



Accelerating Coaching and Counseling  
through e-Tools and innovative Training

## TRANSNATIONAL REPORT

**Situation and Needs of Counselling and Guidance Practitioners  
working with Hard-to-Reach Groups in Five European Countries**



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## Introduction

The integration of hard-to-reach groups into European labour markets is still a challenge. European countries are increasingly accepting migrants, refugees and asylum seekers; groups that can be classed as newer hard-to-reach groups, joining the existing long-term unemployed, early school leavers and NEETs. Career counselling, coaching and guidance practitioners are key agents in the integration of these groups into the European labour market and society by acting as change enablers in the unemployment-to-employment transition. Considering their major role in this challenging integration process, guidance practitioners need to constantly update their knowledge and the tools they use so that they can adapt to present professional realities.

In order to improve the daily work of these practitioners and satisfy their training needs, the ACCEnT project strives to make a significant contribution to the enhancement of the knowledge, qualifications and skills of guidance practitioners working with people at risk of exclusion. ACCEnT is a European project funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ Programme. The consortium of ACCEnT includes five partners coming from five different countries: the Innovation in Learning Institute (Friedrich Alexander University Erlangen-Nuremberg) from Germany, the Kansan Sivistystyön Liitto KSL ry (KSL) from Finland, the Galway and Roscommon Education & Training Board (GRETB) from Ireland, the European Board for certified Counselors (EBCC) from Portugal, and aspire-igen Group Ltd. from the United Kingdom. The first chapter of this transnational report focuses on defining and analysing the evolutionary trends of the above-mentioned hard-to-reach groups in the five European countries participating in the ACCEnT consortium. In the second chapter, the current state of career guidance and counselling with these hard-to-reach groups will be described, while the third and final chapter of the report presents the methodological outline and results of the empirical research conducted by the ACCEnT partnership. ACCEnT research was developed with the purpose to analyse the current situation and training needs of career counsellors, coaches and guidance practitioners working with hard-to-reach groups among the project partners, in addition to informing the structure and curriculum content of an innovative online training course, being developed for these guidance practitioners. This flexible e-Learning offer consists of four modules, providing (1) information, (2) counselling, coaching and communication skills for guidance practitioners, as well as (3) intercultural competences, and (4) the use of e-Tools in counselling and communication processes.

# 1. An Overview of Hard-to-Reach Groups in Five European Countries

“Hard-to-reach” is a term used to describe specific subgroups of the population that are difficult to access, involve and engage in particular services due to their personal circumstances, characteristics and behaviours, institutional relationships, physical and geographical location, social invisibility, cultural background and economic situation (Shaghagi et al., 2011). These groups may include ethnic or linguistic minorities, people with disabilities, young people, older people, people with low literacy levels, among others (Eltis, 2019).

Hard-to-reach groups are multifaceted by nature and typically under-represented in society, leading guidance practitioners and other professionals working with them to face major challenges in providing the appropriate support and building effective engagement with them. Within the various subgroups of the population who could be classified as hard-to-reach, this report will be focused on the following: early school leavers, NEETs, the long-term unemployed, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

## 1.1. Definition of early school leavers, NEETs, the long-term unemployed, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers

### Early School Leavers

The definition of early school leavers appears to be shared among the five European countries under analysis (Germany, Finland, Ireland, Portugal and the United Kingdom). Early school leavers can be defined as those between the ages of 18 and 24 who have only secondary education or less and are no longer in education or training. Early school leaving can take various forms, including “young people who have dropped out of school before the end of compulsory education, those who have completed compulsory schooling, but have not gained an upper secondary qualification, and those who have followed pre-vocational or vocational courses which did not lead to a qualification equivalent to upper secondary level” (European Commission, 2011). Early school leavers face a number of challenges, namely, and most importantly, leaving the educational system lacking the necessary qualifications. For instance, evidence shows that those who leave school early without progressing on to further education or training in Ireland “are twice as likely to be unemployed than another person aged 18-24 who is not an early school leaver” (Central Statistics Office, 2018).

## Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

Although there are many definitions to describe the NEET population, this report will refer to a definition that is commonly used in the European Union. It outlines NEETs as a sub-group of the population that is composed by young people aged between 15 and 24 years, and who meet the following two criteria: are not employed (unemployed or economically inactive according to the definition of the International Labour Organization); and have not received any education or training in the previous four weeks (Eurostat, 2018). The NEET phenomenon is thus a major social problem. They are known as "discouraged" and "inactive" young people because the education system does not look attractive to them and the labour market is not open to facilitate their integration (Eurofound, 2012; 2014; OECD 2016a).

## Long Term Unemployed

Long-term unemployment refers to individuals who are not employed and have been unemployed for 12 months or longer (Eurostat, 2018). Data from the ACCEnT national reports that were produced are in agreement that long-term unemployment tends to affect the most lowly-skilled individuals. As current labour market trends increasingly require certification and qualifications, integration into the labour market is difficult. Other factors that often tend to affect the long-term unemployed are mental health issues, making it a complex issue to address.

## Migrants

There are various ways of defining migrants, but this report will use the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs' definition of an international migrant as "someone who changes his or her country of usual residence, regardless of the reason for their migration or legal status". Therefore, a migrant can be understood as a person with a nationality other than that of the host country. Another way to define a migrant is someone who has changed their country of residence for at least one year. Nevertheless, a migrant is not difficult to reach per definition. Migrants can be seen as 'hard to reach' in some cases due to a lack of language skills, cultural diversity and difficulties in recognising professional skills.

## Refugees and Asylum Seekers

With regard to the definition of a refugee or asylum seeker, we will take into account United Nations' definition. Refugees can be described as people "who are outside their country of origin for fear of persecution, conflict, general violence or other circumstances that have seriously disrupted public order and who therefore need international protection" (United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees). Furthermore, according to the United Nations Refugee Agency, asylum seekers are people who seek international protection and whose applications for asylum have not yet been processed by the country to which they have travelled. As underlined by Amnesty International, "not every asylum seeker will be recognised as a refugee, but every refugee is initially an asylum seeker".

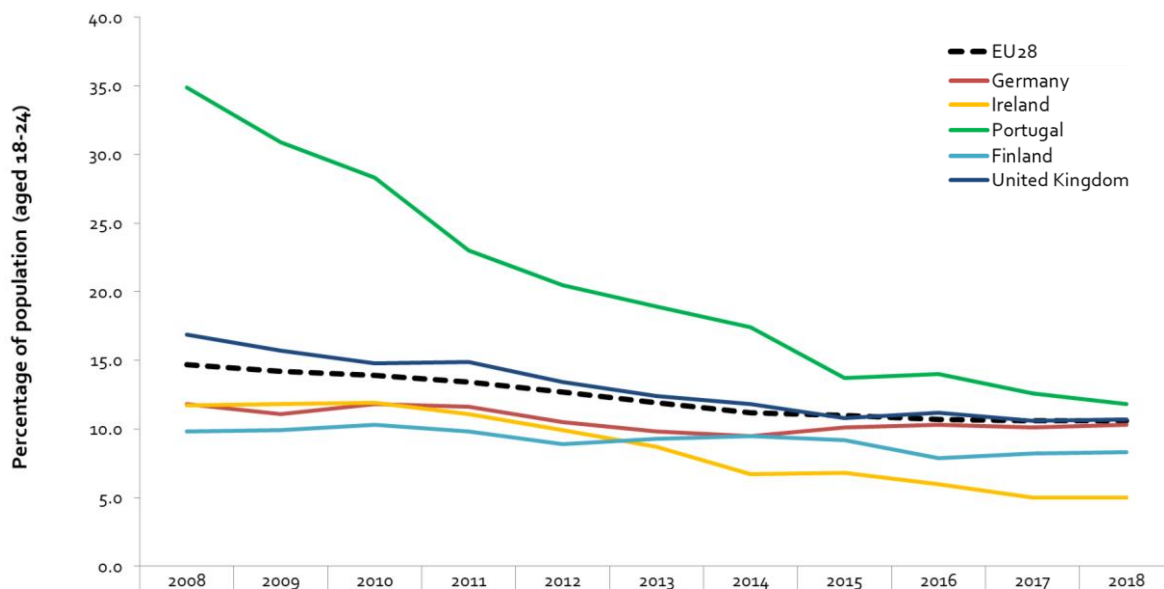
## 1.2. Evolutionary trends of hard-to-reach groups

After having briefly defined the hard-to-reach groups under analysis in this report, we will now look at their main statistical trends in the five European countries.

