



Accelerating Coaching and Counseling
through e-Tools and innovative Training

NATIONAL REPORT

Portugal

Situation and Needs of Counseling and Guidance
Practitioners/Coaches working with Hard-to-Reach Groups
in Portugal



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EUROPEAN BOARD FOR
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report focuses on the work of Portuguese career counselors and vocational guidance practitioners with hard-to-reach groups and their related career guidance processes.

In Portugal, there are large swathes of working age population in risk of exclusion due to being long-term unemployed (LTUs), not in education, employment, or training (NEETs), early school leavers, migrants, and most recently represented in the country, refugees and asylum seekers. As observed in other European countries, the situation of Portuguese counseling practitioners working with these hard-to-reach groups has become increasingly challenging in the last years, leading us to (re)think the conditions and circumstances, problems, training and educational needs of these professionals.

Therefore, this report comprises an in-depth reflection and analysis of the current situation and educational needs of counseling and vocational practitioners working with the above-indicated vulnerable groups in Portugal.

The report is organized in two parts, being the first one dedicated to defining the vulnerable groups under analysis within the national context, which are the following ones: long term unemployed (LTUs), young people neither in education nor employment or training (NEETs), early school leavers, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. In addition to providing clear definitions of these hard-to-reach groups, the first part is intended to describe the main characteristics of each group and its national profile, as well as to understand its recent situation and evolutionary trends in Portugal.

The second part of the report aims at presenting the national results of a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative research focused on analyzing the current situation of the Portuguese career counseling and vocational guidance practitioners (the target group of ACCEnT project) working with these hard to reach groups, in addition to identifying their educational and training needs. We will analyze information and data collected from an empirical research performed during the first trimester of 2019. An online survey was developed and launched on ILIAS E-learning Platform during the month of March 2019, having generated 13 responses from

professionals of the national target group who fully completed the questionnaire designed to get to know more about their current situation and needs while working with people at risk of remaining long-term unemployed. Four semi-structured interviews were later conducted with a few more professionals from the target group during the month of April 2019, using an interview guide, being audio-recorded, partially transcribed and thematically analyzed to better capture their personal and professional context, as well as their perceptions about working with the above-mentioned hard-to-reach groups living in Portugal.

The information and data presented in this report about the Portuguese context is, indeed, intended to improve our understanding about the current situation, support, educational and training needs within the career counseling and vocational guidance fields. This national report entails an analysis of the career counseling practitioners' specific needs and a deep understanding of their current situation and the present-day challenges of their practice.

Since the situation is quite new and almost no scientific results were produced about this specific reality, we expect our national report and empirical research developed under the ACCEnT project to become a major contribution for career counselors and vocational guidance practitioners in Portugal. We intend to do so by transferring their experiences and needs into an innovative e-learning platform, and by delivering the best possible online training opportunity in order not only to help them being better prepared for the labor market needs in terms of qualification and flexibility, but also for them to be able to work more effectively with people at risk of remaining long-term unemployed and potentially excluded from the Portuguese society.

1. Context and background of hard-to-reach groups in Portugal

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

Career guidance can be defined as a continuous process of reflection, goal setting and self-regulation during working life. It is intended to assist in the behavioral development of exploitation and decision, namely among hard-to-reach groups (Taveira, Cardoso & Marques, 2017).

More specifically, career guidance with hard-to-reach groups could be an opportunity to analyze their professional trajectories, which is likely to be characterized by discontinuity and instability. Nevertheless, it could also be seen as an opportunity to rethink their life paths and readjust/redefine future career possibilities.

Each person can identify his/her own reality, seen that (re)telling life stories can be useful to realign one's future professional life and enable socially and professionally excluded individuals to move forward and embrace new challenges, while being also better prepared to face the adversities that may arise throughout the course of their lives (Slowik, 2014).

Taking this into consideration, the main challenge is to perceive career intervention as a life-long helping process in different contexts, focusing on the development of career management processes or skills (Taveira, Paixão & Gamboa, 2016).

This is how it becomes possible to understand the difficulties experienced by counseling and guidance practitioners working with hard-to-reach groups, who perform the fieldwork without structured guidelines or protocols, and are required to demonstrate their experience and self-confidence while helping the most vulnerable individuals.

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

Portugal registers a high percentage of **long term unemployed (LTUs)** in its working population. LTUs can be defined by people aged at least 15 years old who are without work and have been unemployed for 12 months or more (Eurostat, 2018).

The main profile of Portuguese LTUs is characterized by older individuals who have lost their jobs at an advanced stage of life, and who experience difficulties in returning to the labor market. This market does not seem to be prepared to reintegrate more senior individuals with relevant professional experience, preferring young individuals who can be "trained" to fit into the image of the organization that better incorporates them as staff members. For this population, career guidance and counseling professionals work to promote awareness of the countless personal qualities and job skills that an older individual may have accumulated throughout his/her life trajectory, undoubtedly being a process of exploration and discovery for potential new professional paths and challenges (Cedefop, 2015).

Associated to these characteristics, Portuguese LTUs can be described as individuals with lower levels of academic qualifications due to having left school very early, and therefore not holding the necessary educational or professional qualifications required by the current job market in order to perform a specific task and/or profession which they were never asked to present proof of before, but that they, through acquired experience, knew how to perform previously.

Portugal has also got a high number of people with low school qualifications, the so-called **early school leavers** who were forced to drop out of school at an early age for multiple reasons, for instance poor living conditions, young detachment from school system, low-income / disadvantaged family background, among others. The Portuguese profile of early school leavers follows the EU pattern, being mainly composed of individuals aged 18 to 24 years old who achieved lower secondary education at the most, who do not seek further education within the traditional school system (mandatory high school qualifications) or alternative training options available through courses with dual certification/professionalization designed to actively target them (DGERT, 2014).

Initially successful careers were built by Portuguese early school leavers who started working very early in manufacturing-related occupations, the so-called blue-collar workers. However, they lost their low-qualified jobs years later, and have been experiencing many difficulties in returning to the labor market due to not having the necessary qualifications. This job skills gap increases the need of developing career management processes designed to expand their qualifications or even suggest their professional retraining.

