - prioritise any possibilities for validation and the acquisition of credentials online (and promote their quality) that include CMS acquired in formal, non-formal and informal contexts. Non-formal and informal contexts include human resources development, retraining, upskilling and reskilling, professional development and interventions for those who are unemployed and for groups at risk of unemployment;
 - adopt a cross-sector approach across the education, training, labour market, youth and social sectors, including the collaboration of different stakeholders, that supports the continuity of learning of CMS across the relevant sectors.

Resources for policymakers

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Guideline 2: Access to lifelong guidance

Definition

Access refers to the means and conditions by which all individuals and groups can engage with lifelong guidance services, tools, resources and products and participate in career-development-related activities over their lifespan. This enables them to make meaningful life, learning and work decisions⁽¹⁷⁾ and to acquire and develop career management skills (CMS; see [guideline 1](#)). This includes articulation of the extent of universal coverage and entitlements to lifelong guidance independently of individual user profile and across sector, setting or activity (see [guideline 8](#)). Widened access to lifelong guidance involves policy that promotes career education and integrated services for all age groups, and this can comprise self-help, brief staff assisted services (i.e. a career practitioner who is available to assist users) and intensive individual case-managed arrangements, as well as outreach measures.

Provisions can be made available, visible and recognisable to all individuals across a range of education and training, labour market and civil-society contexts through single access points or coordinated or seamless services, including face-to-face, distance and online channels. These services can be accessed despite an individual's changing circumstances, life stage or labour market status or sector of work, whether part of the formal or informal economy (Cedefop et al., 2023). Public-private partnerships and involvement of accredited guidance providers, employers and trade unions across sectors (as relevant) should be considered when widening access. Embeddedness in labour market policies and in social protection or other community programmes helps ensure access.

Access based on individual needs and readiness⁽¹⁸⁾ allows the design of the services to meet the specific needs of the users and support their well-being. Accessible⁽¹⁹⁾ resources and services are responsive to individual needs and preferences and to context and consider the possible barriers faced by diverse groups. Adequate methodologies, tools and language are employed to respond to those needs and preferences in an efficient manner. Access to career guidance services can include tiered services, screening and appropriate referrals to other services, as well as coordination with other provisions using a holistic approach.

Why it is important

Improved access to guidance supports the implementation of relevant policy documents and their follow-up. These include the European Pillar of Social Rights (European Commission. Secretariat-General, 2017), the Council resolution on lifelong guidance⁽²⁰⁾, the exercise of the right to guidance and support arising from the European Social Charter and its additional protocol⁽²¹⁾, several dispositions and recommendations of the ILO⁽²²⁾ and valid national legislation governing the access to lifelong guidance and career development support services.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Improving access to lifelong guidance was a priority area in the Council Resolution of 2008 on better integrating lifelong guidance in lifelong learning strategies (Council of the European Union, 2008). It was also identified in the Council (education) Resolution of 2004 on strengthening policies, systems and practices for guidance throughout life (Council of the European Union, 2004).

⁽¹⁸⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): '(Career) readiness'.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Related to access to services is accessibility, which refers to access to all relevant physical and virtual settings through specific measures, with a preference for universal design solutions (see [Annex 1, Glossary](#)).

⁽²⁰⁾ 'Guidance services, as services of general interest, should be accessible to everyone, irrespective of their knowledge base or their initial skills, and should be readily understandable and relevant. A particular effort should be made to improve access to guidance services for the most disadvantaged groups' (Council of the European Union, 2008, C319/6).

⁽²¹⁾ The [European Social Charter](#) was opened for signature on 18 October 1961 and entered into force on 26 February 1965. An additional protocol to the European Social Charter was presented in 1988 in Strasbourg and an updated Social Charter was signed in 1996.

⁽²²⁾ See [ILO Human Resources Development Convention, 1975](#) (No 142) and Recommendation, 2004 (No 195); the [Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023](#) (No 208); and the [Employment Service Conventions, 1948](#) (No 88) and 1997 (No 181), pertaining to career/vocational guidance.

Improved access to career resources, including assessments and information, helps a greater number of individuals to clarify what they know about themselves, including their well-being, their options and their approach to decision-making. It allows them to document personal achievements and demonstrate acquired and required skills and competences (e.g. portfolios and individual learning or skills accounts) for life, lifelong learning and work.

Career development is a continuous process throughout life, and access to lifelong guidance services and systems can assist people of all ages, according to their needs and circumstances. It is fundamental to the smooth transitions of young people in and out of education and training and the labour market. Young people are presented with an increasing number of choices and amount of information about continuing education and training and need career competences to navigate and master this, including in periods of economic inactivity (see [guideline 17](#)). Adults are facing multiple life transitions and demands to upskill, reskill or move within the labour market (Cedefop et al., 2025).

Workers are employed in a broad range of contexts, including in the informal economy and platform workers (see [guideline 14](#)), with different levels of social protection, career prospects and security, and are confronted with distinct challenges and barriers, for example according to their gender, education level, occupation, sector, disability status, geographic location or a combination of these factors. Effective career guidance can benefit many categories of workers as careers continue to be more irregular, requiring more frequent transitions.

Improved access to lifelong guidance services, tools, products, resources and activities supports diversity and inclusion aims, including equality of opportunities, social equity, social mobility and social cohesion and, therefore, can help to prevent exclusion.

Adequate access to lifelong guidance contributes to efficacy and better outcomes in education and training and the labour market, before, during and after participation in organised learning. It also contributes to greater efficiency in skills investment, while also effectively addressing skills and labour market challenges. These relate to labour market supply (of skills and labour) and demand (for skills and labour) and the changing needs of societies in a context of policies that ensure sustainable socio-economic development, productivity, innovation and growth within countries and globally. In this way, adequate access to guidance increases the relevance and enhances the outcomes of other policies, such as social provisions or youth policies.

Prioritising universal access to lifelong guidance services can help career practitioners and providers to remain informed about the needs of diverse groups. It can also help them to identify ongoing professional training needs and the resources required to provide and deliver services and support (see [guideline 7](#)).

Improved access to lifelong guidance services and support from partners increases the awareness of individuals and about multiple public resources, such as EU mobility and transparency tools, platforms and services for learners and workers. This helps users to understand qualifications, their own competences and needs, and where they can freely access resources for upskilling, reskilling and professional development.

Improved access to lifelong guidance services also increases awareness of relevant EU policies and various support providers that may assist individuals and groups in staying informed about their rights, opportunities and resources in education, training and the labour market. This includes awareness about the provision of guidance and expectations in the labour market.

Good practice

Policies and systems that:

- ensure a sufficient and stable framework for governance and adequate funding for lifelong guidance and for individual access. This includes ensuring that the supply of services and funding for system development is sustainable and meets the current needs and predicted demands of individuals and groups and the public at large;

- promote career education for all within the lifelong learning curriculum as a preventive measure;
- offer a variety of user-friendly services, provided by accessible means in line with individual availability, in a manner that facilitates distance learning, a combination of distance and in-person learning, and physical access. This should also be undertaken in a manner that differentiates between people who require different levels/amounts of assistance and those who can use self-help services;
- ensure that both guidance users and potential users, as well as career professionals, have an adequate level of digital skills to safely and securely (including ethical considerations) access and exploit digital services, tools, products, resources and activities for their or their client's benefit (see [guideline 9](#));
- offer a range of easily accessible services for, and including screening of, the aspirations and needs of individuals and groups; referrals to relevant services or professionals (health, housing, partners and associations, specialised guidance providers or services, etc.); individual needs and readiness (e.g. skills and competences) for career planning and decision-making; and the use of resources. Individual living and working environments should be taken into account at key decision points and transitions over the lifespan;
- support the career development of individuals of all ages, backgrounds and life circumstances and at all career stages and ensure they have access to relevant services, resources and measures that are non-discriminatory. It should also be ensured that individuals and groups can find support within the scope of one or more available services. Other entities in the labour market and community, such as civil-society organisations, trade unions and sector skills councils, can be sources of support;
- target all user groups and individuals – but especially groups at risk of social and economic exclusion, such as vulnerable populations – incorporating a universal services design ⁽²³⁾ where possible. Policy design should address access, for example in relation to gender, disability or migration status (see [guideline 18](#));
- use the mainstream language(s) and, as appropriate, other languages in accordance with user needs and readiness, including national sign languages and Braille, and in accordance with relevant regulations and guidelines;
- improve awareness of lifelong guidance and its recognition by the public by effectively communicating its nature and benefits to individuals and groups and the services available to prospective users;
- use a multi-professional approach (involving relevant professionals) in broadening the reach of guidance activities in any work setting;
- work through non-formal and informal guidance partnerships, particularly with vulnerable communities, groups and individuals and, where possible, through mobile and outreach services;
- promote coordination and collaboration of services, tools, products, resources and activities within and across sectors and also with strategic and professional partnerships, built up at the local, regional, national, European and international levels;
- ensure where possible that online guidance services, tools, products, resources and activities are integrated into national e-governance services and policies;
- promote open access to information resources of all media types;
- improve interlinkages between lifelong guidance and other policies and services, integrating guidance into measures supporting lifelong learning and skills development. This includes outreach activities, ICT portals/platforms that provide access to career guidance and information, validation of non-formal and informal learning, and financial and non-financial incentives and support for adult learning;
- allow for the co-creation of services with diverse user groups and significant others ⁽²⁴⁾, such as parents, to promote career development in different settings, including workplaces and within education and training institutions;
- ensure that access to the guidance system, including accessibility requirements, is adequately considered in monitoring and evaluation, including quality assurance approaches, and in establishing indicators. Policy should ensure evidence-based planning and development.

⁽²³⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Universal design'.

⁽²⁴⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Significant others'.

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Guideline 3: Assuring the quality of lifelong guidance provision

Definition

Quality assurance ⁽²⁵⁾ in lifelong guidance is a process involving a range of policies, standards and procedures based on agreed-upon and updated concepts and principles so that the services designed, provided and delivered meet the needs of the user groups and so that expected outcomes are promoted and clarified. The elements used to assure quality can be organised into reference frameworks and tools that assist in monitoring and evaluating guidance services, products and activities from the perspective of service users and other stakeholders, leading to consistent and continuous service and system improvement. To sustain an effective, high-quality lifelong guidance system in a relevant national, regional, local or other context, policies must develop input measures that assure the quality of the guidance services at different levels (e.g. client-facing services ⁽²⁶⁾) (see [guideline 4](#)).

Quality assurance captures the inputs (investment in professional development and training of the career workforce, etc.) and standards (practitioner competence frameworks and occupational profiles) set out and translated in policies. These include the quality tools (e.g. labels or guidelines) used in public or other services relevant to lifelong guidance, against which the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of services and policy are assessed. This helps maintain continuous awareness of the outcomes and results of guidance and a system for identification of quality services that is recognisable to the public.

Why it is important

Quality assurance in lifelong guidance protects the public's interest by ensuring that the lifelong guidance services and products are referenced according to appropriate pre-established professional quality standards ⁽²⁷⁾, including ethical principles.

Quality assurance can help to achieve continuous improvements in and the sustainability of services and can strengthen lifelong guidance systems, including their coherency, which benefits the wider public and fosters their trust in the system and services.

Quality assurance frameworks provide a structured approach for evaluating the impact and effectiveness of guidance provision that is visible to stakeholders. This includes evaluating how financing can be better utilised for improving guidance services and systems according to their expected outcomes.

A developed quality assurance system that includes users in shaping quality assurance processes enhances the relevance and effectiveness of guidance and its alignment with users' needs and expectations. This helps to maintain users' trust and contributes to the transparency of quality assurance processes.

It assures the comparability (equivalent quality) of lifelong guidance for individuals within and across sectors, over their lifespan, and regardless of their geographical, social and economic circumstances. It also contributes to public accountability, including of funding bodies, and provides evidence of well-informed investments in lifelong guidance activities. In particular, it is key in instances where governments devolve the responsibility of provision of lifelong guidance activities to a region, municipality and/or institution, etc.

⁽²⁵⁾ Although this guideline refers to quality assurance specifically in relation to guidance contexts, a variety of relevant quality management systems and related initiatives exist (e.g. the [European Public Administration Network common assessment framework of 2020](#), the *PES Network Benchmarking Manual*, the [European quality assurance reference framework for vocational education and training \(EQAVET\)](#), the [International Organization for Standardization's Quality Management Principles](#), etc.).

⁽²⁶⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Client-facing services'.

⁽²⁷⁾ The Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies (Council of the European Union, [2008](#)) identified the development of the quality assurance of guidance provision as a priority area for Member States.

Quality assurance contributes to policy and systems development, shaping strategic goals, the planning of services, the development of programmes, the identification of gaps in service delivery, the training needs of professional career practitioners based on available evidence and the optimal use of resources.

Quality assurance helps to maintain the consistency and reliability of the services and activities over time, across the chain of provisions and products, and within and across sectors and policy fields in education, training and the labour market and social inclusion contexts, for both young people and adults. With adequate quality assurance measures in place, this provides a structure and reference points for guidance embedded within other frameworks.

Quality assurance processes enhance continuous professional development.

Good practice

Policies and systems that:

- maintain, and continuously improve, transparent and up-to-date quality assurance systems that make the features of the guidance system explicit and visible to stakeholders, including services contracted out and publicly funded. This also includes any products facilitating organisations or actors or processes undertaken in the service provision chain, whether or not these are provided through the private/independent sector operators;
- maintain and keep updated agreed-upon quality frameworks that are comprehensive and include all the relevant aspects of quality assurance policies, standards and procedures (as defined in [guideline 3](#));
- link quality standards on guidance provision to other relevant quality assurance frameworks and similar in sectors in which guidance is an integral aspect ⁽²⁸⁾;
- encourage the interest and involvement of guidance stakeholders (e.g. users and potential users of services, the general public, employers, trade unions, guidance service providers, training providers and practitioners) in lifelong guidance quality assurance systems, taking into consideration the diversity of their needs and interests and supporting the development of common approaches and joint solutions to challenges;
- clearly define the rationale and the expected outcomes of lifelong guidance and career services where guidance is provided and make this information available for end users and consumers as part of quality assurance;
- promote the development of commonly shared professional quality standards that apply to all lifelong guidance provision and products, and within and across education and training, the labour market and social fields. These should be promoted in the private sector and adapted to the service context;
- focus on practitioner competence and tools: support the initial and continuing professional training of practitioners and other staff who deliver lifelong guidance services and activities;
- ensure that ethical guidelines for practice are part of quality assurance standards and frameworks;
- ensure that other staff who support the delivery of lifelong guidance services and activities, or who develop tools, are trained and develop appropriate competences as required in their role and in accordance with relevant quality standards;
- promote and support continuous development of guidance services and their quality assurance from a user perspective, with the user considered in the service design and improvement, monitoring and design of the quality assurance systems;
- consider and make available detailed information on the level of investment (expenditure) in career guidance services as input elements, for monitoring and evaluating, to measure and understand individual outcomes (social, economic, well-being, etc.) and the impacts of interventions. The outcomes and impact assessed at different levels (individual, provider and other organisations, regional and

⁽²⁸⁾ See, for example, the *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area (ESG)*, [EQAVET](#) and the *PES Network Benchmarking Manual*.

national policy; see [guideline 4](#)) can help ensure continuous funding for services to meet the needs of users and to promote specific outcomes.

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Guideline 4: Evidence-based systems and policy development in lifelong guidance

Definition

Evidence-based systems and policy development in lifelong guidance refer to and involve collecting, analysing and assessing relevant data to ensure that guidance policies and systems are firmly grounded in the strongest available evidence and adhere to agreed-upon expectations and relevant quality standards. The processes involved are part of quality assurance (see [guideline 3](#)) and are adapted to available resources and to local conditions and arrangements for collaboration. This includes systematic and continuous documentation, collection and analysis of data and information at different levels (e.g. client-facing services ⁽²⁹⁾, providers/organisations, education and training, the labour market or other sectors, regions and public policy), through research and other means of monitoring and evaluation ⁽³⁰⁾.

Evidence-based systems and policy development are aimed at understanding the usage, design, effectiveness and impact of lifelong guidance policies, approaches, systems, services and interventions and at promoting co-design and co-funding of guidance systems and their monitoring and evaluation. Evidence collection needs to include validated information on inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes and impacts in all sectors, as well as on sustainable financing, where guidance is provided (education, training, employment, youth, social and other fields). Other services, organisations or professionals play a role in collecting and analysing evidence, and this helps to ensure access to data, cooperation, division of labour, relevant expertise and coherence among policies and services and that individual and societal needs are comprehensively addressed on an ongoing basis.

Why it is important

Having a reliable evidence base on the effectiveness of career guidance interventions in a changing socioeconomic context and in the context of evolving challenges is a prerequisite for optimal policy development ⁽³¹⁾.

The regular collection and analysis of data assists in developing evidence-based policies and practices, as well as strategies for system monitoring and continuous improvements in the provision of quality-assured lifelong guidance and its promotion.

The collection and analysis of data is necessary to assess the effectiveness and impact of lifelong guidance provision at different levels, demonstrating its added value to policymakers. It contributes to many aspects of policy and systems development, for example the shaping of strategic goals, the planning of services, the development of programmes, the identification of gaps in service provision, the determination of training needs of professional practitioners and the optimal use of resources.

It addresses accountability issues, supports policy decision-making in all relevant sectors and supports comparability of guidance methodologies, tools and practices, and it provides a critical perspective on transferability of these across contexts and their adaptability to new contexts.

It provides a platform and opportunity for stakeholder collaboration on quality assurance and contribution of datasets, laying the groundwork for shared data collection, meaningful indicator development and inputs for effective monitoring and evaluation. This may help in the identification of common and evolving challenges across the various sectors and contexts for guidance and facilitate the co-development of systems and policies.

⁽²⁹⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): ‘Client-facing services’.

⁽³⁰⁾ For example, see the Cedefop (2024) glossary for explanations of formative and summative evaluation under ‘evaluation of education and training’.

⁽³¹⁾ The Resolution (Council of the European Union, 2008) on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies invited Member States to pay attention to evidence-based policy development.

Good practice

Policies and systems that:

- support the regular collection of data on the inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes and impacts of guidance and the monitoring and evaluation of such data according to the different levels; these include cost–benefits to individuals, service providers and governments and also the evolving social and economic contexts for guidance. Taken together, this information and these data consider the cross-sectoral, integrated and systemic nature of career development support provisions and related policy development;
- ensure evidence collection, monitoring and evaluation are informed by a ‘sequence structure’ focused on relevant impacts and outcomes (e.g. input–process–output–outcome–impact) while recognising that lifelong guidance provision needs to reflect the non-linearity of careers and learning ⁽³²⁾;
- support a common approach to policy-relevant indicator development and application within and across the education, training, employment, youth, social and other fields where guidance is provided;
- promote research to support evidence-based policymaking. This includes studies from academia and other sources of relevant research that use qualitative and quantitative data and effective methodologies, such as longitudinal and time-series impact evaluation and cost-effectiveness studies (ELGPN, 2014b);
- engage in strategic partnerships with universities/research bodies to promote continuous research on the quality and effectiveness of career guidance policy and practice to build up the evidence base;
- support data-gathering strategies to identify the demand and need for new, different and expanded services, the scope for innovation and new target user groups;
- ensure collection and effective integration of user-benefit and user-satisfaction data and career learning outcomes to tailor services and as part of feedback loops for service provision;
- where relevant, ensure the collection and evaluation of data on private sector provision. This includes publicly funded contracted services to improve accountability, ensure that services meet agreed-upon expectations or quality standards and create opportunities for mutual learning and cooperation. This process is especially important when there are implications for or connections to the public sector (see [guideline 8](#));
- in a mixed model of provision, provide a clear rationale, supported by evidence, on how funding is allocated to different services, service modes and priority groups;
- ensure that evidence underpins the design, delivery and continuous improvement of services and feeds into quality assurance processes and that the relevant stakeholders involved in the provision of lifelong guidance are aware of the evidence and able to put it into practice;
- ensure that systematic monitoring and evaluation is an integral part of the quality assurance system.

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⁽³²⁾ See Cedefop ([2023c](#)) for a description of a sequence structure.

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Guideline 5: Governance and strategic leadership – cooperation and coordination

Definition

Governance and strategic leadership in the context of lifelong guidance involves shared and coordinated management of policy and systems development in a country, region or locality. This can include elements such as vision, goals, responsibilities, legislation, statutory arrangements and organisational rules that mandate the provision, definition and professionalisation of services, their accountability and quality, and their credibility.

Governance and strategic leadership focus on fostering communication, collaboration, cooperation and coordination mechanisms involving all the relevant stakeholders and their responsibilities in lifelong guidance policy and systems development. The aim is to meet the needs of guidance users and to promote career development outcomes. This also entails the use of social dialogue ⁽³³⁾.

Lifelong guidance policy and systems development is planned, funded and organised within and across multiple sectors, including in education, training, labour market, youth, social and other settings ⁽³⁴⁾ (see [guideline 8](#)). This requires purposeful within and cross-sectoral governance and strategic leadership.

The key variables in planning and organising lifelong guidance provision include legislation and funding; policy and administrative responsibility at different levels and across actors; knowledge sharing between ministries; centralised versus decentralised government responsibility (region, municipality or institution); stakeholder involvement; non-governmental actors, associations and networks; and inclusive and integrated policy frameworks.

The promotion and sustainability of frameworks used in human resource and skills development, lifelong learning and employability contexts require shared responsibility, collaboration and communication among providers, stakeholders and several administrations (e.g. interministerial arrangements), as well as in the private and civil-society sectors.

Why it is important

Governance and strategic leadership stipulate the nature, extent, frequency and quality of the services, setting out guidance services as an entitlement for all or for specific groups or contexts across the life course in order to meet diverse needs. It enables the identification of gaps in the provisions and services that are available for individuals to access.

Governance and strategic leadership are important to connect lifelong guidance with up- and reskilling, work-based learning and validation by engaging individuals for learning, achievement, employability and transitions across the lifespan from a lifelong learning perspective.

Connecting lifelong guidance to lifelong learning and/or skills (development) strategies enables consistent strategic leadership for cross-sectoral policy development. It also enhances the continuity of service delivery between different sectors across an individual's lifespan and according to their needs.

Governance and strategic leadership help ensure that lifelong guidance is properly considered in or integrated into the development of a country's education, training, employment, youth and social protection ⁽³⁵⁾ and inclusion policies, and its national human resource development strategies and programmes.

Cooperation helps to connect lifelong guidance with the needs of workers and enterprises through the integration of career guidance policy and provision into social dialogue or through tripartite structures

⁽³³⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Social dialogue'.

⁽³⁴⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Sector'.

⁽³⁵⁾ See the International Labour Organization's web page on '[Social protection](#)' and the website of the [Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals](#).

such as sectoral councils and chambers, which in some cases provide career guidance.

Cooperation and coordination arrangements facilitate the co-construction of genuinely lifelong guidance policy and ensure the public's access to other services and products, for example through referrals or partnerships across relevant sectors.

The sharing of information, knowledge, methodologies and tools supports convergence in understanding and in quality improvement and approaches to monitoring and evaluation.

The involvement of key stakeholders and sectoral entities and individuals across settings in education, training and the labour market can raise awareness of lifelong guidance provisions and benefit the production of career information (see [guideline 6](#)) through cooperation.

Governance and strategic leadership and enhancement of synergies among actors and stakeholders at the national, regional and local levels ensure a common vision and a strategic path for the integration of ICT-based career development services into national e-governance strategies. They also ensure the interoperability of public services within and across borders ⁽³⁶⁾ and set out a formal commitment to such interoperability.

Governance and strategic leadership and early involvement of collaborative partners in the design of services, and referral networks, can ensure continuity and consistency and prevent fragmentation and duplication of efforts. This promotes efficiency of investment in the development and provision of lifelong guidance services and products ⁽³⁷⁾.

Governance and strategic leadership are particularly important from an individual user perspective. Individualised career guidance solutions require a coordinated response from a variety of agencies, and guidance plays a role in connecting services and provision in distinct institutions and organisations. The need for this coordinated response is clear in policies on unemployment and early leaving from education and training, and as individuals move within and between the education, training and labour market contexts and sectors throughout their lifespan.

Coordination and cooperation help to collectively meet the increasing demands made on career services through adequate division of labour across diverse services and through jointly agreed-upon policies. In this way, services do not rely on single providers, actors or individual sectors alone (Kettunen et al., 2025).

Good practice

Policies and systems that:

- promote cross-sector coordination and cooperation for lifelong guidance policies and services in the education, training, labour market, youth, social and other settings and sectors to support their professionalisation;
- promote a shared vision and strategy for the lifelong guidance services and a common view on the expected outcomes and impact of the services. This needs to be recognised by key ministries and relevant authorities, which must draw on and support research and the collection and analysis of data for monitoring and evaluation to inform policy development and for evidence-based leadership and decision-making (see [guideline 3](#) and [4](#));
- ensure lifelong guidance policies and services are based on a jointly agreed-upon cross-ministerial (or relevant equivalent) strategy for lifelong guidance and on a common conceptual framework for service delivery and funding arrangements among partners. Formal commitment to sustainable de-

⁽³⁶⁾ See the [communication on shaping Europe's digital future](#), which refers to e-governance and the digitalisation of public administration; see also European Commission (2020f), the [eGovernment Benchmark 2022](#) and European Parliament & the Council of the European Union (2024a).

⁽³⁷⁾ Member States were invited in the Council resolutions of 2004 and 2008 on lifelong guidance to improve cooperation and coordination among all stakeholders in the provision of lifelong guidance services in order to widen access and ensure coherence of provision (Council of the European Union, [2004](#), [2008](#)). See also Cedefop ([2008a](#)).

velopment and continuous improvements in career services (see [guideline 4](#)), including the use of existing and evolving technologies, must also be ensured;

- use legislation or statutory arrangements to support lifelong guidance provision as an entitlement for individuals within education and training or to support employment services and other relevant contexts;
- use individual entitlement to lifelong guidance and user needs as policy levers for coordination and cooperation;
- promote an approach and/or policy (frameworks) and practice that links lifelong guidance to lifelong learning, skills, and sectoral strategies and social dialogue, including tripartite actions;
- promote inclusive policy frameworks for all young people and adults, such as lifelong learning and employability for workforce preparation and development, where lifelong guidance is an integral part. The private sector should be included, where relevant;
- include a coherent national strategy of systematising the use of ICT and creating a conceptual framework for developing and integrating online services (see [guideline 9](#));
- promote and exploit the systematic use of technological developments and integrate their use more systemically into all aspects of lifelong guidance service provision through coordination and cooperation;
- ensure a coherent legislative process, covering the service providers and the tasks of a central coordination entity at a high level that monitors the quality of provision (see [guideline 3](#) and [4](#)) and the development of competence frameworks (for practitioners). It must also be ensured that the legislative process provides an ethical board to liaise with an ombudsman or similar advocacy arrangement for individual service users (including minors);
- support policy and systems coherence with a professional identity within and across sectors where the same language is used among guidance professionals and policymakers;
- promote the establishment of national coordination entities or research units to inform the design, follow-up and implementation of strategies;
- support the emergence, development and evaluation of mechanisms for coordination and cooperation, such as national guidance forums, inter-ministerial groups or policy units;
- steer and monitor the implementation of lifelong guidance services through standards or certification of professionals across sectors. User and stakeholder feedback should also be considered for systems improvement (see [guideline 4](#));
- foster standardised cross-sector information sharing on client learning outcomes (e.g. career management skills acquisition and individual learning account utilisation), assessment results and client interactions with career services and products, respecting national legislation on personal data protection;
- involve individual users in and incorporate stakeholders' interests into the co-design of policies, programmes and delivery systems for lifelong guidance. This should be done across sectors and in accordance with the national context. For example, consider involving and take into account the interests of the general public, employers, trade unions, guidance service providers, training providers and practitioners;
- ensure equitable access to services and maintain comparable standards in service delivery for all, particularly vulnerable individuals and groups, to prevent potential disparities or segregated service contexts in decentralised and market-based systems (see [guidelines 17](#) and [18](#)). This requires effective governance and strategic leadership in lifelong guidance, which are essential in contributing to fair and just transitions and to more sustainable societies with greener and digital economies.

