



Accelerating Coaching and Counseling
through e-Tools and innovative Training

NATIONAL REPORT

Ireland

**Situation and Needs of Counselling and Guidance
Practitioners/Coaches working with Hard-to-
Reach Groups in Ireland**



gretb

Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna
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I. Executive Summary

In a review of Guidance Counselling provision in Ireland completed by Indecon in its recommendations they state that “Ireland exhibits a number of features of an effective, lifelong and life-wide career guidance system. The evidence assembled as part of this independent review, however, suggests that significant gaps exist. There is an urgent need ... to make much greater use of technology blended with other guidance supports in providing career guidance”¹. So the timing on this ERASMUS+ project ACCEnT is very timely.

This national report will explore the target group of "hard-to-reach" and the guidance counsellor system in Ireland. After a short definition of the target group and the adult guidance system in Ireland, the data collected from 28 questionnaires and four interviews with guidance counsellors are analysed. The aim is to provide an overview of the current situation, challenges and needs of guidance professionals in order to develop a tailor-made online platform to train guidance professionals for the ERASMUS+ project ACCEnT

1. Context and Background of hard-to-reach groups in Ireland

1.1. Main characteristics of hard-to-reach groups and career guidance

The main characteristics of hard to reach groups in an Irish context is very broad. Using the term hard to reach groups in Ireland usually refers to those who are often experiencing poverty, social exclusion, rural isolation, underemployment and often deprivation of some shape or form. The hard to reach group category in an Irish context

¹ (Indecon International Research Economists, April 2019)

also includes additional groups such as rural farmers, ethnic minorities such as travellers and Roma populations, as well as those with mental health difficulties, addiction issues, those in receipt of disability and/or one parent families payments and well as those who live in rural areas with little or no access to transport, childcare or opportunities in their area.

A lot of the hard to reach groups are characterised with similar attributes such as early school leaving, low levels of educational attainment often presenting with reading or writing difficulties, lack of work experience/work history and are very removed from the labour market. In addition, they typically have not engaged in education, training or upskilling in recent years and they are often in long-term receipt of social welfare payments. Increasingly, the hard to reach groups also include those where English is not their first language. For the purpose of this National Report of Ireland the focus is on the hard to reach group that includes early school leavers, those not in employment, education or training, long-term unemployed, migrant population and asylum seekers and refugees.

To work in guidance in different settings, qualifications and other criteria vary according to the requirements of the role and the employer. Guidance services in the educational sector are based in post-primary schools, higher and further education colleges and through adult and second chance education programmes. Within the Further Education and Training (FET) sector the Adult Educational Guidance Services are the public service that provide a professional guidance service directly to hard to reach groups. The Adult Educational Guidance Services (AEGS) are managed by the 16 Education Training Boards (ETBs) in Ireland. The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) coordinates and supports the development of the Adult Educational Guidance Services on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills in conjunction with SOLAS.

The ETB AEGS provide a professional, impartial careers and education information, one-to-one guidance and group guidance, to those over the age of 16 years who are out of the formal education system who wish to return to education and training, and/or are already registered on a FET programme within the ETBs to make informed educational, career and life choices. “The other objectives are to ensure there is integrated and

inclusive adult educational guidance counselling, available at all stages of the career life cycle (including pre-entry and pre-exit) and that services be offered free of charge to target groups which include the above and, disadvantaged men and women, lone parents, those with caring responsibilities, travellers, homeless people, substance misusers, ex-offenders, people with disabilities, people for whom English is not their mother tongue and former residents of designated education institutions and eligible family members”.²

There are a range of other roles within the Further Education and Training Services of the Education and Training Boards that work in a Guidance/Advocate capacity with hard to reach groups. These include guidance counsellors working in Secondary Schools, Colleges of Further Education. Post Leaving Cert colleges (PLC’s) and Advocates in Youthreach/Community Training Centre, Adult and Community Education, Youth Information, Back to Education Initiatives (BTEI) and Prison Services.

Within the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) under the Pathways to Work Strategy there have been significant changes to services to help unemployed jobseekers return to work. These have included the rollout of the Intreo service, a single point of contact for all employment and income supports, client profiling, the introduction of the JobsPlus employment incentive scheme and a series of

² (Indecon International Research Economists, April 2019)

labour market activation programmes. The DEASP case officers working in Intreo Services are publicly funded and work in a guidance capacity with hard to reach groups that are long-term unemployed.

There are a range of other services supported by DEASP that work directly with the unemployed and hard to reach groups in a guidance capacity including Jobs Club and Local Employment Services. These are publicly funded not for profit organisations. One of the strategies under the Pathways to Work Programme was the contracting of placement services for the long-term unemployed under the JobPath programme. The JobPath programme contract was won by two private companies services east and west of the country that work in a guidance capacity to assist long-term unemployed gain employment.

1.1.1. Definition of hard-to-reach groups: early school leavers, long-term unemployed people, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers

The legal definition of early school leaving in Ireland according to the Education (Welfare) ACT 2000³ is understood to mean the non-attendance in school of a young person before they reach the age of 16 years or before completing three years post-primary education, or whichever is later. However, the common definition of early school leaving refers to those that leave school without achieving a minimum of five passes in the Leaving Certificate or equivalent qualification. “Early leavers from education and training denotes the percentage of the population aged 18 to 24 having attained at most, lower secondary education and not being involved in further

³ (Education (Welfare) Act 2000, 2000)

education or training.”⁴ The early school leaving group are very similar to the Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs) hard to reach group as both cover the same age range. The main difference that distinguish the two hard to reach groups in Ireland is that early school leavers are identifiable by the lower level of education achieved.

There are many definitions used for the NEETs population but “in broad terms, the definition of a NEET within the EU and Ireland is an individual not in employment, education or training who is between 15 and 24 years of age”.⁵ The term long-term unemployed in Ireland refers to someone over the age of 18 and under 65 years of age who is capable of work and is in receipt of an unemployment assistance payment/signing for credits with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection for 12 months or longer.