### Early School Leavers

As defined by the Eurostat (2019), the indicator measuring the early school leavers (ESL) is expressed as a percentage of the people aged 18 to 24 who have completed at most a lower secondary education and are not involved in further education or training out of the total population aged 18 to 24.

Graph 1: Early leavers from education and training in the European Union (%)



Source: Eurostat, own elaboration from database [edat\_lfse\_14]

During the last decade (2008-2018), a large reduction in early leavers from education and training rates among the EU-28 countries was observed from 14.7% to 10.6% (Graph 1). Nevertheless, early leavers' rates in 2018 remained very high in Portugal (11.8%), the United Kingdom (10.7%) and Germany (10.3%), especially when compared to the rates observed in Finland (8.3%) and Ireland (5%). The EU-28 share of early school leaving should not exceed 10% by 2020, in line



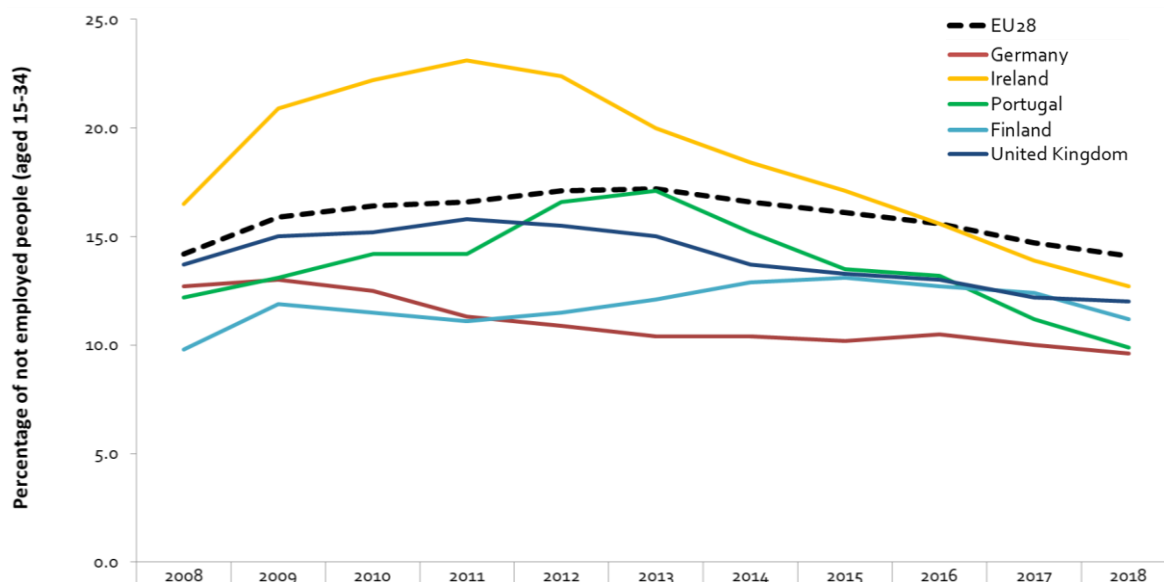
with the target to be achieved under the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (Eurostat, 2018).

According to a recent German report on vocational education and training (Berufsbildungsbericht, 2019), young people with lower educational and vocational qualifications are at greater risk of unemployment and even long-term unemployment, earning on average significantly less money than young people with higher vocational qualifications. In regard to other countries taking part in the ACCEnT project, the education quality in Finland is understood as a key factor when it comes to improving people's employability skills and their quality of life. Moreover, the completion of secondary education is a crucial achievement for the Finnish education policy. In contrast, Portugal has a high number of early school leavers who have been forced to leave school at an early age for a variety of reasons, such as poor living conditions, low income or a disadvantaged family background (DGERT, 2014).

### Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

As seen in Graph 2 below, NEET rates in the European Union (EU-28 countries) remain stable over the last decade (14.2% in 2008, 14.1% in 2018), regardless the fact that they have increased to 17.2% in 2013 due to the economic crisis.

Graph 2: Young people not in employment, education or training in the European Union (%)



Source: Eurostat, own elaboration from database [edat\_lfse\_20]

Among the analysed countries in Graph 2, Ireland registers the highest NEET rate (12.7% in 2018), followed by the United Kingdom (12%) and Finland (11.2%). The lowest NEET rates were observed in Portugal (9.9%) and Germany (9.6%) in 2018.

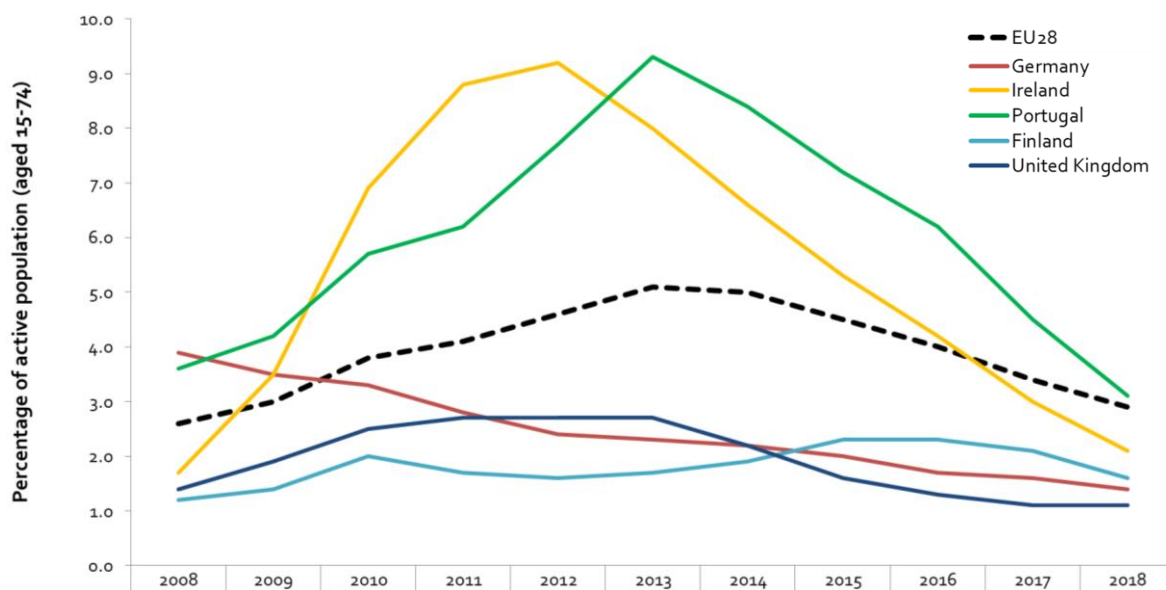


When young people are not in employment, education or training, this phenomenon has two implications: at a microeconomic level, NEETs are more likely to suffer from poverty, civic and social exclusion, while, at a macroeconomic level, they represent a considerable loss in terms of spare productive capacity and unused social benefits (Eurostat, 2018). For these reasons, it is very important to know more about who is at risk of becoming NEET. The risk of low-skilled young people becoming NEETs is three times higher than the risk of highly-skilled young people (Eurofound, 2012). This also affects young immigrants and descendants of immigrants, as well as people with disability and health issues (Silva, 2015).