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Guideline 6: Career information in lifelong guidance

Definition

Career information in lifelong guidance ⁽³⁸⁾ refers to the information, in any medium, that assists individuals and groups to visualise, plan and make meaningful career choices and decisions about their careers, including learning, training and work opportunities. The information and its presentation should as a minimum be objective, impartial, reliable and interconnected.

It includes relevant quantitative or qualitative data and information, including labour market information (LMI) ⁽³⁹⁾. Examples include information on skills; equal opportunities and diversity; competences; occupations; job vacancies; qualifications and credentials; incentives and funding schemes; working and living conditions; geographical and career mobility; regional, national and local labour markets; and education and training. It also includes information on the pathways between these, including validation of non-formal and informal learning. At the same time, this is also useful for integrating career guidance into the validation process and the coordination between these services and processes ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

‘Skills intelligence’, which can be selected and tailored as career information for users, is defined as the outcome of an expert-driven process of identifying, collecting, analysing, synthesising and presenting quantitative and/or qualitative skills and LMI (Cedefop, 2023) ⁽⁴¹⁾.

Data can be drawn from multiple sources and adjusted, presented and repackaged to meet the context, demands and needs of diverse users (Council of the European Union, 2008). Labour market actors, including career service providers, are a significant source of information and data on employment and skills trends and changes (skills and labour supply and demand and their interaction) in economic sectors, as well as on emerging, transforming and fading occupations and pathways ⁽⁴²⁾. Career information also refers to information obtained by individuals through experiential learning, such as work shadowing, work experience and work simulation.

Why it is important

Reliable and up-to-date career information allows individuals and groups the opportunity to (a) compare themselves, their circumstances and their interests and aspirations with the requirements and demands of jobs, work, education and training programmes and decent work opportunities (Cedefop et al., 2021) and career pathways; (b) identify a range of pathways towards these opportunities; and (c) make meaningful choices and decisions in particular contexts.

Individuals and groups in society differ in their capacity to source, interpret, analyse, evaluate and apply career information (see, for example, Cedefop, 2016). Therefore, they may need specific guidance assistance for personal implementation of their career decisions.

Access to, and competence in, sourcing, understanding, evaluating and applying career information are significant factors in social equity, educational participation and performance, as well as in labour market participation and outcomes. Developing such competence is part of career learning, and this includes the acquisition and development of career management skills (CMS; see [guideline 1](#)).

Individuals with adequate CMS can recognise, sort and interpret user-friendly, impartial career in-

⁽³⁸⁾ Guideline 6 mainly refers to the content dimension (the ‘what’) of career guidance / career information, as opposed to the process dimension, which is related to career management skills (see [guideline 1](#)).

⁽³⁹⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): ‘Labour market information’.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ ‘Validation (of prior learning)’ entails identifying, documenting, assessing and certifying learning outcomes against relevant standards (Cedefop, 2023d) (see [Annex 1, Glossary](#)).

⁽⁴¹⁾ The European skills agenda (European Commission, 2020d) communicates the importance of skills intelligence. Skills intelligence is also referred to as labour market and skills intelligence and is closely related to LMI (Cedefop, 2024). See [Annex 1, Glossary](#).

⁽⁴²⁾ See European Commission (2020). A European strategy for data. COM(2020) 66 final.

formation to identify key trends and demands in the labour market to assess, anticipate and forecast skill needs.

Indicators of skills and labour market demands/supply provide individuals with an opportunity to identify the occupations or sectors in which they are interested and locate funding opportunities. This helps in identifying programmes, channels, technical support structures and methods to acquire the skills, competences and/or qualifications needed to work in those sectors or occupations.

LMI, including skills intelligence, helps providers of career guidance to identify and anticipate potential labour market and skills trends, changes and demands; to understand skills needs and requirements; to address skills gaps and mismatches; and to adapt their learning provisions and activities more easily.

Skills intelligence can be used to support and strengthen career guidance to support lifelong learning as an element of the public employment services process (European Commission. DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion et al., 2022) and throughout education and training ⁽⁴³⁾.

Career information and guidance for individuals can communicate the relevance of sustainable development and of the digital and socio-ecological transitions and transformations for learning, work and careers ⁽⁴⁴⁾.

Good practice

Policies and systems that:

- promote career information provision (Tricot, 2002) in the career learning process across the lifespan: it should be designed to take users' needs (their questions) into account, to consider their social milieu and to assist them in identifying these needs and questions. It should be pedagogical in design;
- ensure that the information is reliable, user-friendly, impartial, non-discriminatory, clear, concise and informative for the intended audiences (practitioners and service users, including significant others ⁽⁴⁵⁾ who may support guidance users or provide guidance and information). It should be ensured that information can be customised or generic and can be used through different media in diverse settings;
- promote innovative solutions for career information delivery and provision in lifelong guidance contexts that make use of existing and evolving technology, where appropriate, and include rigorous quality control (see [guideline 9](#));
- provide information that is user-friendly, impartial and accessible, particularly for diverse vulnerable groups;
- when information is available through websites such as portals or platforms and applications, ensure adherence to relevant EU, national or other public standards, such as guidelines and legislation that ensure accessibility for all (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2019) in a safe and secure digital environment and based on the governing EU digital rights and principles (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2023);
- implement a plain-language and easy-to-read approach ⁽⁴⁶⁾ to ensure that the information is clear and easy to understand. The mainstream language(s) and, as appropriate, other languages should be used in accordance with user needs and readiness, including national sign languages and Braille, and in accordance with relevant regulations and guidelines;
- promote interconnectedness of career information through the development of single online access

⁽⁴³⁾ 'Further integrate and increase the regular use of skills intelligence in the (re-)design of national, regional and local skills and economic development strategies, in the areas of career guidance, reorientation and job transitions, as well as in future-proofing curricula design and development' (Council of the European Union, 2025).

⁽⁴⁴⁾ The Green Deal highlights the need for LMI related to green jobs and skills to help support the EU's transition to a climate neutral zone by 2050 (European Commission, 2019). One of the 12 actions of the 2020 skills agenda (European Commission, 2020d) underlines the fundamental role of skills and lifelong learning in supporting the twin (green and digital) transitions and in achieving the United Nation's sustainable development goals. This is also reflected in the Union of Skills (European Commission, 2024).

⁽⁴⁵⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Significant others'.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Plain language and easy-to-read text'.

- points with current and dynamically updated data and suitable interfaces for the general public, employers, trade unions, guidance service providers and training providers;
- consider users' expectations, socioeconomic contexts and labour market realities in respect of the provision of career information in lifelong guidance;
 - promote systematic and coordinated processes through key stakeholders and partnerships, including statistical offices, social partners, education and training providers, and scientific communities (including those with expertise in lifelong guidance), for collecting, analysing, evaluating, synthesising, distributing and presenting quantitative or qualitative (career) information for guidance provision;
 - ensure comprehensive and good-quality LMI ⁽⁴⁷⁾ and dissemination of official, authoritative, up-to-date and impartial data, including production by social partners and quality control;
 - develop and apply appropriate, high-quality, common statistical standards, taxonomies, guidelines and good practices, including common quality frameworks recognised at the European and international levels (e.g. issued by Eurostat, the International Labour Organization, etc.);
 - maintain feedback loops between clients, career practitioners and career guidance or other trained providers of career information. This can help improve the quality and focus of LMI and enable the development of skills intelligence, which can be used for better career information mediation, thus benefiting users;
 - relate information on education and training provision to local, regional, national and international labour market opportunities;
 - use tools and up-to-date resources for jobs and skills anticipation, including quality controls, to enrich career information, building on national/regional and EU sources and setting out the context and limitations of the data for users;
 - enable individuals and groups to gain access to experiential and non-experiential forms of career information, such as through virtual and in-person work experience and shadowing activities;
 - promote individuals' development and acquisition of CMS and their embeddedness in diverse initiatives, curricula and career education programmes to learn how to source, understand, interpret and apply career information and to evaluate such sources, which should enable autonomous exploration of data and information;
 - promote career education as a means to address individual and group differences in relation to career information;
 - ensure that the knowledge and skills of guidance practitioners in relation to career information are developed and maintained through initial and continuing professional development. Practitioners must be fully equipped to assist guidance users in acquiring capacities related to career information;
 - ensure that relevant monitoring and evaluation approaches are established that integrate elements intended to improve career information services, ensure their effectiveness and support career learning; these elements should include the promotion of research on career information in lifelong guidance contexts;
 - provide up-to-date information on the most relevant mobility, transparency and transferability tools, policies and programmes within and, where relevant, outside the EU.

Resources for policymakers

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Guideline 7: Professionalism in lifelong guidance

Definition

‘Professionalism’ in lifelong guidance refers to the professional competences required, including knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and qualifications ⁽⁴⁸⁾, to enhance the quality of guidance provisions (European Commission. DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion et al., 2020) by those who carry out lifelong guidance activities. This includes career practitioners, other relevant job profiles and key support staff across settings and contexts in which guidance is provided. ‘Professionalisation’ in lifelong guidance is an ongoing process of improvement and refers to the quality and impact of the services, resources, products, activities and tools, as well as to the public status of career practitioners ⁽⁴⁹⁾.

‘Training’ refers to the initial preparation, education and continuous professional development of career practitioners and others who provide guidance. Some lifelong guidance activities require intensive and specific training ⁽⁵⁰⁾, while others require less intensive and specific training ⁽⁵¹⁾. Training needs to be provided for those whose main work function is lifelong guidance (career practitioners) and for others (e.g. teachers and employment counsellors/advisors) who may foster the acquisition and development of career management skills (CMS) or provide guidance (Council of the European Union, 2008). Qualifications (certificates or diplomas) help ensure that standards for career practitioners and others providing guidance or working in the field are maintained.

The term ‘core competences’ ⁽⁵²⁾ refers to the combination of related knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that all career practitioners should display in an ethical manner regardless of their employment setting. They can be divided into four areas (Cedefop, 2009): (a) the cognitive competence, involving the use of theory and concepts, as well as informal tacit knowledge gained experientially; (b) the functional competence (skills or know-how), namely those things that a person should be able to do when they are functioning in a given area of work, learning or social activity; (c) the personal competence, involving knowing how to conduct oneself in a specific situation; and (d) the ethical competence, namely having certain personal and professional values.

‘Specialised competences’ are specific and additional knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that career guidance practitioners need for practising in a specific context or setting or for the needs of client groups. A ‘competence framework’ in this context is a structure that sets out and defines the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values inherent within each competence (and, in some cases, at different levels).

Member States promote professionalism and identify career practitioner competences through quality standards, competence frameworks, accreditation and legislation; as well as licensing arrangements, registers of practitioners are normative in nature and are often connected to the funding, the quality assurance and monitoring the effectiveness of career guidance services (see [guidelines 8, 3 and 4](#)). Quality standards and competence frameworks can be promoted by diverse stakeholders, such as social partners; they serve as tools for quality development and guidance practice and can be integrated into quality (assurance) frameworks.

Voluntary standards established by professional networks or associations in the field of lifelong guidance are used in some countries as a way for private career service providers to signal the quality of their services when no formal requirements or qualification pathways exist. Competence standards are also relevant for others: practitioners supporting career development and those involved in lifelong

⁽⁴⁸⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): ‘Qualification’.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ ‘Professionalisation’ here is dependent on all the transversal guidelines of this reference framework; that is, on using them as priority reference points for lifelong guidance systems development. See [Annex 1, Glossary](#), for a definition.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ These activities include career counselling and assessment; career education; labour market information management; non-directive guided, targeted conversation; active listening; and the professional acquisition of communication micro-skills.

⁽⁵¹⁾ These activities include recording the statistics of career service usage.

⁽⁵²⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): ‘Competence’.

guidance, guidance service managers and people conducting research and teaching in the field, those working at the system level and those who have legal authority, provide or are responsible for services involving lifelong guidance. Volunteers working in lifelong guidance also need adequate training.

Why it is important

The Council Resolution of November 2008 on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies established the importance of quality assurance and effective services and programmes. It requires a well-qualified and professionalised career workforce to be maintained. Subsequent EU policy across education, training and labour market contexts increasingly reinforces the need for high-quality services with a well-prepared, trained career guidance workforce.

Quality career development support with professionalised guidance provision also needs to be guaranteed in the emerging career development support roles in the contexts of, for example, validation, social protection, outreach, youth support and intermediary services.

Individuals and groups need to be enabled and assisted to identify their guidance needs, to acquire and develop CMS and to acquire evidence that instils confidence in the fact that the lifelong guidance activities offered are provided by people with the knowledge, skills, competences, attitudes and values to do so. Career practitioners and other staff who are well trained and qualified are better prepared to assist users in enabling the development and acquisition of CMS, resulting in positive career transition outcomes (see [guideline 1](#)).

Education and training enhance the professional profile and standards of career practitioners and of other staff who undertake guidance activities. This enables them to respond better to the diverse needs and expectations of guidance users and policymakers. Such education and training also help them in their interactions with those who manage and lead guidance service provision.

Qualifications for practitioners in lifelong guidance ensure that certain standards of learning and competence have been achieved, for both individual guidance practitioners and professionals. Qualifications also ensure that standards are achieved at the level of guidance providers when used as an 'input' ⁽⁵³⁾ for quality systems. Appropriate training also supports career practitioners in engaging with research and evaluation to inform evidence-based practice and to inform policy.

Professionalism and professionalisation are important for career practitioners, as they allow them to better advocate for their professional peers, to use and generate tools and evidence to advance the field and to develop strategies for doing this.

Practitioner competence frameworks are valuable for many reasons: they enhance adherence to comprehensive quality assurance and effectiveness of career guidance services, systems and continuous improvement. In addition, they:

- (a) help career practitioners and other staff to provide services within the scope of career guidance practice to meet legal and professional obligations and to clarify expectations among users;
- (b) help career practitioners maintain professional boundaries with clients, including the prevention and management of possible conflicts of interest, and help them to identify the need for referrals in critical profiling and screening processes;
- (c) provide tools for service organisation and the management of guidance services for recruiting competent staff and for defining and clarifying job descriptions;
- (d) provide tools for training providers to design and establish initial and in-service training and professional development for career professionals;
- (e) can be used by career practitioners for self-assessment to identify their necessary development areas;
- (f) promote effective intra- and cross-sectoral mobility among career practitioners, contributing to more effective use of resources and the development of a digital ecosystem for training opportunities that

⁽⁵³⁾ See also [guideline 4](#) in relation to indicators and the input–outcome model for assessing effectiveness.

are aligned with the framework elements and that enable practitioners' autonomous use of such resources;

- (g) can be used for promoting national and international cooperation, benchmarking and mutual policy learning and can be used as quality criteria when outsourcing services.

Good practice

Policies and systems that:

- protect the interests of individual and group service users through promoting the professionalisation of career guidance services and their sustainability;
- promote commitment to lifelong learning and continuing professional development and a culture of self-assessment, as an essential feature of the work of both career practitioners and others who are supporting career development and providing guidance. Competence frameworks are a resource in this effort;
- encourage the development of systemic competence so that practitioners develop the capacity to plan and organise service provision according to the national (regional) and local needs and prerequisites for operation;
- promote cross-sectoral practitioner competence frameworks, illustrate which competences must apply across sectors (e.g. the education and training, labour market, youth, and social services and social inclusion sectors), gain support from social partners and other stakeholders and set a standard for career practitioners' competence and professionalism (see [guideline 1](#));
- draw on international and EU studies and national frameworks (e.g. benchlearning) for competences and qualifications for career practitioners to inform their national developments;
- ensure professionalism, structures for practitioner qualifications and training standards through statutory arrangements (legislation, executive orders, guidelines or quality standards);
- enable initial and continuous training for individuals involved in the management, provision and delivery of career guidance activities and require them to hold relevant qualifications, including through validation of prior learning and experience;
- enable individuals to progress from non-specialist to qualified career guidance specialists, to transition to formal professional roles and to have their prior learning recognised and validated. This includes qualification of teachers for basic career development and guidance and for the delivery of career-related learning programmes;
- provide initial and continuous training for guidance professionals and other staff that includes a dedicated focus on diversity and inclusion and that is aligned with relevant national, regional, local and service provider or institutional policies in place. This helps ensure that all eligible users can be adequately served. General and specific/specialised service capacity for vulnerable users should receive adequate attention;
- strengthen the dialogue (see [guideline 18](#)) and links between government policies on career guidance and practitioner training objectives, considering the strengths of, opportunities available to, barriers faced by and constraints affecting both parties. Consideration must also be given to the role that social partners can play in supporting the professional development and capacity building of those providing guidance and career support;
- ensure the ethical practice and behaviour of practitioners and those providing guidance, including compliance with relevant standards and guidelines for personal data protection policies and practices that are applicable to services and activities that involve handling sensitive data and information online and offline;
- enhance and sustain the development of ICT and digital skills ⁽⁵⁴⁾ for guidance practice through initial

⁽⁵⁴⁾ ICT includes emerging technologies and non-digital elements, components and features. See [Annex 1. Glossary](#).

- and continuous professional development. This includes working with and alongside technology and for identifying appropriate and ethical uses of ICT in lifelong guidance (see [guideline 9](#));
- promote the mobility of career practitioners across sectors (e.g. education, training, employment, youth and community services), including in the context of EU and international mobility;
 - promote workplace training and peer learning among colleagues;
 - foster the development of cross-sectoral and multi-professional networks among professionals in service provision;
 - integrate initial training, continuous professional development and research systematically and systematically by working with recognised professional associations;
 - collect data and evidence on investments and costs (and cost-effectiveness) related to the professionalisation of career guidance services, and any data on outcomes, and make these available for research and policy development.

Resources for policymakers

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Guideline 8: Funding lifelong guidance services

Definition

The funding of lifelong guidance using a systemic view refers to securing, identifying, understanding and allocating the sources of funding for provisions, including the supply of services, staff, tools, resources, products and activities, to adequately meet user needs and the demand for guidance. It also includes understanding and calculating costs and possible benefits, as well as understanding how governments and other entities invest in the development of guidance systems or provide structural financing to ensure stable and sustainable funding for universal, individual access to quality guidance across the lifespan (see [guideline 3](#), [4](#) and [2](#)). To achieve a comprehensive perspective and overview of lifelong guidance financing, including pathways between provisions (ILO & ETF, 2021), consideration is required of the mechanisms involved, budget arrangements and any role of private and non-public funding, partnerships, stakeholders or institutions, such as ministries or other entities sharing responsibility for guidance provisions (see [guideline 5](#)).

Sustainable system funding is always desirable in the longer term. Funding sources can include those that are external, project based or internal (e.g. through a dedicated budget) to the service or programme or available through specific regional, national, EU ⁽⁵⁵⁾ or other funds, measures or initiatives. It includes funding guidance provisions for all relevant settings serving individuals at any age or life stage.

There are a variety of financing arrangements for provisions or systems (i.e. the supply of services, particularly public funding), including directly to institutions or local government, etc., for lifelong guidance (services, tools, products, resources and activities) (ILO & ETF, 2021). Secure, long-term solutions and stable arrangements are optimal for providing universal access, and a range of options are available, including: direct funding of services by central or regional government or through funding relevant government agencies (e.g. in the education and labour market sectors); devolved public funding to regions or municipalities or institutions, including schools; through funding raised in regions and municipalities or funding from donors or structural funds; through public subcontracting of services to private, non-profit and voluntary organisations; by employers and trade union contributions [investing in career guidance](#) for their staff or pooled funding, such as national training funds; and a mix of the above that are connected to the public sector. Private and independent operators and funding can form part of this landscape.

Owing to the embeddedness of guidance provision across various systems, services and settings or institutions, which may operate within particular legal/regulatory frameworks, financing is often dependent on other connected budgets and/or policies rather than there being the stability and security of dedicated budget lines. This can create challenges, such as in planning, assessing outcomes and estimating costs. In public employment services, guidance provision may be included within active labour market programmes or as stand-alone employment services (e.g. European Commission. DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2018).

Individuals who require services may be entitled to demand-side schemes that require individual financial support. This needs to be considered in obtaining a complete view on the financing and costs in lifelong guidance provisions and ensuring individual access across the lifespan. This includes vouchers, learning or skills credits, or a development budget towards career guidance, which may be conditional if integrated into or packaged with other policy arrangements, such as individual learning entitlements ⁽⁵⁶⁾.

There are also guidance services that are provided through market-based provision, which are operated by private providers. For these services, either individuals pay privately (or through vouchers) or employers provide part of the cost when there are links with public services.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ Examples of EU funding that have been used for lifelong guidance services, staff, tools, resources, products and activities include the action scheme for the mobility of university students ([Erasmus+](#)), the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Social Fund Plus ([ESF+](#)) and the Recovery and Resilience Facility ([RRF](#)) mechanism.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Individual training entitlement'.

Why it is important

Lifelong guidance is both a public good and a private good and requires adequate investment in suitable provisions. While directly benefiting individuals and societies and promoting sustainable growth, it contributes significantly to the achievement of public policy goals in education, employment, social inclusion and health and to society and the economy in general (see [Chapter 1](#)). It can also generate savings for the public in terms of positive fiscal returns.

Investing in career guidance (Cedefop et al., 2025) can help achieve the aims of European and international standards and agreements that enshrine individual social and economic rights across the lifespan in life, learning and work. The European Social Charter and its additional protocol⁽⁶⁷⁾ refer to the individual right to appropriate facilities for guidance for enabling occupational decision-making suited to personal aptitudes and interests. The International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention concerning Vocational Guidance and Vocational Training in the Development of Human Resources refers to ensuring guidance provisions for individuals of all ages in the context of the labour market (ILO, 1975).

The EU Council of Ministers (Council of the European Union, 2008) recognises guidance as a ‘service of general interest’ that should be accessible to everyone. Such access cannot occur without substantial investment of public funding in providing a stable and continuous lifelong guidance system.

Public investments in career support are critical in striving towards fulfilling agreements on equal opportunities and access to the labour market. This includes the individual right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning, as well as the right to receive customised support for job searches, training and requalification, for personalised, consistent and continuous support in unemployment and for in-depth individual assessment for long-term unemployed, as enshrined in Chapter 1 of the European Pillar of Social Rights (European Parliament et al., 2017).

Investing in lifelong guidance may help address future demands of the workforce and workplaces, since the EU will need to rely more heavily on a skilled and empowered population to remain competitive and to respond to new challenges, societal transformations and existing and rapidly emerging gaps. The ‘Union of Skills’ strategy highlights the following: ‘as younger generations’ needs and expectations evolve, a fresh vision for education and career pathways may be necessary to align with the changing landscape of work and innovation’ (European Commission, 2025a, p. 3).

Identifying and understanding the sources of funding for the intended guidance provisions, including for career education (financing mechanisms, cost and expenditures), and for achieving policy objectives to meet users’ needs (across education, training and employment contexts, etc.) will help establish and maintain the consistent monitoring and evaluation of systems and services, including of their cost-effectiveness. It also fosters continuous system improvement and evidence-based policy development, generates valuable data for research on the effectiveness and impact of provisions and on return on investment, and ensures effective strategic leadership that maintains system quality in relation to supply services, tools, products, resources and activities.

Major improvements are needed to collect, analyse and evaluate data on ensuring an adequate system for the funding of the supply of lifelong guidance provisions. Priority needs to be placed on funding for setting up, operating, and evaluating and improving systems that best meet user needs and demands, as well as for accumulating adequate evidence for systems and policies development. This information is generally limited across sectors, especially for adults, due to the difficulty of locating and aggregating the expenditures of so many public actors who contribute (and private financing, including users’ direct contributions and the contributions of employers and trade unions for workers) and the different budgets, sources and complex funding arrangements. Single budget lines or coordinating bodies may be lacking, and there is a tendency to combine spending on guidance with education and training,

⁽⁶⁷⁾ The [European Social Charter](#) was opened for signature on 18 October 1961 and entered into force on 26 February 1965. The additional protocol to the European Social Charter was presented in [1988](#) in Strasbourg, and an updated Social Charter was signed in [1996](#).

including in schooling, the labour market or social services and other relevant policy fields. There are also shared or divided responsibilities among government or other entities and levels.

Good practice

Policies and systems that:

- ensure adequate and sustainable funding of career services, tools, resources, products and activities to support the individual's right to access and benefit from quality education and training throughout their life, as well as access to active support for employment;
- earmark and effectively allocate a budget for quality guidance provision whenever it is integrated into services in the context of the labour market (especially public employment services, social protection services and economic growth initiatives and programmes). Ensure that funds for social inclusion and integration aspects are explicitly earmarked;
- establish and maintain consistent outcomes focused on the monitoring and evaluation of systems and services for system improvement and user benefits while ensuring stable financing and effective strategic leadership and governance that assures system quality;
- ensure adequate and continuous human resources (e.g. career practitioners and other staff), financial resources and material resources for system operation and delivery and for collecting, generating and analysing data for research on the effectiveness and impact of measures and provisions in the short, medium and long term;
- include the collection of expenditure and resource usage data for building an evidence base to understand the efficacy of use of existing investments and to identify further investment needs and return on investments;
- support the generation of data and research on the effectiveness, outcomes and impact of guidance provision that is focused on service improvement and user benefits;
- promote accountability in the use of funds dedicated to lifelong guidance provision, particularly in relation to the outcomes and impact of career guidance interventions;
- address the cost-effectiveness issues of the provision of services, activities and products in lifelong guidance, such as in coordinating them and integrating them into and across relevant policy fields and sectors, bodies and institutions. Consider any gains or losses related to the outsourcing of services. Consideration must be included of innovative funding models or ways that streamline funding, and funding options should be made visible to guidance users so that they can identify how to access services and systems to support their career development;
- ensure that all bodies and organisations that receive public funding for career guidance provision meet pre-established quality standards for services, tools, resources, products and activities, including recognised practitioner competences (see [guideline 7](#));
- encourage private sector investment, where appropriate, in the provision of career guidance services, tools, resources, products and activities developed in accordance with established quality standards and requirements on transparency in service provision in the best interests of individuals and the public;
- encourage career guidance resource sharing, where appropriate, between the private and public sectors to consolidate and streamline public expenditure through partnerships that are made in the best interests of service users.

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Guideline 9: Information and communications technology in lifelong guidance

Definition

Information and communications technology (ICT) ⁽⁵⁸⁾ in lifelong guidance refers to the broad range of products, infrastructure and digital content that enhance policy and systems development for lifelong guidance. It also refers to the delivery and evaluation of lifelong guidance services, tools, resources, products and activities. This includes how interactive services, tools and resources are designed and developed for individuals and groups; how they are used; and how such uses, in turn, reshape the design. It also refers to the digital competence required by career practitioners (see [guideline 7](#)) and diverse users to use both existing and emerging technologies in a lifelong guidance context.