Another reality is the Portuguese **NEETs**, known as **young adults aged 16-24 who are not in education, employment or training**. The NEET phenomenon constitutes a major social problem that is also widely seen around the European area. They are known as “discouraged” and “inactive” young adults, because the education system does not seem attractive to them and the labour market is not open to integrate them. This increasingly common situation raises two problems in need of being addressed by the Portuguese career counselors and vocational guidance practitioners working with NEETs: on one hand, the unappealing educational system, and the lack of labor market capacity to accommodate younger generations potentially more educated than the older generations who are already employed; and, on the other hand, the mismatch between the highly qualified jobs available in the market and the academic preparation of these young adults that is insufficient to apply for or even be chosen for those positions.

It is therefore important to understand who is at risk of becoming NEET. Those most at risk are the unemployed young people, especially with lower levels of education. The risk of low-qualified young people falling into a NEET situation is three times higher than the risk of young people with increased levels of qualification. This educational issue also affects younger immigrants and descendants of immigrants who have a greater probability of becoming NEET. Having a disability or dealing with health problems are other risk factors contributing to increase the NEET phenomena. Living in a single-parent family or having unemployed parents also substantially increases the probability of being unemployed (Silva, 2015).

Similar to other European countries, Portugal has been working towards its best in dealing with an emerging reality of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Although there are no universally agreed definitions of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, several definitions are widely accepted, namely those suggested by the United Nations.

This report will consider the definition of an **international migrant** as “someone who changes his or her country of usual residence, irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status” (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs) and the length of his or her migration movement (referring to a change of country of residence for a short-term, between 3-12 months, or for a long-term, covering one or more years).

Another different situation is when **refugees** enter the national territory, as they are temporarily kept in custody by the Portuguese official authorities and subject of interviews to assess whether or not they are eligible to the refugee status. Taking into account United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees’ definition, refugees are people “who are outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, require international protection”.

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, **asylum seekers** are individuals who are seeking international protection and whose requests for sanctuary have yet to be processed by the country in which they have submitted them. As outlined by the Amnesty International, “not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but every refugee is initially an asylum seeker”. When compared to the migrants, refugees have a sense of inferiority as a result of being unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of their ethnicity, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion (Amnesty International; Santinho, 2009). Their speeches are marked by the threatening of their physical and psychological integrity while they were in their country of origin, during the escape trips, and their entrance into the EU host countries.

In spite of not being one of the European countries that mostly attracts these vulnerable individuals, mainly related to geographical location reasons, the truth is that more and more people who are under life threatening conditions due to migration and exile processes are seeking for integration into the Portuguese society and labor market.

Career counseling and vocational practitioners play a key role when intervening with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers as they act as helping professionals in facilitating inclusion and overcoming cultural and language

barriers. Therefore, it seems important for the career guidance practitioners to use intervention methods based on a multicultural counseling that respects clients' life experiences and personal values.

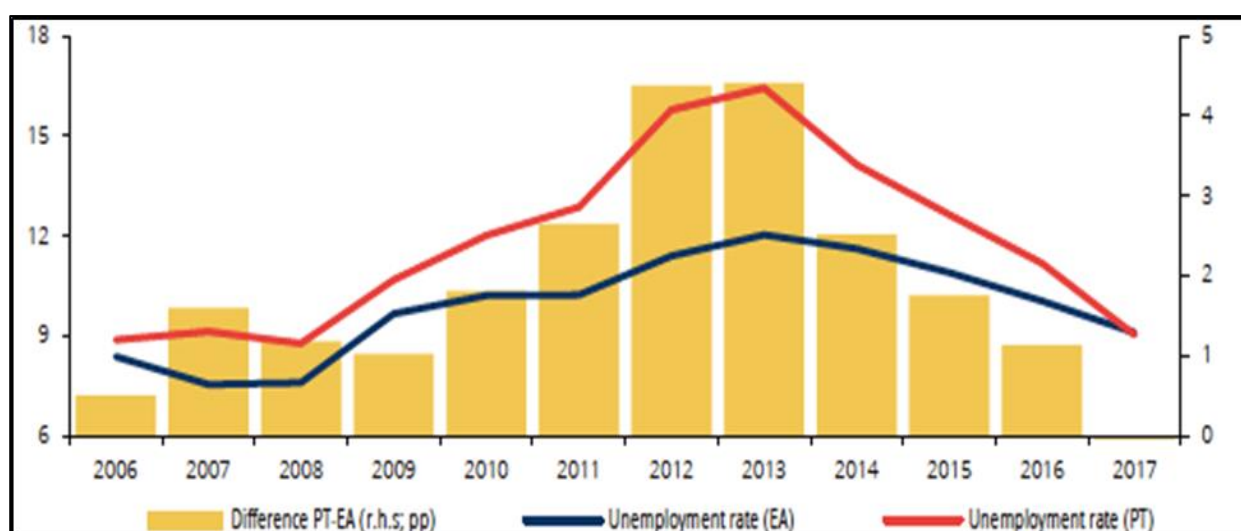
Career counselors and vocational guidance practitioners working with all the above-mentioned hard-to-reach group should act in compliance with the following principles: cooperation and communication through an open dialogue; comprehensive and metaphorical thinking; meaning-making and active participation of the help seeker.

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

A study carried out by Banco de Portugal in 2018 found that the workforce within the national labor market grew after falling for six consecutive years. A sharp decline in the unemployment and, even in the long-term and very long-term unemployment, was one of the most remarkable features of the Portuguese labor market in 2017.

The unemployment evolution can also be favorably compared to the one observed in the EU area. The differential between the unemployment rate in Portugal and in the EU area was positive between 2006 and 2016, ranging from a minimum of 0.5% in 2006 to a maximum of 4.4% in 2012 and 2013. For the first time in over a decade, the difference between EU-PT unemployment rate was negative in -0.1% in 2017 (Graph 1).