There is number of ways of defining migrants in Ireland and a variety of definitions are used. One is based on their place of birth so anyone who is born outside of the Republic of Ireland is a migrant. This is how both the United Nations and the OECD identify migrant groups. Another way “defines migrants based on nationality, which is a more common measure in Europe. Using this definition, a migrant is anyone with a nationality other than Irish”.⁶ There is a third way that migrants are defined which is that it refers to someone who has changed their country of residence for at least a year. All these definitions are used to in order to account for migrants in Ireland

⁴ (Eurostat, 2019)

⁵ (Pobal, 2017)

⁶ (RTE, 2019)

and the broadest definition that includes to anyone changed their country of residence for longer than a year is the preferred option for this report.

Asylum seekers are people who have come to Ireland to seek protection as refugees and are waiting for a decision on their application. “They are legally entitled to stay in the state until their application for protection is decided”.⁷ A refugee is anyone who cannot return to their country of origin for fear of persecution for one of the following five reasons: Race, Religion, Nationality, Membership of a particular social group or political opinion. Refugees are entitled to be protected against forcible return to their countries of origin.⁸

1.1.2. Recent situation, numbers, evolution and trends in Ireland

The numbers of early school leavers in Ireland has drastically decreased in the past 20 years with more students staying in school to complete higher secondary and/or progressing on to further education and training and/or to third level education. In 2008 the figure for early school leaving in Ireland stood at just above the EU average of 10.6%, by 2016 it had lowered significantly to just above 6% and it lowered again in 2017 to 5%⁹ Those who leave school early who do not progress on to further education and training of some form “are twice as likely to be unemployed than another person aged 18--24 who is not an early school leaver”¹⁰

⁷ (Irish Refugee Council , none)

⁸ (Irish Refugee Council , none)

⁹ (Social Justice Ireland , 2019)

¹⁰ (Central Statistics Office, 2018)

“Just under one in six (15.9%) young people aged 18-24 in Ireland in 2016 was neither in employment nor in education and training, (the NEET rate)”¹¹. The average NEET rate in the EU was 15.2% with the highest in Italy at 26% to the lowest in the Netherlands of 6.1%. Although the economy continues to recover, we still have a large number of those aged between 18 years and 24 years of age not engaging in employment, education or training. Also what is significant is the link with the early school leavers group as “one-third of Irish NEETs are early school leavers”.¹²

The long-term unemployment rate in Ireland in the third quarter of 2018 was 2.10% where the EU average stood at 3.50%. This rate of long-term unemployed overall in Ireland has lowered drastically from the highest of 9.80% in the first quarter of 2012 to a record low of 1.20% in the second quarter of 2001. The average rate of long-term unemployed in Ireland over the last 25 years was around 3.99%¹³.

The Migrant population in Ireland has changed drastically in the last 20 years. In 2002 and 2006 the percentage of persons with non-Irish nationality increased significantly from 6% to 10%¹⁴ and in 2016 it has continued to 18.7%. There is however no registration of the migrant population in Ireland currently as only non-European Economic Area (EEA) migrants are required to register in order to obtain VISA and employment permits. “This means that most migrants – around three quarters – are not regularly counted”.¹⁵ The Census provides the most reliable figures on the migrant population in Ireland currently, but only at five-year intervals. The Central

¹¹ (Central Statistics Office, 2018)

¹² (Pobal, 2017)

¹³ (Trading Economics, 2019)

¹⁴ (FOCUS MIGRATION, 2010)

¹⁵ (Éamonn Fahey, March 2019)

Statistics Office (CSO) reported in April 2016, that there were 535,475 non-Irish nationals living in Ireland which was a decrease of 1.6% from the 2011 census. This decline can be explained by the rise in the number of those with dual Irish nationality in the 2016 census which increased by 87.4% to 104,784. In total persons from nearly 200 different countries are living in Ireland with the highest numbers coming from Poland, UK, Lithuania, Romania, Latvia and Brazil.

Using the different definitions of migrants used in Ireland shows the difference in how migrants are counted, and how with the preferred definition, those living outside Ireland for a year, is the preferred definition as it gives us a figure that 18.7% of our total population are migrants. “The 2016 Census counted 535,475 non-Irish nationals, 810,406 people born outside Ireland, and 888,899 had who lived outside Ireland for a year. The lowest number is 11.2% of the total population; the highest number is 18.7% of the total population. That’s a big difference.”¹⁶

The numbers of people applying for international protection status (asylum seekers/refugees) in Ireland has increased year on year “in 2017, a total of 2,926 applications for international protection status were submitted to the International Protection Office (IPO)”¹⁷ 3,673 new applications were received in 2018. There is a backlog of interviews so the length of time on decisions on application can be anything up to two years or more. Also, applicants have the right to appeal a refusal which also extends the period of time asylum seekers are resident in the Ireland

¹⁶ (RTE, 2019)

¹⁷ (Sheridan, 2018)

while awaiting their status. Additionally, in Ireland in February 2018 the supreme court ruled that it was unconstitutional to refuse asylum seekers the right to work.

2. Career Guidance, Counselling and Coaching with hard-to-reach groups in Ireland

The survey was conducted with the help of the Learning Management System (LMS) ILIAS. Using an integrated tool, ILIAS surveys can be published among users and evaluated anonymously. In Ireland, twenty-eight Guidance Counsellors working in Adult Educational Guidance Services filled out the questionnaire, in addition four Guidance Counsellors agreed to partake in either a face to face interview in person or over the telephone by means of semi-structured interviews. One of the limitations of this research is that the online surveys and the semi structured interviews were completed only with professional guidance counsellors working within the Adult Educational Guidance Services and not with the range of professionals employed in a guidance capacity working with hard to reach groups. Due to the size and heterogeneity of the interviewees, no representative statement can be made about the population of career guidance counsellors in Ireland. Individual statements by the interviewees are intended to highlight important results for the development of the ACCEnT online format.

2.1. Personal, Educational and Professional Background

This section of the National Report will go through the data that was collected through the online survey and semi structured interview completed by guidance counsellors working in Adult Educational Guidance Services in Ireland and will highlight the current situation and their experience of working with hard to reach groups in Ireland.