ICT is generally used within lifelong guidance for information, communication, collaborative career learning and co-careering ⁽⁵⁹⁾. It encompasses a wide range of applications, extending from career information (including educational and labour market information and skills intelligence) to telephone support systems and advanced online guidance systems, resources and tools. Moreover, it includes apps, virtual environments, artificial intelligence (AI) solutions, distance services, platforms and social media, which facilitate interactions among individuals, groups and guidance practitioners and between the users themselves and the worlds of learning and work and beyond. ICT applications also include national guidance digital portals that connect the lifelong guidance efforts of various ministries and entities. This forms an ICT lifelong guidance ecosystem, ensuring the interoperability and interconnect-edness of platforms and services, both within and across countries.

ICT, including AI solutions, in lifelong guidance plays several different roles, namely as:

- (a) an agent of change on how existing career development services, resources and tools can be transformed, accessed, used and managed;
- (b) an administrative tool to support evidence collection, evidence-based policy development, accountability, quality assurance, and policy and systems co-ordination and coherence within and across sectors;
- (c) an integrative agent bringing services together, providing a common conceptual framework for the design and delivery of lifelong guidance services, resources and tools within a wider policy, interoperability, and e-governance and -services context across sectors (i.e. the education, training, employment (labour market), youth and social services, inclusion and other sectors), as well as across the wider ICT ecosystem.

Why it is important

ICT improves access to lifelong guidance services, resources and tools, making them more available and accessible to individuals and groups. ICT including AI enables the personalisation and customisation of guidance services, allowing tailored recommendations to be offered, support to be provided in understanding and adapting to automated recruitment tools, and individual needs and preferences to be met.

ICT acts as an integrative factor in lifelong guidance policy development. It allows policymakers to utilise data-driven insights to inform strategies and policy decisions, to adapt guidance services to changing needs and to ensure coherence and alignment across various sectors and stakeholders (see [guideline 6](#)).

ICT has significantly altered communication habits through increased use of social media, online

⁽⁵⁸⁾ ICT includes emerging technologies and non-digital elements, components and features. See Annex 1, Glossary.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Co-careering'.

apps, AI applications and cloud-based services. This has led to greater reliance on online information and services, requiring policies and practices to continuously adapt to behavioural changes.

ICT fosters innovative uses of digital resources, enabling the formation of communities focused on a specific objective and expanding the scope lifelong guidance. It also enables collaborative actions and projects at the local, regional, national and international levels in lifelong guidance, expanding the scope and impact of lifelong guidance.

Combined with AI capabilities, ICT offers significant potential for balancing self-help and staff-assisted services, which allows access to be widened while maintaining equity and cost-effectiveness. ICT also, combined with AI and social media, enhances communication and collaborative knowledge construction among users, both independently and/or in a staff-assisted manner.

The integration of ICT, including AI and social media, in lifelong guidance provides an opportunity and requirement for continuous rethinking of institutional contexts and professional competences. It also requires and enables a culture based on coordination and cooperation that allows efficient use to be made of resources and the prevention of service and policy fragmentation (see [guideline 5](#)).

Good practice

Policies and systems that:

- systematically integrate the use of ICT into existing lifelong guidance services, as appropriate, and adapt guidance services to ICT;
- recognise and prioritise ICT in lifelong guidance as a core component of national e-governance policies, including appropriate interoperability efforts across labour markets, emphasising its significance in modern governance and public service delivery;
- ensure that ministries and entities responsible for lifelong guidance share a common understanding of and have agreed upon a framework (e.g. standards) for the role and use of ICT in lifelong guidance. This should be communicated effectively to all service providers and stakeholders;
- provide the necessary infrastructure to support the development and implementation of existing and emerging technologies to ensure their effective adoption and utilisation. This includes training, upskilling and different types of support for service providers such as support for compliance with relevant EU and national regulations (e.g. European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2024);
- ensure that providers and deployers of AI systems in lifelong guidance establish, to the best of their ability, a sufficient level of AI literacy among their staff and others dealing with the operation and use of AI systems. There should also be consideration of the people or groups of people with whom the AI systems are to be used (see the [EU AI Act](#));
- acknowledge, address and review all ethical issues (e.g. online identity, privacy, security and bias) in the design and use of existing and emerging technologies including AI (see the [EU AI Act](#)). Any relevant digital services such as AI-powered tools used for providing guidance must adhere to relevant professional standards (IAEVG, 2024; 2025). The ownership, security, flexibility and portability of personal career information (including credentials) should also be ensured;
- ensure the impartiality and the human elements of automated services, particularly for matching;
- ensure that updated standards are followed for public services in relation to the personal and sensitive data that are used or stored in online digital guidance portals and interactive platforms to ensure accessibility in a safe and secure digital environment (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2023);
- recognise and support the bridging of differences in general and digital literacy among individuals and groups. This will allow their ability to source, interpret, analyse, evaluate and apply relevant information to be enhanced.
- pay particular attention to the needs, preferences and circumstances of vulnerable and hard-to-reach

- populations to ensure adequate and equitable access to guidance services through ICT;
- implement a plain-language ⁽⁶⁰⁾ approach to ensure that all information is clear and easy to read and understand and that common, updated, web accessibility standards (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2019) are followed so that access is enabled for the widest possible group of lifelong guidance users. The mainstream language(s) and, as appropriate, other languages should be used in accordance with user needs and readiness, including national sign languages and Braille, and in accordance with relevant regulations and guidelines;
 - support digital inclusion in lifelong guidance (including career education) by ensuring that all individuals, and particularly vulnerable groups, have the competences and skills to use ICT in lifelong guidance contexts. Consideration can include freely available national or EU frameworks for assessing digital competences (e.g. DigComp and tools based on this);
 - encourage individuals' and groups' online engagement with lifelong guidance services, tools, resources, products and activities, also recognising their needs and preferences regarding channels and modes of communication and services;
 - allocate adequate resources to provide public access to online career services across different settings;
 - support the use of virtual platforms to provide immersive career learning experiences, such as work-based simulations;
 - support blended learning, combining face-to-face and distance support, to enhance career learning experiences;
 - ensure that all guidance practitioners receive in-service and continuous training to fully understand the nuances of ICT, including ethical considerations and the complexities surrounding time-sensitive responses to users;
 - make use of big and open data (data that can be used, reused and redistributed) to develop an evidence base for informing lifelong guidance policies and for developing skills intelligence (see [guideline 6](#));
 - integrate the use of ICT into national quality assurance mechanisms and frameworks and into effectiveness monitoring for lifelong guidance that is developed collaboratively across sectors. In addition, transparency among stakeholders and guidance providers (e.g. data usage, funding sources and proprietary features) should be prioritised. This helps secure stable funding for innovation and development and for evidence-based policy;
 - develop and continuously improve standards of practice for the use of ICT in lifelong guidance services and programmes;
 - continuously adapt policies and practices for lifelong guidance in the light of behavioural changes related to the use of technology. Research and evaluation should be conducted to guide the evolution of technology and assess its impact on lifelong guidance services, resources and tools.

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Sectoral guidelines

Guideline 10: Lifelong guidance for school pupils and students

Definition

Lifelong guidance activities are complemented by career education, particularly in compulsory and initial education, which builds skills and competences to allow individuals to thrive during these stages of life and during adulthood. Career education for school pupils and students, provided in accordance with their developmental stages and structure of general education, refers to a range of pedagogical services to facilitate career learning, structured programmes and activities including e-learning, and products or tools. Career education enables pupils and students to acquire career management skills (CMS), including a deeper knowledge of the self (see [guideline 1](#)), to allow them to explore and reflect critically on the world of work, to gain an understanding of learning pathways and choices within a school's education programme, to link these to further learning and work opportunities and to make successful transitions to those opportunities (Sampson et al., 2023). The aim is to help learners become aware of what they already know and build on that in self-reflective ways. Lifelong guidance helps pupils, students and their families to be better equipped both for the present and for their next steps in compulsory education. This helps them to make meaningful decisions about their future in general or vocational education and training (see [guideline 11](#)) or on their entry into the labour market.

Lifelong guidance and career education for pupils and students may be provided within or outside the school, or through a combination of the two, including via publicly available digital resources and platforms or through externally provided community activities or school visits. As a systemic measure to enhance students' career development through a range of educational strategies, career education incorporates career-related information and concepts into the school curriculum. Included are also transition or bridging activities, workplace-based experiences and services catering for diverse learners. Career education addresses the developmental and specific needs of individuals and groups and supports the development of their interests. Those at risk of early leaving from education and training (see [guideline 17](#)) or who face complex barriers stand to greatly benefit.

As part of lifelong guidance, career education for pupils and students can be provided over time in collective (class/group) settings or individually and can use existing or emerging technologies to broaden access to services, tools, resources, products and activities. Career education can be provided as a specific career learning programme as part of the formal curriculum (e.g. as a subject), as a thematic aspect across the curriculum (integrated into all subjects and activities), as a formal cross-curricular approach (as a dedicated topic in all subjects) or as an extracurricular activity (outside the formal school programme). The assessment of progress in career learning and of outcomes can include formative evaluation based on self-assessment, interactions, career learning portfolios and feedback on guidance activities. This can feed into evaluation of the effectiveness of the school curriculum. Lifelong guidance and career education programmes can be provided by trained school-based staff or by career practitioners with relevant qualifications and competences ⁽⁶¹⁾.

To enhance (career) readiness ⁽⁶²⁾, employer engagement typically includes job or careers fairs, career

⁽⁶¹⁾ The Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance in lifelong learning strategies called for better teacher/trainer preparation and support (Council of the European Union, [2008](#)).

⁽⁶²⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): '(Career) readiness'.

exposure experiences at workplaces, talks and networking sessions, work experience placements and job shadowing, and coaching and mentoring activities. Trade union engagement can include supporting learning about skills development and labour rights as part of career development and the integration of at-risk groups into the labour market. Lifelong guidance provision includes support for parents, teachers, school management and other stakeholders to help them to understand career pathways and the links between education and the world of work.

Making decisions about learning and work options is a complex process that requires pupils and students to be able to critically evaluate both personal variables (e.g. skills, attitudes and values) and external variables (e.g. family, peers, societal expectations and stereotypes, gender issues, learning pathways, skills and competences, and the labour market).

Why it is important

Universal lifelong guidance services and career education for pupils and students provide the foundations for well-being in career development. This helps learners to prepare for (career) readiness and career adaptability⁽⁶³⁾ and resilience in an ever-changing world of work, as well as in the technological and natural environments and society as a whole, where wider sustainability is increasingly important for careers.

The individual differences in young people's knowledge and capacity to identify, source and interpret information concerning themselves, future learning and work opportunities, and family and societal expectations have an impact on their CMS during childhood and adolescence (see [guideline 1](#)). Timely career education helps pupils and students to acquire key competences for lifelong learning, particularly personal, social and learning-to-learn competences, which enhances the acquisition of CMS (Council of the European Union, 2018) (see [guideline 1](#)). This helps with motivation and enables successful social and geographical mobility in education and training contexts and in the labour market(s), both at present and in the future. It also enhances employability.

Student participation and retention, student motivation and engagement with learning, school performance and achievement, and progression through and beyond school are key indicators of successful school outcomes, in which lifelong guidance plays a role. By providing pupils and students with learning opportunities that connect school education and post-school options in the world of work and learning, lifelong guidance contributes to the implementation of the school education programme, aiding student learning and teachers' work (Council of the European Union, 2022a).

The early subject and programme decisions that pupils and students make (e.g. at the beginning of lower secondary or earlier) can have a significant impact on subsequent decisions at key points, such as at upper secondary school and at school graduation. It is important to provide individuals with lifelong guidance, including career education activities, from an early age. Parents also need access to lifelong guidance to better support their children's best interests and aspirations, to reduce gender and other forms of stereotyping and to help combat social inequality related to family socioeconomic background.

Lifelong guidance, including career education, supports young people, parents and teachers in dealing with the potential consequences of choice limitations in schooling contexts. It also helps them deal with the potential consequences of allocations of pupils in education systems that have streaming or selection procedures, where a young person's wishes or aspirations, competences, interests or circumstances may not be sufficiently considered.

The provision of good-quality lifelong guidance in schooling, including secondary school, contributes to the efficient use of public funding beyond school by ensuring that pupils and students (supported by parents, where relevant for the learners' best interests) make meaningful career decisions about post-secondary education or employment or starting a business, thus reducing public exposure to the cost of dropout.

⁽⁶³⁾ See [Annex 1. Glossary](#): 'Career adaptability'.

Integrating good-quality and reliable labour market information into career learning provided by competent and trained guidance practitioners and educators enables pupils and students to make decisions on learning, work opportunities and pathways that are based on the realities of and changing situations in relation to occupations, qualifications and credentials, skills needs and labour markets.

Guidance that includes counselling provision is pivotal in implementing comprehensive prevention, intervention and compensation strategies against early school-leaving and for promoting pathways to school success (Council of the European Union, 2022a) (see [guideline 17](#)). It is also crucial for raising awareness and contributing to the objectives of other EU initiatives, including the European education area (European Commission, 2020a), the European higher education area ⁽⁶⁴⁾, the digital education action plan (European Commission, 2020b, 2020c) and the European skills agenda (European Commission, 2020d). It promotes the awareness and eventual use of transferability and mobility tools and platforms.

Good practice

Career management skills ([guideline 1](#))

Policies and systems that:

- develop a comprehensive strategy for the teaching, learning and self-evaluation of personal, social and learning-to-learn competences, including the acquisition and development of pupils' and students' CMS and entrepreneurial skills starting in primary school and extending through secondary school (Council of the European Union, 2018);
- in addition to the development of entrepreneurship skills, provide support for learning about self-employment, social enterprise and business start-up through adequate information, guidance and counselling;
- promote a comprehensive lifelong guidance programme within and/or outside schools that assists pupils, students, parents, teachers and school management, which can involve employers, trade unions and other stakeholders in the community, particularly at key points for learning and work decision-making for pupils and students;
- ensure that pupils and students, as well as their parents or guardians, become acquainted with different vocational specialisations, progression and transfer pathways, and career possibilities;
- promote career education and CMS in the curriculum as a means to address individual and group differences in their capacity to source, interpret, evaluate and apply career information, especially when it is obtained from internet and social media sources;
- connect student-centred active learning approaches with the development of CMS in classrooms and at the school level;
- ensure that pupils and students are able to relate their learning experiences to the world of work, including by developing the skills and attitudes that enable successful (re)integration, transition and adaptation to work and life contexts, as well as a sense of responsibility for their career decisions;
- promote the active engagement of pupils and students in the development of their career paths and/or plans;
- support blended learning, combining face-to-face and distance support, to enhance career learning experiences for young people.

Access to lifelong guidance ([guideline 2](#))

Policies and systems that:

- allow for the co-creation of guidance services with the involvement of diverse user groups and significant others ⁽⁶⁵⁾, such as parents, to promote career development for pupils and students;

⁽⁶⁴⁾ [European higher education area \(EHEA\)](#).

⁽⁶⁵⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Significant others'.

- ensure that career guidance is an integral part of school learning programmes throughout each stage and that teachers, school staff, managers and leaders are trained, supported and recognised as resources for pupils and students;
- provide career guidance in schools prior to learning engagement, during course participation and at progression points to further learning and/or work;
- ensure that all pupils and students have access to resources and arrangements for guidance;
- foster stable, transdisciplinary collaboration and partnership among various members of the school community and other stakeholders, including social partners, to improve access to lifelong guidance activities and related initiatives;
- ensure the accessibility of career services and career education for all, including access to physical and virtual spaces and services, to enhance the experience and to maintain engagement in learning (European Commission, 2021a).

Assuring the quality of lifelong guidance provision (guideline 3) and evidence-based systems and policy development in lifelong guidance (guideline 4)

Policies and systems that:

- develop and ensure funding for the monitoring and evaluation of guidance services, including career education, for service and programme improvement for school pupils and students;
- ensure that the monitoring and evaluation system includes the collection and use of feedback from school pupils, parents, teachers, employers, trade unions and all other relevant stakeholders;
- integrate the monitoring and evaluation of lifelong guidance into overall quality assurance arrangements, strategic planning and institutional performance indicators;
- monitor career learning outcomes as evidence of the quality and effectiveness of guidance and career education programmes for school pupils and students and make the users aware of this information;
- use feedback from guidance services to enhance the school's relevance to the labour market and further learning;
- promote and support research on lifelong guidance within the context of school education;
- enhance the collection, analysis and dissemination of comprehensive tracking data about and for school pupils and students;
- promote consistency in the quality of lifelong guidance provision, including career education across schools and regions where the responsibility and funding for this is devolved to schools, municipalities and/or regions;
- adopt jointly agreed-upon standards of guidance services and products when a lifelong guidance programme, products or elements of the programme are delivered through external agencies and contractors.

Governance and strategic leadership: cooperation and coordination (guideline 5)

Policies and systems that:

- support a comprehensive mainstream approach to career learning for school pupils and students that combines career education programmes within the curriculum and outside school, experience-based career learning and workplace learning using cooperation networks that extend beyond the institutional setting;
- encourage partnerships with employers, trade unions and other labour market actors to ensure that the guidance provided in schools creates opportunities for experience-based career learning;
- support stable, transdisciplinary collaboration and partnerships among various stakeholders to establish jointly agreed-upon policies, funding, provisions and networks. This should involve a division of labour among different service providers relevant to lifelong guidance for pupils and students;
- support customised lifelong guidance provisions for diverse user groups of school pupils and students through stable, collaborative partnership with community-based services and targeted outreach strategies;

- increase the awareness of and promote lifelong guidance for pupils and students and encourage its use by sharing information, highlighting the benefits for all school staff, employers, trade unions and other community actors, stakeholders and guidance programme providers;
- promote and provide adequate support for the involvement of students, the school, employers, trade unions and other stakeholders in the design, provision, and monitoring and evaluation of lifelong guidance activities and services;
- develop and promote integrated and comprehensive information and guidance services for all ages at the national, regional and local levels;
- use career guidance when designing flexible learning pathways, ensuring that dead ends in education and training are avoided;
- strengthen the connections between career guidance provisions in upper secondary schools, higher education, vocational and education institutions and adult learning;
- make appropriate referrals ⁽⁶⁶⁾ to relevant supporting or other services to ensure that all the needs of each young person are addressed;
- ensure access to lifelong guidance is coordinated with other supporting policies, such as the validation of non-formal and informal learning and financing for education and training, where relevant in school contexts (see Cedefop, 2019).

Career information in lifelong guidance (guideline 6)

Policies and systems that:

- provide pupils, students and parents/guardians with access to sufficient and user-friendly, impartial, non-discriminatory and accurate information on education, training and enrolment that is designed by taking into account their needs and milieu;
- use the national and EU instruments and resources that forecast and anticipate skills needs in guidance services for pupils and students to identify emerging skills / labour shortages in specific occupations across and within sectors and regions. Service users should also be informed about this information and these resources;
- provide pupils and students with up-to-date information on the most relevant mobility, transparency and transferability tools, policies and programmes within and outside the EU;
- encourage the provision of information and guidance, including on experience-based career learning, that enables young pupils and students, as well as their parents, to become acquainted with a variety of vocational specialisations, progression and transfer pathways, and career possibilities;
- support the transitions of potential students by informing them about the level of achievement required for different higher education programmes and courses and for potential career pathways;
- develop partnerships and feedback loops between schools and employers/trade unions promoting the production of quality career information.

Professionalism in lifelong guidance (guideline 7)

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that the guidelines for professionalism consider practitioners in the context of guidance for school pupils and students;
- ensure that the initial and in-service training of career practitioners, of other school staff involved in the provision of guidance and of school management is carried out. This should include the teaching and assessment of CMS and related methods for preventing disengagement and early school-leaving;
- ensure the continuing improvement of practitioners' qualifications and competences to provide adequate lifelong guidance for school pupils and students;
- enhance and sustain the development of ICT and digital skills ⁽⁶⁷⁾ for guidance practice through initial

⁽⁶⁶⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Referral'.

⁽⁶⁷⁾ ICT includes emerging technologies and non-digital elements, components and features. See [Annex 1, Glossary](#).

and continuous professional development. This includes working with and alongside technology and identifying appropriate and ethical uses of ICT (see [guideline 9](#)).

Funding lifelong guidance services ([guideline 8](#))

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that schools are equipped with appropriate financial and non-financial resources and have an understanding of and the capacity to assure quality career education and lifelong guidance services, including for cooperation with the community and partners;
- ensure adequate and sustainable funding for lifelong guidance that addresses school pupils and students;
- earmark and effectively allocate a budget to ensure high-quality guidance for school pupils and students, for collecting evidence on accountability outcomes, and impact (see [guidelines 3](#) and [4](#));
- ensure that schools, both primary and secondary, that receive public funding for career guidance provision meet pre-established quality standards for services, tools, resources, products and activities, including recognised practitioner competences;
- encourage private sector investment, where appropriate, in the provision of career guidance services, tools, resources, products and activities; these must be developed in accordance with established quality standards and requirements on transparency in service provision for school pupils and students and with their best interests and those of the public in mind.

ICT in lifelong guidance ([guideline 9](#))

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that the ministries and entities responsible for lifelong guidance share a common understanding of and have agreed upon a framework (e.g. standards) for the role and use of ICT in lifelong guidance. This should be communicated effectively to all service providers and stakeholders.
- systematically integrate the use of ICT into existing lifelong guidance services for school pupils and students;
- provide the necessary infrastructure to support both existing and emerging technologies, ensuring their effective adoption and utilisation in the context of guidance for school pupils and students;
- address disparities in general and digital literacy by supporting school pupils and students to enhance their ability to source, interpret, analyse, evaluate and apply relevant information;
- support digital inclusion in lifelong guidance, especially in career education, by ensuring that all individuals – particularly vulnerable groups – possess the competences and skills to use ICT in lifelong guidance contexts;
- establish and continuously improve the standards of practice for the use of ICT in lifelong guidance services for school pupils and students;
- ensure that all guidance practitioners receive in-service and continuous training to develop ICT skills, address ethical concerns and ensure quality accordingly;
- ensure that updated standards are followed in relation to the personal and sensitive data that are used or stored in online digital guidance portals and interactive platforms to ensure accessibility in a safe and secure digital environment.

Lifelong guidance for young people at risk ([guideline 17](#)) and lifelong guidance for vulnerable groups ([guideline 18](#))

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that lifelong guidance for pupils and students forms part of community-based services and outreach measures in easily accessible guidance points or one-stop shops. In addition, appropriate use should be made of new and evolving technologies to better reach early leavers from education and training;

- provide guidance to promote the retention of pupils and students in school, to prevent pupils' and students' disengagement and to prevent, intervene in and compensate for school dropout and early leaving from education and training contexts. In particular, such guidance should aim to motivate pupils and students through CMS curricula, the acquisition of basic skills, including for access to online guidance services;
- ensure that lifelong guidance is sensitive and responsive to all students and is aligned with the diversity and inclusion policy in place;
- place particular focus on students facing transitions during education and especially those facing barriers;
- place adequate focus on vulnerable groups, those facing barriers and those potentially at risk of social exclusion in order to enable their ability to manage transitions and adapt to changes in the labour market and society.

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Guideline 11: Lifelong guidance for learners in vocational education and training

Definition

Vocational education and training (VET) may be offered to young people and adults of all ages ⁽⁶⁸⁾, either as initial vocational education and training (IVET) ⁽⁶⁹⁾ or as continuing vocational education and training (CVET). IVET refers to VET that allows people to acquire the knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences required in particular occupations or more broadly on the labour market. It also includes dedicated training programmes that are typically aimed at young people at risk (of early school leaving and/or economic/social exclusion); these programmes aim to enable these young people to improve their employability by gaining the basic skills needed to enter employment or access education and training. CVET refers to education or training undertaken after the completion of IVET or after entry into working life. It aims to assist individuals with improving or updating their knowledge and skills, acquiring new skills for a career move or retraining, or continuing their personal or professional development (Cedefop, 2024). It may also include VET at higher levels, such as higher vocational education and training, and takes place in a range of settings for adult learning. VET programmes might also be used to support transitions to other programmes.

Lifelong guidance in IVET refers to a range of activities and products that assist students to be familiar with and understand the available vocational learning pathways and the choices and decisions to be made prior to, when entering, during and after VET. It aims to link these pathways and choices to apprenticeships, to further vocational, higher education or other learning opportunities and to the labour market and to make meaningful transitions to those opportunities. Guidance in IVET may also aim to reduce early leaving from VET (see [guideline 17](#)). Career education, which is a key part of lifelong guidance, can assist in equipping VET students with key competences for lifelong learning (Council of the European Union, 2018), which is an explicit policy objective of VET. In particular, personal, social and learning-to-learn competences can enhance the acquisition of career management skills (CMS; see [guideline 1](#)) and can provide motivation for and promote successful mobility and transitions across countries, institutions and sectors. Lifelong guidance also includes providing support for parents, teachers, trainers, the management of VET providers and other stakeholders to help them understand the pathways available and links between them. It also includes support for the guidance work of teachers and trainers in dedicated training programmes for young people at risk of exclusion (see [guideline 17](#)) and for workplace mentors in situations where workplace learning is a key feature of VET programmes.

Lifelong guidance in CVET may take a variety of forms (e.g. further career education, workplace mentoring and staff appraisal) and may be combined with public or external lifelong guidance provision. This includes provision through public employment services, national all-age lifelong guidance services (or services for all ages) and private provision or guidance provided by employers, trade union organisations or chambers of commerce. This provides opportunities for enhancing the acquisition of CMS from a lifelong perspective. Provisions can be offered collectively (to a class or group) or individually and may utilise existing or evolving technologies to enhance access to activities, services, sources and resources, as well as information on accessing and financing CVET participation. Support for the transition to self-employment or other working arrangements may be included (see [guideline 14](#)).

⁽⁶⁸⁾ Unless otherwise specified, VET learners includes both IVET and CVET students (registered as full- or part-time) and learners of any age participating in any form of VET (see [Annex 1, Glossary](#)).

⁽⁶⁹⁾ IVET takes place at different levels of education and in different forms, namely in lower secondary school, upper secondary school, apprenticeships, post-secondary non-tertiary education and tertiary education.

Why it is important

Universal lifelong guidance services and career education in the IVET context provide the foundations for well-being in career development and prepares learners for career adaptability⁽⁷⁰⁾ and resilience by supporting the development and acquisition of CMS in an ever-changing technological environment and society (see [guideline 10](#)).

The individual differences in learners' knowledge, capacity for and maturity in relation to career management, including their ability to make meaningful career decisions, have an impact on their choice of vocational pathways and related decision-making. IVET students require guidance and support to enable them to continue engaging with learning, transition to the labour market or to undertake further learning.

Career education assists in equipping IVET students with key competences for lifelong learning, particularly personal, social and learning-to-learn competences, thereby enhancing the acquisition of CMS (Council of the European Union, 2018). It also motivates them to pursue and promotes successful learning mobility.

Both IVET students and participants in CVET and adult learning (see [guideline 13](#)) should be enabled to acquire skills and competences for career management. This was recognised in the [Osnabrück Declaration](#) (Ministries in charge of VET et al., 2020), and the VET recommendation (Council of the European Union, 2020a) emphasising user-friendly career guidance, career learning and pathways. The follow-up [Herning Declaration](#) maintains that in sharpening the attractiveness of VET systems, access to quality, inclusive and effective career guidance should be strengthened.