### Long-Term Unemployed

The long-term unemployment rate is analysed in Graph 3 and refers to the percentage of long-term unemployed between 15 and 74 years old in relation to the percentage of working population from the same age, whether they are employed or unemployed.

Graph 3: Long-term unemployment in the European Union (%)



Source: Eurostat, own elaboration from database [une\_ltu\_a]

As seen in Graph 3, Portugal (3.1%) and Ireland (2.1%) were the two countries with the highest long-term unemployment rates in 2018 when compared to Finland (1.6%), Germany (1.4%) and the United Kingdom (1.1%). Ireland is, therefore, the only country under analysis with a long-term unemployment rate lower than the rate in the EU-28 area (2.9% in 2018). The risk of becoming long-term unemployed is high for people with so-called employment-inhibiting characteristics, such as being older and low skilled, which thus represent a major obstacle to placement on the labour market (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2017). Moreover, unemployment also seems to be

positively correlated with having unemployed parents or living in a single-parent family (Silva, 2015).

On a broader scale, it must also be noted that Germany has the third lowest general unemployment rate of 3.4% across the European Union (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2018). Additionally, Eurostat (2019) has recently estimated that 16 million people in the EU-28 were unemployed by February 2019. Compared to February 2018, unemployment fell down by 1.5 million people in the EU-28 and 1.2 million people in the Euro zone.

### Migrants

European immigration policy strives to promote the integration of immigrant citizens into the host society. We can verify in Table 1 below that Germany is the country registering in 2017 the highest number (917.1 thousand) of immigrants, followed by the United Kingdom (644.2 thousand) among the five European countries under analysis. With far fewer numbers of immigrants, we can find Ireland (78.5 thousand), Finland (31.8 thousand) and Portugal (36.6 thousand).

Table 1: Number of immigrants in five European Union countries (2017)

Country	Total number of immigrants	
	Thousand	Per 1 000 inhabitants
Germany	917.1	11.1
United Kingdom	644.2	9.8
Ireland	78.5	16.3
Portugal	36.6	3.6
Finland	31.8	5.8
<b>EU28</b>	-	<b>4.7</b>

Source: Eurostat, own elaboration from database [migr\_imm1ctzand migr\_pop1ctz]

The five European countries under analysis receive immigrants with multiple citizenship who seek good employment opportunities and better living conditions. There is a great heterogeneity of migrants in Germany, where Turkish people were the most represented group as of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018 (Eurostat, 2019). At that time, Polish people were the most prominent migrant group in the United Kingdom, where Pakistani and Bangladeshi people were also very important migrant communities. An interchangeable connection is seen between the UK and Ireland, so Ireland has mainly received migrants from Poland and the UK. As far as Portugal is concerned, one in each 25 residents is an immigrant, and most of the foreign populations hail from Portuguese-speaking countries such as Cape Verde and Brazil. Lastly, Estonians and Russians were the most significant foreign populations registered in Finland as of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018. According to the

European Migration Network and the Finnish Immigration Service (2018), the main reasons for the foreign populations to migrate to the country were family, employment, training and international protection.

### Refugees and Asylum Seekers

According to the available data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2019) in Table 2, Germany and the United Kingdom are the European countries showing the highest numbers of refugees (1,063,837 and 126,720, respectively) when compared to the other EU countries under analysis. Moreover, 456,000 job-seeking refugees were registered in Germany in December 2018, including almost 175,000 unemployed people (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2018). This is a very different reality from countries such as Finland (22,295), Ireland (6,041) and Portugal (2,136), where this hard-to-reach group was much less prevalent in 2018.

Table 2: Number of refugees and asylum-seekers in five European Union countries (2018)

Country of asylum/residence	Refugees	Asylum seekers
Germany	1,063,837	369,284
United Kingdom	126,720	45,244
Finland	22,295	3,290
Ireland	6,041	7,196
Portugal	2,136	85

Source: own elaboration from UNHCR/Governments (2019)

Germany and the United Kingdom are also the two European countries under analysis where more asylum seekers seek protection (369,284 and 45,244 in 2018), followed by Ireland (7,196), Finland (3,290) and Portugal (85). Moreover, citizens of 147 countries have applied for asylum for the first time in the European Union during the fourth quarter of 2018, with Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis being the three main citizens of the people seeking asylum (Eurostat, 2018).

## 2. Current State of Career Guidance and Counselling with Hard-To-Reach Groups in Five European Countries

The European economic crisis has affected businesses, increased the risk of exclusion for many people and caused instability in employment. Young people were particularly affected by the financial meltdown, with their career prospects placed under threat.

In response to the unemployment phenomenon among different groups, the European countries have attempted to design several education, training and employment policies. Career guidance, counselling and coaching has increasingly played a central role in these national policies due to its effectiveness in the development of appropriate skills and capabilities needed for successful career paths. Despite being focused on the individual, guidance has broader benefits at a societal level. Through its flexibility, counselling and coaching can help individuals to become more self-aware about their aspirations, providing them with a better understanding of their training needs and career prospects. These processes can be carried out in companies, local communities or schools, aiming to improve learning outcomes, knowledge transmission, productivity and innovation. In sum, career guidance, counselling and coaching practices are ultimately intended to help people and organizations adapting to atypical socioeconomic conditions (Cedefop, 2015). Within a much broad scope of career services, career counselling specialisation can be described as a two-way, impartial and flexible process. It responds to clients' needs and their desire to change by supporting them in decision-making processes and encouraging them to be more proactive (Prometheus, 2016). There is an urgent need to contextualize the practice of career counselling, so that it can be understood as an added value for individuals and for the society as a whole. It is, therefore, essential to take into consideration the positive impact of career counselling on the most disadvantaged population. Thus, we will address the current state of career counselling within the roles of guidance practitioners with the above-mentioned hard-to-reach groups and beyond in the ACCEnT partner countries.

### 2.1. Finland

One of the aims of guidance practitioners in Finland is to assist individuals in making decisions regarding their career management. According to the national Euroguidance centre (2019), "everyone in Finland is entitled to guidance and counselling services regardless of whether they are studying, working, unemployed or outside of the labour market". As observed in other European countries, the primary responsibility of these services falls on public institutions

(governmental administration and municipalities), which are responsible for educational, training and employability programmes. Education and training institutions are the two entities mainly responsible for guiding and advising students and youth, while employment services are primarily focused on those who are in need of career counselling, especially the unemployed.

Finland has been developing a strong, coherent and holistic lifelong guidance system which ensures that counselling is easily accessible to all individuals and appropriately delivered to satisfy their needs. This national lifelong guidance strategy sets out the objectives for a cooperative lifelong guidance provision. Moreover, the Finnish strategy strives for equal access to services, career management skills, guidance practitioners' competences, quality assurance and cooperation between different sectors of society (Euroguidance Finland, 2018).

## 2.2. Germany

The German guidance system provides access to education and career guidance services to all citizens at any stage of their lives. The provision of career guidance is traditionally based on the distinction between educational guidance and vocational guidance within the vocational training and employment sectors. The structure of guidance provision is reflected in German educational and employment systems, which have shared responsibilities between the federal government, the federal states and the municipalities, playing as well an important role in providing guidance services through their Adult Education Centres.

The Federal Employment Agency (also known as BA – Bundesagentur für Arbeit) is composed of more than 150 local employment agencies and vocational information centres, representing a key player in providing career guidance services. Additionally, educational institutions are responsible for guidance services in schools, offered throughout students' learning trajectories. In Germany, lifelong guidance is thus seen as fundamental in accordance to the lifelong learning paradigm (Euroguidance Germany, 2018).

