

Session 3

Embedding lifelong guidance across policies and systems: putting strategies to work in uncertain times

Chair: Daniel Reumiller, President, Swiss Career Guidance Conference, (KBSB), Switzerland, CareersNet expert

Presentations by:

- *Anna Toni*, Senior adviser, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Finland
- *Marianne Almbakk*, Senior adviser, Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, Norway
- *Carol Guilda*, Guidance specialist, Department of Education and Youth, Ireland, CareersNet expert
- *Diana Reiners*, Director, Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enfance et de la Jeunesse, Maison de l'orientation – Service de coordination, Luxembourg

Discussant: *Fotini Vlachaki*, Independent career guidance and social inclusion expert; Doctoral researcher, Department of Psychology of the National and Kapodistrian, University of Athens, Greece, CareersNet expert



Rapporteur: Alessandra Biancolini, Seconded National Expert, Cedefop



Summary:

The renewed Framework stresses that lifelong guidance can be strengthened with a coordinated, system-wide approach rather than as isolated services and sectors. This requires cooperation across ministries, services, and stakeholders, along with clear responsibilities and long-term political commitment and stable investments. Key transversal priorities also include CMS development, access as well as inclusion (accessibility), quality assurance, professionalism, evidence-based development, and effective use of ICT.

Growing challenges: demographic shifts, changing skills and labour market demands (including shortages), widening and changing inequalities, mobility flows, complex career transitions, environmental pressures, and AI-driven labour market changes, increasing the need for stronger and more adaptable lifelong guidance systems.

The session explored cases within countries of national guidance frameworks, strategies and/or coordination mechanisms. Country “snapshots” (Finland, Norway, Ireland, Luxembourg) were presented to highlight common and distinct challenges, and practical approaches, shifting focus from single ideal models. Reflecting on the ambitions the renewed EU Reference Framework represents, the session offered reflection, sharing and discussions around qualitative comparison, structured collaboration among stakeholders, and self-assessment.

Key speaker points:

Daniel Reumiller opened the session highlighting the main features of the context for Switzerland that underlines the role of early career choices and strong VET structures but also difficulties in coordination due to regional diversity. Switzerland has developed a national strategy with increasing interest in improving cross-sector coordination.

Anna Toni presented the context for Finland, highlighting the importance of the approach underlying their national strategy for lifelong guidance, characterised by a holistic, embedded and cross-sectoral design, incorporating national, regional and local levels. One-stop-shops for young people are a good example in which this strategy comes alive, also built on a monitoring and evaluation framework and its outputs.

Stable structures matter to avoid that each key policy actor remains within its own silos. A big effort was made establishing a national digital service and a platform to support career planning; the Competency Path was officially launched in 2025. The national strategy is highly aligned with the Cedefop LLG framework, especially in its principles and transversal guidelines—showing strong conceptual clarity and well-

identified priorities “on paper.” Key elements like quality, professionalism, and data collection are well established and regulated. Despite challenging times and limited resources, there has been a positive shift toward focusing on outcomes, particularly the importance of CMS, evidenced through successful pilots, such as for ageing workers. Current focus is on communication and outreach, and a much-needed handbook. Attention to older adults as target users is growing, and recent government signals suggest potential progress, though budget cuts may affect services.

Digitalisation is a key trend, with benefits from accessible LMI, hybrid services, and AI. Public (versus commercial or private) digital services remain essential, however, due to their reliability, scale, and integration with official systems, even if they may seem less innovative than other tools. Lifelong guidance is less of a political priority than previously, affected by austerity and budget cuts. As a result, coordination is focused on information sharing, monitoring, and compliance, rather than active development and innovation.