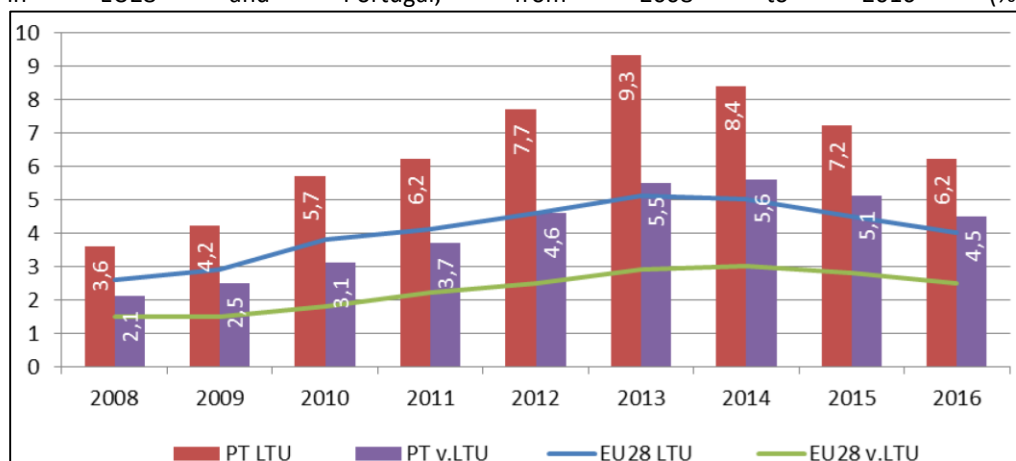
Graph 1: Unemployment rate in the European area and Portugal (%)



Source: Eurostat (2018).

As previously mentioned, the unemployment reality is frequently associated with low levels of qualification and insufficient basic skills. They may also reflect a lack of adjustment between the skills demanded by the labor market and the skills developed within the formal education and training systems (CEDEFOP, 2015). In spite of the positive developments made under the educational framework of Portuguese workers, it seems crucial that the low qualifications of the Portuguese workforce are adjusted in order to accommodate the job market demands within a global environment, where the economic growth relies on technologically advanced industries and fast paced innovation movements (Economic Bullet, 2018). One of the most negative aspects of the Portuguese labor market in the last years is the high level of long-term unemployment, which originates an externally high depreciation of the Portuguese human capital and comprises adverse effects on the potential growth of the national economy. According to Eurostat, the Portuguese long-term unemployment rate arose from 3,6% to 9,3% between 2008 and 2013, persisting high during the following years (Graph 2). Nevertheless, LTU rate in Portugal has been declining since 2013, registering a percentage of 6.2% in 2016. Also positive are the recent developments of the very long-term unemployment rate in Portugal, which had a substantial fall in 2016 (representing 4,5% of the active population) after having increased from 2008 until 2015 (from 2,1% to 5,1%). Although the Portuguese LTU and v.LTU rates have been constantly higher than the ones verified in the EU28, most recently a concomitant decreasing trend must be outlined on the EU, including Portugal.

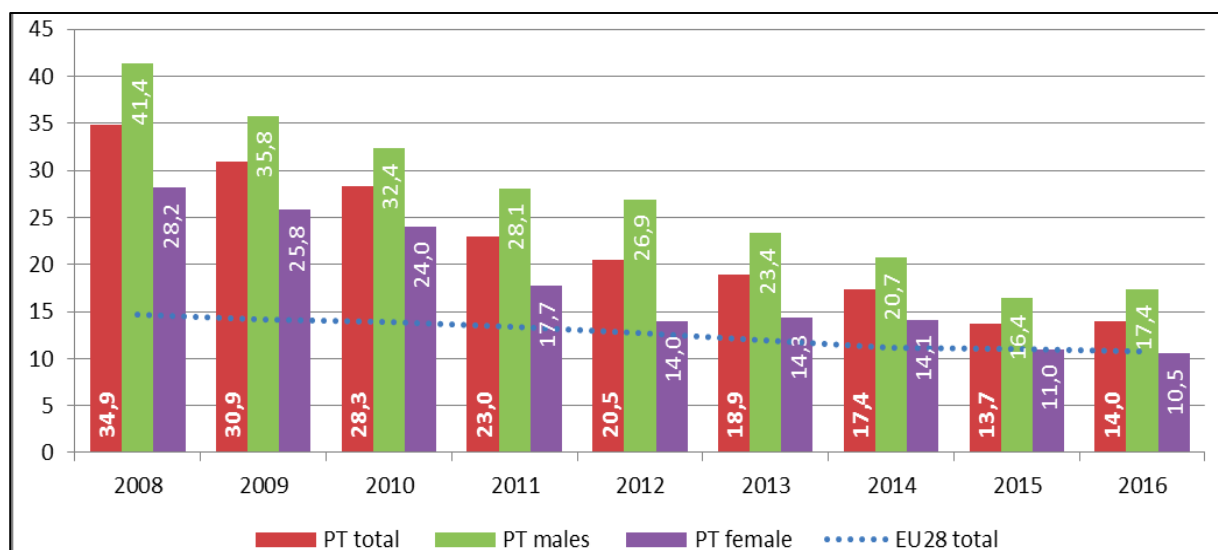
Graph 2: Long-term unemployment (LTU) and very long-term unemployment (v.LTU), in EU28 and Portugal, from 2008 to 2016 (% of active population)



Source: Eurostat, Labor Force Survey (2017).

However, according to OECD (2017), the unemployment rate in Portugal remains one of the highest among the OECD countries. According to the data published on a CEDEFOP report (2018), the rate of young unemployment (aged from 15 to 24) reached an average of 23.6% in the EU28 at the peak of the economic crisis (2013) – a percentage that is much lower than the 38.1% of young employment observed in Portugal. Young people were the most exposed to the national economic crisis, which had a huge negative impact on their labor market integration. Nevertheless, youth unemployment is not the only issue arising from young people’s vulnerabilities. At the same time, the rates of early school leavers and young people who are neither in education nor employment or training also grew in Portugal in the last decade, contrary to the EU trend registered by Eurostat (see Graphs 3 and 4). During the economic crisis, the rate of early school leavers in Portugal was decreasing (from 34.9% in 2008 to 18.9% in 2013), still being much higher than the rate of early school leavers in the EU28 (from 14.7% in 2008 to 11.9% in 2013) when both genders were compared. For the first time in Portugal, it rose to 14.0% in 2016 due to an increase of 1% among the male population, since the rate of female early school leavers continued to decrease. Despite a recent slight change on the positive trend observed in Portugal, the country has been approaching the EU28 rate of early school leavers, which decreased to 12.6% and 10.6% in 2017, respectively (Graph 3).