German providers of public services, welfare organizations, and municipalities (through their social welfare offices) provide career counselling, work and training services funded by the Federal Agency. Advisory methods used in employment offices include programmes and services such as onsite individual counselling in order to understand clients' needs, determine further strategies and provide support or crisis intervention responses if the cases require immediate assistance (European Network on Youth Employment, 2010).

### 2.3. Ireland

Working in career services in Ireland requires careful attention to social contexts, educational qualifications and job requirements. Adult Educational Guidance Services (AEGS) are the public response providing career guidance directly to hard-to-reach groups. AEGS are managed by 16 Irish Education Training Boards, promoting guidance and information services on education and training, providing individual and group guidance to individuals over 16 years who are outside the formal education system and who wish to return to education and training. These services are aimed at helping young people, students and adult learners to be aware of the available options and make more informed decisions about educational opportunities and career possibilities. Ensuring the availability of inclusive educational guidance, counselling and coaching for adults at all stages of their career lifecycle is, thus, a goal to achieve. The provided services are free of charge and particularly focus on vulnerable groups, whose needs might require special attention. Career guidance, counselling and coaching in Ireland are provided at a national level through a variety of both private and state-funded bodies. Lifelong guidance services are indeed provided not only within the education and training sectors but also inside the labour market, requiring delivery approaches from practitioners that are tailored to their clients' target group. The National Centre for Guidance in Education takes on the responsibility of supporting and developing the guidance practice in Ireland, hosting the national Euroguidance Centre as well. According to the Irish Euroguidance Center, "information and guidance services in the Further Education and Training sector provide impartial careers and education information, one-to-one guidance and group guidance, which help people to make informed educational, career and life choices".

### 2.4. Portugal

As clearly outlined by the national Euroguidance centre (2018):

"career guidance has a long tradition in Portugal, going back to the first decades of the 20th century. Currently, guidance services are delivered by many players, in a wide variety of contexts, throughout the lifespan of the clients. Guidance, and counselling services are mainly organised under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Employment, Solidarity and Social Affairs".

Moreover, in Portugal it is possible to carry out free-of-charge public career guidance activities with people at risk of remaining long-term unemployed in order to promote their labour market integration. By doing so, the guidance process is seen as an opportunity to rethink life paths and readjust future career possibilities. For instance, there are psychology and guidance services in

schools, Qualifica centres, public employment services, career centres in universities, among others, providing systematic and complementary responses, which are adapted to their users' profile and the needs of each target group in Portugal

## 2.5. United Kingdom

England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are the four constituent nations of the United Kingdom, which have built their own systems of career services. England has a guidance system in place that is different from the systems in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Career services for young people in England are provided by schools, and they are responsible for informing, advising and mentoring their students. In addition, the National Careers Services provide guidance on learning, training and employment for adults.

The career services in Scotland (Careers Scotland), Wales (Careers Wales/Gyrfa Cymru) and Northern Ireland (Careers Service Northern Ireland) are similarly provided by private or charitable organizations receiving direct funding from central governments among these three countries. Youth career services are conducted at schools by private entities supporting young people, namely when they are transitioning from school into the labour market or seeking a career change. Adults are also covered by career services, which enable them to retrain for the jobs of the future and ensure that the guidance process is accessible throughout their lives.

As mentioned by the national Euroguidance centre (2018):

“In 2017, the UK Government’s new Careers Strategy set out its ambitions and plans to expand the quality and quantity of career provision for all ages. It highlights high-quality careers support, world class technical education and high-quality labour market information as key areas of investment, as well as outlining the crucial role of Government, employers, careers services, local authorities and other actors”.



### 3. Situation and Training Needs of Career Counsellors and Guidance Practitioners Working with Hard-To-Reach Groups in Five European Countries

#### 3.1. Methodological outline of the empirical research

The empirical research developed under the scope of the ACCEnT project entailed the use of quantitative and qualitative methods. Each project partner from Finland, Germany, Ireland, Portugal and the United Kingdom applied both methods while conducting the study during two months at a national level. This research aimed to understand the current situation of guidance practitioners working with hard-to-reach groups in these five European countries, as well as identify and better understand their main educational and training needs. In order to achieve these goals, two complementary data collection techniques were developed and translated into all five languages: an online survey that was launched on ILIAS Learning Management System, along with semi-structured interviews and related materials (an interview guide, a declaration of consent, among other guidelines) to guarantee participants' identity protection and the anonymity of their responses.

The quantitative data was collected through the ILIAS platform in February 2019, followed by the collection, audio-recording and partial transcription of the qualitative data which was gathered either in person, over the phone or via Skype during March 2019. All data was later subject to a country-specific analysis by each partner, and then all five national reports were integrated into this report to expand our developing knowledge about the present situation and needs of European guidance practitioners working with hard-to-reach groups.

In this chapter of the report, we will present the combined results of the empirical research carried out among the ACCEnT partnership after outlining its major limitation. The small sample size of the conducted study needs to be considered while interpreting the research results. Although the study is not representative of the population of guidance practitioners in the five European countries where the research was undertaken, it is still very useful to gain understanding of their professional situation, educational and training needs. Moreover, these results are considered to be a valid contribution for the ACCEnT online training course that is being designed to satisfy the educational needs of guidance practitioners helping people at risk of remaining long-term unemployed or socially excluded.

### 3.2. Who are they? Analysing guidance practitioners’ personal, educational and professional backgrounds, and identifying their clients’ characteristics

Guidance practitioners who participated in ACCEnT research were asked to fill in an online survey, and some of them were also invited to be interviewed.

Table 3: Sample size of guidance practitioners who participated in ACCEnT research, per country (number and %)

Country	Surveyed		Interviewed	
	n	%	n	%
Germany	11	13.1	4	21.1
Portugal	13	15.5	4	21.1
United Kingdom	14	16.7	4	21.1
Ireland	26	31.0	4	21.1
Finland	20	23.8	3	15.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As seen in Table 3, 84 guidance practitioners were surveyed in Germany, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Finland, in addition to 19 guidance practitioners who were interviewed about their working life with hard-to-reach groups. Despite some of the 84 survey respondents having dropped out before answering all questions, most of them did so at a later stage in the data collection process and are still considered to be part of the research sample. A higher percentage of guidance practitioners participating in the ACCEnT survey can be observed in Ireland (31%) and Finland (23.8%), when compared to those professionals from the United Kingdom (16.7%), Portugal (15.5%) and Germany (13.1%). More balanced is the national distribution of those involved in the qualitative part of the study, considering that four guidance practitioners were interviewed in all countries except Finland where three interviews were held.

#### Professionals’ Characteristics

Most of the guidance practitioners surveyed in the five European countries were female (77%), having only 19% of the respondents declared to be male, and 4% chose not to disclose their gender.