2.1.1. Professionals' Characteristics

From the responses to the survey the gender distribution of respondents weighed very heavily towards female guidance counsellors with over 92.31% female and only 7.69% of respondent's male. 50% of those who responded were aged between 41 years and 50 years of age. With just over 23% aged between 31 years and 40 years of age and nearly 27% aged between 51 years and 60 years of age.

2.1.2. Qualifications and Professional Training

Over 54% of those who responded to the survey held a qualification at Postgraduate Diploma level and over 45% had a Degree at Master's Level completed. The type of qualifications completed at both these levels is reflective of the profession of Guidance and Counselling in Ireland. All held a qualification in the field of Career Guidance, Guidance Counselling, Adult Guidance and Counselling, School Guidance and Education or Educational Guidance and Counselling

A very broad range of answers were given for what training, courses, or seminars that respondents have attended to work as Guidance counsellors and with hard to reach groups. A lot of respondents to the online survey referred to their initial training as guidance counsellors as well as Continuous Professional Development provided by National Centre for Guidance in Education over their career. Others that were mentioned by respondents included Creative Facilitation provided by Partners for Transformation, Motivational Interviewing, Suicide Intervention, Psychometric Testing, Certificate in Addiction Studies, Conflict Resolution, Refugee Awareness Training, Dyslexia Awareness Training, High Dream/Low Dream, Narrative Approach to Guidance Interventions and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

In the semi structured interviews respondents did not feel that their initial training in Guidance Counselling prepared them to work with hard to reach groups. One of the interviewees reported that "learning was on the hoof and life experience and previous background prepared me more for working with this group than the actual training received." This was also referred to by some of the respondents in the online survey who reported that no specific training prepared them to work with hard to reach groups that they have built on the experience over their career to date.

2.1.3. Institutional and Professional Profile

All respondents to the online survey worked as Guidance Counsellors/Coordinators in the public service in an Adult Education Guidance and Information Service with one of the Education and Training Boards in Ireland. The Adult Guidance and Information Services deliver one-to-one and group guidance to those over the age of 16 who have left the formal education system at either pre-entry, ongoing, pre and post exit stages of completing a qualification from level 1 to level 6 on the National Framework of Qualification in Ireland on a part time or full time basis in one of the Further Education and Training centres in the Education and Training boards in Ireland.

2.1.4. Collaboration and Career Development of hard-to-reach groups

The majority of respondents worked 37 hours a week to the online survey. A few respondents reported working 35 hours, 30 hours, and 15 hours. One respondent reported working 2 hours a week. Some reported difficulty trying to quantify with any degree of authenticity the amount of time that was spent each week working with hard to reach groups.

In the semi-structured interviews guidance counsellors felt that what was important for career management with hard to reach group was, listening to them and getting them to feel valued. This is emphasised by one of the guidance counsellors “to Listen to the client and to value them. To engage them and make them feel welcome in order to give them a good experience in Education”. Another guidance counsellor felt that what was important was, to allow the client the time to develop career management skills and for them to be there when they are ready.” The key is developing up a relationship with the client to be there when the client is ready to look at next steps, study or work”. The importance of taking time with hard to reach

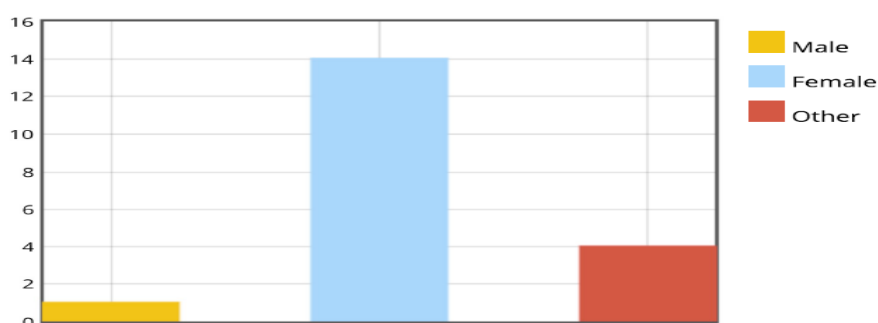
groups to develop career management skills was also highlighted by one of the guidance counsellors: From my perspective working with those groups career management would be very small steps.”

When expressing what it means to work with hard to reach groups in the semi structured interviews the guidance counsellor expressed both the positivity and joy it brings to them as well as the challenges and difficulties that it brings. One guidance counsellors expressed it has been a “privilege ... to be able to give something back” and another expressed how she feels lucky “love working with hard to reach groups. Feels lucky that I love my work”.

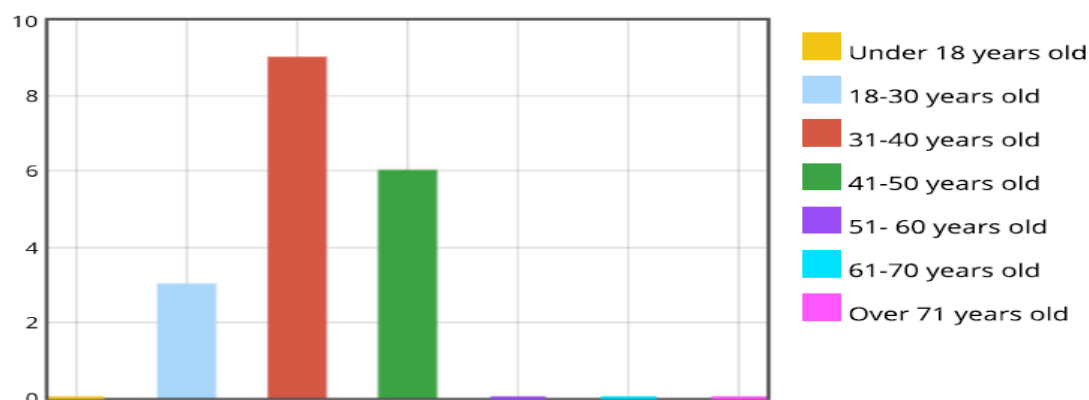
Regarding the challenges and difficulties one guidance counsellor expressed how she is not sure how to measure the impact of the intervention “it's very hard to measure the impact the guidance conversation has had especially if it is only one time”. Another guidance counsellor finds it difficult and she questioned her own ability to work with hard to reach groups. “I do find it very challenging. probably due to my personal barriers that I lack confidence if I'm not 100% sure what to do or if I feel it's going to be difficult to get through to them whether that is due to lack of engagement on their part or I get a sense that the group would rather be somewhere else. Trying to reach them”.