Marianne Almbakk shed light on practical examples on how Norway passed from the policy level (quality framework) to an “Implementation logic” for embedding lifelong guidance services and focusing on quality inputs. Freely available to all individuals, lifelong guidance is a shared responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research through the support of the Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (in higher education, HVET and skills policy, acting as a knowledge advisor and policy implementer). A national quality framework for career guidance promotes quality across sectors through a common vocabulary, strong focus on professionalism, career learning, and digitalisation. The key areas competence standards, ethics, CMS, and quality assurance, underpin online tools for practitioners (self-assessment resources and an online “Quality Lab”) to turn policy into actionable career practice. Practical resources like the “The guidance room” support practitioner competence self-development through case-based learning. The Lab faces the challenges and limitations of digital tools, which alone, are no guarantee for real change in practice: career practitioners may struggle with complex real-world situations, potentially widening gaps between users. Successful implementation will depend on local factors like professional learning, and continuous adaptation to context.

Carol Guildea highlighted the current lifelong guidance landscape in Ireland, particularly focusing on the relevance of Guideline 5 (also the importance of universal coverage in the social inclusion guidelines) of Cedefop’s LLG Framework in an analysis of the country’s current national strategic Framework for lifelong guidance. Examples of the approaches to implementation were showcased, emphasising the importance of strategic leadership, coordination and strong cross-government (and society) involvement.

Moving beyond its traditional education-sector focus and backed up by increasing policy attention and appropriate resourcing, lifelong guidance now involves multiple departments (social protection, enterprise and trade, youth, disability, etc.), also

aiming to provide more comprehensive and coordinated services across settings, for the benefit of all, including vulnerable groups and regions.

Key priorities noted include clarifying guidance terminology (including for career professionals), improving the visibility of practitioners and services, and mapping guidance services nationwide to better understand those falling under the definition, national coverage, areas of duplication and gaps.

Diana Reiners introduced the Luxembourg context, as a small country with a very high rate of non-native inhabitants and immigrants with foreign cultures. The country's guidance system might be perceived as somewhat “fragmented” with clear differences between education, vocational, and adult guidance, creating gaps. For educational guidance the challenge is the diversity of languages —over 50% overall and 74% in the capital—who speak a foreign language at home. To address this, policies have introduced more linguistically diverse school options; hence stronger guidance structures located at the schools are needed to help students and parents navigate the complexity.

There are also persistent skills shortages despite a high share of cross-border workers and international talent.

Adult guidance addresses major upskilling challenges—especially for low-skilled migrants—through a centralized system, but coordination between services is a challenge. Policy priorities include better case management, digital and personalized guidance, and improved skills recognition.

Fotini Vlachaki connected the perspectives represented by the panelists across the cases, providing reflection on broader common implications:

- Governance and coherence: there is progress toward coordinated, lifelong guidance systems, but persistent gaps remain between policy and implementation due in part to complexities in multi-stakeholder coordination.
- Professionalisation: efforts focus on setting entry standards and continuous training for practitioners as well as service tools and resources, while keeping user needs at the centre.
- Inclusion: expanding access is not enough - systems must actively reduce inequalities, as digitalisation can improve access but also deepen divides.

Key messages:

1. Lifelong guidance as a public good, supported by coherent cross-sectoral coordination and sustainable governance.
2. Stronger professionalisation, through professional identity, competence frameworks, ethics and continuous professional development (CPD) as the foundation of quality.
3. Human-centred digitalisation, ensuring technology complements professional practice and that universal access translates into equitable access.

Notable quotes:

In these times of where there's really lack of trust and our national experience shows that the guidance systems can survive political shifts when the structures are protected. And this is also where a strong European mandate matters (Anna Toni)

Quality isn't only about doing the right steps at the right time, it's about handling uncertainty, ethical dilemmas and competing goals, and complex client situations. Under time pressure. And digital services also can unintentionally widen the gap (Marianne Almbaak)

Even with adequate resources, we need to know how to allocate this funding efficiently. (Carol Gildea)

Young people need more personalized service when access the guidance, such as coaching" (Diane Reiners.)

How can integrated cross sectoral lifelong guidance systems become more responsive and resilient in the context of growing uncertainty? (Fotini Vlachak)