Career guidance in IVET and CVET can increase individuals' understanding of work-based learning (engagement) and how to enhance their skills and employability (achievement). The provision of career education on entrepreneurial opportunities to IVET and CVET learners will support transitions, including those to self-employment and to the establishment of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Information and guidance can help young people and their parents to better understand the transfer and progression opportunities/consequences of their choices at different points before, after and during IVET. This allows them to make informed and meaningful decisions on vocational specialisation and to engage with learning at different points. Lifelong guidance can also assist in course transfers or other transitions.

Lifelong guidance and support from teachers, trainers, specialists and other staff can help VET learners to better understand the barriers that they experience to learning, to employment and to active citizenship. It can also help them to learn how to take advantage of workplace learning and acquire employability skills to help them overcome these barriers and avoid disengagement and discouragement (see [guidelines 17](#) and [18](#)).

Lifelong guidance provision helps to make VET systems more efficient by assisting individuals with initial VET choices and subsequent CVET decision-making, by supporting learning and performance during VET programmes, and by supporting transitions to the labour market or further learning. Career guidance in VET programmes can also help to create awareness of the multiple career resources available online and offline.

Lifelong guidance can enhance the quality and attractiveness of IVET and CVET, which are recognised as playing a key role in any economy in terms of workforce preparation and development, meeting labour market needs, and enhancing the employability of those who are most vulnerable to changes in the labour market.

Lifelong guidance can support the work of policymakers and employers, namely the signposting of new arrangements – such as mechanisms for transfer at the national level between vocational and general academic streams and mechanisms for progression within and between pathways (including to tertiary and postgraduate tertiary education) – and the attractiveness of VET as a career option.

The provision of early and timely lifelong guidance will enhance the efficiency of VET, reducing dis-

(70) See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Career adaptability'.

engagement and dropout, which can be costly to both the individual and society. Lifelong guidance for VET students and participants can also help in creating awareness of and in contributing to relevant EU initiatives, including the European education area (European Commission, 2020a), the digital education action plan (European Commission, 2020b) and the European skills agenda (European Commission, 2020d) and subsequent EU policy. In addition, it can promote the use of different mobility and transparency tools, platforms and other available services (e.g. the Europass skills passport, the European employment services (EURES), the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) classification, national qualifications frameworks and the European qualifications framework (EQF)).

Good practice

Career management skills ([guideline 1](#))

Policies and systems that:

- develop a comprehensive strategy for the teaching, learning and self-evaluation of personal, social and learning-to-learn competences, including the acquisition and development of VET learners' CMS and entrepreneurial skills throughout all settings (Council of the European Union, 2018);
- in addition to the development of entrepreneurship skills, provide support for learning about self-employment, social enterprise and business start-up through adequate information, guidance and counselling;
- promote a comprehensive lifelong guidance programme within and/or outside of VET settings that assists VET learners and significant others ⁽⁷¹⁾, such as parents and other stakeholders in the community, particularly at key points for learning and work decision-making;
- ensure that VET learners, and their parents or guardians when relevant, become acquainted with different vocational specialisations, progression and transfer pathways, and career possibilities;
- promote career education and CMS in the curriculum as a means to address individual and group differences in their capacity to source, interpret, evaluate and apply career information, especially when it is obtained from internet and social media sources;
- connect student-centred active learning approaches with the development of CMS in classrooms and across the VET system;
- ensure that VET learners are able to relate their learning experiences to the world of work, including by developing the skills and attitudes that enable successful (re)integration, transition and adaptation to work and life contexts, as well as a sense of responsibility for their career decisions;
- promote the active engagement of VET learners in the development of their career paths and/or plans;
- support blended learning, combining face-to-face and distance support, to enhance career learning experiences for VET learners.

Access to lifelong guidance ([guideline 2](#))

Policies and systems that:

- allow for the co-creation of guidance services with the involvement of diverse user groups and significant others, such as parents, to promote career development for VET learners;
- ensure that career guidance is an integral part of VET programmes throughout each stage and that teachers, school staff, managers and leaders are trained, supported and recognised as resources for VET learners;
- provide career guidance in VET prior to learning engagement, during course participation and at progression points to further learning and/or work;
- ensure that all VET learners have access to resources and arrangements for guidance;
- foster stable, transdisciplinary collaboration and partnership among various members of the VET

⁽⁷¹⁾ See [Annex 1. Glossary](#): 'Significant others'.

community and other stakeholders, including social partners, to improve access to lifelong guidance activities and related initiatives;

- ensure the accessibility of career services and career education for all, including access to physical and virtual spaces and services, to enhance the experience and to maintain engagement in learning (European Commission, 2021a).

Assuring the quality of lifelong guidance provision ([guideline 3](#)) and evidence-based systems and policy development in lifelong guidance ([guideline 4](#))

Policies and systems that:

- develop and ensure funding for the monitoring and evaluation of guidance services, including career education, for service and programme improvement for VET learners;
- ensure that the monitoring and evaluation system includes the collection and use of feedback from VET learners, parents, teachers, trainers, employers, trade unions and all other relevant stakeholders;
- integrate the monitoring and evaluation of lifelong guidance into overall quality assurance arrangements, strategic planning and institutional performance indicators;
- monitor career learning outcomes as evidence of the quality and effectiveness of guidance and career education programmes for VET learners and make the users aware of this information;
- use feedback from guidance services to enhance the relevance of VET to the labour market and further learning;
- promote and support research on lifelong guidance within the context of VET;
- enhance the collection, analysis and dissemination of comprehensive tracking data about and for VET learners;
- promote consistency in the quality of lifelong guidance provision, including career education across VET providers and regions where the responsibility and funding for this is devolved to providers, municipalities and/or regions;
- adopt jointly agreed-upon standards of guidance services and products when a lifelong guidance programme, products or elements of the programme are delivered through external agencies and contractors.

Governance and strategic leadership: cooperation and coordination ([guideline 5](#))

Policies and systems that:

- support a comprehensive mainstream approach to career learning for VET learners that combines career education programmes within the curriculum and outside VET settings, experience-based career learning and workplace learning using cooperation networks that extend beyond the institutional setting;
- encourage partnerships with employers, trade unions and other labour market actors to ensure that guidance provided in VET creates opportunities for experience-based career learning;
- support stable, transdisciplinary collaboration and partnerships among various stakeholders to establish jointly agreed-upon policies, funding, provisions and networks. This should involve a division of labour among different service providers relevant to lifelong guidance for VET learners;
- support customised lifelong guidance provisions for diverse user groups of VET learners through stable, collaborative partnership with community-based services and targeted outreach strategies;
- increase the awareness of and promote lifelong guidance for VET learners and encourage its use by sharing information and highlighting the benefits for all staff, employers, trade unions and other community actors, stakeholders and guidance programme providers;
- promote and provide adequate support for the involvement of VET learners, VET providers, employers, trade unions and other stakeholders in the design, provision, and monitoring and evaluation of lifelong guidance activities and services;
- develop and promote integrated and comprehensive information and guidance services for all ages at the national, regional and local levels;

- use career guidance when designing flexible learning pathways, ensuring that dead ends in education and training are avoided;
- strengthen the connections between career guidance provisions in VET institutions, upper secondary schools, higher education and adult learning settings;
- make appropriate referrals ⁽⁷²⁾ to relevant supporting or other services to ensure that all the needs of each VET learner are addressed;
- ensure access to lifelong guidance is coordinated with other supporting policies, such as the validation of non-formal and informal learning and financing for education and training, where relevant in VET contexts (Cedefop, 2019).

Career information in lifelong guidance (guideline 6)

Policies and systems that:

- provide VET learners and parents/guardians with access to sufficient and user-friendly, impartial, non-discriminatory and accurate information on education, training and enrolment that is designed by considering their needs and milieu;
- use the national and EU instruments and resources that forecast and anticipate skills needs in guidance services for VET learners to identify emerging skills / labour shortages in specific occupations across and within sectors and regions. Service users should also be informed about this information and these resources;
- provide VET learners with up-to-date information on the most relevant mobility, transparency and transferability tools, policies and programmes within and outside the EU;
- encourage the provision of information and guidance, including on experience-based career learning, that enables VET learners, and their parents when relevant, to become acquainted with a variety of vocational specialisations, progression and transfer pathways, and career possibilities;
- support the transitions of potential VET learners by informing them about the level of achievement required for different higher education programmes and courses and for potential career pathways;
- develop partnerships and feedback loops between VET providers and employers/trade unions, promoting the production of quality career information.

Professionalism in lifelong guidance (guideline 7)

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that the guidelines for professionalism consider practitioners in the context of guidance for VET learners;
- ensure that the initial and in-service training of career practitioners, of other VET staff involved in the provision of guidance and of school management is carried out including the teaching and assessment of CMS and methods for preventing disengagement and early school-leaving;
- ensure the continuing improvement of practitioners' qualifications and competences to provide adequate lifelong guidance for VET learners;
- enhance and sustain the development of ICT and digital skills ⁽⁷³⁾ for guidance practice through initial and continuous professional development. This includes working with and alongside technology and identifying appropriate and ethical uses of ICT in lifelong guidance (see [guideline 9](#)).

Funding lifelong guidance services (guideline 8)

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that VET providers are equipped with appropriate financial and non-financial resources and have an understanding of and the capacity to assure quality career education and lifelong guidance services, including for cooperation with the community and partners;

⁽⁷²⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Referral'.

⁽⁷³⁾ ICT includes emerging technologies and non-digital elements, components and features. See [Annex 1, Glossary](#).

- ensure adequate and sustainable funding for lifelong guidance that addresses VET learners;
- earmark and effectively allocate a budget to ensure high-quality guidance for VET learners, including accountability, outcomes and impact;
- ensure that all VET providers that receive public funding for career guidance provision meet pre-established quality standards for services, tools, resources, products and activities, including recognised practitioner competences;
- encourage private sector investment, where appropriate, in the provision of career guidance services, tools, resources, products and activities; these must be developed in accordance with established quality standards and requirements on transparency in service provision for VET learners and with their best interests and those of the public in mind;
- stimulate guidance in VET settings, as relevant, by introducing incentives such as individual learning accounts, training funds and/or schemes offering tailored career development support.

ICT in lifelong guidance (guideline 9)

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that the ministries and entities responsible for lifelong guidance share a common understanding of and have agreed upon a framework (e.g. standards) for the role and use of ICT in lifelong guidance. This should be communicated effectively to all service providers and stakeholders;
- systematically integrate the use of ICT into existing lifelong guidance services for VET learners;
- provide the necessary infrastructure to support both existing and emerging technologies, ensuring their effective adoption and utilisation in the context of guidance for VET learners;
- address disparities in general and digital literacy by supporting VET learners to enhance their ability to source, interpret, analyse, evaluate and apply relevant information;
- support digital inclusion in lifelong guidance, especially in career education, by ensuring that all individuals – particularly vulnerable groups – possess the competences and skills to use ICT in lifelong guidance contexts;
- establish and continuously improve the standards of practice for the use of ICT in lifelong guidance services for VET learners;
- ensure that all guidance practitioners receive in-service and continuous training to develop ICT skills, address ethical concerns and ensure quality accordingly;
- ensure that updated standards are followed in relation to the personal and sensitive data that are used or stored in online digital guidance portals and interactive platforms to ensure accessibility in a safe and secure digital environment.

Lifelong guidance for young people at risk (guideline 17) and lifelong guidance for vulnerable groups (guideline 18)

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that lifelong guidance for VET learners forms part of community-based services and outreach measures in easily accessible guidance points or one-stop shops. In addition, appropriate use should be made of new and evolving technologies to better reach early leavers from education and training;
- provide guidance to promote the learning and retention of VET learners, to prevent VET learners' disengagement and to prevent, intervene in and compensate for dropout. In particular, such guidance should aim to motivate VET learners through CMS curricula, the acquisition of basic skills and access to online guidance services;
- ensure that lifelong guidance is sensitive and responsive to all VET learners and is aligned with the diversity and inclusion policy in place;
- place particular focus on VET learners facing transitions during education and especially those facing barriers;
- place adequate focus on vulnerable groups, those facing barriers and those potentially at risk of

social exclusion in order to enable their ability to manage transitions and adapt to changes in the labour market and society.

Resources for policymakers

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Guideline 12: Lifelong guidance for higher education students

Definition

Lifelong guidance for higher education students refers to a range of activities and products that support students in making informed study choices, coping with the transition to higher education and progressing within their chosen study programme. It supports students to enhance the potential of their academic experience and connects this experience to their personal and career development. It fosters their ability to explore and learn about the labour market, further education (e.g. postgraduate education) and entrepreneurship opportunities. It enables them to make transitions to these opportunities. It supports students' capacity to apply their academic learning to professional contexts.

Guidance in higher education also provides support for course changers, namely the re-orientation of students whose initial choice of higher education programme did not prove subsequently to be successful or meaningful (Council of the European Union, 2022b). Additionally, it caters to the guidance needs of an increasing number of adult learners and returnees to education who are seeking further professional development perspectives (see [guideline 13](#) and [11](#)), reskilling or upskilling, or the acquisition of further qualifications and credentials, including for workers (see [guideline 14](#) and [15](#)). It also concerns people who are pursuing higher education through distance learning.

Career management skills (CMS) (see [guideline 1](#)) are essential to learn for higher education students, as they connect self-reliant and reflective learning in disciplines studied with students' career development needs and other competence demands in modern knowledge societies requiring future-proof skills development (European Commission, 2023). CMS facilitate the learning creativity, innovation, critical thinking and responsibility of graduates, as well as their employability and personal development (Ministers responsible for higher education in the European higher education area, 2012). Given the immediacy of labour market demands during education and upon graduation (including research in critical fields), the development of competences related to job-search and entrepreneurial skills (Council of the European Union, 2023a) is essential for higher education students⁽⁷⁴⁾ and those who are self-employed (see [guideline 14](#)). Such career orientation programmes may be delivered centrally by a career service or by faculties or departments with central or external support from staff possessing relevant skills. When part of a tertiary education programme, cooperative education / workplace learning contributes significantly to career learning.

Lifelong guidance and entrepreneurial education in the higher education setting may be organised collectively (class/group) or individually and may be provided using existing or emerging technologies to expand access to activities, services and resources. Guidance including counselling⁽⁷⁵⁾ can often be accompanied by careers fairs, on-campus employment recruitment, alumni engagement and entrepreneurial mentoring. Lifelong guidance should also be available to secondary students, vocational education and training (VET) learners and others prior to enrolment in higher education or in partnership with these institutions (see [guideline 10](#) and [11](#)).

Why it is important

The diversity of student participation has notably increased. Consequently, there is a need for more extensive lifelong guidance services delivered in a wide range of modes to accommodate the increasing variety of student learning and work transitions, as well as individual circumstances.

Significant individual differences exist in student capacities for identifying, sourcing and interpreting

⁽⁷⁴⁾ The acquisition of these skills may be part of optional or compulsory learning with academic credit.

⁽⁷⁵⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Counselling' (e.g. career counselling, guidance counselling or employment counselling).

career information, information about themselves, and future learning and work opportunities and expectations, as well as their ability to use this information for decision-making (see [guideline 6](#)). Career guidance can address these differences by enhancing CMS, contributing to better social mobility and addressing social equality across different socio-demographic contexts.

Career education can help with ensuring students acquire key competences for lifelong learning, particularly personal, social, and learning to learn skills, enhancing acquisition of CMS (Council of the European Union, 2018) (see [guideline 1](#)) and motivating and promoting successful learning mobility.

Lifelong guidance can facilitate the well-considered and meaningful reorientation of those students whose initial choice of higher education programme did not align with their competences, their interests or labour market realities and skills requirements.

With the expansion and internationalisation of higher education, including the growth of distance education, graduates' success in the job market has become an asset test of higher education institutions. Enhancing students' employability assures the professional relevance of higher education programmes.

Higher education and research are crucial to economic growth and development (e.g. [higher education initiatives](#)), as well as workforce preparation and development. Lifelong guidance before, during and after tertiary education is the cornerstone of better and more flexible skills matching to the needs of the economy and to technological advances, helping prevent qualifications mismatches.

Effective and efficient guidance services in higher education contribute to student-centred learning, the social dimension and the continuing development of higher education systems.

With the growing number of pathways and the increasing complexity of the credentials and qualifications landscape (e.g. modularisation and micro-credentials), the promotion of student mobility through European programmes, the harmonisation of degree structure within the Bologna process (Ministers responsible for higher education in the European higher education area, 2012) and the adoption of the European qualifications framework (EQF) (Council of the European Union, 2017), lifelong guidance has become increasingly important.

Lifelong guidance for higher education can play a significant role in raising awareness of and contributing to relevant EU initiatives and the European dimension in higher education, such as the digital education action plan (European Commission, 2020b, 2020c), the European area of higher education (ENQA et al., 2015), the European research area (Council of the European Union, 2023), the EU skills agenda (European Commission, 2020d) and subsequent EU policy developments, and the various mobility and transparency tools, platforms and services available (e.g. the Europass skills passport, the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) classification, the European employment services (EURES), national qualifications frameworks and the European qualifications framework (EQF)).

Good practice

Career management skills ([guideline 1](#))

Policies and systems that:

- develop a comprehensive strategy for the teaching, learning and self-evaluation of personal, social and learning-to-learn competences, including the acquisition and development of higher education students' CMS and entrepreneurial skills throughout all settings (Council of the European Union, 2018);
- in addition to the development of entrepreneurship skills, provide support for learning about self-employment, social enterprise and business start-up through adequate information, guidance and counselling;
- promote a comprehensive lifelong guidance programme within and/or outside of higher education that assists students and significant others ⁽⁷⁶⁾, such as parents when relevant, particularly at key points for learning and work decision-making;

⁽⁷⁶⁾ See [Annex 1. Glossary](#): 'Significant others'.

- ensure that higher education students, and their parents or guardians when relevant, become acquainted with different disciplines and vocational specialisations, progression and transfer pathways, and career possibilities;
- promote career education and CMS in the curriculum as a means to address individual and group differences in their capacity to source, interpret, evaluate and apply career information, especially when it is obtained from internet and social media sources;
- connect student-centred active learning approaches with the development of CMS in classrooms and across the higher education system in faculties and departments and at the central level;
- ensure that higher education students are able to relate their learning experiences to the world of work, including by developing the skills and attitudes that enable successful (re)integration, transition and adaptation to work and life contexts, as well as a sense of responsibility for their career decisions;
- promote the active engagement of higher education students in the development of their career paths and/or plans;
- support blended learning, combining face-to-face and distance support, to enhance career learning experiences for higher education students.

Access to lifelong guidance (guideline 2)

Policies and systems that:

- allow for the co-creation of guidance services with the involvement of diverse user groups and significant others to promote career development for higher education students;
- ensure that career guidance is an integral part of higher education programmes throughout each stage and that teachers, school staff, managers and leaders are trained, supported and recognised as resources for higher education students;
- provide career guidance in higher education prior to learning engagement, during course participation and at progression points to further learning and/or work;
- ensure that all higher education students have access to resources and arrangements for guidance;
- foster stable, transdisciplinary collaboration and partnership among various members of the wider higher education community and other stakeholders, including social partners, to improve access to lifelong guidance activities and related initiatives;
- ensure the accessibility of career services and career education for all, including access to physical and virtual spaces and services to enhance the experience and to maintain engagement in learning (European Commission, 2021a).

Assuring the quality of lifelong guidance provision (guideline 3) and evidence-based systems and policy development in lifelong guidance (guideline 4)

Policies and systems that:

- develop and ensure funding for the monitoring and evaluation of guidance services, including career education, for service and programme improvement for higher education students;
- ensure that the monitoring and evaluation system includes the collection and use of feedback from higher education students, parents, teachers, trainers, employers, trade unions and all other relevant stakeholders;
- integrate the monitoring and evaluation of lifelong guidance into overall quality assurance arrangements, strategic planning and institutional performance indicators;
- monitor career learning outcomes as evidence of the quality and effectiveness of guidance and career education programmes for higher education students and make the users aware of this information;
- use feedback from guidance services to enhance the relevance of higher education to the labour market and further learning;
- promote and support research on lifelong guidance within the context of higher education;

- enhance the collection, analysis and dissemination of comprehensive tracking data about and for higher education students;
- promote consistency in the quality of lifelong guidance provision, including career education across higher education settings and regions where the responsibility and funding for this is devolved to providers, municipalities and/or regions;
- adopt jointly agreed-upon standards of guidance services and products when a lifelong guidance programme, products or elements of the programme are delivered through external agencies and contractors.

Governance and strategic leadership: cooperation and coordination (guideline 5)

Policies and systems that:

- support a comprehensive mainstream approach to career learning for higher education students that combines career education programmes within/across the curriculum or study programme and through external providers, experience-based career learning and workplace learning using cooperation networks that extend beyond the institutional setting;
- encourage partnerships with employers, trade unions and other labour market actors to ensure that the guidance provided in higher education creates opportunities for experience-based career learning, fine-tuning specialisation, building student portfolios and planning/implementing work experience;
- support stable, transdisciplinary collaboration and partnerships among various stakeholders to establish jointly agreed-upon policies, funding, provisions and networks. This should involve a division of labour among different service providers relevant to lifelong guidance for higher education students;
- support customised lifelong guidance provisions for diverse user groups of higher education students through stable, collaborative partnership with community-based services and targeted outreach strategies;
- increase the awareness of and promote lifelong guidance for higher education students and encourage its use by sharing information and highlighting the benefits for all staff, employers, trade unions and other community actors, stakeholders and guidance programme providers;
- promote and provide adequate support for the involvement of higher education students, higher education providers, employers, trade unions and other stakeholders in the design, provision, and monitoring and evaluation of lifelong guidance activities and services;
- develop and promote integrated and comprehensive information and guidance services for all ages at the national, regional and local levels;
- use career guidance when designing flexible learning pathways, ensuring that dead ends in education and training are avoided;
- strengthen the connections between career guidance provisions in higher education institutions, upper secondary schools, VET and adult learning settings;
- make appropriate referrals ⁽⁷⁷⁾ to relevant supporting or other services to ensure that all the needs of each higher education student are addressed;
- ensure access to lifelong guidance is coordinated with other supporting policies, such as the validation of non-formal and informal learning and financing for education and training, where relevant in higher education contexts (Cedefop, 2019).

Career information in lifelong guidance (guideline 6)

Policies and systems that:

- provide higher education students and parents/guardians where relevant with access to sufficient and user-friendly, impartial, non-discriminatory and accurate information on education, training and enrolment that is designed by taking into account their needs and milieu;
- use the national and EU instruments and resources that forecast and anticipate skills needs in

⁽⁷⁷⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Referral'.

guidance services for higher education students to identify emerging skills and labour shortages in specific occupations across and within sectors and regions. Service users should also be informed about this information and these resources;

- provide higher education students with up-to-date information on the most relevant mobility, transparency and transferability tools, policies and programmes within and outside the EU;
- encourage the provision of information and guidance, including on experience-based career learning, that enables higher education students, and their parents when relevant, to become acquainted with a variety of disciplines and vocational specialisations, progression and transfer pathways, and career possibilities;
- support the transitions of potential students by informing them about the level of achievement required for different higher education programmes and courses and for potential career pathways;
- develop partnerships and feedback loops between higher education providers and employers/trade unions promoting the production of quality career information.

Professionalism in lifelong guidance (guideline 7)

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that the guidelines for professionalism consider practitioners in the context of guidance for higher education students;
- ensure that the initial and in-service training of career practitioners, of other higher education staff involved in the provision of guidance and of administration/management is carried out. This should include the teaching and assessment of CMS and methods for preventing disengagement and early exit from higher education;
- ensure the continuing improvement of practitioners' qualifications and competences to provide adequate lifelong guidance for higher education students;
- enhance and sustain the development of ICT and digital skills ⁽⁷⁸⁾ for guidance practice through initial and continuous professional development. This includes working with and alongside technology and identifying appropriate and ethical uses of ICT in lifelong guidance (see [guideline 9](#)).

Funding lifelong guidance services (guideline 8)

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that higher education providers are equipped with appropriate financial and non-financial resources and have an understanding of and the capacity to ensure quality career education and lifelong guidance services, including for cooperation with the community and partners;
- ensure adequate and sustainable funding for lifelong guidance that addresses higher education students;
- earmark and effectively allocate a budget to ensure high-quality guidance for higher education students, including accountability, outcomes and impact;
- ensure that all higher education providers that receive public funding for career guidance provision meet pre-established quality standards for services, tools, resources, products and activities, including recognised practitioner competences;
- encourage private sector investment, where appropriate, in the provision of career guidance services, tools, resources, products and activities; these must be developed in accordance with established quality standards and requirements on transparency in service provision for higher education students;
- stimulate guidance in higher education settings, as relevant, by introducing incentives such as individual learning accounts, training funds and/or schemes offering tailored career development support.

⁽⁷⁸⁾ ICT includes emerging technologies and non-digital elements, components and features. See [Annex 1. Glossary](#).

ICT in lifelong guidance (guideline 9)

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that the ministries and entities responsible for lifelong guidance share a common understanding of and have agreed upon a framework (e.g. standards) for the role and use of ICT in lifelong guidance. This should be communicated effectively to all service providers and stakeholders;
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- address disparities in general and digital literacy by supporting higher education students to enhance their ability to source, interpret, analyse, evaluate and apply relevant information;
- support digital inclusion in lifelong guidance, especially in career education, by ensuring that all individuals – particularly vulnerable groups – possess the competences and skills to use ICT in lifelong guidance contexts;
- establish and continuously improve the standards of practice for the use of ICT in lifelong guidance services for higher education students;
- ensure that all guidance practitioners receive in-service and continuous training to develop ICT skills, address ethical concerns and ensure quality accordingly;
- ensure that updated standards are followed in relation to the personal and sensitive data that are used or stored in online digital guidance portals and interactive platforms to ensure accessibility in a safe and secure digital environment.

Lifelong guidance for young people at risk (guideline 17) and lifelong guidance for vulnerable groups (guideline 18)

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that lifelong guidance for higher education students forms part of community-based services and outreach measures in easily accessible guidance points or one-stop shops. In addition, appropriate use should be made of new and evolving technologies to better reach early leavers from education and training;
- provide guidance to promote the learning and retention of higher education students, to prevent higher education students' disengagement and to prevent, intervene in and compensate for dropout. In particular, such guidance should aim to motivate higher education students through CMS curricula, the acquisition of basic skills and for access to online guidance services;
- ensure that lifelong guidance is sensitive and responsive to all higher education students and is aligned with the diversity and inclusion policy in place;
- place particular focus on higher education students facing transitions during education and especially those facing barriers;
- place adequate focus on vulnerable groups, those facing barriers and those potentially at risk of social exclusion in order to enable their ability to manage transitions and adapt to changes in the labour market and society.

Resources for policymakers

- Borbély-Pecze, T. B., & Hutchinson, J. (2013). *The Youth Guarantee and Lifelong Guidance*. ELGPN Concept Note, 4. <https://www.elgpn.eu/publications/elgpn-concept-note-youth-guarantee>
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Guideline 13: Lifelong guidance for adult learners

Definition

Adult learning is a vital component of the lifelong learning continuum, comprising general and vocational education and training that supports well-being and prosperity (see [guideline 11](#)). This form of learning is undertaken by adults after leaving, or on the completion of, initial education. Among the many reasons for becoming adult learners and critical contextual factors, there are those who have interrupted or discontinued their studies and those engaging in learning for social integration. It contributes to the empowerment of marginalised individuals or groups (see [guideline 18](#)) and, at the same time, it addresses a range of adults' needs as related to skills development and employability. It covers ⁽⁷⁹⁾:

- (a) formal, non-formal and informal learning for improving basic skills, obtaining new qualifications, completing requirements for initial education, upskilling or reskilling;
- (b) participation in social, cultural, artistic and societal learning for holistic personal development and fulfilment to support well-being, including to support active ageing (see [guideline 16](#)).