2.1.5. Clients' Characteristics

The main type of population that guidance counsellors in Ireland reported working with was female at 74% and just over 21% of those that they worked with did not identify with any gender and just only 5% were male.



50% of Guidance Counsellors in Ireland reported the age group that they worked with the most were those aged between 31 and 40 years of age, just over 33% reported the age group of 41 to 50 years of age as those they worked with the most and nearly 17% reported the age group 18 to 30 years old age group



In the semi structured interviews, the guidance counsellors explored the main characteristics that they felt that hard to reach groups had and the common thread where that the hard to reach groups showed a complexity of needs. One of the guidance counsellors mentioned that the characteristics included a “lack of self-belief disillusionment, feeling of being left behind, I don’t fit into these boxes”, another

referred to the “disadvantage profile”, another referred to “mental health distance from the system rural isolation and transport being able to access the service and socialisation”

2.2. Working Challenges, Difficulties and Training Needs

2.2.1. Working Challenges and Intervention Concerns

One of things that was highlighted in the semi structured interviews with Guidance Counsellors as a challenge of working with hard to reach groups was trying to show them the value in education, that it is worth their time in doing an education or training course. This is highlighted by one interviewee “Trying to show the value in education, it is worth your time in doing this “. Another interviewee reported that “this group often showed a lack of understanding/value of education. As a result, their children also left school early a problem that was going to continue and repeat itself”.

Another challenge experienced by the guidance counsellors when working with the hard to reach groups was being able to build the relationship with the person so that they understood that the guidance counsellor was there to help them, not to tell them what to do, and that they understood what the role of guidance was. This is highlighted by one of the interviewee responses: “The major challenge is trying to get past that to make a relationship with the person that there is a bit of trust. And that they believe that you will support them to take a step whatever that might be and to help them get a sense of belief in themselves”. Another interviewee felt that they themselves had “a concern that it doesn’t connect in some way or that there is a barrier that you don’t recognise” Although it can be a challenge it also can be very rewarding which is highlighted by one interviewee “Reaching people, trying to show people the value of guidance, to listen to them to ask “what do you want?” to listen to them can be very powerful”.

Another challenge that guidance counsellors found was getting the hard to reach groups to understanding the vocabulary of guidance. This is difficult for those whose English is not their first language which is emphasised by this interviewee: “English language, for migrant groups do they understand what I say. Getting mixed messages is an intervention concern, find myself saying - no that’s not what I meant.” It was also a challenge for English speakers hard to reach group. This is highlighted by one of the interviewee “even where you have English speakers, some groups of people lack the language, didn’t understand the word employment/they called it work. Lack of understanding of guidance related language”.

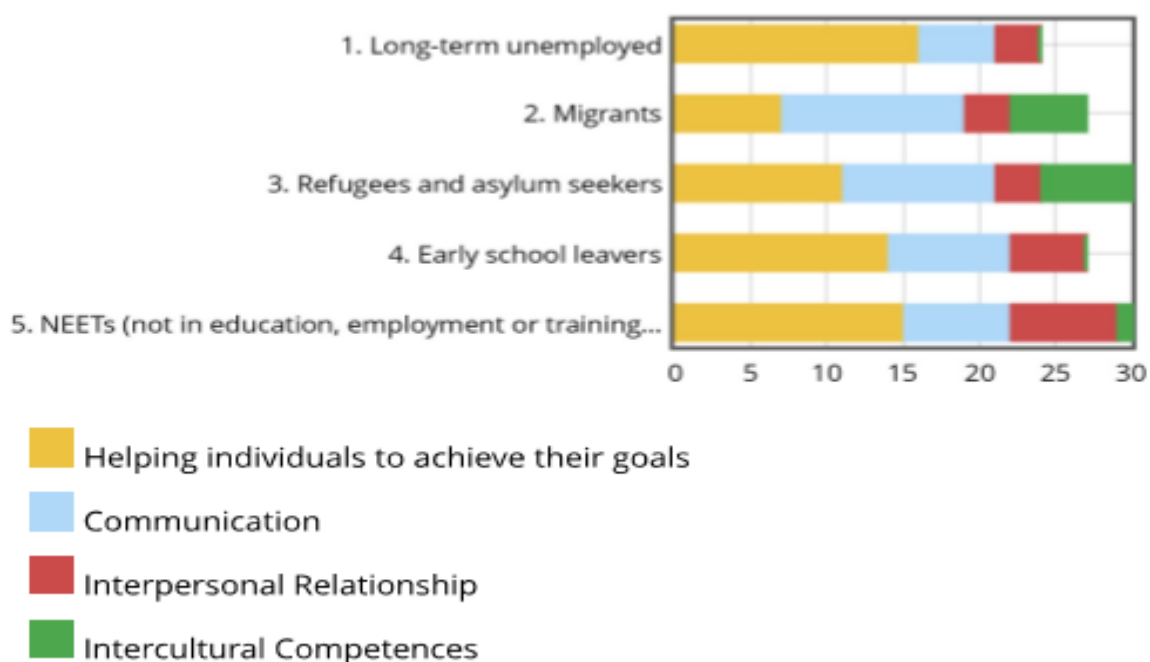
2.2.2. Experienced Working Difficulties

The type of difficulties reported by Guidance Counsellors in the survey as experiencing the most difficulty was - helping individuals to achieve their goals, and the target group that they reported experiencing this difficulty with the most was long-term unemployed at 66.67%. Helping individuals achieve their goals was also a significant difficulty experienced with all other target groups Early School Leavers 51.85%, NEETS 50%, Refugees and Asylum Seekers 36% and Migrants 25.93%.