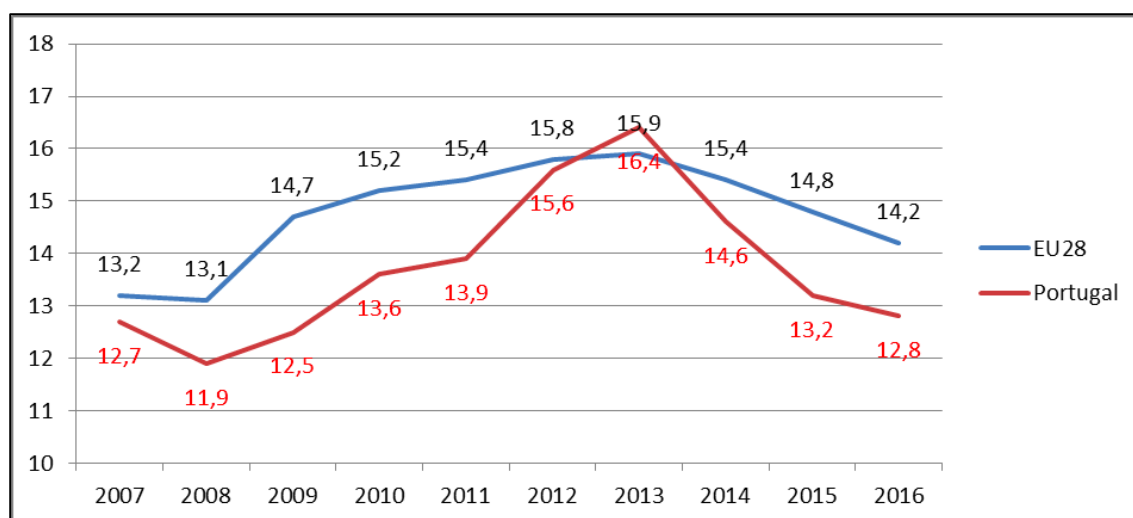
Graph 3: Early leavers from education and training by sex, from 18 to 24 years old, from 2008 to 2016, in EU28 and Portugal (%)



Source: Eurostat, Labor Force Survey (2017).

According to the Eurostat (2017), the rate of young people aged 15-29 years who were not in education, training or employment in EU28 was 15,9% in 2013, a percentage that is quite lower than the one registered in Portugal (16,4%). As a sign of the positive evolution within the national context, this trend has switched in favor of Portugal, where 12.8% of NEETs were observed in 2016, comparing to 14.2% of them in the EU28.

Graph 4: NEETs from 15 to 29 years, in the EU28 and Portugal (%)



Source: Eurostat, Labor Force Survey (2017).

The number of Portuguese NEETs has been growing significantly since 2008, having reached a maximum (15,9%) of inactive young people in 2013, contributing to place Portugal among the top 10 OECD countries with higher NEET rates.

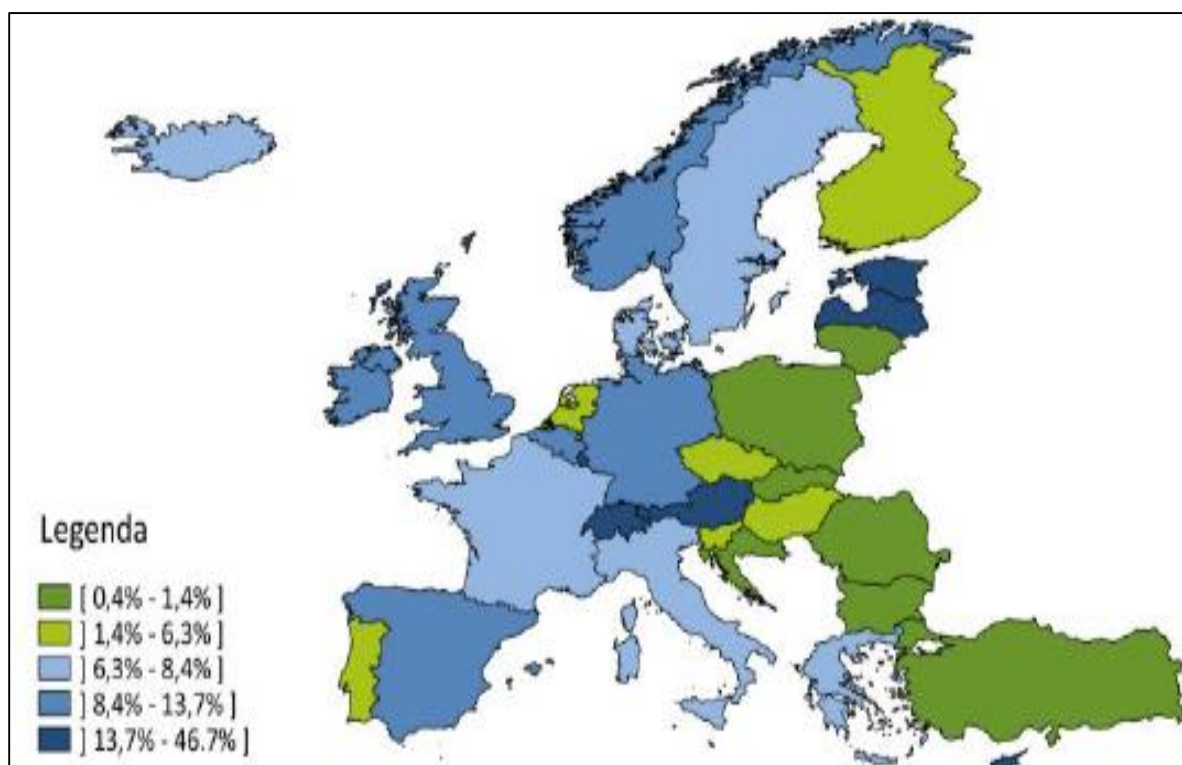
Although this phenomenon affects young population regardless of their educational levels, the Eurofound (2016) established a correlation between low levels of education and high rates of NEETs. This correlation is observed on the Portuguese case, where NEETs who are most at risk are those with lower levels of education. Such a problem poses structural barriers for NEETs' access to the labor market in particular, affecting as well young people in general (Eurofound, 2012; 2014; OECD 2016a).

