

**Document 2: Policy Guidelines for Career Counseling
Decision Makers**
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Introduction

The aim of **sheltered workshops is to prepare and support people with disabilities in transitioning to regular employment**. However, many individuals with disabilities end up staying in sheltered workshops for **extended periods or their entire working lives, particularly those with cognitive disabilities**. This indicates a failure to achieve the inclusion goals outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and a recent directive from the European Parliament.

Table: Disability Statistics & Employment Rates in Partner Countries

| Country | Population with Disabilities (%) | Employment Rate (%) |
|----------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Belgium | 9% | 26% |
| Cyprus | 24% | 48.5% |
| Germany | n/a | 53% |
| Slovenia | 1% | n/a |

(Source: Include3 Transnational Report, find here: https://include3.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Include_3_Transnational_report.pdf)

To facilitate a sustainable transition, it is crucial to **align the needs of individuals with disabilities with the requirements of the labor market**. **Counseling** plays a central role in this process by **identifying strengths, interests, and training needs of individuals seeking advice**. Counselors in sheltered workshops also maintain contact with employers, serving as intermediaries. Proper guidance ensures that vocational training is tailored to individual learning needs, skills, and goals, as well as the demands and support opportunities within the labor market.

The "Include³" project aims to **develop resources and a participatory curriculum** through collaboration between guidance practitioners, individuals with intellectual disabilities, employers, and vocational training professionals. The goal is to **create pathways from targeted training to sustainable and suitable employment in regular work settings**. This process involves reorienting vocational education in an individualized manner to prepare individuals for specific labor market opportunities.

This policy document highlights the main findings from the partner countries Belgium, Cyprus, Germany and Slovenia. The policy document refers to the national report by picking up examples of good practice and summarizing the outcomes from the national report. It also derives practical guidelines for policy makers in Sheltered Workshop VET. Four to five practical guidelines for implementation are given for specific topics, such as collaborative partnerships. The policy document ends with a conclusion.

Policy Document 2: Policy Guidelines for Career Counseling Decision Makers

Introduction

This policy document aims to provide policy guidelines for decision-makers **involved in career counseling for individuals with disabilities**. It emphasizes the need to promote inclusive practices, empower individuals, and ensure equal opportunities in career development and employment. The document draws insights from the National report and highlights key areas of improvement.

Summary of Partner Countries

Summary of the counseling concepts and transitions from sheltered employment to the general labor market in the partner countries:

Belgium:

Counseling Concept: *DSL* offers comprehensive counseling and guidance for people with disabilities, including general counseling before and during training and employment. The counseling method is goal-oriented, with set counseling and evaluation times, and it also checks training companies' compliance with the content.

Transitions to the General Labor Market: Belgium presents "outgroups" as a best practice for transitioning from sheltered employment. Workshop employees retain their status and pay while working in companies in the general labor market. Outgroups provide a first step into the labor market while ensuring system protection.

Cyprus:

Counseling Concept: The *Agios Stefanos Foundation* implements Supported Employment counseling using the job coaching method. Job coaches with professional backgrounds in sociology and psychology support adults with disabilities in entering the open labor market. The counseling concept aims to strengthen self-confidence, develop communication skills, demand equal opportunities, and promote self-determination.

Transitions to the General Labor Market: The special school in Cyprus offers a pre-vocational training and qualification program called "Part-Time Study - Part-Time Employment." It involves placing students with intellectual disabilities in part-time jobs in the general labor market with the support of job coaches.

Germany:

Counseling Concept: Germany presents three counseling concepts. The counseling concept of the Federal Employment Agency focuses on vocational guidance for people with disabilities, considering the person with disabilities as an expert in their own right. The *Supplementary Independent Participation Counseling (EUTB)* provides a peer counseling and empowerment approach. The *JOBSTER. Team* offers close support before, during, and after the placement of people with disabilities.

Transitions to the General Labor Market: The *Diakoniewerkstätten Rhein-Neckar* provides job coaching to support transitions to the general labor market. Job coaches accompany individuals with intellectual disabilities during internships and in external workplaces. They also facilitate a vocational training day as a project day each week.

Slovenia:

Counseling Concept: The Slovenian case study focuses on an inclusive social farm called *Korenika*. The counseling concept combines ecological and social aspects with a regional reference, emphasizing empowerment, participation, and ecological sustainability. Principles of "learning from each other" and individual adaptation to the target group are employed.

Transitions to the General Labor Market: The Slovenian case study highlights inclusive employment opportunities provided by the "*Druga vilonia*" supported by CUDV. The inn creates jobs under real conditions of gastronomy and emphasizes the responsibility of companies and society in providing inclusive employment opportunities.