In the semi structured interviews one of the guidance counsellor tried to explain why they felt that helping individuals to achieve their goals was significantly high for these hard to reach groups and said that it could be related to other things going on in their individual lives: “I think it has to do with the mindset with where people are at, but also with early school leavers, NEETS and long-term unemployed there could be other things going on with them, be it lack of education, be it literacy difficulties, addiction, or other things going on. Which obviously are part of what you have to work with but makes it a lot slower for them to progress”.

Another guidance counsellor in explaining this felt that, with the migrant, asylum and refugee group, it is lower as they are motivated, “Felt that helping someone achieve their goals was not as big an issue when working with migrants and refugees because they are very motivated, they want to work they have worked, they’re educated, they want to be independent. They have had so much taken away so what they can control they want to control”.

The second type of difficulty experienced by Guidance Counsellors in the online survey when working with the target groups was communication with 44.44% reporting this was a difficulty when working with Migrants and 33.33% reporting this with Refugees and Asylum Seekers. What is interesting is that this is also reported as a significantly high difficulty when working with early school leavers at 29.63%, NEET’s 23.33% and long-term unemployed 20.83%. In the semi structured interviews one of the guidance counsellors explained that this was a major challenge with Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers as they have the motivation but lack the communication skills in English. “The language issues is probably a bigger issue for this group. Their language is a barrier and the frustration is helping someone who is frustrated that they want to go on but their English isn’t going as quickly as they’d like. The motivation is there but the English is not there”. In explaining why this was still particularly high for the other hard to reach groups early school leavers, NEETs and long term unemployed maybe because of the language used in guidance “maybe it is due to the language we use everyday or maybe it is not language that they use everyday or their background. Or even they are in a different mindset”. Another guidance counsellor expressed her own difficulty sometimes of communicating with early school leavers and this could be due to their own sense of self “one reason for the difficulty with communication could be that the younger people do not have awareness about themselves. May not have the skills to verbally express what their skills are or who they are or what they’re good at”.



Interpersonal relationship was reported as being a difficulty across all the target groups with the highest experience of 23.33% with those not in education, employment or training. Interpersonal relationship in the survey was also experienced as a difficulty when working as a guidance counsellor with early school leavers 18.52%, long-term unemployed 12.50%, migrants 11.11% and refugees and asylum seekers 10%. In the semi structured interviews one of the guidance counsellors identified some of the same difficulties and felt it was related to their sense of self “Their motivation being low, confidence Giving up easily, getting a knock, fear, sense of self hasn’t been considered.it can impact on your decisions. If you don’t recognise things about yourself it impacts how do you deal with your life, relationships, your work, your career”.

In the survey Intercultural Competences was reported as a difficulty mainly with refugees and asylum seekers at 20%, migrants 18.25% it was also reported 3.33% with those not in education, employment or training.

2.2.3. Frequency, Motivation and Areas of Needed Training

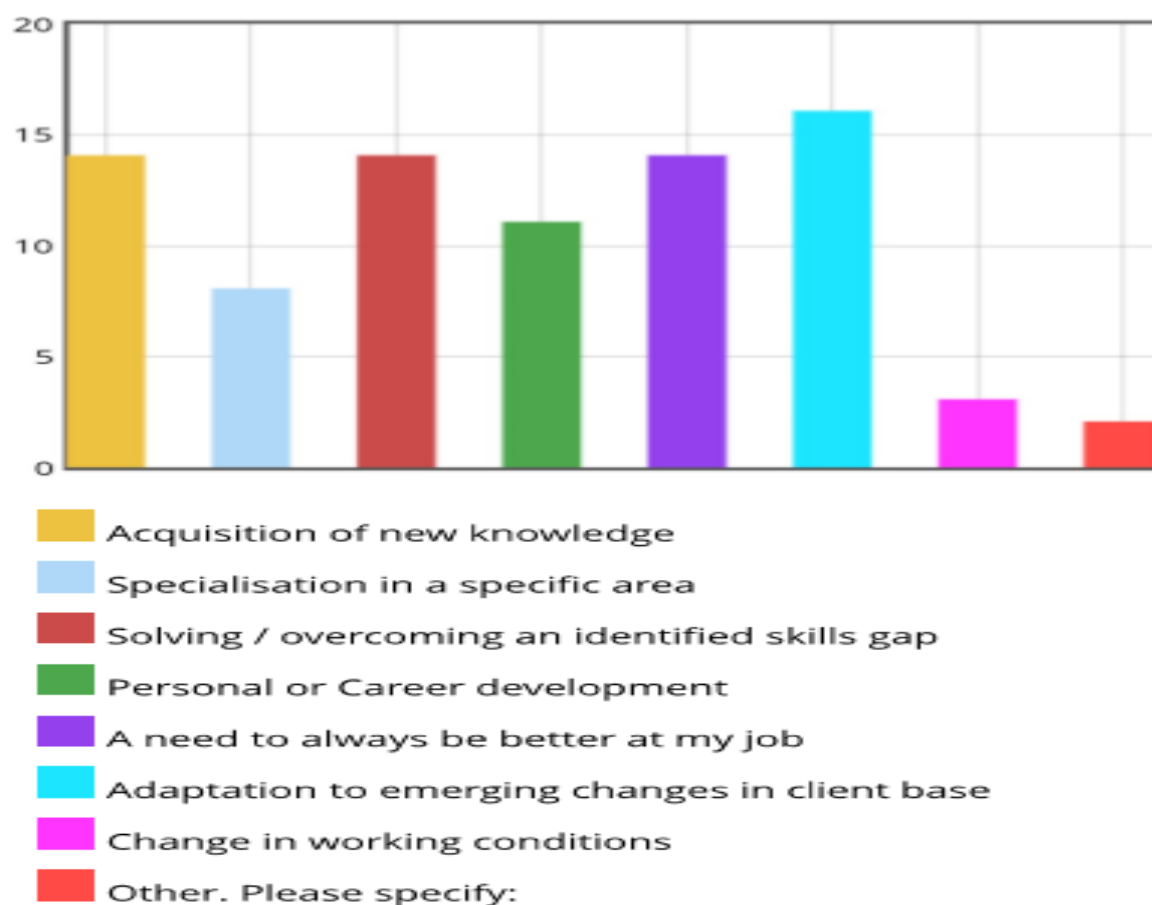
In the semi structured interviews, the guidance counsellors referred to very similar things regarding professional development they hadn't attended anything significant related to hard to reach groups in the past three years this was particularly well explained by one of the guidance counsellors “more informing you of things rather than giving you more skills. Not as much practical training”. One of the guidance counsellors had done “cognitive behavioural therapy, autism awareness and autistic spectrum”.