As far as the other hard-to-reach groups are concerned, one in every 25 residents are foreigners living in Portugal, being the majority composed of female individuals (51,5%), and 62 per every 100 foreigners being

individuals who are in a working age (Immigrant Integration Indicators report, 2017). When regional differences are taken into account, foreigners have a great impact on the total of municipal residents in the Algarve and on the metropolitan area of Lisbon.

As we can see on Figure 1, Portugal is one of the EU countries with the lowest percentage of foreign citizens in the total number of residents (representing between 1,4% and 6,3% of them).

Figure 1: Share of foreign nationals in the total resident population in each European country, January 1st, 2016



Source: Eurostat (2016).

Portugal is one of the European countries with lower numbers of asylum seekers, with only 45 registered people who have moved to the national context in 2017 (UNHCR, 2017).

In 2017 the European Commission implemented an EU voluntary fostering program for refugees' resettlement purposes. This program enables the inclusiveness of at least 50,000 people in European countries. Within the scope of this program, Portugal has received a small number of 1,550 refugees in total, from which 517 are

minors, mainly traveling from Greece (1190) and Italy (360). When refugees' countries of origin are considered, Syrians (833) compose the largest group, followed by Iraqis (338), and Eritreans (340). Another 147 Turkish refugees were accepted and resettled in Portugal. One third of the entrances in Portugal were made by female refugees. A refugee presence was found in 98 municipalities across the country, but more frequently along the northern and coastal areas of Portugal (ACM, 2017). The regional presence of refugees in Lisbon or other areas around the country is managed by the ACM Special Unit for the Integration of Refugees (NAIR), but the integration process is decentralized.

2. Career guidance, counseling and coaching with hard-to-reach groups in Portugal

With the aim of understanding the professional reality of Portuguese career counselors and vocational guidance practitioners working with hard-to-reach groups, a quantitative and qualitative research was conducted to focus on expanding our knowledge about their current situation, educational and training needs.

This research was carried out using the following data collection techniques: an online survey launched on ILIAS Platform, and an interview guide serving as reference tool to conduct the semi-structured interviews. Quantitative results retrieved from the only survey were descriptively interpreted, while a thematic analysis of the interviews content was applied to decode the qualitative results gathered in Portugal.

Unfortunately, we have to point out the sample size as a major limitation of the conducted research, considering the data retrieved from 13 completed online surveys and four semi-structured interviews addressing Portuguese career counselors and vocational guidance practitioners' working experience with people at high risk of staying long-term unemployed.

2.1. Personal, Educational and Professional Background

2.1.1. Professionals' characteristics

The sample size of Portuguese survey respondents consisted of 13 female career counselors and vocational guidance professionals (100%). The age range of survey respondents varied between 20-30 years (7,7%), 31-40

years (61,5%), 41-50 years, and 51-60 years (15,4% each age group). The semi-structured interviews were conducted with four counselors and vocational guidance practitioners working with different hard-to-reach groups around the northern area of Portugal.

2.1.2. Qualifications and professional training

The majority of the surveyed and interviewed Portuguese professionals hold a bachelor's degree (38,5%) or a master's degree (38,5%) in Social Sciences (Psychology, Education Sciences or Social Economy).

All survey participants involved in the quantitative part of the study reported to have attended careers guidance training courses mainly designed for refugees, migrants and NEETs in order to complement their formal qualifications. The interviewed professionals also reported to have attended specific training courses aiming to better work with individuals from these hard-to-reach groups.

2.1.3. Institutional and professional profile

Most Portuguese career counselors and guidance professionals who participated in the national research declared to be working at vocational training centres, followed by those who work at private and non-profit organisations, and lastly by local public administration institutions.

The research participants identified their professional titles as career counselors, higher technicians in the public administration, psychologists, technicians for guidance, recognition and validation of competences, experts in adult education, social workers and family therapists, professional integration animators, experts in social and solidarity economy, and technicians for social education. This diversity of professional titles reveals a wide variety of tasks and functions associated to career guidance and counseling in Portugal, where there is much heterogeneity of professional profiles mapping the fields of intervention with hard-to-reach groups.

2.1.4. Collaboration and career development of hard-to-reach groups

Most survey respondents (61,5%) reported to work around 25 hours or more per week with hard-to-reach groups. However, 15,4% of them still reported that the number of weekly working hours may vary throughout the year.

For the professionals who were interviewed, career development with hard-to-reach groups means having a positive impact on the other (revealed through empowerment, information, and education). This conclusion was made of their personal testimonies, such as those highlighted below:

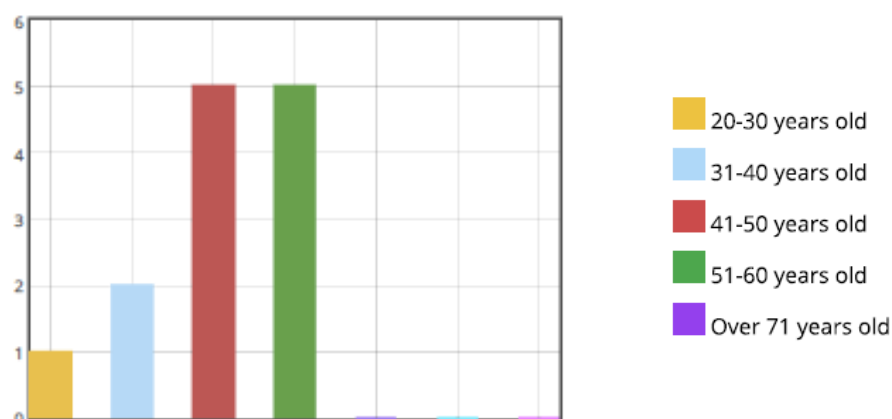
- “Working with these groups means promoting the motivation for autonomy, it is the aim of development”;
- “It’s fundamental to help, collaborate, and support the integration of these groups”;
- “Career management for these groups is sometimes a very distant reality from our own reality, so it is essential to help them approach the job market understand career as an element to construct their personal identity.”