These case studies provide innovative approaches and practices in counseling and transition to the general labor market for people with disabilities. The experiences and elements from each country can be *considered in the development of the Include³ method*, such as **goal-oriented counseling, supported employment programs, job coaching, vocational training, and inclusive employment opportunities.**

Example of Good Practice

One outstanding example of good practice in **career counseling** is the inclusive social farm "*Korenika*" in **Slovenia**. This innovative approach **combines ecological sustainability with empowerment and participation for individuals with disabilities.**

Participants receive **comprehensive counseling and gain valuable skills in agriculture and farm management.** *Korenika* fosters a collaborative and supportive environment, encouraging knowledge exchange among participants.

By providing inclusive employment opportunities, this counseling concept demonstrates the potential for meaningful transitions to the labor market. It serves as an inspiring model for decision-makers, showcasing the benefits of tailoring counseling to individual needs and integrating ecological and social elements into the process.

Excerpt from the Conclusion of the Transnational Report

The Transnational Report **highlights key conclusions and claims that have significant implications for decision-makers in the field of career counseling.** It emphasizes the **need for innovative approaches and successful strategies** to inspire and guide professionals in this important field. The following conclusions are of particular relevance:

1. **Improved Integration Programs:** The report emphasizes the importance of **enhancing integration programs in career counseling.** These programs should focus on creating inclusive environments that accommodate the diverse needs of individuals seeking career guidance. By **implementing accessibility accommodations, promoting inclusive hiring practices, and fostering supportive**

work environments, career counselors can help break down barriers and provide equal opportunities for people with disabilities to participate fully in the labor market.

2. Support Measures for Career Transitions: The National Report stresses the significance of supporting individuals during career transitions. Career counselors **should provide guidance and assistance to individuals with disabilities as they navigate the process of transitioning from sheltered employment** to the general labor market. By understanding the challenges faced during these transitions and developing effective strategies and programs, career counselors can ensure successful integration into mainstream employment.
3. Financial Assistance for Employment: The report underlines the **crucial role of financial assistance in facilitating employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities**. Career counselors should advocate for policies and programs that provide adequate financial support, including funding for assistive technologies, workplace accommodations, vocational training, and other resources. **Ensuring accessible and equitable financial assistance will empower individuals with disabilities** to access and thrive in employment.
4. Inclusive Practices and Empowerment: The National Report emphasizes the need for career counselors to **promote inclusive practices and empower individuals with disabilities**. By offering disability awareness training and educating employers on reasonable accommodations, career counselors can facilitate the creation of inclusive workplaces that value diversity. Empowering employers and fostering an inclusive mindset will lead to improved job opportunities for people with disabilities.
5. Counseling Services and Vocational Training: The report highlights the pivotal role of career counseling services and vocational training programs in supporting individuals with disabilities. **Career counselors should provide comprehensive career guidance, helping individuals explore various career options, set goals, and develop the necessary skills for employment**. Additionally, vocational training programs should be tailored to enhance the employability of individuals with disabilities and prepare them for specific job roles.

Guidelines for Career Counseling Decision Makers

The following policy guidelines provide specific recommendations for **career counseling for individuals with disabilities**. These guidelines aim to:

- **enhance inclusive practices,**
- **promote empowerment and self-determination,**
- **ensure equal access to career development opportunities.**

By implementing these guidelines, decision-makers can foster an environment that supports individuals with disabilities in achieving their career goals and participating fully in the labor market.

Providing Comprehensive Career Guidance:

- Conduct person-centered assessments: **Decision-makers should prioritize person-centered career assessments that consider individuals' strengths, interests, skills, and aspirations.** Utilize a variety of assessment tools and techniques to gain a holistic understanding of the individual's capabilities and potential career paths.
- Goal setting and individualized support: Encourage career counselors to collaborate **closely with individuals with disabilities to set realistic and meaningful career goals.** Provide tailored support, including personalized career plans, skill development opportunities, and ongoing guidance to assist individuals in realizing their career aspirations.

Fostering Partnerships and Collaborations:

- Foster networking activities involving parents and employers.
- Establish partnerships with employers: Decision-makers should **actively engage employers in the career counseling process.** Foster partnerships with businesses to create inclusive workplaces that value diversity and provide employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Encourage employers to participate in job shadowing, mentoring programs, and internships to facilitate career exploration and skill development.
- Collaborate with vocational training providers: **Strengthen connections with vocational training institutions to align career counseling efforts with relevant training programs.** Work together to develop curricula that address the specific needs of individuals with disabilities, **ensuring they acquire the skills and qualifications required for their desired career paths.**

- Engage community organizations: Collaborate with community organizations, disability advocacy groups, and support services to enhance career counseling outcomes. These partnerships can provide additional resources, networking opportunities, and peer support for individuals with disabilities during their career development journey.