What the guidance counsellors felt was needed to be covered in the training was particularly the guidance and counselling methods. Another guidance counsellor mentioned “e-tools (could do with it but won't want it!) Coaching methods, motivating people Open to any training That would help your practice and help you work with somebody”.

In the online survey, 21.74% of guidance counsellors identified the area that they needed the most training as being using e-tools in Career/Vocational Guidance, Counselling and/or Coaching process. 18.84% of guidance counsellor identified coaching methods, 17.39% identified career development models, 13.04% identified intercultural competences and 10.14% identified psychological knowledge. Only 13.04% of guidance counsellors identified helping individuals to achieve their goals as an area they required training in even though it was the main difficulty that they experienced when working with all the hard to reach target groups. Other interesting area's that they identified in the online survey included mental health and learning difficulties, rights and entitlements of asylum seekers and working with addiction and ex-offenders.



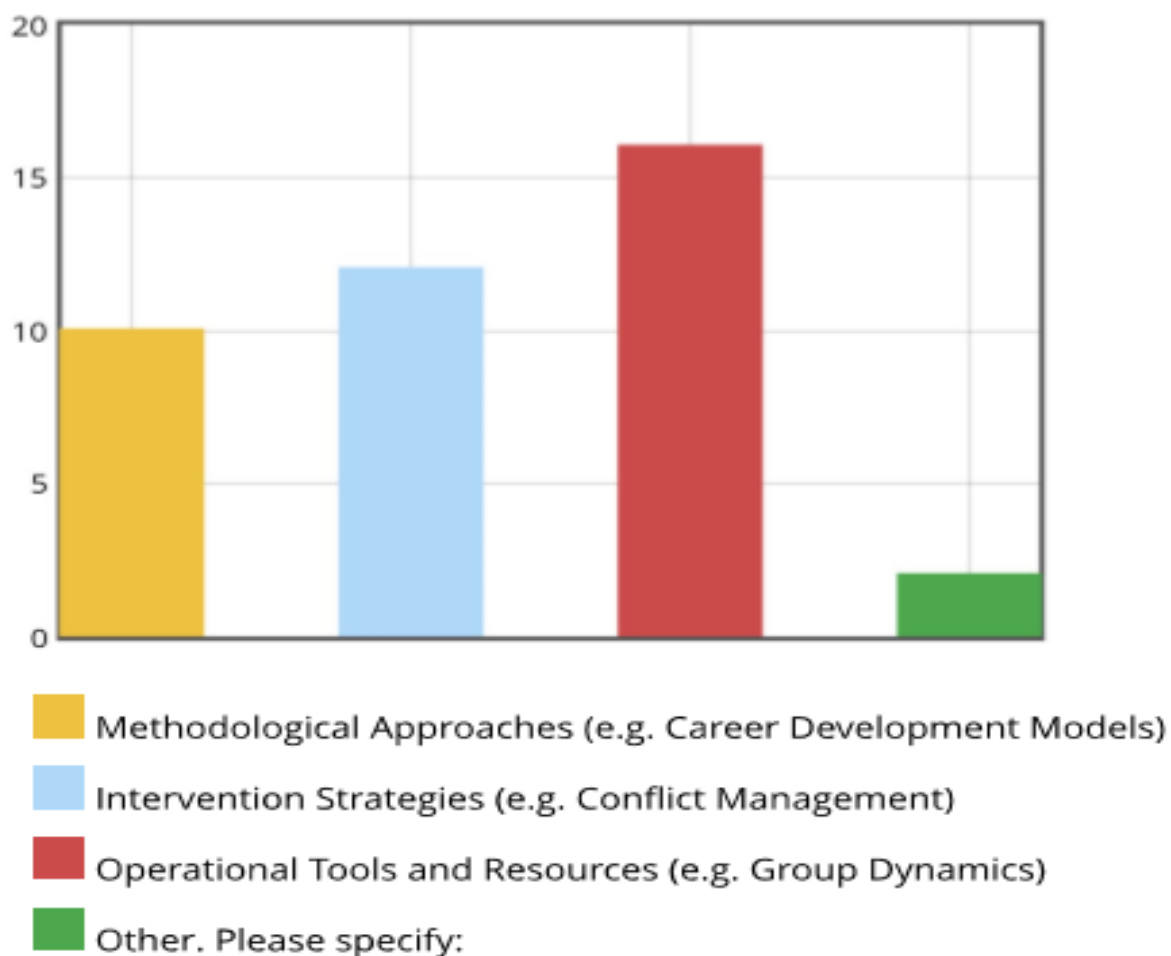
The reasons motivating guidance counsellors in Ireland for seeking training from the online survey was very broad. The main motivator was adaptation to emerging changes in client base with 19.51% of guidance counsellors reporting this as the motivator. The other main reasons highlighted by 17.07% of guidance counsellors were; acquisition of new knowledge, solving/overcoming an identified skills gap and a need to always be better at my job. Other motivators included in the survey by guidance counsellors were, personal or career development 13.41%, specialisation in a specific area 9.76%, and change in working conditions 3.66%. One of the interesting motivators given by one of the respondents to the online survey was ‘a love of education and embracing change’ and another was ‘issues with emerging targets, learner’s opportunities in this area’.