Lifelong guidance in adult learning refers to a range of activities and products that enable adults to participate in and engage with learning and, where appropriate, to progress to qualifications and further meaningful learning and work transitions. It includes providing referrals to processes for validating non-formal and informal learning and for recognising skills and qualifications. It provides opportunities for enhancing the acquisition of career management skills (CMS) from a lifelong perspective (see [guideline 1](#)).

Lifelong guidance for adult learners may be provided in many settings, including in educational institutions and workplaces (see [guideline 14](#) and [15](#)), as well as within the public, private and third sectors, including by social partners. It can take place in collective settings (e.g. the classroom) and on an individual basis, such as through career counselling, and it can be provided using existing or emerging technologies that broaden the access to activities, services, sources and resources. Those involved in its delivery may have specialist career guidance training or other relevant training for guidance for adults, such as multicultural counselling skills for migrants.

Why it is important

Lifelong guidance allows adults to make sense of the complexity of their lives and enables them to manage their careers. It also helps them to make meaningful life, learning and work decisions that contribute to their well-being over the whole lifespan. It increases the adult learner's capacity to manage their career and decide where to invest their resources, reducing financial and other risks.

Lifelong guidance is necessary for many adults to find their way in the current learning or working world, which might have significantly changed since they completed or attended initial education. 'This will ensure that all adults have the opportunity to develop their basic skills and key competences based on their needs and attain the skill level necessary in today's society and labour market' (Council of the European Union, 2021a).

Lifelong guidance is essential for those who are facing barriers as a result of previous experiences in formal schooling contexts and for those who are far from the labour market or are re-entering education after taking leave. Lifelong guidance enables the participation, re-entry, retention, engagement, achievement and progression through learning of these individuals.

Lifelong guidance can provide referrals to and support in the process of validation of non-formal and informal learning. This allows the identification, documentation, assessment and certification of learning

⁽⁷⁹⁾ See [Annex 1. Glossary](#): 'Adult learning'.

that has taken place outside formal education institutions.

Free-of-charge lifelong guidance provisions can offer adult learners and prospective learners' access to information about individual learning accounts (ILAs) (Council of the European Union, 2022c) or other learning, training or skills entitlements, such as vouchers or other individual schemes. This supports engagement in adult learning and ensures that it is suited to individuals' needs and profiles. This enables meaningful decision-making and boosts both the incentives and motivation to participate in lifelong guidance, validation and lifelong learning.

Lifelong guidance has become more important with the increasing number of career pathways and the complexity of credentials and the qualifications landscape (including modularisation, micro-credentials, etc. (Council of the European Union, 2022d), and the adoption of the European qualifications framework (EQF) (Council of the European Union, 2017) and the national qualifications frameworks).

Lifelong guidance provision is an essential component of lifelong learning policies. It plays a key role in stimulating demand for adult learning and in providing information and counselling, complemented by effective outreach strategies. These aim to raise awareness and motivation and to support readiness for participation among current and potential learners (Council of the European Union, 2021b). This also contributes to achieving targets set by Member States to increase adult participation in learning ⁽⁸⁰⁾.

Upskilling and reskilling needs in the modern transitional labour markets make the role of lifelong guidance within all types of adult learning more essential than ever before. It serves to improve adult learners' engagement in learning and to enable their acquisition of credentials and qualifications or other relevant skills.

By supporting the development of adult learning, career guidance makes an important contribution to social mobility, active citizenship and personal development.

Lifelong guidance for adults can help in creating awareness of and contribute to relevant EU initiatives, including the European Pillar of Social Rights (European Parliament et al., 2017), the digital education action plan (European Commission, 2020b) and the European skills agenda (European Commission, 2020d) and subsequent EU policies. It also promotes the use of the available mobility and transparency tools, platforms and services (e.g. the Europass skills passport, the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) classification, the European employment services (EURES), the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and national qualifications frameworks).

Good practice

Career management skills (guideline 1)

Policies and systems that:

- develop a comprehensive strategy for the teaching, learning and self-evaluation of personal, social and learning-to-learn competences, including the acquisition and development of adult learners' CMS and entrepreneurial skills throughout all settings (Council of the European Union, 2018). This includes within adult learning contexts and in working life;
- in addition to the development of entrepreneurship skills, provide support for learning about self-employment, social enterprise and business start-up through adequate information, guidance and counselling;
- promote a comprehensive lifelong guidance programme within adult learning and/or provided externally, such as by trade unions or other organisations that assists adult learners and significant others ⁽⁸¹⁾, particularly at key points for learning and work decision-making;
- ensure that adult learners become acquainted with different vocational specialisations, progression and transfer pathways, and career possibilities;

⁽⁸⁰⁾ The Porto Communiqué indicates a target of 60% of adult participation in learning by 2030. See European Parliament (2023).

⁽⁸¹⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Significant others'.

- promote career education and CMS within adult learning programmes as a means to address individual and group differences in their capacity to source, interpret, evaluate and apply career information, especially when it is obtained from internet and social media sources;
- connect learner-centred active learning approaches with the development of CMS in adult learning settings;
- ensure that adult learners are able to relate their learning experiences to the world of work, including by developing the skills and attitudes that enable successful (re)integration, transition and adaptation to work and life contexts, as well as a sense of responsibility for their career decisions;
- promote the active engagement of adult learners in the development of their career paths and/or plans;
- support blended learning, combining face-to-face and distance support, to enhance career learning experiences for adult learners.

Access to lifelong guidance (guideline 2)

Policies and systems that:

- allow for the co-creation of guidance services with the involvement of diverse user groups and significant others, to promote career development for adult learners;
- ensure that career guidance is an integral part of the diverse range of adult learning programmes throughout each stage and that teachers and trainers, school staff, managers and leaders are trained, supported and recognised as resources for adult learners;
- provide career guidance in adult learning prior to learning engagement, during course participation and at progression points to further learning and/or work;
- ensure that all adult learners have access to resources and arrangements for guidance;
- foster stable, transdisciplinary collaboration and partnership among various members of the adult learning community and other stakeholders, including social partners, to improve access to lifelong guidance activities and related initiatives;
- ensure the accessibility of career services and career education for all, including access to physical and virtual spaces and services to enhance the experience and to maintain engagement in learning (European Commission, 2021a).

Assuring the quality of lifelong guidance provision (guideline 3) and evidence-based systems and policy development in lifelong guidance (guideline 4)

Policies and systems that:

- develop and ensure funding for the monitoring and evaluation of guidance services, including career education, for service and programme improvement for adult learners;
- ensure that the monitoring and evaluation system includes the collection and use of feedback from adult learners, teachers, trainers, employers, trade unions and all other relevant partners and stakeholders;
- integrate the monitoring and evaluation of lifelong guidance into overall quality assurance arrangements, strategic planning and institutional performance indicators;
- monitor career learning outcomes as evidence of the quality and effectiveness of guidance and career education programmes for adult learners and make the users aware of this information;
- use feedback from guidance services to enhance the relevance of adult learning to the labour market and further learning;
- promote and support research on lifelong guidance within the context of adult learning;
- enhance the collection, analysis and dissemination of comprehensive tracking data about and for adult learners;
- promote lifelong guidance as a tool in active labour market measures in adult education settings. It should be aligned with relevant quality standards for products and services, particularly if obligatory, and the individual's long-term career development perspective should be considered;
- promote consistency in the quality of lifelong guidance provision, including career education across

adult learning providers and regions where the responsibility and funding for this is devolved to providers, municipalities and/or regions;

- adopt jointly agreed-upon standards of guidance services and products when a lifelong guidance programme, products or elements of the programme are delivered through external agencies and contractors.

Governance and strategic leadership: cooperation and coordination (guideline 5)

Policies and systems that:

- develop and promote integrated and comprehensive information and guidance services for adults of all ages at the national, regional and local levels;
- support a comprehensive mainstream approach to career learning for adult learners that combines career education programmes within the curriculum or programme and/or provided by external providers, experience-based career learning and workplace-based learning using cooperation networks that extend beyond the institutional setting;
- encourage partnerships with employers, trade unions and other labour market actors to ensure that the guidance provided in adult learning settings creates opportunities for experience-based career learning;
- support stable, transdisciplinary collaboration and partnerships among various stakeholders to establish jointly agreed-upon policies, funding, provisions and networks. This should involve a division of labour among different service providers relevant to lifelong guidance for adult learners;
- support customised lifelong guidance provisions for diverse user groups of adult learners through stable, collaborative partnership with community-based services and targeted outreach strategies;
- increase the awareness of and promote lifelong guidance for adult learners and encourage its use by sharing information and highlighting the benefits for all staff, employers, trade unions and other community actors, stakeholders and guidance programme providers;
- promote and provide adequate support for the involvement of adult learners, adult learning providers, employers, trade unions and other stakeholders in the design, provision, and monitoring and evaluation of lifelong guidance activities and services;
- use career guidance when designing flexible learning pathways, ensuring that dead ends in education and training are avoided;
- strengthen the connections between career guidance provisions in adult learning institutions, upper secondary schools, higher education and other adult learning settings;
- make appropriate referrals ⁽⁸²⁾ to relevant supporting or other services to ensure that all the needs of each adult learner are addressed;
- ensure access to lifelong guidance is coordinated with other supporting policies, such as the validation of non-formal and informal learning and financing for education and training, where relevant in adult learning contexts (Cedefop, 2019);
- ensure that lifelong guidance for adult learners is included as an incentive in the collective bargaining agenda of the social partners at the national and sector levels.

Career information in lifelong guidance (guideline 6)

Policies and systems that:

- provide adult learners with access to sufficient and user-friendly, impartial, non-discriminatory and accurate information on education, training and enrolment that is designed by taking into account their needs and milieu;
- use the national and EU instruments and resources that forecast and anticipate skills needs in guidance services for adult learners to identify emerging skills / labour shortages in specific occupations

⁽⁸²⁾ See [Annex 1. Glossary](#): 'Referral'.

across and within sectors and regions. Service users should also be informed about this information and these resources;

- provide adult learners with up-to-date information on the most relevant mobility, transparency and transferability tools, policies and programmes within and outside the EU;
- encourage the provision of information and guidance, including on experience-based career learning, that enables adult learners to become acquainted with a variety of vocational specialisations, progression and transfer pathways, and career possibilities;
- support the transitions of potential adult learners by informing them about the level of achievement required for different higher education programmes and courses and for potential career pathways;
- develop partnerships and feedback loops between adult learning providers and employers/trade unions, promoting the production of quality career information.

Professionalism in lifelong guidance (guideline 7)

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that the guidelines for professionalism consider practitioners in the context of guidance for adult learners;
- ensure that the initial and in-service training of career practitioners and of other staff and management involved in or supporting the provision of guidance includes the teaching and assessment of CMS and methods for preventing disengagement and early leaving from education and training;
- ensure the continuing improvement of practitioners' qualifications and competences to provide adequate lifelong guidance for adult learners;
- enhance and sustain the development of ICT and digital skills⁽⁸³⁾ for guidance practice through initial and continuous professional development. This includes working with and alongside technology and for identifying appropriate and ethical uses of ICT in lifelong guidance (see [guideline 9](#)).

Funding lifelong guidance services (guideline 8)

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that adult learning providers are equipped with appropriate financial and non-financial resources and have an understanding of and the capacity to assure quality career education and lifelong guidance services, including for cooperation with the community and partners;
- ensure adequate and sustainable funding for lifelong guidance that addresses adult learners;
- earmark and effectively allocate a budget to ensure high-quality guidance for adult learners, including accountability, outcomes and impact;
- ensure that all adult learning providers that receive public funding for career guidance provision meet pre-established quality standards for services, tools, resources, products and activities, including recognised practitioner competences;
- encourage private sector investment, where appropriate, in the provision of career guidance services, tools, resources, products and activities; these must be developed in accordance with established quality standards and requirements on transparency in service provision for adult learners ensuring their best interests;
- stimulate guidance and support in adult learning settings, as relevant, by introducing incentives such as ILA, training funds and/or schemes offering tailored career development support.

ICT in lifelong guidance (guideline 9)

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that the ministries and entities responsible for lifelong guidance share a common understanding of and have agreed upon a framework (e.g. standards) for the role and use of ICT in lifelong guidance. This should be communicated effectively to all service providers and stakeholders;

⁽⁸³⁾ ICT includes emerging technologies and non-digital elements, components and features. See [Annex 1. Glossary](#).

- systematically integrate the use of ICT into existing lifelong guidance services for adult learners;
- provide the necessary infrastructure to support both existing and emerging technologies, ensuring their effective adoption and utilisation in the context of guidance for adult learners;
- address disparities in general and digital literacy by supporting adult learners to enhance their ability to source, interpret, analyse, evaluate and apply relevant information;
- support digital inclusion in lifelong guidance, especially in career education, by ensuring that all adult learners – particularly vulnerable groups – possess the competences and skills to use ICT in lifelong guidance contexts;
- establish and continuously improve the standards of practice for the use of ICT in lifelong guidance services for adult learners;
- ensure that all guidance practitioners receive in-service and continuous training to develop the ICT skills appropriate to the adult learning context, address ethical concerns and ensure quality accordingly;
- ensure that updated standards are followed in relation to the personal and sensitive data that are used or stored in online digital guidance portals and interactive platforms to ensure accessibility in a safe and secure digital environment.

Lifelong guidance for young people at risk (guideline 17) and lifelong guidance for vulnerable groups (guideline 18)

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that lifelong guidance for adult learners forms part of community-based services and outreach measures in easily accessible guidance points or one-stop shops. In addition, appropriate use should be made of new and evolving technologies to better reach early leavers from education and training;
- provide guidance to promote learning and retention, to prevent adult learners' disengagement and as one supporting measure to prevent, intervene in, and compensate for, dropout. In particular, such guidance should be used to motivate adult learners through CMS programmes, the acquisition of basic skills including for access to online guidance services;
- ensure that lifelong guidance is sensitive and responsive to all adult learners and is aligned with the diversity and inclusion policy in place;
- Place adequate focus on vulnerable groups, those facing barriers and those potentially at risk of social exclusion in order to enable their ability to manage transitions and adapt to changes in the labour market and society.

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Guideline 14: Lifelong guidance for workers

Definition

Lifelong guidance for workers⁽⁸⁴⁾ covers a range of learning activities and products that enable workers to take stock of their current and future work situation (role, conditions, content and form). This includes having an understanding and self-awareness of the competences that individuals have acquired from work and life-wide learning, the role of personal interests in careers, new training and upskilling demands, and validation of non-formal and informal learning, as well as completing qualifications. It involves the development and acquisition of career management skills (CMS) (see [guideline 1](#)), planning and managing diverse working arrangements, work-life balance, transitions in life, learning and work. This includes transitions at key career stages.

Lifelong guidance activities for formally employed workers can take place within workplaces as part of a human resources development strategy or practices or as a trade-union activity. They are also provided by national career services, public employment services, specialist career services or private providers. These activities can include outreach measures and access to advice on entrepreneurship (Cedefop, 2008b). Career support can be provided in connection with financial and non-financial support measures to promote workers' training, including initiatives coordinated with employers, trade unions and other partner organisations, which are also provided with advice and resources on supporting workers' learning and development (Cedefop, 2020).

Other forms of lifelong guidance for workers are provided by outplacement agencies, coaching consultancies, mentoring services, civil-society organisations and adult learning centres (see [guideline 13](#)). Career guidance can support informal workers (e.g. employees without contracts, own-account workers and those in non-standard forms of employment⁽⁸⁵⁾) in terms of training, developing a business or transitioning to the formal economy, as well as those at risk of redundancy (see [guideline 15](#)). It can likewise be available to those in undeclared work or engaged in domestic work such as caring for the family and home (see ELA, n.d.).

Lifelong guidance for workers may be provided collectively (in a class/group) or individually and may be provided using existing or emerging technologies that enhance access to activities, services and resources. The internet is the information source and contact point for many workers seeking new learning and work opportunities. It is a rich source for social networking dedicated to career development, career information and advice. Workplace training, mentoring and appraisal also provide opportunities for informal career information and advice.

Why it is important

Lifelong guidance provision has substantial added value for those who are employed and all types of workers; for organisations, including employers and trade unions; for the economy and wider society; and for policymakers.

It helps those who are employed and other workers to maintain their employability and career adaptability⁽⁸⁶⁾, to gain appropriate qualifications through relevant training courses and in the validation

⁽⁸⁴⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Workers'. This term designates, in a broad sense, any person of working age carrying out an activity that is recognisable as work. See also [guideline 15](#), which addresses those who are unemployed across a range of circumstances.

⁽⁸⁵⁾ See the International Labour Organization's definition of [non-standard forms of employment](#).

⁽⁸⁶⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Career adaptability'.

of non-formal and informal learning ⁽⁸⁷⁾. It assists in their progression and development both while at work and at the personal level.

Lifelong guidance aims to enable everyone to anticipate and better adapt to changing labour market needs throughout their lives through offering continuous upskilling and reskilling, supporting fair and just transitions for all, strengthening social outcomes and addressing labour market shortages ⁽⁸⁸⁾.

Lifelong guidance has become increasingly important as a result of the growing number of career pathways and interconnections between them, the increasing complexity of credentials and the qualifications landscape (e.g. modularisation and microcredentials), and the adoption of the European qualifications framework (EQF).

It supports individuals and enterprises in making informed decisions on training and upskilling pathways to adapt to changes at the workplace and in society. It also helps them to move and manage transitions from one job to another or within transforming occupations and skills requirements. Career guidance provides workers with an opportunity to enhance the acquisition of CMS.

Lifelong guidance has added value for human resource development; maintaining a high level of workforce productivity; attracting, motivating and retaining employees; aligning the skill types and levels of workers/staff with current and forecasted competence needs; and ensuring a demographically balanced workforce. Workers may require additional support during the recruitment process, including with the development of critical skills to prepare for screening by automated recruitment tools related to matching job vacancies with the CVs of jobseekers ⁽⁸⁹⁾ (see [guideline 9](#)).

Lifelong guidance has a key role to play in flexicurity ⁽⁹⁰⁾ strategies for both employers and employees that simultaneously address labour market security and flexibility. It supports the redeployment of human resources to meet new business challenges, and it assists those at risk of unemployment, those who are recently unemployed and those facing redundancy to reassess their competence profile and take advantage of learning opportunities to upskill and improve their employability.

Free-of-charge career guidance provisions can offer workers access to information about individual learning accounts (ILA) (Council of the European Union, 2022d) or other training entitlements, such as vouchers or individual skills accounts, and is used before, during and after the validation process. This facilitates engagement in adult learning suited to individuals' needs and profiles and aligning with labour market requirements. This enables meaningful decision-making while also boosting incentives to participate in career guidance, validation and lifelong learning.

Together with other essential policies, services and partners, lifelong guidance for those who are employed and other workers contributes to achieving prosperous, competitive, green, sustainable, digital and resilient economies and inclusive, fair and democratic societies.

Lifelong guidance, along with other policies, can support the workforce and companies in transitions related to the reshaping of workplaces due to structural transformation (through flexible arrangements, greater use of existing and emerging technology, career transition support and acquiring new skills in emerging fields) and to socioeconomic changes related to demography. As part of this, the promotion of active ageing and age management strategies as well as attracting young people are needed to ensure balanced workforces, where more workers can contribute to the labour market.

By having effective diversity and inclusion policies in place, lifelong guidance can support improvements in accessibility in physical and virtual spaces, including in workplace training and in assisting workers with reasonable workplace accommodations, including in recruitment settings.

Providers can offer information on other EU initiatives that support the rights of all employees both

⁽⁸⁷⁾ ETUC (2023) underpins that European workers need 'support in just transitions to improve their skills, qualifications and consequently wage levels, working conditions and career and transition prospects'. It also emphasises that implementation of the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights requires the provision of free and quality career guidance ensured by law or collective agreements.

⁽⁸⁸⁾ See Council of the European Union (2020b). See also European Trade Union Confederation's position on equipping workers with the necessary skills for the green transition (ETUC, 2022).

⁽⁸⁹⁾ See ETUC (2025) for views on the use of artificial intelligence in workers' skills development.

⁽⁹⁰⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Flexicurity'.

at work and in training opportunities, such as the 2021–2030 ‘Union of equality’ strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities (European Commission, 2021a) or its successor strategies. Providers can also raise awareness of other current legislation.

Lifelong guidance for workers can help in creating awareness of and can contribute to relevant EU initiatives, including the European Pillar of Social Rights (European Parliament et al., 2017), the digital education action plan (European Commission, 2020b, 2020c) and the European skills agenda (European Commission, 2020d) and subsequent EU policy developments. It can also help to raise awareness of other current policies and promote the use of the different mobility and transparency tools, platforms and services available (e.g. the Europass skills passport, the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) classification, the European employment services (EURES), the European qualifications framework (EQF) and national qualifications frameworks).

Good practice

Career management skills ([guideline 1](#))

Policies and systems that:

- develop a comprehensive strategy for the teaching, learning and self-evaluation of personal, social and learning-to-learn competences, including the acquisition and development of workers’ CMS and entrepreneurial skills throughout all settings (Council of the European Union, 2018). This includes within adult learning contexts and in working life;
- in addition to the development of entrepreneurship skills, provide support for learning about self-employment, social enterprise and business start-up through adequate information, guidance and counselling;
- promote a comprehensive lifelong guidance programme for workers at workplaces and/or provided in adult learning settings, including by trade unions, that assists workers and significant others (where relevant) ⁽⁹¹⁾, particularly at key points for learning and work decision-making;
- ensure that workers learn about and experience, where relevant, different fields and vocational specialisations, progression and learning pathways, and career possibilities;
- promote career education and CMS in human resources practices, workforce management, organisational strategies and guidelines as a means to address individual and group differences in their capacity to source, interpret, evaluate and apply career information, especially when it is obtained from internet and social media sources;
- connect user-centred active learning approaches with the development of CMS for workers and for continuous development;
- ensure that workers are able to relate their learning experiences to the wider world of work, including by developing the skills and attitudes that enable successful (re)integration, transition and adaptation to work and life contexts, as well as a sense of responsibility for their career decisions;
- promote the active engagement of workers in the development of their career paths and/or plans;
- support blended learning, combining face-to-face and distance support, to enhance career learning experiences for workers.

Access to lifelong guidance ([guideline 2](#))

Policies and systems that:

- allow for the co-creation of guidance services with the diverse user groups to promote career development for workers;
- ensure that lifelong guidance is an integral part of the diverse range of learning programmes for

⁽⁹¹⁾ ‘Significant others’ refers to people of importance for an individual’s positive personal and career development, including family members, caregivers, mentors, etc. (see [Annex 1, Glossary](#)).

- workers in different settings, including adult education institutions, workplaces and trade unions;
- provide lifelong guidance for workers not only through a diverse range of learning programmes, but also prior to learning engagement, during course participation and at progression points to further learning and/or work;
 - ensure that all workers have access to resources and arrangements for guidance;
 - foster stable, transdisciplinary collaboration and partnership among various members of the relevant community and other stakeholders, including social partners, to improve workers' access to lifelong guidance activities and related initiatives;
 - ensure the accessibility of career services and career education for all workers, including access to physical and virtual spaces and services to enhance the experience and to maintain engagement in learning (European Commission, 2021a);
 - extend available guidance services in the adult learning and continuing education sectors to workers through outreach or pop-up offers at workplaces or online;
 - ensure the availability of vocational rehabilitation, reasonable accommodations in working and learning contexts, and supported employment ⁽⁹²⁾ to enhance well-being and to maintain individual employability.

Assuring the quality of lifelong guidance provision ([guideline 3](#)) and evidence-based systems and policy development in lifelong guidance ([guideline 4](#))

Policies and systems that:

- develop and ensure funding for the monitoring and evaluation of guidance services for workers, including career education, for service and programme improvement;
- ensure that the monitoring and evaluation system includes the collection and use of feedback from career guidance service users, employers, trade unions and all other relevant stakeholders;
- integrate the monitoring and evaluation of lifelong guidance into overall quality assurance arrangements, strategic planning and institutional performance indicators;
- monitor career learning outcomes as evidence of the quality and effectiveness of guidance and career education programmes for workers and make the users aware of this information;
- use feedback from guidance services to enhance the relevance of adults' career development and of human resource development functions to the labour market and further learning;
- promote and support research on lifelong guidance for workers.
- enhance the collection, analysis and dissemination of comprehensive data about and for workers' career development;
- promote consistency in the quality of lifelong guidance provision for workers, including career education across adult learning providers and regions where the responsibility and funding for this is devolved to providers, municipalities and/or regions;
- promote lifelong guidance as a tool to be used as part of active labour market measures at workplaces and in guidance services for adults. The provisions should be aligned with relevant quality standards for products and services, particularly if obligatory, and the individual's long-term career development perspective should be considered;
- adopt jointly agreed-upon standards of guidance services and products when a lifelong guidance programme, products or elements of the programme are delivered through external agencies and contractors.

Governance and strategic leadership: cooperation and coordination ([guideline 5](#))

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that workforce management/human resource development policies stress the importance of lifelong guidance in workforce development;

⁽⁹²⁾ See [Annex 1. Glossary](#): 'Supported employment'.

- support a comprehensive mainstream approach to career learning for adult learners (workers) by combining career education programmes within the curriculum/learning programme and by external providers, together with experience-based career learning and workplace learning. Cooperation networks are used that extend beyond the institutional setting;
- encourage partnerships with employers, trade unions and other labour market actors to ensure that the guidance provided in adult learning contexts creates opportunities for experience-based career learning;
- support stable, transdisciplinary collaboration and partnerships among various stakeholders to establish jointly agreed-upon policies, funding, provisions and networks. This should involve a division of labour among different service providers relevant to lifelong guidance for workers;
- extend available guidance services to workers through outreach or pop-up offers at workplaces or online;
- support customised lifelong guidance provisions for diverse user groups of adult learners through stable, collaborative partnership with community-based services and targeted outreach strategies;
- increase the awareness of and promote lifelong guidance for workers and encourage its use by sharing information and highlighting the benefits for all staff, employers, trade unions and other community actors, stakeholders and guidance programme providers;
- promote and provide adequate support for the involvement of workers, employers, trade unions and other stakeholders in the design, provision, and monitoring and evaluation of lifelong guidance activities and services;
- develop and promote integrated and comprehensive information and guidance services for all ages at the national, regional and local levels;
- use career guidance when designing flexible learning pathways, ensuring that dead ends in education and training are avoided;
- make appropriate referrals ⁽⁹³⁾ to relevant supporting or other services to ensure that all the needs of each worker are addressed;
- ensure access to lifelong guidance is coordinated with other supporting policies, such as the validation of non-formal and informal learning and financing for education and training, social, youth and health-related policies, where relevant in adult learning contexts (Cedefop, 2019);
- seek ways to widen the role of public employment services in providing lifelong guidance for workers;
- ensure that lifelong guidance is included as an incentive in the collective bargaining agenda of the social partners at the national and sector levels. The roles and capacities of trade unions in providing training and career guidance to workers within and beyond the workplace and in the promotion of career guidance by skills sector bodies and tripartite workplace committees are key.