Based on their testimonies, it seems very important for the interviewed Portuguese career guidance professionals to improve human development while providing work “interventions with significant impact”.

2.1.5. Clients’ characteristics

The majority of the Portuguese survey respondents stated that their clients are mainly female (53,9%) and likely to be older (with 76,9% of the clients being over 30 years old).

Graph 5: Age groups of clients with whom the Guidance Practitioners work in Portugal



Source: ACCEnT Portuguese Online Survey

From the conducted interviews, we can narrow down the main characteristics pointed out by four Portuguese career counselors and vocational guidance practitioners, and taking into account their vast professional experience with the following hard-to-reach groups as being:

- **Long-term unemployed people** demonstrate “low self-confidence and low expectations”, having also “difficulty in defining objectives, talking about themselves, knowing what they do well.”
- **Early school leavers** reveal to be “discredited, suspicious, and unmotivated.”
- **Young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs)** reveal financial difficulties, lack of occupation, low expectations, low self-knowledge, impulsiveness, and low ability to handle frustration.”
- **Migrants and refugees:** “It depends on their nationality – Ukrainians focuses on an action plan, they have a well-defined plan for themselves”, while “Brazilians feel completely lost and have no idea of what to do with their lives”. Migrants and refugees from “other nationalities face “language barriers.”

2.2. Working Challenges, Difficulties and Training Needs

2.2.1. Working challenges and intervention concerns

Through the information obtained from the semi-structured interviews, we noted that the following intervention concerns related to different vulnerable groups were expressed by four Portuguese career counselors and vocational guidance practitioners:

- **Long-term unemployed (LTUs) people** are characterized by their “lack of motivation”, which could be overcome if a program is developed to help them towards their own capacitation, and while trying to find out their talents. One of the biggest challenges for those professionals working with the LTU population is the motivation of these individuals. They are usually unmotivated and do not have initiative or energy to operate a change. According to the professionals’ point of view, it becomes challenging to help them recognizing their skills and their strengths into themselves, as well as being able to (re)integrate them into labor market. As mentioned by one interviewed practitioner, “the promotion of autonomy is a crucial concern to help people getting out of social exclusion.”

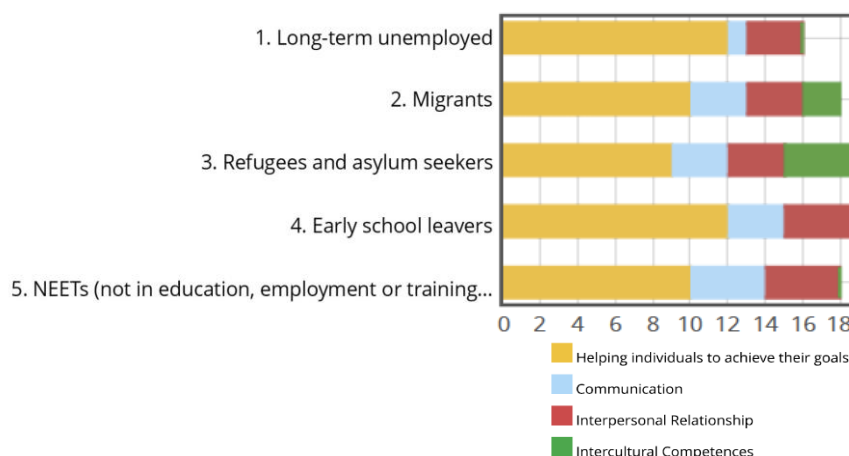
- **Early school leavers:** interview testimonies outlined the “demotivation of this group”, their “lack of information”, the difficulty in “encouraging those individuals and reaching this group.” The interviewed career counselors and vocational guidance professionals generally work with low-skilled early school leavers, so one of their strategies to face this challenge is to use appropriate and easy-to-understand language, trying to help these individuals approaching formal education structures in order to increase their school and/or professional qualifications. An interviewed practitioner referred that “it’s important to be clear and precise”, as saying “something that makes sense” to the early school leavers should be an intervention concern.
- **Young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs):** the main concern identified by the interviewed career counselors and vocational guidance practitioners is “bringing this people closer to the job market”, since “it seems that no adequate training programs exist for this kind of group”. The professional concern about the NEET population shared by the interviewed professionals relies on how to approach them, since they are generally unmotivated, uninterested and not focused on their future life. Their professional strategy is dedicated to engage NEETs into their future projects, making them reflect on diverse possibilities and taking into account their skills and competences. “It’s important to create impact for the members of this group, using differentiating intervention” methods, as suggested by an interviewed.
- **Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers** living in Portugal: interview testimonies outlined professional concerns about this group that encompass “many situations, including helping them to find a home and a job; (dealing with) legal issues.” With these vulnerable groups, the main concern is their legal situation, followed by their integration into the community through a job being granted, for instance. Another testimony reinforced “the importance of community integration (...) with a special emphasis on finding a place to live and getting a job”.