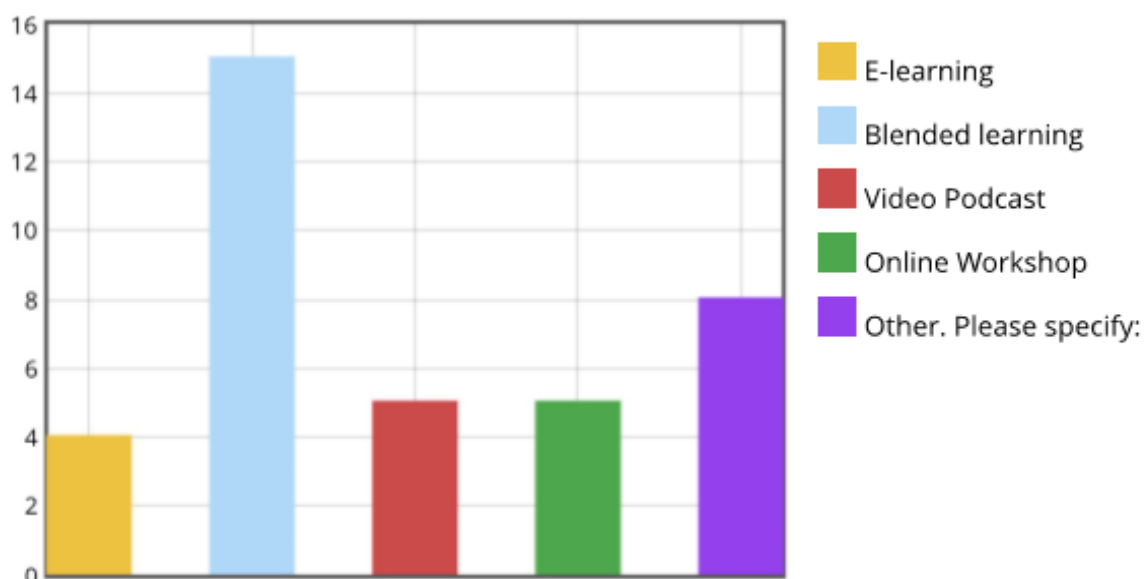
2.3. Learning Content and Environment

2.3.1. Content and Type of Training

The content that 40% of guidance counsellors would like to explore the most in the training for those working with hard to reach groups was operational tools and resources for example group dynamics. 30% of guidance counsellors identified Intervention strategies, for example conflict management, and 25% identified methodological approaches, for example career development models. Other areas that guidance counsellor identified as wanting to explore in the training for working with hard to reach groups included 'difficulties in meeting the education/training needs of clients in areas where there are little services and transport' and also 'issues to be aware of with working with people with addiction and or ex-offenders'.



Over 40% of Guidance counsellors in Ireland would prefer to attend blended learning, with only 13.51% preferring video podcast and online workshop and 10.81% preferring eLearning. Other preferences that guidance counsellors highlighted in the online survey included attendance at training in a group with real time/face to face workshops/lectures/seminars to simulate classroom and not to be isolated with individuals sharing best practice in person and class sharing different opinions.



In the semi structured interviews, the guidance counsellors felt that the skills and competences that were important to explore were things that would inform guidance practice. One of the guidance counsellors explained that it would need to be things “related to communication skills, physical or creative way to help people express themselves”. Another Guidance counsellor expressed needing “creative ideas for working with these groups ... practical ways of being more positive especially where people are stuck in a negative, finding positive ways / tools to work with. People can get quite stuck there.

In exploring the impact that the professional development will have on their skills and competences the guidance counsellors in the semi structured interviews felt it would help motivate them more and that the hard to reach groups would also benefit. This is explained very well by one of the interviewees: “Open to anything that will help my practice. The impact of such training if you are more aware of something you can be more open to it you can be more sensitive to it in your use of language and the way you say things.

2.3.2. The Use of E-tools and E-learning Training Structure

The main structure that guidance counsellors in Ireland identified as preferring in the online survey was step by step with more than 51% opting for this as their preferences. 22.58% preferred completion of deadline and only 16.13% preferred quizzes. Other preferences in the online survey included, none, threads to connect with fellow learners, and meeting with other people in person to share best practice.

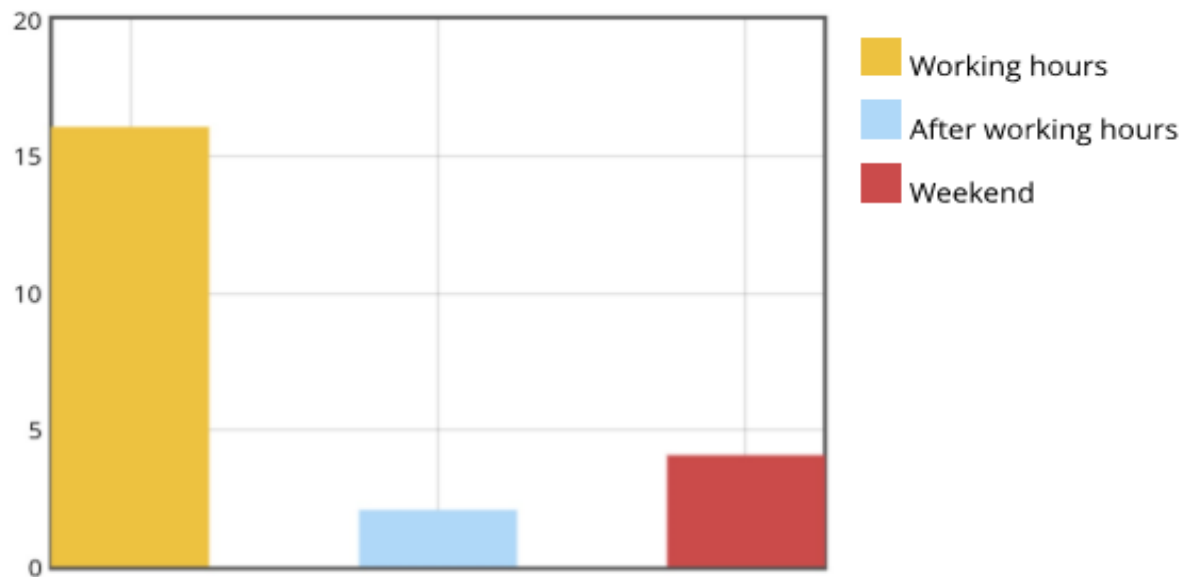
In the semi structured interviews all the guidance counsellor mentioned using the main e-tool in Ireland which is called Career Portal. The main obstacles that the guidance counsellor in Ireland mentioned in using e-tools is they felt they did not have enough competence and training and sometimes that their own professional style was a preference for using the more personal approach. One of the guidance counsellors explains this “wouldn’t have a big enough repertoire of what to use. Maybe something I need to look at. Would focus more on talking and the relationship”.