Career information in lifelong guidance ([guideline 6](#))

Policies and systems that:

- provide workers, and significant others where relevant with access to sufficient and user-friendly, impartial, non-discriminatory and accurate information on education, training and enrolment that is designed by taking into account the needs and milieu of workers;
- use the national and EU instruments and resources that forecast and anticipate skills needs in guidance services for workers to identify emerging skills / labour shortages in specific occupations across and within sectors and regions. Service users should also be informed about this information and these resources;
- provide workers with up-to-date information on the most relevant mobility, transparency and transferability tools, policies and programmes within and outside the EU;
- encourage the provision of information and guidance, including on opportunities for experience-based career learning, that enables workers to broaden their skills and become acquainted with different

⁽⁹³⁾ See [Annex 1. Glossary](#): 'Referral'.

roles and with progression and development pathways that are relevant to diverse working and learning contexts;

- support the transitions of workers to adult learning by informing them about the level of achievement required for different education programmes and courses and for potential career pathways;
- develop partnerships and feedback loops between adult learning providers and employers/trade unions, promoting the production of quality career information that benefits workers.

Professionalism in lifelong guidance ([guideline 7](#))

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that the guidelines for professionalism consider practitioners in the context of guidance for workers;
- ensure that human resource development staff have professional training for and the competences to deliver lifelong guidance and that initial and in-service training is provided to career practitioners and to other staff and management involved in the provision of guidance and career development support for workers. Such training should focus in particular on CMS acquisition, outcomes assessment and methods for promoting engagement at work;
- ensure the continuing improvement of career practitioners' qualifications and competences to provide adequate lifelong guidance for workers;
- enhance and sustain the development of ICT and digital skills⁽⁹⁴⁾ for guidance practice through initial and continuous professional development. This includes working with and alongside technology and for identifying appropriate and ethical uses of ICT in lifelong guidance (see [guideline 9](#)).

Funding lifelong guidance services ([guideline 8](#))

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that employers, trade unions and services for workers are equipped with appropriate financial and non-financial resources and have an understanding of and the capacity to assure quality career education and lifelong guidance services, including for cooperation with the community and partners;
- ensure adequate and sustainable funding for lifelong guidance that addresses workers;
- earmark and effectively allocate a budget to ensure high-quality guidance for workers, including accountability, outcomes and impact;
- ensure that those who provide guidance for workers who receive public funding for career guidance provision meet pre-established quality standards for services, tools, resources, products and activities, including recognised practitioner competences;
- encourage private sector investment, where appropriate, in the provision of career guidance services, tools, resources, products and activities; these must be developed in accordance with established quality standards and requirements on transparency in service provision for workers;
- stimulate the provision of career guidance for workers by introducing and raising awareness of incentives such as ILA, training funds and/or schemes offering tailored career development support. Career guidance should be integrated into training measures that are supported by incentives funded or co-funded by governments.

⁽⁹⁴⁾ ICT includes emerging technologies and non-digital elements, components and features. See [Annex 1. Glossary](#).

ICT in lifelong guidance ([guideline 9](#))

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that the ministries and entities responsible for lifelong guidance share a common understanding of and have agreed upon a framework (e.g. standards) for the role and use of ICT in lifelong guidance. This should be communicated effectively to all service providers and stakeholders;
- systematically integrate the use of ICT into existing lifelong guidance services for workers;
- provide the necessary infrastructure to support both existing and emerging technologies, ensuring their effective adoption and utilisation in the context of guidance for workers;
- address disparities in general and digital literacy by supporting workers to enhance their ability to source, interpret, analyse, evaluate and apply relevant information;
- support digital inclusion in lifelong guidance by ensuring that all individuals – particularly vulnerable groups – possess the competences and skills to use ICT in lifelong guidance contexts;
- establish and continuously improve the standards of practice for the use of ICT in lifelong guidance services for workers;
- ensure that all guidance practitioners receive in-service and continuous training to develop ICT skills, address ethical concerns and ensure quality accordingly;
- ensure that updated standards are followed in relation to the personal and sensitive data that are used or stored in online digital guidance portals and interactive platforms to ensure accessibility in a safe and secure digital environment.

Lifelong guidance for young people at risk ([guideline 17](#)) and lifelong guidance for vulnerable groups ([guideline 18](#))

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that policies that include workforce/human resource development stress the importance of lifelong guidance to maintain employability for potentially vulnerable workers;
- ensure that all categories of workers are considered, such as those in non-standard contracts, informal workers and those who are inactive (see [guideline 17](#) and [18](#));
- ensure that lifelong guidance for workers forms part of community-based services and outreach measures in easily accessible guidance points or one-stop shops. In addition, appropriate use should be made of new and evolving technologies to better reach early leavers from education and training;
- ensure that lifelong guidance is sensitive and responsive to all workers and is aligned with the diversity and inclusion policy in place;
- place adequate focus on the skills and needs of workers who are at a disadvantage and those potentially at risk of exclusion in order to enhance their ability to manage transitions and adapt to changes in the labour market and society. This includes those with incomplete or low qualifications, those in need of re- or upskilling and those with integration difficulties.

Resources for policymakers

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- ELGPN. (2012). *Lifelong Guidance Policy Development: A European Resource Kit. ELGPN Tool 1*. [Chapters 4 to 7 cover the application of the resource kit to policies on lifelong guidance in the employment sector.]
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Guideline 15: Lifelong guidance for the unemployed

Definition

Lifelong guidance for those who are unemployed refers to a wide range of career guidance activities and products for individuals who are fully or partially unemployed and those further from the labour market. The latter group includes those who are long-term unemployed, those not registered as unemployed and workers at risk of social exclusion or becoming unemployed such as those in non-standard employment or who move between jobs (see [guideline 14](#)) (Cedefop et al., 2023).

Those without adequate employment or in transition can take stock of their situation and consider future work (desirable role, conditions, content and form). This includes having an understanding and self-awareness of the competences that they have acquired from work and life-wide learning, the role of personal interests in their career, possible training and upskilling demands, and validation of non-formal and informal learning, and any qualifications needed. It involves the acquisition and development of career management skills (CMS) and regaining agency for sustainable careers. The unemployed population is not a homogeneous group, as the individuals in this population have diverse needs. There are intersectional, demographic and life stage aspects that are relevant for careers. Those experiencing long-term unemployment require customised and adapted service provision, with short-term or long-term support that addresses their higher levels of need. Groups include those who are unemployed at different points in their career pathway, those seeking to change occupations or to re-engage in education, those who have suddenly been made redundant, those returning to paid work after child-rearing or caring for family and students or recent graduates seeking a first job. Service users who are early leavers from education/training or young people not in education or training may be covered under the reinforced Youth Guarantee scheme (Council of the European Union, 2020c) or other initiatives (see [guideline 17](#)).

Lifelong guidance services can be provided for those in unemployment contexts by public employment services (PES), national career services, private services or agencies, with community organisations, youth and social workers, and non-governmental organisations often having targeted and outreach roles. Outreach measures with trained staff aim to reach individuals outside the formal labour market who may lack access to standard lifelong guidance provision and social protection. There can be involvement of social partners and/or regional and local authorities, as well as social economy organisations in guidance provision, including through dedicated EU-funded schemes.

Some PES offer one-stop guidance services, whereas others cooperate with external guidance service providers or have other arrangements. Initiatives supporting labour market transitions offer career support for workers, and services frequently act as information points for screening, signposting and making referrals to community partners or across agencies for comprehensive support.

Employment counselling⁽⁹⁵⁾ is a basic service provided by career practitioners (employment counsellors, advisers and other staff). Tiered or differentiated services can be provided for more comprehensive or integrated solutions (e.g. to a low-skilled unemployed young person or adult who wishes to pursue a learning opportunity and avail themselves of financial support). Lifelong guidance is recognised as one of the most effective interventions of active labour market policies (ETF, 2022).

Lifelong guidance provision for those who are unemployed can take place collectively (class/group) or individually and can be provided using existing or emerging technologies that broaden the access to services, tools, resources, products and activities.

⁽⁹⁵⁾ See [Annex 1. Glossary](#): ‘Employment counselling’ (sometimes referred to as vocational or employment advice).

Why it is important

The role of PES in providing access to guidance and in meeting the needs of categories of applicants, including young people, is established by the International Labour Organization (ILO) Employment Service Convention of 1948 (No 88) ⁽⁹⁶⁾. This ensures the best possible organisation of the employment market.

Lifelong guidance is important for attracting and recruiting individuals according to their preferences, competences and aspirations, as well as meeting the requirements for a demographically balanced workforce.

Lifelong guidance has a key role to play in flexicurity strategies for both employers and workers, as well as for those in transition ⁽⁹⁷⁾ (see [guideline 14](#)). It supports the redeployment of human resources to meet new labour market and business challenges, and it assists those at risk of unemployment, those who have recently become unemployed and those facing redundancy in reassessing their competence profile and taking advantage of learning opportunities.

Lifelong guidance aims to enable everyone to anticipate and better adapt to changing labour market needs throughout their lives by offering continuous upskilling and reskilling, supporting fair and just transitions for all, strengthening social outcomes and addressing labour market shortages (Council of the European Union, 2020b).

It enables service users to acquire CMS. This includes skills for the labour market to improve motivation and career readiness and gain credentials and qualifications through training and validation of non-formal and informal learning. It plays a key role in motivating the workforce and thereby the 'labour supply and improving access to employment, skills, and competences' ⁽⁹⁸⁾.

Lifelong guidance also assists those who are unemployed to cope with any negative psychosocial consequences of unemployment and its effects on individual career development, particularly in the longer term. It also encourages and empowers people to self-manage and plan their future career, helping them to avoid disqualification processes, skills obsolescence and decreases in employability.

Free-of-charge career guidance can provide those who are unemployed with access to information about individual learning accounts (ILA) (Council of the European Union, 2022d) or other training entitlements, such as vouchers or individual skills accounts that can be used before, during and after the validation process. This facilitates engagement in adult learning suited to individuals' needs and profiles and that is aligned with labour market requirements, enabling meaningful decision-making and boosting incentives to participate in career guidance, validation and lifelong learning.

By having effective diversity and inclusion policies in place, lifelong guidance can support improvements in accessibility in physical and virtual spaces, including in training and increasing awareness of reasonable accommodations ⁽⁹⁹⁾. Providers can offer information on other EU initiatives that support individual rights in relation to work and in lifelong learning (European Commission, 2021a).

Lifelong guidance helps to prevent or mitigate labour market inflows into longer term unemployment and to reduce the risk of social exclusion. It also helps to reduce the time that individuals spend receiving unemployment benefits or other types of insurance and assistance, as well as the cost of such benefits and, therefore, the social welfare budget.

In addition, it helps create awareness and an understanding of everyone's right to fair and decent work, as well as to lifelong learning, skills acquisition and equal participation in society at large. It can therefore contribute to achieving the employment, education and training, and social inclusion targets of, and facilitating the integrated approach outlined in, the EU Pillar of Social Rights action plan for 2030 (European Parliament et al., 2017).

⁽⁹⁶⁾ The ILO Employment Service [Convention](#), 1948 (No 88). This convention refers in several places to the framework of the education and vocational guidance services (Articles 6 and 8) and ensures effective cooperation between public and private services not conducted with a view to profit (Article 11).

⁽⁹⁷⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Flexicurity'.

⁽⁹⁸⁾ See [guideline 6](#), which covers integrated employment guidelines (Council of the European Union, [2020b](#)).

⁽⁹⁹⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Reasonable accommodations'.

Lifelong guidance for the unemployed can help in creating awareness of and can contribute to relevant EU initiatives such as the European Skills Agenda (European Commission, 2020d) and subsequent EU skills policy frameworks, the Digital Education Action Plan (European Commission, 2020b) and the reinforced Youth Guarantee scheme (Council of the European Union, 2020c). It also promotes the use of the available mobility and transparency tools, platforms and services (e.g. the Europass skills passport, the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) classification, the European employment services (EURES), the European qualifications framework (EQF) and national qualifications frameworks).

Good practice

Career management skills ([guideline 1](#))

Policies and systems that:

- develop a comprehensive strategy for the teaching, learning and self-evaluation of personal, social and learning-to-learn competences, including the acquisition and development of CMS and entrepreneurial skills for those who are unemployed throughout all settings (Council of the European Union, 2018). This includes within adult learning contexts and in working life;
- in addition to the development of entrepreneurship skills, provide support for learning about self-employment, social enterprise and business start-up through adequate information, guidance and counselling;
- promote a comprehensive lifelong guidance programme for unemployed individuals within adult learning settings and/or provided externally, including by trade unions or through public employment services or other providers or schemes. This should assist those who are unemployed and significant others⁽¹⁰⁰⁾, where relevant, particularly at key points for learning and work-related decision-making;
- ensure that those who are unemployed learn about and experience, where relevant, different fields and vocational specialisations, progression and learning pathways, and career possibilities;
- promote career education and CMS for those who are unemployed as a means to address individual and group differences in their capacity to source, interpret, evaluate and apply career information, especially when it is obtained from internet and social media sources;
- connect user-centred active learning approaches with the development of CMS for those who are unemployed and for continuous development;
- ensure that those who are unemployed are able to relate their learning experiences to the world of work, including by developing the skills and attitudes that enable successful (re)integration, transition and adaptation to work and life contexts, as well as a sense of responsibility for their career decisions;
- promote the active engagement of those who are unemployed in the development of their career paths and/or plans;
- support blended learning, combining face-to-face and distance support, to enhance career learning experiences for those who are unemployed.

Access to lifelong guidance ([guideline 2](#))

Policies and systems that:

- allow for the co-creation of guidance services with the involvement of diverse user groups to promote career development for those who are unemployed;
- ensure that career guidance is an integral part of the diverse range of learning programmes for adults who are unemployed and that staff, managers and leaders are trained, supported and recognised as resources for those who are unemployed;
- provide career guidance for those who are unemployed in a diverse range of learning programmes,

⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ See [Annex 1. Glossary](#): 'Significant others'.

including by trade unions and in other settings, prior to learning engagement, during course participation and at progression points to further learning and/or work;

- ensure that all those who are unemployed have access to resources and arrangements for guidance;
- foster stable, transdisciplinary collaboration and partnership among various stakeholders, including social partners, to improve access to lifelong guidance activities and related initiatives for those who are unemployed;
- ensure the accessibility of career services and career education for all, including access to physical and virtual spaces and services to enhance the experience and to maintain engagement in learning (European Commission, 2021a);
- extend available guidance services in the adult education and continuing education sectors to those who are unemployed and through outreach or pop-up offers at workplaces or online;
- ensure the availability of vocational rehabilitation, reasonable accommodations in working and learning contexts, and supported employment ⁽¹⁰¹⁾ to enhance well-being, facilitate transitions and maintain individual employability.

Assuring the quality of lifelong guidance provision (guideline 3) and evidence-based systems and policy development in lifelong guidance (guideline 4)

Policies and systems that:

- develop and ensure funding for the monitoring and evaluation of guidance services for those who are unemployed, including career education, for service and programme improvement;
- ensure that the monitoring and evaluation system includes the collection and use of feedback from career guidance service users, employers, trade unions, partners and all other relevant stakeholders;
- integrate the monitoring and evaluation of lifelong guidance for those who are unemployed into overall quality assurance arrangements, strategic planning and institutional performance indicators;
- monitor career learning outcomes as evidence of the quality and effectiveness of guidance and career education programmes for those who are unemployed and make the users aware of this information;
- enhance the relevance of adults' career development to the labour market and further learning using the feedback from guidance services;
- promote and support research on lifelong guidance for and about those who are unemployed, including the collection, analysis and dissemination of comprehensive tracking data;
- promote consistency in the quality of lifelong guidance provision for those who are unemployed, including career education across regions where the responsibility and funding for this is devolved to providers, municipalities and/or regions;
- promote lifelong guidance as a tool in active labour market measures at workplaces and in guidance services for those who are unemployed. The provisions should be aligned with relevant quality standards for products and services, particularly if obligatory, and the individual's long-term career development perspective should be considered;
- adopt jointly agreed-upon standards of guidance services and products when a lifelong guidance programme, products or elements of the programme are delivered through external agencies and contractors.

Governance and strategic leadership: cooperation and coordination (guideline 5)

Policies and systems that:

- seek ways to widen the role of PES in providing lifelong guidance for those who are unemployed;
- support a comprehensive mainstream approach to career learning for those who are unemployed that combines career education programmes, experience-based career learning and workplace-based learning using cooperation networks that extend beyond the institutional setting;
- include activation policies that facilitate reemployment within the enterprise or sector, a transition to

⁽¹⁰¹⁾ See [Annex 1. Glossary](#): 'Supported employment'.

other employment for older workers following restructuring or similar changes that result in job loss, or where workers are at risk of job loss, at risk of losing their labour market position or lack adequate labour market protections;

- encourage partnerships with employers, trade unions and other labour market actors to ensure that the guidance provided for those who are unemployed creates opportunities for experience-based career learning;
- support stable, transdisciplinary collaboration and partnerships among various stakeholders to establish jointly agreed-upon policies and funding, provisions and networks. This should involve a division of labour among different service providers relevant to lifelong guidance for those who are unemployed;
- support customised lifelong guidance provisions for diverse user groups through stable, collaborative partnership with community-based services and targeted outreach strategies;
- increase the awareness of and promote lifelong guidance for those who are unemployed and encourage its use by sharing information and highlighting the benefits for all staff, employers, trade unions and other community actors, stakeholders and guidance programme providers;
- promote and provide adequate support for the involvement of those who are unemployed, employers, trade unions and other stakeholders in the design, provision, and monitoring and evaluation of lifelong guidance activities and services;
- develop and promote integrated and comprehensive information and guidance services for all ages at the national, regional and local levels.
- use career guidance when designing flexible learning pathways, ensuring that dead ends in education and training are avoided;
- strengthen the connections between career guidance provisions in adult learning institutions, upper secondary schools and higher education;
- make appropriate referrals ⁽¹⁰²⁾ to relevant supporting or other services to ensure that all the needs of each unemployed person are addressed;
- ensure access to lifelong guidance that is coordinated with other supporting policies, such as the validation of non-formal and information learning and financing for education and training, social, youth and health policies where relevant in adult learning contexts (Cedefop, 2019);
- promote and support access to validation services using lifelong guidance to help individuals to identify and have validated their competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning and to foster coordination between the services;
- ensure that lifelong guidance for unemployed individuals is included as an incentive in the collective bargaining agenda of the social partners at the national and sector levels. The roles and capacities of trade unions in providing training and career guidance to workers within and beyond the workplace and in the promotion of career guidance by skills sector bodies and tripartite workplace committees are key.

Career information in lifelong guidance (guideline 6)

Policies and systems that:

- provide those who are unemployed with access to sufficient and user-friendly, impartial, non-discriminatory and accurate information on education, training and enrolment that is designed by taking into account their needs and milieu;
- use the national and EU instruments and resources that forecast and anticipate skills needs in guidance services for those who are unemployed to identify emerging skills/labour shortages in specific occupations across and within sectors and regions. Service users should be informed about this information and these resources;
- provide those who are unemployed with up-to-date information on the most relevant mobility, trans-

⁽¹⁰²⁾ See [Annex 1. Glossary](#): 'Referral'.

- parency and transferability tools, policies and programmes within and outside the EU;
- encourage the provision of information and guidance, including on opportunities for experience-based career learning, that enables unemployed individuals to broaden their skills and to become acquainted with different roles and with progression and transfer pathways that are relevant to diverse working and learning contexts;
 - support those who are unemployed by informing them about the level of achievement required for different higher education programmes and courses and for potential career pathways;
 - develop partnerships and feedback loops between services for those who are unemployed and employers/trade unions promoting the production of quality career information.

Professionalism in lifelong guidance (guideline 7)

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that the guidelines for professionalism are considered for practitioners in the context of guidance for those who are unemployed;
- ensure that all staff working in the area of career guidance for unemployed individuals receive professional training for and have the competences to provide lifelong guidance. Ensure that initial and in-service training is provided to career practitioners and to other staff and management involved in the provision of guidance and career development support for those who are unemployed. Such training should focus in particular on CMS acquisition, outcomes assessment and methods for promoting engagement at work;
- ensure that the initial and in-service training of PES professionals and other staff involved in or supporting the provision of guidance and career development support for unemployed individuals focuses particularly on CMS acquisition and outcomes assessment;
- ensure the continuing improvement of practitioners' qualifications and competences to provide adequate lifelong guidance for those who are unemployed;
- enhance and sustain the development of ICT and digital skills⁽¹⁰³⁾ for guidance practice serving the unemployed through initial and continuous professional development. This includes working with and alongside technology and for identifying appropriate and ethical uses of ICT in lifelong guidance (see [guideline 9](#)).

Funding lifelong guidance services (guideline 8)

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that employers, trade unions and services for those who are unemployed are equipped with appropriate financial and non-financial resources and have an understanding of and the capacity to assure quality career education and lifelong guidance services, including for cooperation with the community and partners;
- ensure adequate and sustainable funding for lifelong guidance that addresses those who are unemployed;
- earmark and effectively allocate a budget to ensure high-quality guidance for those who are unemployed, including accountability, outcomes and impact;
- ensure that those who provide guidance for unemployed individuals who receive public funding for career guidance provision meet pre-established quality standards for services, tools, resources, products and activities, including recognised practitioner competences;
- encourage private sector investment, where appropriate, in the provision of career guidance services, tools, resources, products and activities; these must be developed in accordance with established quality standards and requirements on transparency in service provision for those who are unemployed;
- stimulate the provision of career guidance for unemployed individuals by introducing and raising awareness of incentives such as ILA, training funds and/or schemes offering tailored career devel-

⁽¹⁰³⁾ ICT includes emerging technologies and non-digital elements, components and features (see [Annex 1. Glossary](#)).

opment support, including validation of non-formal and informal learning before and after a learning opportunity. Career guidance should be integrated into training measures that are supported by incentives funded or co-funded by governments.

ICT in lifelong guidance (guideline 9)

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that the ministries and entities responsible for lifelong guidance share a common understanding of and have agreed upon a framework (e.g. standards) for the role and use of ICT in lifelong guidance. This should be communicated effectively to all service providers and stakeholders;
- systematically integrate the use of ICT into existing lifelong guidance services for those who are unemployed;
- provide the necessary infrastructure to support both existing and emerging technologies, ensuring their effective adoption and utilisation in the context of guidance for those who are unemployed;
- address disparities in general and digital literacy by supporting those who are unemployed to enhance their ability to source, interpret, analyse, evaluate and apply relevant information;
- support digital inclusion in lifelong guidance, especially in career education, by ensuring that all individuals – particularly vulnerable groups – possess the competences and skills to use ICT in lifelong guidance contexts;
- establish and continuously improve the standards of practice for the use of ICT in lifelong guidance services for those who are unemployed;
- ensure that all guidance practitioners receive in-service and continuous training to develop ICT skills, address ethical concerns and ensure quality accordingly. This may include knowledge about automated recruitment tools to support the recruitment process ⁽¹⁰⁴⁾;
- ensure that updated standards are followed in relation to the personal and sensitive data that are used or stored in online digital guidance portals and interactive platforms to ensure accessibility in a safe and secure digital environment.

Lifelong guidance for young people at risk (guideline 17) and lifelong guidance for vulnerable groups (guideline 18)

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that all categories of unemployed workers are considered, such as those who are short-term, seasonally or long-term unemployed, as well as those who are inactive (either registered or not with the employment services) (see [guideline 17](#) and [18](#));
- ensure that policies that include workforce/human resource development stress the importance of lifelong guidance to maintain the employability of workers at risk of unemployment;
- ensure that lifelong guidance for those who are unemployed forms part of community-based services and outreach measures in easily accessible guidance points or one-stop shops. In addition, appropriate use should be made of new and evolving technologies to better reach early leavers from education and training;
- provide guidance to promote learning and retention, to prevent adult learners' disengagement and to prevent, intervene in and compensate for dropout. In particular, such guidance should aim to motivate the unemployed through CMS curricula (see [guideline 1](#)), the acquisition of basic skills, including for access to online guidance services;
- support flexible and sustainable solutions for people with diverse social, work and learning backgrounds, and unemployment experiences, while balancing the benefits of timely reintegration in the labour market and prioritising individual competences, interests and aspirations;
- ensure that lifelong guidance is sensitive and responsive to all unemployed individuals and is aligned with the diversity and inclusion policy in place;

⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ See ETUC (2025).

- implement guidance on preventive and remedial policies and other supporting measures to help people at risk of unemployment, such as early leavers from education and training; young people not in education, employment or training; those with lower skills and qualifications; workers in restructuring sectors of industry; and those in occupations or sectors at risk of automation;
- place adequate focus on the skills and needs of unemployed individuals, those at a disadvantage and those potentially at risk of unemployment and social exclusion in order to enhance their ability to manage transitions and adapt to changes in the labour market and society. This includes those with incomplete or low qualifications, those in need of re- or upskilling and those experiencing difficulties with integration;
- ensure the availability of vocational rehabilitation, reasonable accommodations and supported employment ⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ to enhance well-being and to maintain individual employability in disability contexts.

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Guideline 16: Lifelong guidance for older adults

Definition

Older adults ⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ refers to a broad category of individuals or groups that includes full-time older workers, part-time older workers, older unemployed individuals and fully retired individuals. This includes older adults who are adult learners. Many individuals have undertaken a variety of life roles and responsibilities, which has an impact on their career decision-making. There are specific career concerns for older adults in these categories in addition to the unique needs of individuals, which do not necessarily correspond to age as defined in the policy measures supporting learning and careers.

The purpose of lifelong guidance for older adults is to support ‘active ageing’ (Council of the European Union, 2012) in accordance with their specific circumstances. Active ageing implies measures that are focused on age management strategies, learning and employment, well-being, unpaid work/social participation, independent living and the capacity for active ageing (i.e. individual characteristics and environmental factors) (European Parliament, 2022).

Active ageing is defined by the European Commission as ‘helping people stay in charge of their own lives for as long as possible as they age and, where possible, to contribute to the economy and society’ (Eurofound, 2018). ‘Active ageing includes optimising opportunities for workers of all ages to work in good quality, productive and healthy conditions until legal retirement age, based on mutual commitment and motivation of employers and workers’ (BusinessEurope et al., 2017).

Successful guidance activities for older adults include the development and acquisition of career management skills (CMS), the identification of their transferable skills and referrals to services for validation of competences gained through non-formal and informal learning, providing access to information on further training and learning opportunities, and individual counselling to stimulate and strengthen learning motivation and their capacity to change to a different occupation, to move into self-employment or other transitions in their individual life path.

Lifelong guidance for older adults can be delivered collectively (class/group) or individually and can be provided using existing or emerging technologies that broaden the access to services, tools, resources, products and activities.

Why it is important

Timely and appropriate career guidance for older adults can support their continuing economic and social participation, regardless of the socio-demographic context (e.g. discrimination). Older people form a growing segment of the population, while their share of the working population is declining. By 2050 it is predicted that there will be only two people of working age (15–64) for every person aged over 65 years in the EU (Eurostat, 2023). Thus, policies need to ensure that as people grow older, they can continue to contribute to the economy and society and can help to maintain economic prosperity and social cohesion.

Career guidance for older adults can help achieve longer participation in the workforce. Many of the Member States are increasing their state pension age, with the goal of keeping older people in the workforce longer. Adult education and training programmes, salary schemes, working conditions and pension systems should be adapted to create a labour market for older workers by making their recruitment and employment more attractive (European Commission, 2024).

Timely career guidance provision can contribute to flexible transitions to retirement and healthy ageing and can help older adults to make meaningful decisions in the context of the economic and social

⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ See [Annex 1. Glossary](#): ‘Older adults’. See also [guideline 16](#), which covers what is known as the third age.

circumstances in which they find themselves. Older workers being out of work for extended periods can lead to long-term unemployment, putting people at even greater risk of poverty in retirement.