2.2.2. Experienced working difficulties

As shown on Graph 6, the Portuguese surveyed career counselors and vocational guidance practitioners experienced different working difficulties while working with the following hard-to-reach groups:

- **Long-term unemployed people:** helping individuals to achieve their goals (75,0%), establishing an interpersonal relationship (18.8%) and communication (6,3%).
- **Early school leavers:** helping individuals to achieve their goals (63.2%) establishing an interpersonal relationship (21.1%) and a communication (15.8%).
- **Young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs):** helping individuals to achieve their goals (55,6%), establishing communication (22,2%), and an interpersonal relationship (22,2%).
- **Migrants:** helping individuals to achieve their goals (55,6%), establishing communication (16,7%) and an interpersonal relationship (16,7%), followed by the difficulty in applying intercultural competences (11,1%).
- **Refugees and asylum seekers:** helping individuals to achieve their goals (47,4%), applying intercultural competences (21,1%), followed by the establishment of communication (15,8%) and an interpersonal relationship (15,8%).

Graph 6: Working difficulties according to different hard-to-reach group



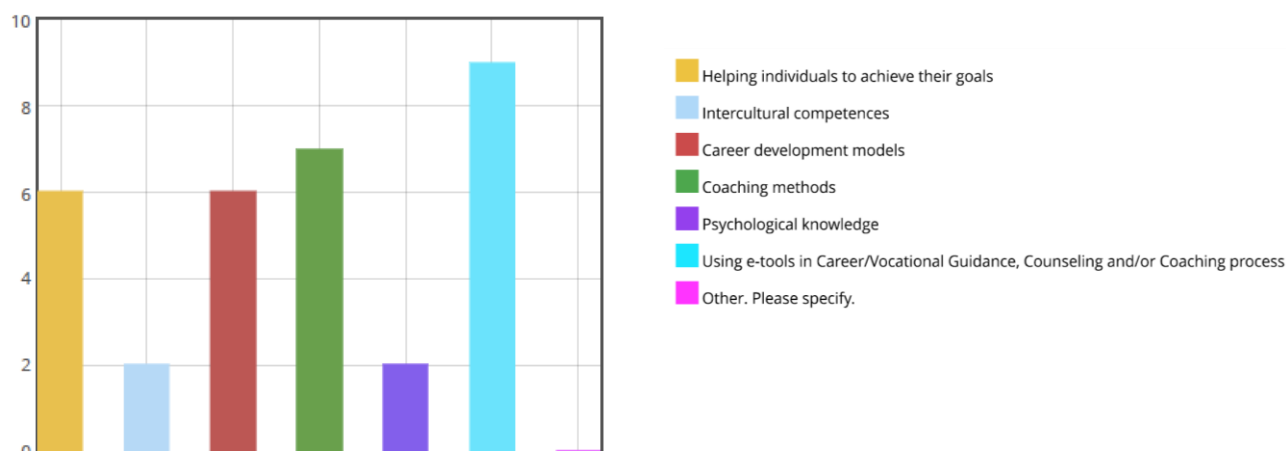
Source: ACCEnT Portuguese Online Survey

The same type of difficulties was experienced by the interviewed professionals, including “communication and language barriers”, as well as “different communication styles.” Other specific difficulties were reported by those who were interviewed, namely “legal issues, such as residence visas and employment contracts, lack of organizational responses, and inflexibility to singular conditions”. Regardless of the hard to reach group being considered, the Portuguese counselors and vocational guidance practitioners who participated in the national research experienced more difficulties in helping individuals at risk of staying long-term unemployed from all specific vulnerable subgroups to achieve their goals. Higher obstacles in assisting them to reach their objectives were noted for long-term unemployed and early school leavers. Additionally, communication and interpersonal relationship constrains expressed by the surveyed professionals were most evident among young people who are neither in education, nor employment or training, and among migrants. Moreover, the refugees and asylum seekers were the hard-to-reach group to whom the survey respondents revealed more difficulties in applying their intercultural competences.

2.2.3. Frequency, motivation and areas of needed training

The main training needs of the surveyed professionals working with hard to reach groups in Portugal entailed the use of e-tools for career/vocational guidance, counselling and/or coaching processes (28.1%), followed by the acquisition of coaching methods (21,9%), the possibility of helping individuals to achieve their goals, and the implementation of career development models (18,8% for both training areas).

Graph 7: Areas of needed training by Guidance Practitioners working with hard-to-reach groups



Source: ACCEnT Portuguese Online Survey

All of the interviewed career counselors and career practitioners reported having had training within the last 3 years, which reveals their awareness of the need to remain up-to-date and to acquire new knowledge in these counseling-related issues subject to ongoing evolutions and major shifts. Therefore, one interviewed professional explained that her additional training coursework is “important because these are constantly changing areas nowadays”.

Furthermore, the training was usually carried out on public and governmental institutional facilities, being aligned to the practice of these career counseling and vocational guidance professionals and the governmental policies applied in Portugal.

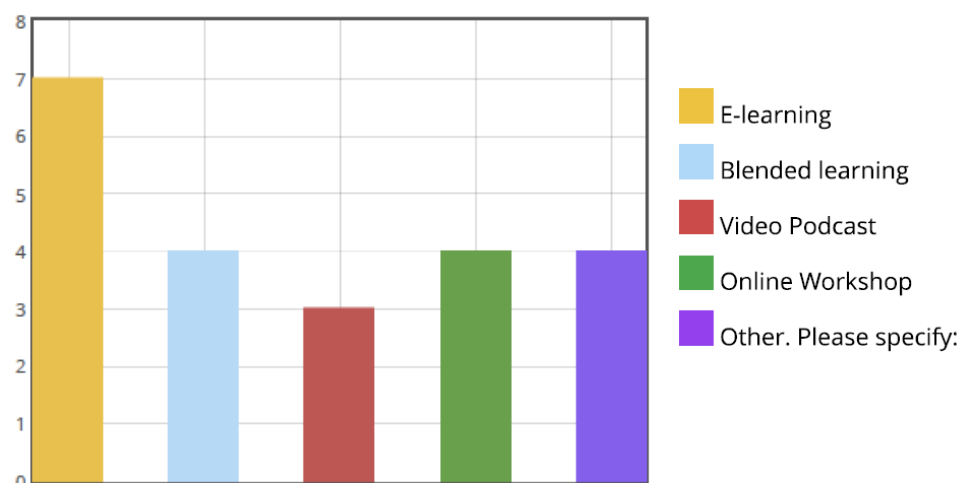
2.3. Learning Content and Environment

2.3.1. Content and type of training

The surveyed Portuguese career counselors and vocational guidance practitioners stated that they would like to know more about operational tools (34,6%), intervention strategies such as conflict management (30,8%), and methodological approaches including career development methods (26,9%). The interviewed professionals have also identified content areas for further training to be obtained, highlighting the “coaching, new approaches for motivation, intercultural training and practical strategies” to work with hard-to-reach groups.