In the semi structure interviews, we explored the use of e-tools for professional development the overall views were mixed. One of the guidance counsellors felt strongly that online was not for her, another expressed that she was very open to it and another guidance counsellor had done a few things online through her own ETB and NCGE that were beneficial

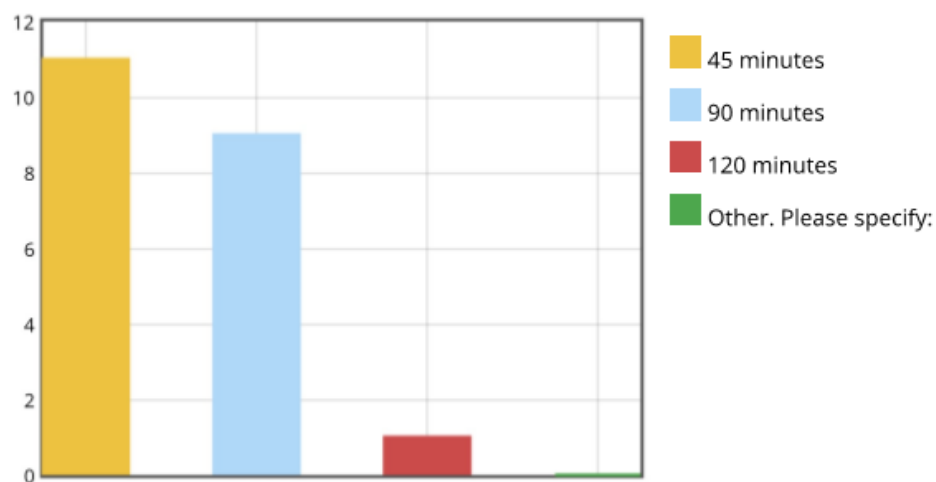
In the semi structured interviews, we also explored the difficulty that the hard to reach group would have with using some of the e-tools with the guidance counsellors. The main obstacles identified were that the hard to reach groups may not have enough literacy skill and IT skills to use e-tools, other obstacle mentioned not having computers at home or broadband and the cost incurred if have to use computers elsewhere.

2.3.3. Training Schedule, Frequency, Duration and Information

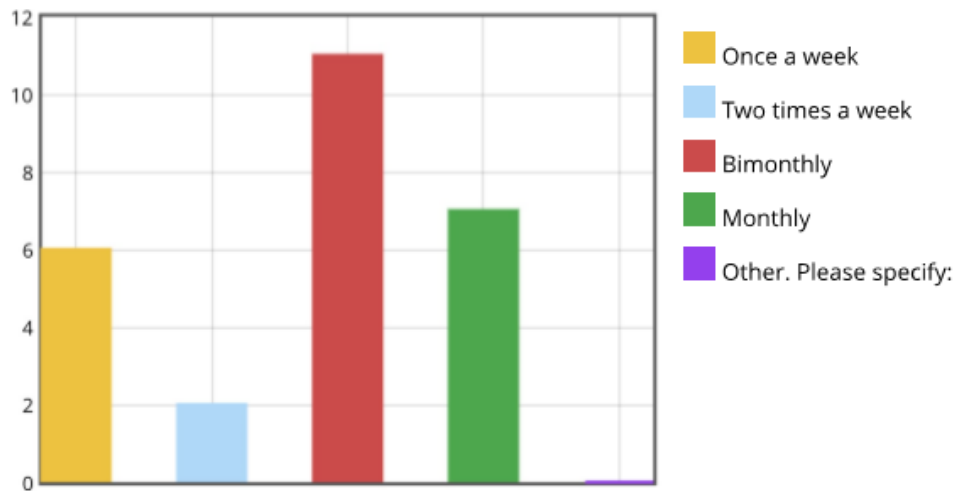
The type of training schedule from guidance counsellors in Ireland in the online survey was 72.73% preferred it to be completed during working hours, with 18.18% preferring weekend and 9.09% preferring after working hours.



In Ireland, in the online survey of the guidance counsellors, 52.38% preferred the duration of the training to be 45 minutes and 42.86% preferred it to be 90 minutes' duration with only 4.76% opting for 120 minutes.



The preference of guidance counsellors in the online survey for the frequency of attending the training programme was 42.31% opted for bi monthly, whereas only 26.92% opted for monthly, and 23.08% opted for once a week. The least preferred option was two times a week.



The highest preference on the method to receive information about the training course was overwhelmingly through e-mail at 85% opting for this as their preference. Only 10% opted for newsletters and only 5% opted for social networks. No guidance counsellors in Ireland would prefer to receive information through the ACCEnT website.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

It is evident that working with hard to reach groups in a guidance context presents a number of very complex and challenging issues for the practitioner to work with on a daily basis often in isolation and without support. Despite the various challenges and difficulties in engaging hard to reach groups in the guidance process, it is also evident that guidance counsellors in Ireland have a high level of job satisfaction, enjoy working with hard to reach groups and are very resourceful in dealing with the challenges they face.

In providing support and training for guidance counsellors from an Irish perspective the following recommendations can be made:

- The training provided is provided in a way that allows the guidance practitioner to engage with other professionals, that there is some face-to-face element, and that support is available
- The possibilities and benefits of e-tools to the guidance process need to be sold to the guidance counsellor.
- The language of guidance must be such that it does not alienate clients and that the guidance counsellor connects with the client in a way that is understood this is needed for both the English speaking clients and for clients where English is not their first language
- Provide a portal to keep abreast of policy changes and schemes that impact on the target groups
- Tools to support the guidance counsellor in working with hard to reach groups featured highly in the survey
- Broadening out the research to include all professional guidance counsellors and those working in any guidance capacity with hard to reach groups would give a more in-depth analysis of the needs of guidance counselling in Ireland

II. Annexes and/or Appendixes

Annexe I – References

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