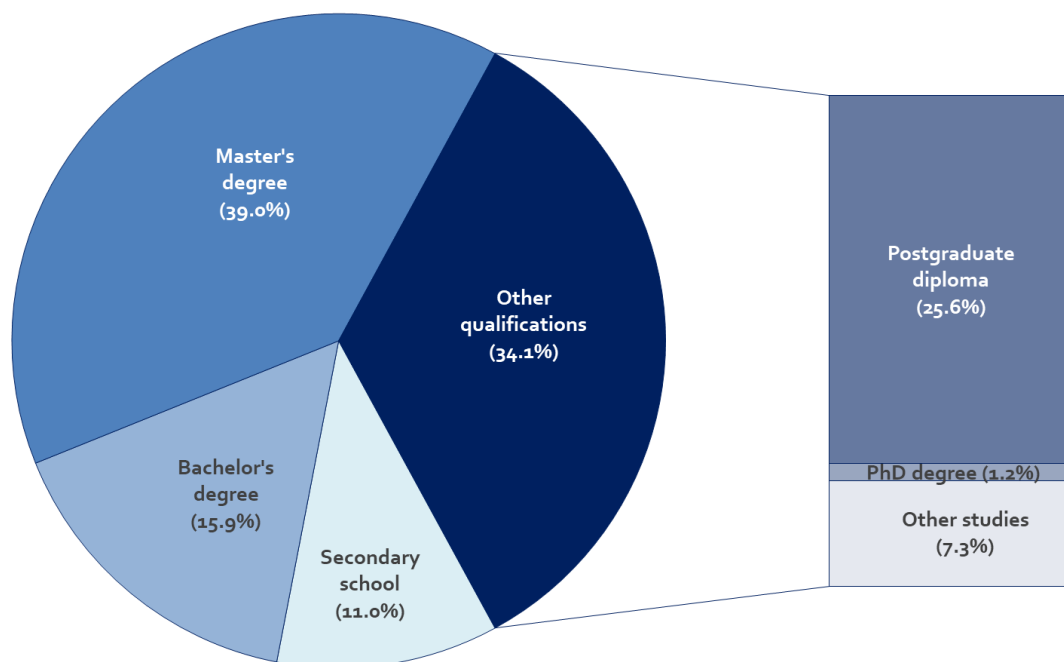
Regarding the age groups of ACCEnT survey respondents, 36.9% of them were aged between 41-50 years, and 35.7% of them were aged between 20-40 years, while 27.4% of those surveyed were aged 50 or older.

When the countries are compared, it must be noted that the surveyed guidance practitioners in the United Kingdom who are aged 50+ years represent 42.8% of the national sample. In contrast to the older guidance professionals surveyed in the UK, the younger respondents (aged 20-40 years) were located in Portugal and Germany (respectively 69.2% and 54.5% of the respondents from the national samples). Lastly, the majority of the surveyed Irish (50%) and Finnish (45%) guidance practitioners declared to be aged between 41-50 years, illustrating how variable the age of this type of professional is among the partnership.

### Qualifications and Professional Training

The survey results presented in Graph 4 also indicate that the majority of guidance practitioners working with hard-to-reach groups in the five European countries have Master's degrees (39%) in a wide range of subjects and areas such as Counselling and Guidance, Educational Guidance, Cultural Studies, Pedagogy and Social Pedagogy, among others.

Graph 4: Education levels of guidance practitioners (%)



34.1% of the survey participants declared to have other type of qualifications, mainly referring to postgraduate diplomas (specialized in Guidance, Career/Educational Guidance and Counselling, etc.) and other studies (focused on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy). The remaining guidance practitioners declared to have a Bachelor's degree (15.9%) or secondary education (11%).

When the education levels of the survey respondents are analysed by country, we note that the German sample is mainly composed of practitioners holding a Master's degree (81.8% of the

national sample). In Portugal, there is an equivalent portion of practitioners holding either a Master’s degree (38.5%) or a Bachelor’s degree (38.5%). Contrastingly, the majority of the surveyed guidance practitioners in the United Kingdom and Ireland declared other qualifications (78.7% and 54.2%, respectively), primarily linked to postgraduate counseling diplomas. Lastly, 40% of the surveyed Finnish practitioners declared the lowest educational background among the partnership, having no more than a secondary level qualification. This means that the survey respondents from Finland weren’t just counselling and guidance professionals, but also non-professionals with lower educational backgrounds who declared to be practicing without having received specific training or having a very little training as guides/counsellors. As far as professional training is concerned (see Table 4), the survey respondents have also declared an enormous variety of subject-specific, on-the-job and certified courses.

Table 4: Training, courses or seminars attended by guidance practitioners

<b>Subject-specific training</b>	<b>Expertise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-violent communication and counselling</li> <li>• Client-oriented and addictions counselling</li> <li>• Personal advice, adult and career guidance</li> </ul>	<b>On-the-job training</b>	<b>Capacity building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of job profiles and the labour market</li> <li>• Active labour market measures and employment support</li> <li>• Counselling at Job centre and Qualification centre</li> <li>• Guidance, recognition, validation and certification of competences at Qualify centres</li> </ul>	
	<b>Skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counselling, advisory and teaching pedagogical skills</li> <li>• Creative facilitation and mediation skills</li> <li>• Interpersonal skills (empowering interaction)</li> <li>• Interview skills (motivational interviewing)</li> <li>• Negotiation skills and group work strategies</li> </ul>		<b>Professionalization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workplace stewards on occupational safety and health</li> <li>• Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) practitioner</li> <li>• Adventure, theatre education and multicultural instructors</li> </ul>	
	<b>Specialisms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocacy and citizens’ information</li> <li>• Gender equality and men’s issues</li> <li>• Regional development and social diagnosis</li> <li>• Equality, diversity and social dialogue</li> <li>• People at risk of social exclusion and disengagement</li> <li>• Immigrant integration and refugee awareness</li> <li>• Vulnerable youth (NEETs) and dyslexia awareness</li> <li>• Mental health issues and suicide intervention</li> <li>• Conflict management and resolution</li> <li>• Human resources management (recruitment and selection, labour legislation)</li> </ul>		<b>Certified training</b>	<b>Adult education and training</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organised by the national agencies for employment, qualification and vocational training</li> </ul>
	<b>Approaches</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drama and empowering photography</li> <li>• Narrative approach to guidance interventions</li> <li>• Psychometric testing and solution-oriented methods</li> <li>• Competence-based qualification, teaching principles and assessment</li> <li>• Men's Shed information and systemic consulting</li> <li>• Work psychology, voluntary and social work</li> <li>• Family therapy and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)</li> </ul>			<b>Guidance and counselling</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organised by the chambers of industry and commerce, national institutes of guidance counsellors and national centres for educational guidance</li> <li>• Focused on information, advice, guidance, youth mental health and disability</li> </ul>
			<b>Coaching</b>			
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focused on personal, business and career coaching, coaching methods, and coaching for social intervention</li> </ul>			

The conducted interviews have also shown that guidance practitioners seek further training in diverse areas (Table 5), finding it useful for their daily work with hard-to-reach groups.

Table 5: Testimonies about training courses or seminars attended by guidance practitioners

<b>Germany</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Has repeatedly done further and advanced training such as <b>conversation skills, intercultural competences</b>. Has been in the profession since 1992 and has been doing further training courses every year since (if possible for the employer).”</li> </ul>
<b>Portugal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Yes, training held by the High Commissioner for <b>Migration</b>.”</li> </ul>
<b>United Kingdom</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “We have 5 CPD [Continuing Professional Development] opportunities a year where we get together, share information, as well as having guest speakers. A lot of the value is <b>networking</b>, so I can learn <b>people’s specialisms</b> and go to them if I am stuck with something.”</li> </ul>
<b>Ireland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “<b>Cognitive Behavioural Therapy</b> – class based.”</li> </ul>
<b>Finland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “At the moment, I’m participating in training on <b>narrative methods</b> as safe education environment and communality builders in a university of applied sciences.</li> <li>• I have been studying <b>special vocational qualification in Finnish and Roma’s minority cultural studies</b>. I’ve also studied <b>empowering photography</b> and <b>phenomenon-based learning</b>.”</li> </ul>

### Institutional and Professional Profile

Regarding the professional titles of surveyed guidance practitioners, Table 6 shows the tremendous diversity of job names that fall under the ‘guidance practitioner’ category.