Timely career guidance helps individuals and groups to maintain their well-being, work–life balance and occupational health and safety, to plan future finances and to consider career and learning opportunities in mid-life, including by accessing dedicated funding, which can be challenging.

Timely career guidance can help employers to retain an ageing workforce and increase their well-being. Older workers are an important source of corporate knowledge and memory and of work experience. They are important for passing on knowledge and information from one generation to the next, for helping to save resources and increase innovation based on prior work, and for supporting less experienced workers.

The provision of career guidance for older adults will help to maximise economic and social returns to this group, as it does to other groups. This requires a life-cycle approach that supports flexible transitions and pathways between full-time work and full-time retirement.

Lifelong guidance provision for older adults supports and raises awareness of the European Pillar of Social Rights (European Parliament et al., 2017) and the European skills agenda (European Commission, 2020d) and promotes the use of mobility and transparency tools and services (the Europass skills passport, the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) classification, the European employment services (EURES), the European qualifications framework EQF) and national qualifications frameworks). It also can raise awareness of the European Parliament Resolution on active ageing (European Parliament, 2021).

Since the incidence of disability can increase with age, career guidance providers can offer information on other EU initiatives that support the rights of older adults at work and in lifelong learning, including on ways to overcome barriers (see [guideline 18](#)). This includes frameworks such as the 2021–2030 ‘Union of equality’ strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities (European Commission, 2021a) and subsequent strategies and policies.

Good practice

Career management skills ([guideline 1](#))

Policies and systems that:

- develop a comprehensive strategy for the teaching, learning and self-evaluation of personal, social and learning-to-learn competences, including the acquisition and development of CMS and entrepreneurial skills, as appropriate, throughout all settings (Council of the European Union, 2018). This includes within adult learning contexts and in working life for the benefit of active ageing;
- promote the development and acquisition of CMS throughout life, including in preparation for active ageing and retirement, and for social and economic participation during retirement. This is particularly important for adults who have not been exposed to such skills previously;
- in addition to the development of entrepreneurship skills, provide support for learning about self-employment, social enterprise and business start-up through adequate information, guidance and counselling;
- promote a comprehensive lifelong guidance programme that addresses the adult learning needs of older adults, involving diverse providers, including trade unions, who assist older adults and significant others, where relevant, particularly at key points for learning and work decision-making;
- ensure that older adults learn about and experience, where relevant, different vocational specialisations, progression and transfer pathways, and career possibilities;
- promote career education and CMS, as appropriate, in active ageing policies and strategies as a means to address individual and group differences in their capacity to source, interpret, evaluate and apply career information, especially when it is obtained from internet and social media sources;

- connect user-centred active learning approaches with the development of CMS for older adults, including those in employment, and for continuous development;
- ensure that older adults are able to relate their learning experiences to the world of work, including by developing and retaining the skills and attitudes that enable successful (re)integration, transition and adaptation to work and life contexts, as well as a sense of responsibility for their career decisions;
- promote the active engagement of older adults in the development of their career paths and/or preparation for active ageing and retirement;
- support blended learning, combining face-to-face and distance support, to enhance career learning experiences for older adults.

Access to lifelong guidance (guideline 2)

Policies and systems that:

- allow for the co-creation of guidance services with the involvement of diverse user groups and significant others ⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ to promote career development for older adults;
- ensure that career guidance is an integral part of the diverse range of learning programmes for older adults in different settings;
- provide career guidance for older adults not only through a diverse range of learning programmes, but also prior to learning engagement, during course participation and at progression points to further learning and/or work;
- ensure that older adults have access to resources and arrangements for guidance;
- foster stable, transdisciplinary collaboration and partnership among the older adult community and other stakeholders, including social partners, to improve access to lifelong guidance activities and related initiatives;
- ensure the accessibility of career services and career education for all, including access to physical and virtual spaces and services to enhance the experience and to maintain engagement in learning (European Commission, 2021a) for older adults;
- extend available guidance services in the adult learning and continuing education sectors to older adults through outreach or pop-up offers at workplaces or online;
- ensure the availability of vocational rehabilitation, reasonable accommodations in working and learning contexts, and supported employment ⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ to enhance well-being and to maintain individual employability for older adults.

Assuring the quality of lifelong guidance provision (guideline 3) and evidence-based systems and policy development in lifelong guidance (guideline 4)

Policies and systems that:

- develop and ensure funding for the monitoring and evaluation of guidance services for older adults, including career education, for service and programme improvement and to encourage active ageing;
- ensure that the monitoring and evaluation system includes the collection and use of feedback from career guidance service users, employers, trade unions, partners and all other relevant stakeholders;
- use feedback from guidance services for older adults to enhance the relevance of career development and human resources development for the labour market and further learning;
- integrate the monitoring and evaluation of lifelong guidance into overall quality assurance arrangements, strategic planning and institutional performance indicators;
- monitor career learning outcomes as evidence of the quality and effectiveness of guidance and career education programmes for older adults and make the users aware of this information;
- promote and support research on lifelong guidance for older adults;
- enhance the collection, analysis and dissemination of comprehensive data about and for older adults;

⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): ‘Significant others’.

⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): ‘Supported employment’.

- promote consistency in the quality of lifelong guidance provision for older adults, including career education across adult learning providers and regions where the responsibility and funding for this is devolved to providers, municipalities and/or regions;
- promote lifelong guidance as a tool to be used as part of active labour market measures at the workplace and in guidance services for older adults. The provisions should be aligned with relevant quality standards for products and services, particularly if obligatory, and the long-term career development perspective of older workers should be considered where relevant;
- adopt jointly agreed-upon standards of guidance services and products when a lifelong guidance programme, products or elements of the programme are delivered through external agencies and contractors.

Governance and strategic leadership: cooperation and coordination (guideline 5)

Policies and systems that:

- revise legislation to allow for the extension of working life;
- include a dedicated and integrated age-management strategy that is focused on general training, skills development, career guidance and information, and flexible working, including redeployment to develop skills and adaptability among older employees and retain them in employment;
- promote active ageing strategies in relevant policy fields and available EU instruments to ensure older adults have access to lifelong guidance services, lifelong learning and programmes for reskilling and upskilling;
- incentivise employers and trade union organisations to help older adults keep their skills up-to-date and preserve their work ability through guidance support for lifelong learning;
- ensure that workforce staff management / human resource development policies stress the importance of lifelong guidance in workforce development for older adults;
- ensure intergenerational knowledge exchange, including succession planning; involve older employees in mentor and training roles; and record the knowledge of older workers accumulated during their career;
- support a comprehensive mainstream approach to career learning for older adults that combines career education programmes provided within the curriculum, including by external guidance providers; experience-based career learning and workplace learning using cooperation networks that extend beyond the institutional setting;
- encourage partnerships with employers, trade unions and other labour market actors to ensure that the guidance provided for older adults creates opportunities for experience-based career learning;
- support stable, transdisciplinary collaboration and partnerships among various stakeholders to establish jointly agreed-upon policies and funding, provisions and networks. This should involve a division of labour among different service providers relevant to lifelong guidance for older adults;
- extend available guidance services to older adults through outreach or pop-up offers at workplaces or online;
- support customised lifelong guidance provisions for diverse user groups of older adults through stable, collaborative partnership with community-based services and targeted outreach strategies;
- increase the awareness of and promote lifelong guidance for older adults and encourage its use by sharing information and highlighting the benefits for all staff, employers, trade unions and other community actors, stakeholders and guidance programme providers;
- ensure that career guidance supports the connection between active ageing and health;
- promote and provide adequate support for the involvement of older adults, employers, trade unions and other stakeholders in the design, provision, and monitoring and evaluation of lifelong guidance activities and services;
- develop and promote integrated and comprehensive information and guidance services for all ages at the national, regional and local levels and that address the needs of older adults;

- use career guidance when designing flexible learning pathways in education and training;
- make appropriate referrals ⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ to relevant supporting or other services to ensure that all the needs of each older adult are addressed;
- ensure access to lifelong guidance that is coordinated with other supporting policies, such as the validation of non-formal and informal learning and financing for education and training, social, youth and health related policies where relevant in adult learning contexts (Cedefop, 2019);
- promote and support access to validation services using lifelong guidance to help individuals to identify and have validated their skills competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning and work and life experience, to assist them in making these transferable and to foster coordination between the related services;
- ensure that the public employment services have dedicated guidance for older adults;
- ensure that lifelong guidance for older adults is included as an incentive in the collective bargaining agenda of the social partners at the national and sector levels. The roles and capacities of trade unions in providing training and career guidance to workers within and beyond the workplace and in the promotion of career guidance by skills sector bodies and tripartite workplace committees are key.

Career information in lifelong guidance (guideline 6)

Policies and systems that:

- provide older adults with access to sufficient and user-friendly, impartial, non-discriminatory and accurate information on education, training and enrolment that is designed by taking into account their needs and milieu;
- use the national and EU instruments and resources that forecast and anticipate skills needs in guidance services for older adults to identify emerging skills / labour shortages in specific occupations across and within sectors and regions, as relevant. Service users should be informed about this information and these resources;
- provide older adults with up-to-date information on the most relevant mobility, transparency and transferability tools, policies and programmes within and outside the EU;
- encourage the provision of information and guidance, including on opportunities for experience-based career learning, that enables older adults to broaden their skills and to become acquainted with different roles and with progression and transfer pathways that are relevant to diverse working and learning contexts;
- support the transitions of older workers to adult learning, as relevant, by informing them about the level of achievement required for different higher education programmes and courses and for potential career pathways;
- develop partnerships and feedback loops between adult learning providers and employers/trade unions promoting the production of quality career information.

Professionalism in lifelong guidance (guideline 7)

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that the guidelines for professionalism consider practitioners in the context of guidance for older adults;
- ensure that human resource development staff receive professional training for and have the competences to deliver lifelong guidance for older adults and that initial and in-service training is provided to career practitioners and to other staff and management involved in the provision of guidance and career development support for older adults. Such training should focus particularly on CMS acquisition, outcomes assessment and methods for promoting engagement at work for individuals of all ages and career stages;

⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ See [Annex 1. Glossary](#): 'Referral'.

- ensure the continuing improvement of practitioners' qualifications and competences to provide adequate lifelong guidance for older adults;
- enhance and sustain the development of ICT and digital skills ⁽¹¹⁰⁾ for guidance practice through initial and continuous professional development. This includes working with and alongside technology and for identifying appropriate and ethical uses of ICT in lifelong guidance (see [guideline 9](#)).

Funding lifelong guidance services ([guideline 8](#))

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that employers, trade unions and services for older adults are equipped with appropriate financial and non-financial resources and have an understanding of and the capacity to assure quality career education and lifelong guidance services, including for cooperation with the community and partners;
- ensure adequate and sustainable funding for lifelong guidance that addresses older adults;
- earmark and effectively allocate a budget to ensure high-quality guidance for older adults, including accountability, outcomes and impact;
- ensure that those who provide guidance for older adults who receive public funding for career guidance provision meet pre-established quality standards for services, tools, resources, products and activities, including recognised practitioner competences;
- encourage private sector investment, where appropriate, in the provision of career guidance services, tools, resources, products and activities; these must be developed in accordance with established quality standards and requirements on transparency in service provision for workers;
- stimulate the provision of career guidance for older adults by introducing and raising awareness of incentives as relevant such as individual learning accounts, training funds and/or schemes offering tailored career development support. Career guidance should be integrated into training measures that are supported by incentives funded or co-funded by governments.

ICT in lifelong guidance ([guideline 9](#))

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that the ministries and entities responsible for lifelong guidance share a common understanding of and have agreed upon a framework (e.g. standards) for the role and use of ICT in lifelong guidance. This should be communicated effectively to all service providers and stakeholders;
- systematically integrate the use of ICT into existing lifelong guidance services for older adults;
- provide the necessary infrastructure to support both existing and emerging technologies, ensuring their effective adoption and utilisation in the context of guidance for older adults;
- address disparities in general and digital literacy by supporting older adults to enhance their ability to source, interpret, analyse, evaluate and apply relevant information;
- support digital inclusion in lifelong guidance, including in career education, by ensuring that all individuals – particularly vulnerable groups – possess the competences and skills to use ICT in lifelong guidance contexts;
- encourage the digital skills of older adults, which can not only allow them to benefit from online education but also improve their access to lifelong guidance and other online services; it can also ensure that older adults effectively adapt and benefit from new working methods. This also can support their civic competences and active engagement in society at large.
- establish and continuously improve the standards of practice for the use of ICT in lifelong guidance services for older adults;
- ensure that all guidance practitioners receive in-service and continuous training to develop ICT skills, address ethical concerns and ensure quality accordingly;

⁽¹¹⁰⁾ ICT includes emerging technologies and non-digital elements, components and features (see [Annex 1, Glossary](#)).

- ensure that updated standards are followed in relation to the personal and sensitive data that are used or stored in online digital guidance portals and interactive platforms to ensure accessibility in a safe and secure digital environment.

Lifelong guidance for vulnerable groups (guideline 18)

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that older adults are included as a category in diversity policies, with innovative approaches to service provision;
- ensure that policies that include workforce/human resource development stress the importance of lifelong guidance to maintain the employability of older adults in employment who are at risk of exclusion from the labour market;
- ensure older adults' access to rehabilitation and reintegration services with a view to supporting older adults' return to the labour market after health-related career breaks, if they wish to do so;
- ensure that lifelong guidance for older adults forms part of community-based services and outreach measures in easily accessible guidance points or one-stop shops. In addition, appropriate use should be made of new and evolving technologies to better reach early leavers from education and training;
- place adequate focus on the skills and needs of older adults at a disadvantage and those potentially at risk of unemployment and social exclusion in order to enhance their ability to manage transitions and adapt to changes in the labour market and society. This includes those with incomplete or low qualifications, those in need of re- or upskilling and those with integration difficulties.

Resources for policymakers

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Social inclusion dimension

Guideline 17 (dimensional): Lifelong guidance for young people at risk

Definition

Lifelong guidance for young people at risk of exclusion from education, training and the labour market consists of a range of services, measures and activities that are often associated with specific youth policies and certain age groups, and it addresses the precarious circumstances of young people. These provisions aim to enhance lifelong guidance, including by using career education ⁽¹¹¹⁾ as a preventive measure for students at risk in compulsory education (prevention); to enable (potential) early leavers from education and training to achieve their personal goals, such as specific skills or obtaining a qualification ⁽¹¹²⁾ (intervention/prevention); or to help those who have left education or training early (compensation/remediation). It includes those who are not in employment, education or training to re-enter education pathways and/or secure meaningful employment and to develop their careers through various routes available to them (see [guideline 10](#), [11](#) and [15](#)) (Council of the European Union, 2022a). Flexible pathways in which guidance is provided include apprenticeships, training and traineeships (or internships) (compensation and/or remediation). The user groups include young adults who qualify for the reinforced Youth Guarantee scheme ⁽¹¹³⁾. Owing to their age or life circumstances, these young people may fall into gaps in public entitlements and may lack appropriate social protection or other services, including lifelong guidance, that fits their circumstances and needs. This applies to those who have been outside the labour market for extended periods, those in precarious work and those whose skills are not recognised.

Prevention measures within education and training settings, including schools and workplaces, entail lifelong guidance that includes career education. Particular emphasis should be placed on the development and acquisition of career management skills (CMS) in or across the curriculum for young people who are at risk of disengagement and exclusion. Prevention and intervention both aim to take early action, including early involvement of school staff or others and of guidance practitioners, such as multi-professional teams, to identify and engage with potential early leavers from education and training with diverse skills and readiness levels. Lifelong guidance support starts with interviews and activities that lead students and those with incomplete or inadequate qualifications to reflect on their strengths, needs and capabilities and to identify school and life-wide barriers to learning.

The follow-up of early leavers from education and training and of those not in employment, education or training includes outreach and further guidance-related assistance to co-develop individual action plans. These plans aim to assist these young people in managing their next steps, understanding their rights and developing as autonomous and independent learners who can manage their careers and take full advantage of the labour market and of education and training.

⁽¹¹¹⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Career education'.

⁽¹¹²⁾ Eurostat (2024) defines an early leaver from education or training as a person aged 18 to 24 years whose highest level of education is at most lower [secondary education](#) (international standard classification of education (ISCED) 2011 level 0–2 from 2014 onwards) and is not in further [education](#) or training, as recorded in the Labour Force Survey; the related indicator is expressed as a percentage of the people aged 18 to 24 with such criteria out of the total population aged 18 to 24.

⁽¹¹³⁾ The [reinforced Youth Guarantee scheme](#) recommends that Member States ensure that all young people under 30 years of age receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education, in line with principle 4 of the European Pillar of Social Rights (Council of the European Union, 2020c).

Why it is important

Within the EU, early leavers from education and training and those with few recognised (validated) skills and qualifications have a higher risk of social exclusion associated with unemployment and of drifting into long-term unemployment. Some of the key targets of the Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European education area and beyond (Council of the European Union, 2021b) are to reduce the share of early leavers from education and training to less than 9 % and to ensure that these individuals have a baseline proficiency in basic skills. Lifelong guidance is recognised as essential in making lifelong learning and mobility a reality (Council of the European Union, 2022a).

The economic and broader social costs of youth unemployment, unrecognised skills and fewer qualifications associated with early leaving from education and training are significant. These include financial benefits paid out and other costs associated with high numbers of young people out of work, such as those related to personal health and income (see, for example, Chircop & Claros, 2021). The guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States (Council of the European Union, 2019; particularly guideline 6) imply a strong role for lifelong guidance, wherein Member States should continue to address youth unemployment and young people not in employment, education or training. Measures preventing early school-leaving are involved, along with structural improvement of the school-to-work transition, including implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee scheme.

These long-term economic and social costs of early leaving from education and training accumulate significantly over an individual's lifespan. They may also weaken the position of young people in the labour market and in society, prevent equal access to economic opportunities and to participation in education and training, and reduce the opportunities to develop civic competences (Joint Research Centre: Institute for the Protection and Security of the Citizen et al., 2012; Psifidou et al., 2022). Early prevention measures, such as through lifelong guidance, can significantly reduce such costs while helping young people at risk to better manage their transitions through enhanced skills, competences and capacities.

Lifelong guidance is a key success factor for supporting the reinforced Youth Guarantee scheme⁽¹⁴⁾. This involves offering personalised guidance and developing an individualised action plan aimed at helping the individual to progress towards suitable employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship leading to a sustainable career.

For young people who have finished school but are not in employment, education or training, personalised and tailored lifelong guidance (compensation/remediation) provided by career guidance services, employment services (e.g. public employment services (PES)) or social and youth services, or similar, increases their capacity to understand and make full use of all relevant information channels and opportunities under the reinforced Youth Guarantee scheme and other initiatives, policies or programmes. Of particular importance are those that link to good-quality, decent employment.

In times of more frequent economic and wider world crises, high-impact youth support can increase system responsiveness, whereby schools and school counsellors are supported with adequate resources, tools and effective methodologies (Cedefop, et al., 2021b).

A lifelong guidance approach for young people at risk of exclusion can be effective by offering impartial information, support with taking up work experience opportunities or undertaking work-based learning, and accurate, up-to-date labour market and skills information. It is important that this is provided by guidance practitioners who are aware of the impact of existing and evolving technologies and big data (see [guideline 9](#)).

Career readiness can be enhanced when all young people have multiple opportunities to speak with trusted adults who work in fields they are interested in or in industries undergoing significant changes. Providing them with information and advice, as well as experiential learning about the opportunities in vocational education and training programmes, can help them to understand the value of skills and qualifications, facilitating their access to quality employment.

⁽¹⁴⁾ See the [reinforced Youth Guarantee scheme](#).

Good practice

Policies and systems that:

- ensure that lifelong guidance is part of schools' strategies to support all learners equitably. This involves identifying and assisting potentially early leavers and/or early leavers from education and training to help them to find meaning in staying at school or to have well-planned exit strategies that will enable them to re-engage in learning and successfully complete their basic or secondary education and training;
- develop a comprehensive strategy for teaching and learning, including the acquisition of CMS in the curriculum, in education and training contexts (see [guidelines 1, 10](#) and [11](#)). It should be ensured that all learners and especially those at risk have access to such experiences, including through experience-based learning, and standards and practices for quality career guidance provisions for all individuals and groups should be followed (as outlined in guidelines 1–9);
- encourage education and training institutions and employment services (e.g. PES) to promote and provide continuous guidance on entrepreneurship and self-employment for young people;
- help users to source, interpret, analyse, evaluate and apply career information concerning themselves and future learning and work opportunities, family and societal expectations, and to use this for decision-making;
- ensure that every early leaver has an individual action plan for further learning, work and other life goals;
- support a comprehensive strategy for young people at risk based on their diverse needs. This should include schemes in which lifelong guidance is provided in connection with the reinforced Youth Guarantee initiatives and early intervention through education and training and by other relevant staff, including guidance practitioners;
- allow for the co-creation of guidance services with the involvement of diverse user groups and significant others ⁽¹¹⁵⁾ to promote career development;
- foster stable, transdisciplinary collaboration and partnership among young people at risk of exclusion and other stakeholders, including social partners, to improve access to lifelong guidance activities and related initiatives;
- ensure that lifelong guidance is aligned with and an integral part of existing standards for quality and equity in programmes designed for young people at risk of early leaving. In particular, these include programmes that are organised to help young people to obtain school-leaving qualifications and participate in continued education opportunities, such as flexible learning pathways, work-based learning, bridging programmes and 'second chance' programmes. This includes validation of non-formal and informal learning where appropriate (Council of the European Union, 2020c);
- ensure the continuous collection of data and encourage analysis, reflection and self-assessment methods and research on lifelong guidance for young people at risk. This includes methods for studying the effectiveness and impact of lifelong guidance including career education provided in these contexts;
- make use of the data collected at different levels (e.g. national, EU and international surveys), in addition to the data collected in connection with common indicators related to young people at risk and the role of lifelong guidance. Methodologies such as longitudinal and tracking methods are helpful in studying the career trajectories and pathways of young people and those at risk, which helps to support policy development that addresses prevention, intervention and compensation measures. Career readiness levels can be considered ⁽¹¹⁶⁾;
- ensure that schools undertake timely follow-up of early leavers, providing lifelong guidance assistance as needed;

⁽¹¹⁵⁾ 'Significant others' refers to people of importance for an individual's positive personal and career development, including family members, caregivers and mentors (see [Annex 1, Glossary](#)).

⁽¹¹⁶⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'career readiness'.

- maximise the impact for young people and prevent exclusion by providing credible, impartial and coherent assistance to meet their unique and comprehensive needs. This is made possible through promoting and strengthening collaboration, cooperation, coordination and referral ⁽¹¹⁷⁾ across and within all relevant organisations. Especially important are youth programmes, community and civil-society support services and organisations, social workers, and providers of career education and guidance in education and training institutions. This includes school staff, employment service advisers, social workers and community-based staff;
- develop the capacity of communities with high levels of early school-leaving through context-sensitive awareness raising and targeted measures. This can assist potential young early leavers by helping them to develop their CMS and encouraging them by supporting their educational attainment, helping them to obtain qualifications and encouraging them to re-engage with learning;
- make use of the community outreach measures that are available where young people and those at risk congregate. Ensure that significant adults who are in daily contact with them can provide lifelong guidance or refer them to suitable holistic services;
- ensure that lifelong guidance forms part of community-based services and outreach measures in easily accessible guidance points or one-stop shops. In addition, appropriate use should be made of new and evolving technologies to better reach early leavers from education and training. It should also be ensured that career practitioners and other staff who are involved in this process and who work with young people at risk have adequate professional competences suited to this role;
- develop early-intervention strategies, in cooperation with families as needed, in different settings, including in homes, and organise assistance such as through homework clubs (e.g. structured after-school programmes or other support for completing homework);
- strengthen partnerships between the world of work, education and training institutions, and guidance services in order to boost employment, apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities for young people;
- involve social partners at all levels in designing and implementing policies for young people, including providing information on the labour market and on education and training opportunities;
- provide young people at risk with up-to-date information on the most relevant mobility, transparency and transferability tools, policies and programmes within and outside the EU;
- improve the initial and continuing training of school principals, teachers and guidance practitioners who work with learners of all ages and in different settings so that they are able to work in cross-disciplinary teams to detect potential early leaving and provide timely assistance (see [guidelines 10](#) and [11](#));
- provide specialised training for all staff working with young people at risk;
- encourage capacity building for the staff of youth and community-based services, including by training local leaders to act as lifelong guidance facilitators. This includes for the initial screening of interested users and for making referrals to appropriate services;
- ensure that career practitioners and other staff who are involved in this process and work with young people at risk have adequate professional competences suited to this role;
- facilitate access to relevant EU funding to support the establishment of sustainable lifelong guidance services within the framework of the Youth Guarantee scheme or other relevant initiatives;
- ensure adequate and sustainable funding for lifelong guidance that addresses young people at risk;
- ensure that the ministries and entities responsible for lifelong guidance share a common understanding of and have agreed upon a framework (e.g. standards) for the role and use of ICT in lifelong guidance. This should be communicated effectively to all service providers and stakeholders;
- ensure that lifelong guidance is sensitive and responsive to guidance users and is aligned with the diversity and inclusion policy in place, in order to support the economic and social inclusion of all individuals and groups in society. This includes lifelong guidance for vulnerable groups (see [guidelines 18](#));
- ensure that the four phases of the Youth Guarantee scheme include lifelong guidance throughout: (a)

⁽¹¹⁷⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): 'Referral'.

mapping of the target user group and available services (including skills in demand, regional labour market specificities and barriers faced by young people), (b) outreach, (c) preparation and (d) offer (of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship). Guidance needs to be incorporated from the initial phases of identification and outreach; it should include supporting the acquisition of CMS and the continued follow-up of users through post-placement support. Awareness of this scheme should also be raised at the national, regional and local levels;

- specifically, under the reinforced Youth Guarantee scheme, provide young people with personalised guidance and individualised action plans that are linked to effective profiling and screening, as well as career information that includes that derives from experiential learning. These plans should be based on mutual agreement between the individual beneficiary and the provider. Individual support schemes should be tailored to individuals at an early stage, including career guidance in education and training and involving community structures and individuals, as well as referrals to relevant community partners. This should enable access to education and training pathways or sustainable employment and prevent their (long-term) unemployment;
- promote a holistic and impartial case management approach. This involves producing individualised action plans for young people who are facing multiple barriers to learning and to sustainable labour market participation, and these should address discrimination of all kinds and in all its forms⁽¹¹⁸⁾ (see [guidelines 18](#)). This approach includes cooperation with other services that address specific and multiple needs and circumstances (e.g. related to health, family and personal issues).

Resources for policymakers

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⁽¹¹⁸⁾ This is in the spirit of the key principles set out in various international instruments that are upheld in or integrated within EU policies on preventing and eliminating discrimination (e.g. the Universal Declaration on Human Rights ([UDHR](#)), the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination ([ICERD](#)) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ([CEDAW](#))).

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Guideline 18 (dimensional): Lifelong guidance for vulnerable groups

Definition

Lifelong guidance for vulnerable groups concerns the design of services, tools, resources, products and activities in assisting the most vulnerable or potentially marginalised groups in relation to learning, work and participation in society. The vulnerability of the target users who are experiencing multiple disadvantages, requiring individual support, is the common factor, regardless of the policy sector. This is an additional transversal dimension that helps ensure that the needs of all individuals and groups are considered when designing policy that is aimed at the professionalisation⁽¹¹⁹⁾ of lifelong guidance services and systems across all settings and provisions. Depending on the context, available resources and needs of individuals and groups, policy measures at the system level can favour universal coverage or mainstreaming while also being targeted to best meet higher level needs⁽¹²⁰⁾. ‘Twin track’ approaches⁽¹²¹⁾ and universal design⁽¹²²⁾ policies are examples of measures supporting these ends.