Strengthening Transition Support:

- Develop comprehensive transition programs: Decision-makers should **design and implement transition programs that facilitate the successful movement of individuals from sheltered workshops to the general labor market**. These programs should provide comprehensive information on mainstream employment options, career pathways, and available support services.
- Provide training and mentorship: **Offer training programs to equip individuals with disabilities with the necessary skills, knowledge, and self-confidence** to thrive in the general labor market. Mentorship initiatives can pair individuals with disabilities with experienced professionals who can provide guidance, share insights, and support their transition process.

Ensuring Accessibility and Accommodation:

- Accessibility in career counseling services: Decision-makers should ensure that career counseling services are **accessible to individuals with disabilities**. This includes **providing accommodations such as assistive technologies, alternative communication methods, and accessible physical spaces**.
- Reasonable accommodations in the workplace: Advocate for the implementation of reasonable accommodations in the workplace to support the employment of individuals with disabilities. Decision-makers should **educate employers about the range of accommodations available and promote inclusive practices** that enable individuals with disabilities to fully participate in their chosen careers.

Promoting Awareness and Sensitization:

- Develop training programs: Decision-makers should **prioritize the development and implementation of training programs for career counselors, educators, employers, and other stakeholders**. These programs should focus on disability awareness, promoting a positive attitude towards individuals with disabilities, and addressing stereotypes and misconceptions.

- Sensitize stakeholders: **Conduct awareness campaigns to sensitize the general public, employers, and educational institutions** about the abilities and contributions of individuals with disabilities. **Challenge societal biases and promote inclusive attitudes towards career development** and employment opportunities.

Tailoring Career Counseling Approaches:

- Individualized counseling plans: **Emphasize the importance of individualized career counseling plans that consider the unique needs, abilities, and aspirations** of individuals with disabilities. These plans should be **flexible, adaptable, and regularly reviewed to accommodate changing goals and circumstances**.
- Culturally sensitive counseling: Encourage career counselors to be **culturally sensitive and considerate of diverse backgrounds**, including ethnicity, race, gender, and sexual orientation. Cultural competence should be integrated into counseling practices to ensure inclusive and respectful services.

Advocating for Policy and Legal Frameworks:

- Support policy development: Decision-makers should **actively advocate for the development and implementation of policies that promote equal opportunities**, non-discrimination, and accessibility in education and employment for individuals with disabilities. **Collaborate** with relevant government agencies, disability rights organizations, and policymakers to influence policy reforms.
- Legal protection: Ensure that individuals with disabilities are **protected by comprehensive legal frameworks** that safeguard their rights to equal access to career counseling services, education, vocational training, and employment. Encourage the **enforcement of anti-discrimination laws and reasonable accommodations** in the workplace.

Research and Innovation:

- Invest in research: **Allocate resources and funding to support research initiatives focused on inclusive career counseling for individuals with disabilities**. Research findings should inform evidence-based practices and contribute to the continuous improvement of career counseling services.

- Embrace technological advancements: Explore and embrace technological innovations that can enhance career counseling experiences for individuals with disabilities. This includes virtual career guidance platforms, assistive technologies, and online resources that provide accessible and interactive career exploration tools.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

- Establish monitoring mechanisms: **Implement robust monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the effectiveness of inclusive career counseling initiatives.** Regularly collect data on outcomes, satisfaction levels, and employment rates of individuals with disabilities to identify areas for improvement and inform evidence-based decision-making.
- Stakeholder feedback: **Actively seek feedback from individuals with disabilities, career counselors, employers, and other stakeholders** to ensure continuous improvement and responsiveness to their needs. Encourage participation in feedback mechanisms such as surveys, focus groups, and consultations.
- **Create action guidelines for counseling** that build on comprehensibility and commitment, an open and empathetic basic counseling attitude, motivation, and independent counseling

Conclusion for Career Counseling Decision-Makers

Career counseling decision-makers plays a vital role in fostering an inclusive labor market and empowering individuals with disabilities. The guidelines provided in this report serve as a comprehensive roadmap for these decision-makers to ensure equitable and accessible career counseling services.

By adopting person-centered approaches, building partnerships with employers and vocational training providers, and strengthening transition support, decision-makers can facilitate the career development of individuals with disabilities. The guidelines emphasize the significance of recognizing individual strengths, aspirations and providing tailored support.

Implementing these guidelines requires a **commitment to inclusivity, collaboration, and resource allocation**. Decision-makers must engage in continuous training, seek feedback from stakeholders, and prioritize the participation of individuals with disabilities in shaping career counseling services.

An **inclusive labor market benefits not only individuals with disabilities but also society as a whole**. By embracing diversity and empowering all individuals, decision-makers can create a workforce that thrives on the unique talents and contributions of everyone.

In conclusion, by embracing the provided guidelines, decision-makers can make a significant impact on the lives of individuals with disabilities, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. Let us work together to ensure that every individual, **regardless of disability, has equal access to career development opportunities and the chance to achieve their dreams and lead fulfilling lives**.