Table 6: Professional titles of guidance practitioners

Germany	Portugal	United Kingdom	Ireland	Finland
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business coach</li> <li>• Career and job counsellor</li> <li>• Ecumenical unemployment counsellor</li> <li>• Education and vocational counsellor</li> <li>• Professional and life counsellor</li> <li>• Social pedagogue</li> <li>• State-certified business economist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Animators for labour market integration</li> <li>• Psychologist</li> <li>• Senior technician for labour market integration</li> <li>• Social worker and family therapist</li> <li>• Specialist in adult education and training</li> <li>• Specialist in social and solidary economy</li> <li>• Technician in social education</li> <li>• Technicians in guidance, recognition, validation and certification of competences</li> <li>• Training centre delegate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Careers advisor</li> <li>• Careers consultant</li> <li>• Careers, education, information, advice and guidance officer</li> <li>• Engagement advisor</li> <li>• Engagement coordinator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult education guidance counsellor</li> <li>• Adult education guidance counsellor and coordinator</li> <li>• Adult guidance counsellor</li> <li>• Further education and training guidance counsellor</li> <li>• Guidance counsellor and coordinators</li> <li>• Guidance counsellors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baker</li> <li>• Career counsellor</li> <li>• Chief shop steward, health and safety representative</li> <li>• Educational content producers</li> <li>• Educational planner</li> <li>• Experts</li> <li>• Lecturer</li> <li>• Officer</li> <li>• Regional secretary</li> <li>• Warehouse worker</li> </ul>

When job names are compared among the partnership, Irish, British and German guidance practitioners seem to have well-defined professional titles that are more aligned to the formal recognition of the career guidance, counselling and coaching profession than other countries such as Portugal and Finland. In the latter two countries, most of the survey respondents use only a small part of their working time in guidance, counselling and/or coaching activities, while

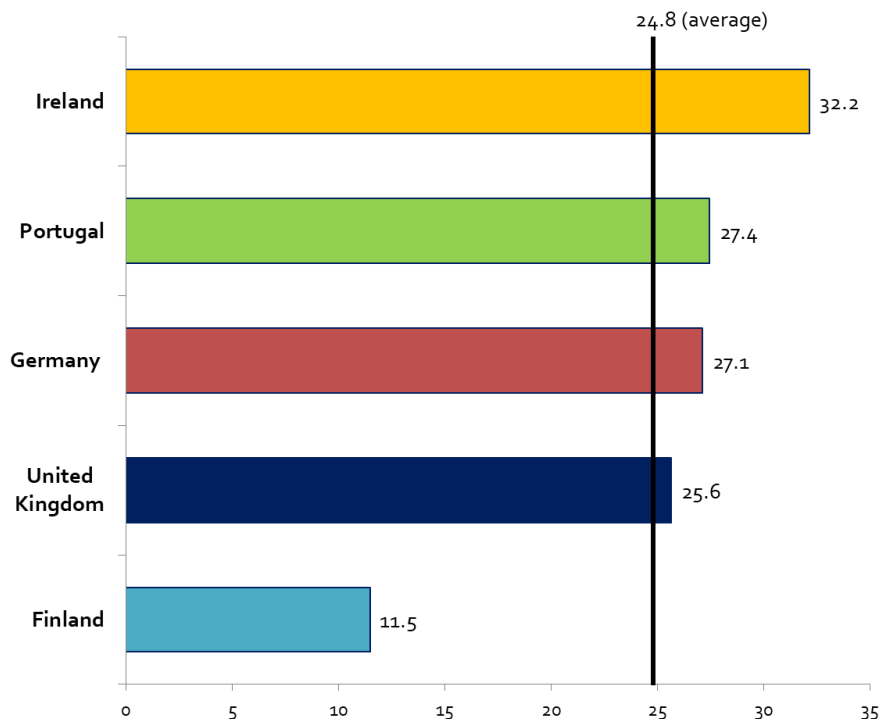
being mainly working as psychologists, social workers, technicians specialized in guidance, recognition, validation and certification of competences, educational content producers and planners, chief stewards, warehouse workers, bakers, among others.

The sample heterogeneity remains visible in relation to the type of organizations where guidance practitioners participating in the ACCEnT project work, varying from church and private institutions in Germany to vocational training centres, public employability offices and non-profit organizations in Portugal, information, advice and guidance offices in the United Kingdom, adult educational guidance services in Ireland, as well as educational institutes, trade union offices and food facilities in Finland. Our research sample indicates that career guidance, counselling and coaching are professional practices implemented across completely diverse institutions in the five European countries under analysis.

### Collaboration and Career Development of Hard-to-Reach Groups

Graph 5 below show that our sample works an average amount of 24.8 hours per week in career services.

Graph 5: Average number of weekly hours worked in career guidance, counselling and coaching with hard-to-reach groups, per country

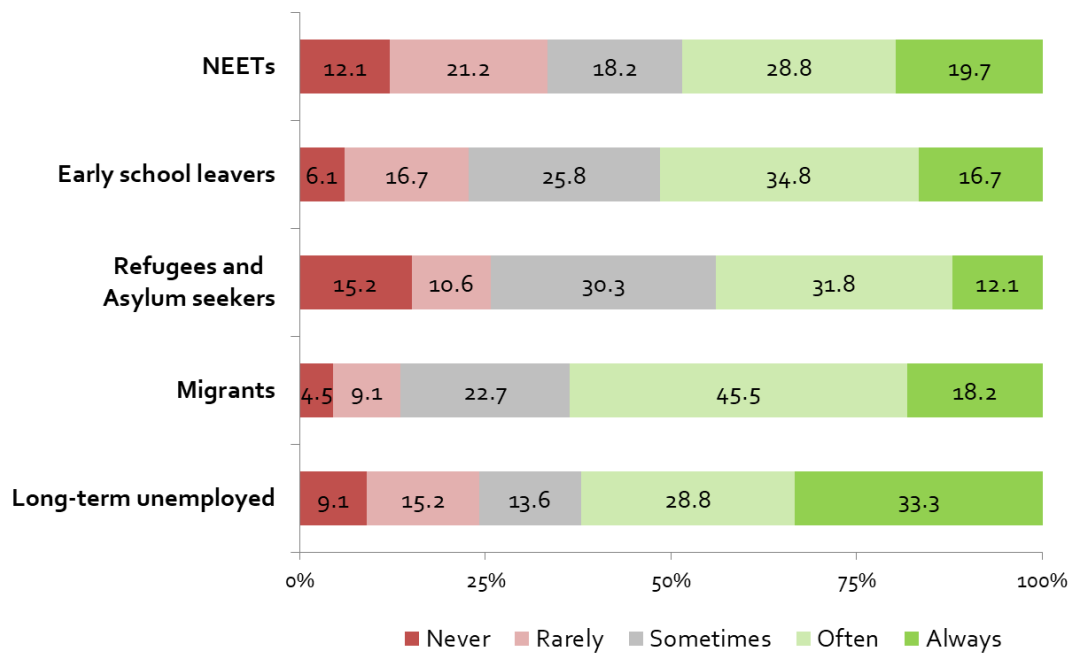


Apart from the surveyed guidance practitioners in Finland (11.5h), all the remaining practitioners reported more than the average amount of working hours with hard-to-reach groups in Ireland (32.2h), Portugal (27.4h) and Germany (27.1h). This leads us to conclude that, instead of working

exclusively in this area, guidance practitioners perform their roles on a part-time basis while developing other professional activities.

Regarding the frequency with which the surveyed guidance practitioners work with hard-to reach-groups, the collected data indicates that most of them do so very often (Graph 6). If each group is individually considered, these practitioners located in five European countries work more frequently with migrants (63.7% work with them either ‘always’ or ‘often’) and long-term unemployed (62.1%), followed by school leavers (51.5%) and NEETs (48.5%). The hard-to-reach groups with whom guidance practitioners expressed least professional contact are refugees and asylum seekers: 25.8% of the survey respondents have either ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ worked with these vulnerable people.

Graph 6: Frequency with which guidance practitioners declare to work with hard-to-reach groups (%)



### Clients' Characteristics

Regarding the gender of the population with whom guidance practitioners work with the most, there seems to be a balance between female (45.5%) and male (43.9%) clients as expressed by the surveyed guidance practitioners, regardless the fact that 10.6% of them have not disclosed this information.