The potentially vulnerable individuals and groups referred to here⁽¹²³⁾ include those whose personal, economic, social, cultural and/or linguistic circumstances, including those facing difficulties with their citizenship, migration or residency status, play a role in their access to learning and work opportunities. It can include a combination of these and other factors related to labour market status or education and skills levels (e.g. long-term unemployment, low-skilled jobs, informal work or categories of platform workers), and these circumstances can act as barriers to their full social integration and to active citizenship. Lifelong guidance, including employment counselling (see [Annex 1, Glossary](#)), may include:

- (a) guidance provided by social workers, rehabilitation counsellors and case managers to help individuals to overcome complex barriers, address high-level needs or address issues in specific contexts (personal, health, social, etc.);
- (b) outreach strategies, including providing information and guidance at places where the target service users are or can be reached, for example cultural centres for ethnic communities;
- (c) services provided by specialist coordinators, job coaches other career guidance staff or others who provide guidance, such as for persons with disabilities or for migrants and refugees, also in recruitment functions in labour market contexts.

The lifelong guidance services, tools, resources, products and activities may form part of outreach, specialised education and training programmes, and/or support for transitions to learning, work or supported employment⁽¹²⁴⁾, among other targeted measures.

Why it is important

Groups and communities in society differ in their capacities to source, interpret, analyse, evaluate and apply information concerning themselves and future learning and work opportunities, family and societal expectations. They differ in their level of acquired career management skills (CMS) for use in meaningful decision-making, as well as in their ability to implement those decisions successfully. Without external

⁽¹¹⁹⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): ‘Professionalisation’.

⁽¹²⁰⁾ See Cedefop (2005), which covers the improvement of lifelong guidance policies and systems as the basis of universal and targeted guidance systems.

⁽¹²¹⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): ‘Twin track’.

⁽¹²²⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): ‘Universal design’.

⁽¹²³⁾ These groups include, but are not limited to, those with specific needs and persons with disabilities, refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and members of ethnic minorities, and their children.

⁽¹²⁴⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): ‘Supported employment’.

and additional support, pathways through learning and work for the most vulnerable individuals/groups, while already difficult, can become even more difficult in social exclusion contexts. Lifelong guidance can support and develop their capacity to respond, and, where agency can be restored, empowerment can be boosted through CMS learning ⁽¹²⁵⁾.

All individuals should have the possibility to contribute to the social and economic well-being of society. Marginalisation and all forms of exclusion have social and economic costs, such as in respect of health and social justice (see [guidelines 17](#) and [15](#)). Timely and preventive interventions with specialised career guidance supports the public good and can lessen the long-term costs for both individuals and society.

Lifelong guidance can help people at risk of, or experiencing, any form of exclusion. This can be done by arranging provisions and facilitating access to these and other needed services in either mainstream and/or dedicated settings that offer comprehensive support ⁽¹²⁶⁾. The aims are to re-establish, encourage and strengthen motivation and to co-construct an individualised action plan between service users and guidance providers. These plans include concrete steps based on the needs of users in respect of education and training, skills development, orientation to working life, maintaining employment and navigating transitions.

Lifelong guidance can provide vulnerable individuals, groups and communities with hope and a positive vision for the future. It can assist in ensuring individual social and economic rights ⁽¹²⁷⁾, especially when individuals are unaware of and/or reluctant to use services and products that are administered in formal institutional contexts. Innovative outreach measures are needed to appeal to all potential vulnerable groups ⁽¹²⁸⁾.

Good practice

Policies and systems that:

- integrate non-formal life skills with career learning to enable individuals to restore their agency and self-direction;
- develop a comprehensive strategy for the teaching, learning and self-evaluation of personal, social and learning-to-learn competences, including the acquisition and development of CMS and entrepreneurial skills throughout all settings. This includes within adult learning contexts and in working life;
- in addition to the development of entrepreneurship skills, provide support for learning about self-employment, social enterprise and business start-up through adequate information, guidance including counselling;
- integrate a variety of user-friendly services (tools, resources and activities) provided by accessible means in line with individual availability, in a manner that facilitates distance learning, a combination of distance and in-person learning, and physical access. This should be done in a manner that differentiates between persons who require different levels/amounts of assistance and those who can use self-help services (see [guideline 9](#));
- ensure that lifelong guidance is aligned with and an integral part of existing standards for quality and equity in programmes designed for vulnerable groups. In particular, these include programmes that are organised to enable vulnerable groups to obtain school-leaving qualifications and participate in continued education opportunities, such as flexible learning pathways, work-based learning, bridging programmes and ‘second chance’ programmes. This includes validation of non-formal and informal learning where appropriate;

⁽¹²⁵⁾ ‘Career learning’ refers to learning to promote career development, including the acquisition of CMS (see [Annex 1, Glossary](#)).

⁽¹²⁶⁾ See, for example, Cedefop (2023f) on disability contexts.

⁽¹²⁷⁾ See, for example, European Commission. DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (2021) and European Commission (2021c). At the international level, see the [Resolution](#) adopted on 25 September 2015 on transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

⁽¹²⁸⁾ See ETF (2025); see also the Cedefop ReferNet reports on outreach (2018).

- favour a variety of outreach and other approaches for comprehensive support (e.g. involving mentors, tutors, families, communities, networks, institutions and advocacy, civil-society or support associations) to assist those with higher level needs, those facing complex barriers or those potentially at risk of exclusion to overcome their difficulties or their reluctance to approach formal services;
- promote comprehensive, collaborative and integrated arrangements and structures that are fully accessible, such as one-stop guidance centres or similar. These can utilise co-location, co-funding and multi-partner cooperation, and may also exploit ICT platforms that are developed through shared responsibilities to cover all the needs of service users;
- involve vulnerable groups and their representatives in the design, planning, implementation, evaluation and monitoring of lifelong guidance services and products for them, according to their specific strengths and needs;
- facilitate collaboration with agencies and organisations that are experienced with specific vulnerable user groups and support these bodies to build their capacity for offering lifelong guidance;
- stimulate research that considers vulnerable populations or the different contexts of guidance users and support the collection and analysis of data on the usage, user satisfaction and individual and social outcomes of all lifelong guidance services and products. This includes those specifically targeting vulnerable user groups and all quality assurance and monitoring and evaluation processes (see [guideline 3](#) and [4](#));
- provide vulnerable groups with access to sufficient and user-friendly, impartial, non-discriminatory and accurate information on education, training and enrolment that is designed to consider their needs and milieu.
- strengthen capacity building for specific groups through training their leaders/representatives to be lifelong guidance facilitators;
- provide initial and continuous training for guidance practitioners, professionals and other staff that includes a dedicated focus on diversity and inclusion and that is aligned with relevant national, regional, local and service provider or institutional policies. This should ensure that all eligible users can be adequately served. General and specific/specialised service capacity for vulnerable users and those with complex or higher-level needs should receive adequate attention (see [guideline 7](#));
- ensure that career practitioners ⁽¹²⁹⁾ and other staff have the training to enable them to work effectively with all individuals, groups and providers of comprehensive services, including intercultural training and ‘culturally sensitive’ guidance, including counselling ⁽¹³⁰⁾;
- ensure ethical practices and behaviour among practitioners, including compliance with relevant standards and guidelines for personal data protection policies and practices applicable to services and activities handling sensitive data and information online and offline (see [guideline 7](#));
- implement a plain-language and easy-to-read ⁽¹³¹⁾ approach to ensure that all the information provided is clear and easy to understand, and that common, updated web accessibility standards (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2019) are followed so that access is enabled for the widest possible group of lifelong guidance users. The mainstream language(s) and, as appropriate, other languages should be used in accordance with user needs and readiness, including national sign languages and Braille, and in accordance with relevant regulations and guidelines (see [guideline 6](#));
- ensure adequate and sustainable funding for lifelong guidance addressing those who are unemployed;
- when information is available through websites such as portals or platforms and applications, ensure adherence to relevant EU, national or other public standards, such as guidelines and legislation that ensure accessibility for all in a safe and secure digital environment and based on the governing EU digital rights and principles (see [guideline 9](#));
- ensure that lifelong guidance is sensitive and responsive to the diversity of individuals and groups

⁽¹²⁹⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): ‘Career practitioner’ and ‘Career practitioners and other staff’.

⁽¹³⁰⁾ Other similar concepts include guidance that is ‘culturally appropriate’ or ‘culturally aware’.

⁽¹³¹⁾ See [Annex 1, Glossary](#): ‘Plain language and easy-to-read text’.

- and to the benefits of diversity. Attention should be paid to integrating diversity policies with clear concepts regarding vulnerable populations across guidance providers and partner organisations;
- prioritise the role of lifelong guidance as an instrument of social equity, mobility and social inclusion to promote the interests and rights of people facing significant barriers and in contexts of vulnerability.

Resources for policymakers

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Abbreviations

AI	artificial intelligence
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CMS	career management skills
CVET	continuing vocational education and training
DG	Directorate-General
ELGPN	European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network
EQAVET	European quality assurance reference framework for vocational education and training
EQF	European qualifications framework
ESCO	European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations
ETF	European Training Foundation
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
FIER	Finnish Institute of Educational Research
IAEVG	International Association for Education and Vocational Guidance
ICCDPP	International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy
ICT	information and communications technology
ILA	individual learning account
ILO	International Labour Organization
IVET	initial vocational education and training
LMI	labour market information
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PES	public employment service(s)
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VET	vocational education and training
WGCG	Inter-agency Working Group on Career Guidance

Glossary

This serves as a working glossary of the terms used in the lifelong guidance framework and guidelines. It is not intended as a general glossary for use outside this purpose. For those terms not developed internally, sources are noted, including those adapted accordingly.

Accessibility refers to access to all relevant physical and virtual settings through specific measures, preferring universal design solutions where possible. It is referred to in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the related 2021–2030 ‘Union of equality’ strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities (European Commission, 2021c).

Adult learning is formal or non-formal learning – of a general or vocational nature – that is undertaken after initial education and training, including to (adapted from Cedefop, 2024):

- acquire general education in topics of particular interest (e.g. in open universities);
- acquire core skills not acquired earlier during initial education or training, such as literacy and numeracy – this is called compensatory learning;
- gain access to qualifications not obtained, for various reasons, during initial education and training – this is sometimes called ‘second chance education’;
- improve or update knowledge and skills (upskilling);
- acquire new skills for a career move (retraining/reskilling);
- ensure social integration (e.g. language courses for migrants).

Artificial intelligence (AI) literacy refers to the knowledge, skills and understanding that enable providers, deployers and affected people – taking into account their rights and obligations in the context of the EU AI Act – to make informed decisions in respect of AI systems, to understand the potential opportunities and risks and to be aware of the impact of AI on individuals, society and the environment (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2024, Article 3).

Career refers to the interaction between work roles and other life roles over a person’s lifespan, including how they balance paid and unpaid work, and their involvement in learning and education (ELGPN, 2015b).

Career adaptability is a construct commonly used in adolescent development and preparation that can be defined as ‘...the readiness to cope with the predictable tasks of preparing for and participating in the work role and with the unpredictable adjustments prompted by the changes in work and work conditions’ (Savickas, 1997, p. 254). It has been highlighted as a positive response to disruptive work circumstances, a form of self-regulation and a necessary resource for successfully navigating the complex labour market (McMahon & Abkhezr, 2025). It is a component of **career management skills** that supports lifelong learning, employability and personal development.

Career development is the individual lifelong process of managing and balancing learning, working and personal life, work expectations and constraints, personal interests, transitions and decision-making to shape one’s future and to achieve a successful and fulfilling career (Cedefop, 2024).

Career education refers to the programmes and activities of learning that help people to develop the skills necessary to manage their career and life pathway. These can be structured or semi-structured and can include accessing and making effective use of career information and guidance (adapted from ELGPN, 2015b).

Career guidance (see also **lifelong guidance**). While in some countries and contexts, terms such as ‘career counselling’, ‘career development’, ‘career information’, ‘advice and guidance’, ‘vocational counselling’ or ‘vocational guidance’ are used, this refers to the range of activities that are included within the umbrella term ‘lifelong guidance’. Career guidance normally refers to the specific practice in a sector, setting or other context.

Careering is the lifelong process of self-steering one’s career development based on what is possible, given opportunity structures. It includes becoming aware, being motivated, becoming informed, exploring and experiencing, reflecting and analysing, theorising and planning, and practising (ILO, 2024).

Career learning is learning that is undertaken to promote career development, including the acquisition of career management skills.

Career management skills are a set of career competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes) that enable individuals at any age or stage of development to proactively manage their careers, learning, and work life paths and career development (see guideline 1). ‘Career management skills encompass not only being able to search and apply for jobs and to acquire the capacity to identify, source, and interpret information about the labour market and careers (career information) but also developing skills to cope with complex challenges such as adaptability and resilience.’ ‘This serves to gain advantages, understand individual rights, and to develop skills to navigate diverse networks, for career planning, or gaining awareness of cultural constraints and own self-awareness’ (Cedefop et al., 2025).

Career practitioner is a shortened form of the title ‘career guidance practitioner’ and refers to people whose main role and speciality is the conduct of career guidance activities in any work setting or capacity (e.g. guidance counsellor or advisor). It is defined as a practitioner who is qualified or trained to provide career development support, such as in career education, career guidance or guidance counselling, that is adapted to the specific requirements and needs of each user.

Career practitioners and other staff. In this term, ‘other staff’ refers to people for whom the conduct of career guidance activities is a secondary or minor part of their official function. ‘Support staff’ or ‘teacher’ are examples of this (adapted from Cedefop, 2024, and ELGPN, 2015a).

(Career) readiness is a construct used in the field that refers to an individual’s readiness for career decision-making, assessed and determined according to specific factors and criteria. It includes the level of individual skills needed in order to determine the needs of and demands for specific services. Readiness also requires consideration of an individual’s internal (i.e. cognitive and affective) and external (i.e. social aspects, such as socioeconomic status and experiences with discrimination) dimensions with respect to undertaking a task of solving a career problem. Readiness reflects a person’s preparation in terms of engaging in the learning activities necessary for career development (Sampson et al., 2020). This also involves both the enabling and support aspects for lifelong guidance policy development and integration into other policies.

Citizen refers to members of the public and not an individual’s nationality/citizenship. ‘Individuals and groups’ is used to address guidance users or potential users who are also members of the public and who are provided with and access services.

Client-facing services are services that are provided to users at the frontline where interaction with services occurs, involving a career practitioner, other staff or digital service.

Co-careering refers to a collaborative approach to career development, with exploration and learning shared between career practitioners, clients and others, namely the meaningful co-construction of guidance questions / career issues among community members (career-related knowledge and skills), particularly using ICT (Kettunen, 2017).

Competence refers to the ability to critically reflect on and assess one’s activities regarding the situation and results, in order to learn for future challenges. ‘Core competences’ refers to the combi-

nation of related knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that all career practitioners should comply with in an ethical manner, regardless of their employment setting (Cedefop, 2009).

Counselling (e.g. career counselling, guidance counselling and employment counselling) refers to the interaction between a professional and an individual, with the aim being to help the individual to resolve a specific problem or issue related to their career (adapted from ELGPN, 2015b).

Digital competence refers to the skills and knowledge required to effectively use ICT in a lifelong guidance setting.

Employment counselling (other terms: vocational or employment advice), in the public employment services (PES), assists jobseekers in the development of integration strategies to find a job. It can comprise job search assistance or more complex support interventions such as internships, training or working in partnership with various types of social services (Kraatz, 2021). The 2022 PES bench learning framework noted that PES ‘employment counsellors’ have a job profile that can combine ‘the role of broker, counsellor, social worker and includes administrative tasks’ (European Network of Public Employment Services, 2022).

Flexicurity is an integrated strategy for enhancing, at the same time, flexibility and security in the labour market. It attempts to reconcile employers’ need for a flexible workforce with workers’ need for security, that is, the confidence that they will not face long periods of unemployment ([European Commission. DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, n.d.-c](#)). Flexicurity is monitored in the European Commission’s annual joint employment report and includes recommendations for Member States on ensuring the provision of career guidance (see, for example, European Commission. Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (2025b)).

Formative evaluation refers to the appraisal of an action, with the intention of improving the action’s performance and, in most cases, it is conducted during the implementation phase of projects or programmes (Cedefop, 2024). Depending on the context of the formative evaluation and the assessment outcomes of career management skills – for example whether in the context of labour market providers such as public employment services or non-educational youth programmes – assuring quality may play a stronger role than evaluation.

Guidance is used as a shortened form of ‘lifelong guidance’ (see **lifelong guidance**).

Information and communications technology (ICT) includes emerging technologies and non-digital elements, components and features. It is intentionally used instead of the term ‘digital technology’ to capture the comprehensive scope of both infrastructure and the variety of interactive services, resources and tools that are instrumental in enhancing policy and systems development and in the delivery of lifelong guidance services. The term ‘ICT’ in this context also underscores the importance of digital competence, namely the skills and knowledge required to effectively use these technologies in a lifelong guidance context and setting.

Individual training entitlement refers to the right to access a personal budget that is at an individual’s disposal to cover the direct costs of labour-market-relevant training, guidance and counselling, skills assessment or validation of prior learning (European Commission, 2021b). The Council recommendation on individual learning accounts (ILAs) (Council of the European Union, 2022c) recommends that Member States ensure that career guidance services and validation opportunities are available and accessible to every owner of an ILA, free of charge, or by using their individual training entitlements.

Labour market information is a quantitative or qualitative dataset on the size, structure and composition of the labour market and on the way it functions, its issues and the opportunities it offers, as well as on the intentions of stakeholders. The aim of the dataset is to support decision-making on labour market policy. The information includes professions, occupations, jobs and skills. The abbreviation ‘LMSI’ is used to refer to labour market information combined with ‘skills intelligence’ (adapted from Cedefop, 2024) (see **skills intelligence**).

Lifelong guidance is an umbrella concept that describes a continuous process referring to a range of activities throughout life that enable individuals at any age and at any stage to identify their capacities, competences and interests; to make educational, training and occupational decisions; and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/or used (Council of the European Union, 2008; ELGPN, 2015a).

Older adults. Age is understood differently across contexts and countries, policies and practices vary, including in career guidance during mid and later career stages. For this reason, specific age categories of older adults are not used (see guideline 16, which also covers what is known as the ‘third age’ of life).

Plain language and **easy-to-read text.** Written plain language is clear, concise, well organised and appropriate to the subject and audience. Easy-to-read text ensures accessibility for people with specific needs or disabilities (Publications Office of the European Union, n.d.).

Professionalisation is an ongoing process of improvement and refers to the quality and impact of lifelong guidance services, resources, products, activities and tools and to the public status of career practitioners.

Qualification is the formal outcome of an assessment and validation process, which is obtained when a competent authority determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards (Council of the European Union, 2017). Examples include a diploma or certificate.

Reasonable accommodations are necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to enjoy or exercise on an equal basis with others all human rights and fundamental freedoms (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 2).

Referral occurs when a guidance practitioner or service provider refers an individual service user (a client, customer, learner or student) to another provider, specialist, internal (e.g. job placement officer) or external service, professional (mental health services) or other source of support (e.g. community association) to meet the individual’s comprehensive needs.

Screening is an initial step in career guidance during which a brief interview, and sometimes a quick screening measure, is used to assess decision-making readiness to help ensure that career guidance provides the type and amount of assistance that best meets the needs of the individual (Sampson et al., 2023).

Sector refers broadly to the area, setting or context (systems and policies) for lifelong guidance provision, policy development, service delivery and implementation, and usually evaluation, including in education and training, the labour market and other government institutions and services/programmes, and civil society (or the third sector). It can also refer to the private domain, within and outside firms.

Significant others refers to people of importance for an individual’s positive personal and career development, including family members, caregivers and mentors.

Skills intelligence is used to identify key trends and demands in the labour market; assess, anticipate and forecast skill needs; address skill gaps and mismatches; and adapt provision of education and training accordingly (European Commission, 2020d, 2020e). It is the process of identifying, collecting, analysing, synthesising and presenting quantitative or qualitative information on skills and the labour market. The abbreviation ‘LMSI’ is also used (which refers to the combination of labour market information and skills intelligence) and it is closely related to labour market information, although these terms are not synonymous (adapted from Cedefop, 2024) (see also **labour market information**).

Social dialogue refers to ‘all types of negotiation, consultation or exchange of information between, or among, representatives of governments, employers and workers, on issues of common interest relating to economic, employment and social policy, that exist as bipartite relations between la-

bour and management, including collective bargaining, or as a tripartite process, with the government as an official party to the dialogue. It can be informal or institutionalised or a combination of the two, taking place at national, regional, local or enterprise level across industries or sectors, or at several of those levels at a time' (Council of the European Union, 2023b).

Social protection policies are the integrated set of policies designed to ensure income security and support for all people across the life cycle, with particular attention paid to low-paid and vulnerable individuals (adapted from ILO, 2012, and [Universal Social Protection](#)).

Supported employment is 'a scheme that supports people with specific needs or disabilities or other groups needing particular assistance in obtaining and maintaining paid employment in the open labour market. Supportive measures must include assistance to the employee before, during, and after obtaining a job, and support for the employer. Key to this is the job coach function' (European Commission. DG Justice et al., 2012).

Twin track is, in the context of disability, an approach that requires the systematic integration of people with disabilities into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all programmatic and operational policies, strategies and actions, as well as targeted initiatives to support the empowerment of people with disabilities (WHO, 2021).

Universal design is the design of products, environments, programmes and services to ensure that they are usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design. It does not exclude assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities, where these are needed ([United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), Article 2).

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is the process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard. It consists of the following four distinct phases: identification, documentation, assessment and certification (Cedefop, 2023d).

Vocational education and training (VET) learners include, unless otherwise specified, both initial and continuing VET students (registered as full- or part-time) and learners of any age participating in any form of VET.

Workers designates in a broad sense any person of working age carrying out an activity that is recognisable as work, including those who are self-employed, salaried workers and those who are temporarily unemployed and in search of another job (Cedefop et al., 2023).

ANNEX 2.

CareersNet members

Table 2. **CareersNet experts** ⁽¹³²⁾

Active core experts	Active alternate experts
Eldisa Zhebo (Albania)	
Wolfgang Bliem (Austria)	Eva Baloch-Kaloianov (Austria)
Claire Kagan (Belgium)	
Silvia Toneva (Bulgaria)	
Lena (Chrystalleni) Nicolaou (Cyprus)	Chrystalla Afxentiou (Cyprus)
Lenka Hloušková (Czechia)	Petr Chaluš (Czechia)
Inger-Lise Vanja Lund Petersen (Denmark)	
Margit Rammo (Estonia)	
Jaana Kettunen (Finland)	Raimo Vuorinen (Finland) Mika Launikari (Finland)
Graziana Boscato (France)	David Bourne (France)
Peter Weber (Germany)	Minh-Tuan Nguyen (Germany)
Fotini Vlachaki (Greece)	Ioanna Papavasileiou (Greece)
Tibor Bors Borbély-Pecze (Hungary)	
Jennifer McKenzie (Ireland)	Rosarii Molloy-Curran (Ireland)
Giulio Iannis (Italy)	Concetta Fonzo (Italy)
Isabelle Reinhardt (Luxembourg)	
Dorianne Gravina (Malta)	Clayton Micallef Grimaud (Malta)
Thea van den Boom (Netherlands)	Jouke Post (Netherlands)
Ida Holth Mathiesen (Norway)	Petra Røise (Norway)
Jerzy Bielecki (Poland)	Anna Bilon-Piórko (Poland)
Hélia Moura (Portugal)	
Angelica-Mariana Andrei (Romania)	Mihai Iacob (Romania)
Marko Banković (Serbia)	
Ladislav Ostroha (Slovakia)	
Ema Perme (Slovenia)	Alicia Leonor Sauli Miklavčič (Slovenia)
Luis Carro (Spain)	Jose Luis Martinez Garcia (Spain)

⁽¹³²⁾ The core and alternate experts listed include all those members of the network active at the time and invited to contribute during the development of the framework from December 2021 to 31 December 2024. This is no indication of the extent of any contribution, and members may have retired from the network, or joined, during the period, as indicated by duplicate country names. See the [CareersNet web page](#) for a list of current members.

Nina Ahlroos (Sweden)	
Daniel Reumiller (Switzerland)	
Fusun Akkök (Türkiye)	
Chris Percy (United Kingdom) Deirdre Hughes (United Kingdom)	Siobhan Neary (United Kingdom)

Additional methodological note

The work on this framework was coordinated by Cedefop, within the lifelong guidance project strand, and CareersNet, which had overall responsibility for the activity (see also the introduction and acknowledgements).

Opportunities to comment were offered to members of the network and others at various points, and Cedefop welcomed feedback in any form. This included but was not limited to the following forums and opportunities for input and feedback:

- (a) the working group made up of CareersNet members selected by Cedefop management and nominated in 2021, which co-developed an initial survey for core members;
- (b) an online meeting of core network experts to discuss the survey replies during the sixth annual CareersNet meeting in December 2021;
- (c) the 2023 participatory in-person dedicated workshop during the seventh CareersNet meeting in Stockholm, Sweden, attended by core and available alternate network experts, including thematic groups led by the working group, to work on the draft sectoral guidelines;
- (d) a series of collegial online meetings, open to all network members, held from January to June 2024 to invite and discuss feedback on the draft transversal guidelines;
- (e) the sharing of the first full draft of the proposed set of guidelines with officers at the European Commission's DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion for comment (including the European Public Employment Services (PES) Network), as well as with experts from the European Training Foundation and an expert from the International Labour Organization, represented in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Inter-agency Working Group on Career Guidance, between September to December 2024;
- (f) comments and sources on specific sections from selected Cedefop experts with relevant thematic expertise and from a policy adviser from the European Trade Union Confederation;
- (g) input from the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Inter-agency Working Group on Career Guidance, in which Cedefop is represented, and the project manager of the framework to inform the development of the framework through the latest revision of the leaflet *Investing in Career Guidance*;
- (h) substantial advice and contributions from experts from the Finnish Institute for Educational Research, which was previously the coordinator of the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network;
- (i) a Cedefop open webinar organised by the lifelong guidance strand, at which a preview of the new framework was presented and discussed on 10 April 2025, with selected CareersNet experts, stakeholders and members of the working group. The webinar announcement was widely disseminated.



An EU reference framework for lifelong guidance

18 guidelines for policy and systems development

To enable Europe to ride the waves of change, it is critical for all individuals to acquire and update their skills and competences, to manage their careers, and to meet their needs in learning, work and life. Lifelong guidance is realised through provisions to enable all individuals across their lifespan and in any circumstances to identify their capacities, competences, and interests, and to make career decisions that are meaningful for them along their life paths.

Professionalising lifelong guidance systems amid change and societal transformations requires better coherence and integration of policies. Cedefop, supported by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion and CareersNet, has coordinated work on this renewed reference framework and cross-sectoral guidelines. It aims to inspire purposeful collaboration, innovation, dialogue, and evidence collection to foster effective policies and systems. Cedefop's work and the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network's 2015 guidelines are acknowledged and built upon.

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