



**GOOD
GUIDANCE**
Stories +

PRACTICAL

RECOMMENDATION

HANDBOOK

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ABSTRACT

This practical recommendation handbook is aimed at policy makers, guidance organisations and guidance practitioners working in the field of lifelong guidance for low skilled people. It builds on recommendations of the previous project GUIDE but focuses more on the low-skilled and refines and sharpens some of our statements.

THE PROJECT GOOD GUIDANCE STORIES+

GOOD GUIDANCE STORIES+ Case study Training modules for Guiding the Low Skilled

Educational & vocational guidance is an increasingly important element of lifelong learning. Over the course of their working lives, individuals must navigate multiple transitions. Adequately trained career guidance practitioners are a prerequisite for making high quality guidance service provision a reality for every European citizen. The challenge is therefore to identify and develop the skills and competences which guidance practitioners need in order to work effectively with target groups who are a great distance from the labour market. Training methods are required which cross national boundaries and can be implemented in diverse cultural settings.

The focus of GOOD GUIDANCE STORIES+ was to develop and to test case study based training modules for guidance practitioners who work mainly with low skilled people. The modules are based on case studies which were especially written for GUIDE+ and the previous project GUIDE. The case studies are targeting different competences. The findings of this process are summarized as recommendations in this guideline.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Listen to guidance practitioners!

Guidance practitioners are in close contact with many groups that participate in the process of lifelong learning and vocational education: clients, the providers of vocational education, policy makers and social partners. Guidance practitioners are an interface between all these groups and know their needs and interests. Therefore it is very important to take guidance practitioners' perspectives into account when new services for low skilled people are planned or when new methods of guidance are proposed. Guidance practitioners can also have good ideas for the improvement of existing services as they know what methods are useful for clients with lower levels of education and how guidance services must be designed to reach and empower these clients. They can also take into account the specific conditions regarding their city or region. Therefore it is important for the policy makers to engage and communicate with guidance practitioners.

2. Offer more holistic counselling services to the low skilled

Low skilled people have to handle multi-faceted barriers on their way into training or back into employment. Closer cooperation between different institutions increases the chances of (re) integration. One concrete method of working in a holistic way is the interagency approach, which means that all institutions that the client is in contact with are working very closely together. An interagency approach prevents clients from having to tell their stories over and over again. However, such tailor-made services cost money and people who benefit from career guidance are often people who cannot pay for these services. Therefore, such guidance services have to be paid publicly and must be free of charge for the clients.

3. Support self-reflection in the continuous professional development of guidance practitioners!

It is important to provide guidance practitioners with continuous professional development. This not only provides guidance practitioners with the newest theories and methods, but it also gives them the chance to pause for a little while to reflect on single counselling interviews and/or on their own guidance practice. This is of great importance as the behaviour of the guidance practitioners has a direct effect on the behavior of the clients; and as such, a reflective personality is seen as a key requirement to the provision of high quality guidance.

The case study approach used in GUIDE+ places self-reflection at the centre of the learning activities and promotes it as an equally important as theory and methods, in the continuous professional development of guidance practitioners.

4. Get an overview of the services for clients in your region

For policy makers and people that make decisions about the services provided, it is very important to know what services are already available in a city or region. There might be different guidance services provided by state institutions, by private enterprises and services funded through different means (national, European, private). There might also be services for specific target groups or for different transition points. Moreover, many guidance services are provided through projects which have a limited lifetime. Therefore, it would be useful to have a platform that is regularly updated i.e. like the lifelong guidance platform in Berlin (www.bildungsberatung-berlin.de). On this platform, all the institutions providing guidance are

listed (such as the national employment service, regional projects, guidance services for women or migrants, etc.). With this kind of overview it is easier to identify the gaps in the guidance services in a region, for example if there is no services for certain target groups in need of guidance. Such an overview also makes it possible to utilize service-chains or interagency-approaches, i.e. to counsel one person through different counselors/services. Additionally, such a platform is a good way to promote lifelong guidance and to inform people about the services available in their region.

5. Provide guidance practitioners with possibilities to exchange

Guidance practitioners are confronted with different types of clients with a variety of questions and problems. As mentioned previously, guidance practitioners need to find tailor-made solutions for their clients. To be able to offer the best possible service for their clients, guidance practitioners need enough time to prepare their counselling sessions as well as follow-up time to review them. Furthermore, they can learn a lot from each other and therefore they need time, not only for formal vocational education but also for collegial advice. Moreover, guidance practitioners are often confronted with their clients' problems and they need a place where they themselves can reflect on the guidance sessions as well as find new energy for their work. Therefore it is important to plan time and money for collegial advice and supervision when planning guidance services. A good overview of the guidance services in a region would help guidance practitioners to make contact with each other and find colleagues who work in similar fields, with similar target groups or on comparable subjects.

Of course collegial advice takes place even if it is not planned. But then it is incidental and its potential not be maximized or used. One of the most important points in general is realistic workload planning by providers of lifelong guidance and the guidance practitioners working there. If the aim is to provide a high-quality guidance service, then only a defined number of people can be counselled in a given time frame.

6. Provide independent guidance on a voluntary basis

Guidance services should be “client centred” and it should empower clients. This is especially important for low skilled people as they may have often experienced situations where their deficits were the focus and not their strengths. To put client needs into the center, guidance has to be independent. On the one hand, it has to be independent from providers of vocational education as they might focus on the courses they offer and that might be not appropriate for the person in question. On the other hand, guidance has to be independent from receiving social benefits. This means that a person enters voluntarily into the guidance process and is not penalized for rejecting job offers or training that he or she is not interested in and which do not fit into his or her career plan. Furthermore, guidance should take place on a voluntary basis in order to positively impact and empower clients. One possible solution could be that clients are asked to visit the guidance service to hear about the services available but can then decide voluntarily if they will use the services offered.

7. Provide services for lifelong guidance especially at transition points

Lifelong guidance is needed for lifelong learning. Guidance should take place at key transition points throughout one's life (e.g. from nursery to primary school, from primary school to secondary school, from secondary school to work or to university, from work to work, from work to unemployment and from unemployment to work, back to work after maternity/paternity/family leave or illness, from work to pension) but also in the time between such transition points. Offering guidance at these key transition points is particularly important for low skilled people or people who are not used to formal learning environments. In these cases there might be a need for additional information, e.g. explaining the educational system if it is not known or understood. This additional information can enable the people to make the right choice. Furthermore, due to the changes in the world of work, low-skilled people are often more at risk of losing their jobs so they might need more guidance at the transition point from work to work. One focus here then should be improving their employability.

8. Strengthening the counselling approach

Everyday, guidance practitioners counsel different target groups with different personal needs. This requires empathy and also being clear on what counselling is and is not within their specific setting and service.

Guidance organisations should check regularly if their counselling approach still meets the need of their clients and if their target group is still the same. A clear counselling approach helps identify appropriate methods to be used by guidance practitioners when counselling different target groups. The prerequisite for this is to reflect regularly on the needs of the different client groups, among them the low-skilled, and to implement methods that support these clients.

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