However, there are major differences between the countries under analysis if clients' gender is taken into consideration. The surveyed Irish (73.7%) and Portuguese (53.8%) guidance practitioners work with female clients the most, in contrast to the German (77.8%), Finnish (55.6%) and Portuguese (30.8%) guidance practitioners who declared to work mostly with the



male population. Although all the surveyed professionals in the United Kingdom declared to work mostly with male clients, this doesn't mean that they don't work with female clients, simply that there is a higher demand for these services among male clients.

Guidance practitioners participating in the ACCEnT survey were also invited to provide information about their clients' age. Most of those asked work the most with clients aged 18-40 years (61.5%) or over 40 years (29.2%), while 9.3% of the respondents expressed more work experience with people under the age of 18.

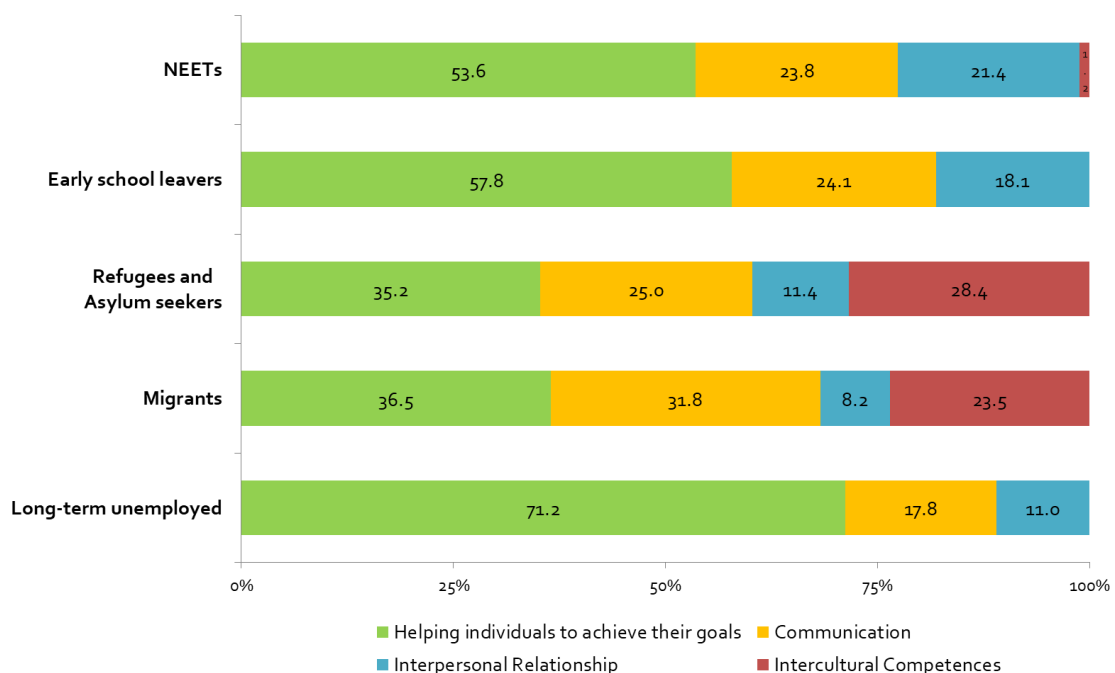
This trend is confirmed by the analysis of clients' age per country, except in the United Kingdom where the majority of the surveyed guidance practitioners (57.1%) work with clients under 18 years old. Despite a predominance of clients aged between 18 and 40 years old in the practice of the surveyed guidance practitioners in four out of five European countries, there is also a high proportion of older clients (over 40 years) with whom they work in Finland, Portugal and Ireland.

### 3.3. What are guidance practitioners' working difficulties, challenges, and training needs?

#### Working Difficulties and Challenges

Helping individuals to achieve their goals was the difficulty experienced most by surveyed guidance practitioners in the five European countries, regardless of the hard-to-reach group they work with.

Graph 7: Most difficulties experienced by guidance practitioners working with hard-to-reach groups (%)



By studying these difficulties in detail, Graph 7 above shows that guidance practitioners commonly express a higher difficulty in helping the long-term unemployed (71.2%), early school leavers (57.8%) and NEETs (53%) to achieve their goals, than migrants (36.5%), refugees and asylum seekers (36.5%). The latter two hard-to-reach groups naturally seem to pose more communicational and skill-based challenges for the survey respondents. Thus, the surveyed guidance practitioners expressed higher communication difficulties with migrants (31.8%), refugees and asylum seekers (25%), having also declared a greater lack of intercultural competences while working with them (23.5% and 28.4%, respectively). Lastly, NEETs and early school leavers were the two hard-to-reach groups with whom the survey respondents faced more interpersonal relationship barriers (21.4% and 18.1% of respondents, respectively).

When asked to think of the major challenges encountered in their professional practice with hard-to-reach groups (Table 7), the interviewed guidance practitioners outlined associated problems, such as legal issues (directly linked to the refugees), lack of information and engagement, demotivation and poor language skills.

Table 7: Testimonies about major challenges faced by guidance practitioners working with hard-to-reach groups

<b>Germany</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Which residence permit does a refugee have (are they recognized or not)? If they are recognized, they have <b>more prospects</b> and <b>less fear</b>. Non-recognized refugees have more <b>anxiety</b>. They want to find an apprenticeship, no matter in which field. Open questions are here: <b>What status does a person have, what perspectives does it offer?</b>”</li> </ul>
<b>Portugal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The major work challenges are the <b>demotivation</b> and the <b>low level of information</b> to engage the individuals and reach these groups.”</li> </ul>
<b>United Kingdom</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “<b>Engagement</b>. If they are forced to do something, then how do you <b>overcome those barriers</b> and help them recognize that you are actually <b>trying to help?</b>”</li> </ul>
<b>Ireland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Reaching people, trying to show people <b>the value of guidance</b>, to <b>listen to them</b> to ask “what do you <b>want?</b>”</li> </ul>
<b>Finland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “In training I find it hard to cover <b>societal issues</b> in the group because <b>language skills</b> are so low.”</li> </ul>

### Training Needs and Professionals’ Motivation

As seen in Table 8, the use of e-Tools in the career guidance process was the main area in which the surveyed practitioners (21.9%) identified having more training needs. The second and third training needs mostly felt by the survey respondents were related to core elements of their own practice, such as coaching methods (21.3%) and career development models (16.4%). The acquisition of psychological knowledge and intercultural competences, along with strategies to help individuals achieving their goals, were the three areas where training was deemed less needed by the survey respondents. Nevertheless, Irish and Finnish guidance practitioners identified other areas in which they would like to receive more training, such as: local employment

opportunities, learning difficulties, educational pathways for migrants, and rights and entitlements of asylum seekers.

Table 8: Areas in which guidance practitioners working with hard-to-reach groups declare to need more training (number of responses to *multiple choice* question and %)

Ranking	Areas of Needed Training	Nr. of responses	%
1 <sup>o</sup>	Using e-Tools in career/vocational guidance, counselling and/or coaching process	40	21.9
2 <sup>o</sup>	Coaching methods	39	21.3
3 <sup>o</sup>	Career development models	30	16.4
4 <sup>o</sup>	Psychological knowledge	24	13.1
5 <sup>o</sup>	Intercultural competences	23	12.6
6 <sup>o</sup>	Helping individuals to achieve their goals	21	11.5
7 <sup>o</sup>	Other areas	6	3.2
<b>Total</b>		<b>183</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The personal testimonies outlined in Table 9 also reflect the previously mentioned key areas in which training is mostly needed by the guidance practitioners taking part in ACCEnT research for them to better work with hard-to-reach groups.

Table 9: Testimonies about the main areas in which more training is needed by guidance practitioners working with hard-to-reach groups

<b>Germany</b>	• “E-Tools. It would be great to get a definition and get examples demonstrated.”
<b>Portugal</b>	• “IT competences are very important nowadays. Coaching is also a very important approach.”
<b>United Kingdom</b>	• “Psychological training is not always covered and it is important to understand that people learn in different ways.”
<b>Ireland</b>	• “Guidance and counseling methods along with coaching are key areas to the work.”
<b>Finland</b>	• “I think coaching skills and e-Tools would make counselling easier... if I knew how to use them properly. Maybe other people think so, too?”

In regard to the motivation of the surveyed guidance practitioners to seek further training, the results presented in Table 10 below show us that there are three main reasons contributing to this professional investment: the desire to acquire new knowledge, the need to overcome skill gaps, and the urge to adapt to emerging changes in their client base (each reason was chosen by 17.5% of the respondents). An eighth of the respondents were still motivated to search for training as a way to promote their personal and career development, improve their job performance and obtain a professional specialisation. Only a few survey participants either mentioned a change in their working conditions as a reason to pursue further training or gave other reasons.

Table 10: Motivations of guidance practitioners to seek training  
(number of responses to *multiple choice* question and %)

Ranking	Motivations to Seek Training	Nr. of responses	%
1 <sup>o</sup>	Acquisition of new knowledge	41	17.5
	Solving/overcoming an identified skills gap	41	17.5
	Adaptation to emerging changes in client base	41	17.5
2 <sup>o</sup>	Personal or career development	36	15.4
3 <sup>o</sup>	A need to always be better at my job	33	14.1
4 <sup>o</sup>	Specialization in a specific area	27	11.5
5 <sup>o</sup>	Change in working conditions	12	5.1
6 <sup>o</sup>	Other motivations	3	1.3
<b>Total</b>		<b>234</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### 3.4. What is the identified learning content and preferred learning environment for training? The challenge of using e-Tools in the counselling/coaching processes

#### Training Content, Type and Structure

When the surveyed guidance practitioners were asked to specify what contents they would like to be trained on (see Table 11 below), most of them referred to operational tools and resources as well as intervention strategies (33.6% of the respondents mentioned each category), followed by methodological approaches (28.4%) in working with hard-to-reach groups. Other training content was suggested by the surveyed Portuguese, British and Irish guidance practitioners, including the following topics: cognitive and behavioural theories; school dropout prevention techniques; customised approaches to deal with refugees and asylum seekers; mechanisms to overcome the difficulty in meeting clients' educational/training needs and accessing them if located in remote areas.

Table 11: Contents that guidance practitioners working with hard-to-reach groups would like to explore in the training course (number of responses to *multiple choice* question and %)

Ranking	Training Contents	Nr. of responses	%
1 <sup>o</sup>	Operational tools and resources (e.g. Group dynamics)	39	33.6
	Intervention strategies (e.g. Conflict management)	39	33.6
2 <sup>o</sup>	Methodological approaches (e.g. Career development models)	33	28.4
3 <sup>o</sup>	Other content	5	4.4
<b>Total</b>		<b>116</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Aside from the training content, the guidance practitioners working with hard-to-reach groups were invited to share their preferences about the type of training to be developed.

Most of the surveyed guidance practitioners expressed their preferences for blended learning (38.4%) and e-Learning (21.2%), followed by other types of training such as onsite learning environments which were preferred by 16.2% of the respondents. The online workshop and the video podcast were the two least preferred training structures among the survey respondents (respectively chosen by 14.1% and 10.1% of those asked). Worth mentioning as well are the national differences regarding the preferred type of training. On the one hand, surveyed guidance practitioners working with hard-to-reach groups in Finland, Ireland and the United Kingdom confirmed the main trend while expressing their preferences for blended learning (71.4%, 40.6% and 37.5% of the national samples, respectively). On the other hand, the guidance practitioners located in Germany (72.7%) and Portugal (31.8%) declared to prefer an e-Learning environment for training purposes.

Moreover, the entire sample indicated its preference for e-Learning training designed step-by-step (50.5%), including quizzes (26.9%) and requiring adherence to deadlines (16.1%) as well as other types of structures (6.5%). As suggested by some Irish and Finnish guidance practitioners taking part in the survey, other type of e-Learning training structures might include multiple threads, a combination of virtual and face-to-face interaction with other learners, along with an opening session plan that suits learners' progression and is adapted to it (available for each person at a certain time).

### Training Schedule, Length, Frequency and Information

More general aspects of the training course were also subject to guidance practitioners' assessment. Regarding the training schedule, 67.9% of the survey respondents preferred to receive training during working hours instead of doing so on weekends (16.7%) or after work (15.4%). Additionally, the majority of the surveyed guidance practitioners also expressed their preference for short training sessions rather than longer ones. Therefore, most of them would like each session to last about 45 minutes (57.5%) instead of two hours (32.9%) or three hours (6.8%). From the other (2.7%) two training length suggestions made by the surveyed German and Finnish guidance practitioners, we can also attest a preferred short duration for these sessions, which should last up to 30 minutes or an hour maximum.

Along with training sessions of a shorter duration, the collected survey data shows that guidance practitioners would like to attend such courses either once a week (30.8%), bimonthly (29.5%) or monthly (20.5%). The preferred low training frequency is also explained by the fact that only

17.2% of the survey respondents considered the option of attending them twice a week or during another time frame (1.3%).

Lastly, most of the guidance practitioners surveyed in preferred to receive training information by email (63.2%) instead of receiving it through their social networks (15.2%), along with newsletters (11.4%), or looking for it on the ACCEnt project website (8.9%). Only 1.3% of the survey respondents suggested other options to be informed about training courses.

## Conclusion

Based on the empirical research conducted among the ACCEnT partnership, guidance practitioners are highly interested and motivated to undertake training in order to develop new skills and acquire practical tools to better interact with a wide range of hard-to-reach groups with whom they work.

Addressing the educational and training needs of practitioners is undoubtedly a priority for the ACCEnT project. The training needs of the research participants are mostly focused on the use of e-Tools, followed by coaching methods and career development models. Therefore, our transnational research study outlined the importance of developing a training program with content such as operational tools/resources, intervention strategies and methodological approaches in working with hard-to-reach groups.

Throughout this report, it was possible to conclude that working with hard-to-reach groups presents challenging issues for guidance practitioners, who sometimes work in an isolated and unsupported context (peripatetically). In this way, it is understood that a training program that allows guidance practitioners to get involved with other practitioners and that has available support will always be an added value.

Regarding the motivation to carry out training, ACCEnT empirical research indicates guidance practitioners' desire to acquire new knowledge, the need to solve/overcome skill gaps and the urge to adapt to emerging changes in their client base. It was also clear that although practitioners may work with a type of group that is difficult to reach, not all of them work with all groups, so they will have a high level of knowledge of some groups and a limited knowledge of others. Because professionals have very different experiences both in terms of years of practice and level of contact with different hard-to-reach groups, it would be beneficial to have a training programme with content with varying levels of complexity.

The most general aspects of the training course design and structure refer to practitioners' preferences for blended-learning, during working hours, and consisting of short training sessions (lasting between 45 and 60 minutes) once a week or bimonthly, so a flexible training environment where a variety of different topics at varying levels of difficulty can be explored is preferred.

To conclude, the course must be updated and socially contextualised in order to meet the real needs expressed by guidance practitioners in their practice.

It is therefore suggested that the content and activities of a training program take into account dynamic tools and practices applicable to guidance practitioners who will carry out the training program and will be empowered from it. It may be beneficial for the training program to be multi-



level and formatted in modules. This would allow the course to be fully adapted to the level of experience of each individual user, allowing them to better adapt to it. The possibilities and benefits of e-Tools in the guidance process should be taken into account.

The ultimate goal of such a training program would then be to help those involved in career services to improve their daily work and feel better equipped to help individuals who are hard-to-reach.

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