Additionally, the desire to be enrolled into an e-learning training program was high among the Portuguese career counselors and vocational guidance practitioners who participated on both the interviews and on the online survey (expressed by 31,8% of the respondents). According to the surveyed professionals, their declared preferences were followed by the blended learning, online workshops, and other type of on-site and face-to-face training (18,2% for each of the last three training options).

Graph 8: Type of training preferred by Guidance Practitioners working with hard-to-reach groups

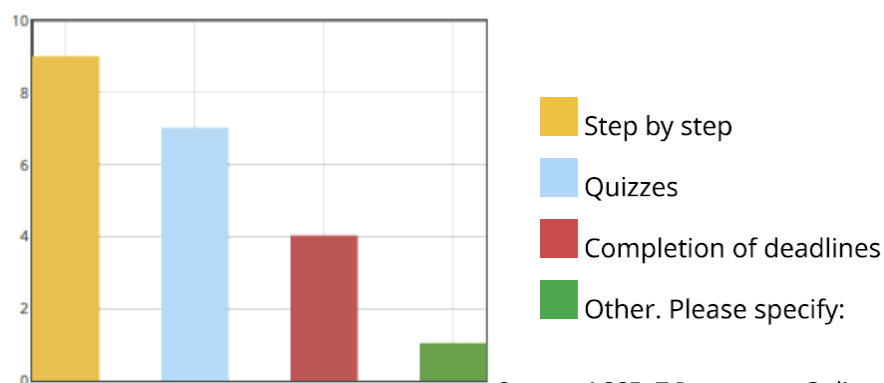


Source: ACCEnT Portuguese Online Survey

2.3.2. The use of e-tools and e-learning training structure

When it comes to the type of e-learning training structure, the surveyed Portuguese career counselors and vocational guidance practitioners preferred a step-by-step arrangement (42.9%), followed by quizzes (33.3%), and deadline completion procedures (19.1%).

Graph 9: Training structure preferred by Guidance Practitioners working with hard-to-reach groups



Source: ACCEnT Portuguese Online Survey

Regarding the use of e-tools, the interviewed Portuguese guidance practitioners mentioned that they would like to take advantage of these online instruments if possible, having also outlined that a wider availability of this kind of digital resources would be beneficial advantageous for their professional practice.

2.3.3. Training schedule, frequency, duration and information

In regards to the scheduling mode, 42,1% of the survey respondents mentioned that they would prefer to complete training during their regular working hours, while 31,6% considered learning after work as a preferable option. Finally, 26,3% of the surveyed practitioners would like to be trained on the weekends.

A shorter training duration is preferred by the majority of the survey respondents (56,2%), who mainly supported training sessions of 45 minutes each. Longer sessions were less appreciated by the surveyed, considering that only 37,5% of them were willing to attend a 90-minute training session, and just 6,3% preferred it for about 120 minutes.

In Portugal, the majority of the career counselors and vocational guidance who were surveyed declared to prefer attending training sessions on a bi-weekly basis (42,1%) or once a week (36,8%). Most of them (72,2%) would like to be informed about the training sessions by e-mail, having only a few considered an additional source of information via social networks.

Based on the national quantitative and qualitative data presented above, it can be understood that Portuguese career and vocational guidance practitioners are motivated to receive training, even if it involves spending extra professional time to acquire more knowledge and becoming more familiar with digital tools, that could help them to better perform their diverse duties and tasks on a daily professional practice.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

Career guidance strategies seem to be necessary while supporting the most vulnerable people and finding social integration solutions for them. Its instrumental role in providing information, identifying job skills needs, clarifying career options and developing positive attitudes towards employability was made clear on the report.

In view of the more changing nature of the current working environments, there was also evidence being found about the importance of developing career adaptability skills (e.g.: planning, exploration, and decision-making) and learning skills that enable the professionals working with hard-to-reach groups to deal effectively and continuously with unforeseen employability problems and job market demands (Savickas, 2012).

According to our national research carried out under the scope of ACCEnT project, we can now better understand the situation of the Portuguese career counselors and vocational guidance practitioners working with people at risk of remaining long term unemployed. To briefly describe their profile, they are highly qualified professionals, having obtained a Social Sciences degree at a bachelor's and/or a master's level.

Based on the conducted research study, we can also conclude that the most frequent situation is described by professionals working with one or two types of hard to reach groups, having indeed a high level of knowledge with some vulnerable groups and limited knowledge with others. The national research study still indicates that these professionals feel very interested and motivated to learn more, being willing to receive additional training that would allow them to expand their knowledge and acquire new skills and better methods to work with hard-to-reach groups, especially with those barely present in their territorial area of intervention.

Regarding the less common career guidance practice with migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, the counseling professionals tend to work on accompanying them towards the value added to their biographical and professional (formal, non-formal and informal) experiences while

(re)constructing their careers in the host country (Slowik, 2014). Counselors seem to be keystones for the integration process of hard-to-reach groups, providing them opportunities to demonstrate their skills and competences, develop new ones and increase their chances of being (re)integrated into the labor market.

Addressing the educational and training needs of professionals is undoubtedly a priority for ACCEnT project. Therefore, our national research study outlined the importance of developing a training program that enables them to acquire skills and helping individuals at risk of social and job market exclusion to achieve their goals.

The use of e-tools is one of the main concerns of those Portuguese career counseling and vocational guidance practitioners who were surveyed and interviewed. They reported the need of receiving more training and being able to discover which digital e-learning instruments are more appropriate to each hard-to-reach group. Having more tools available to be used while intervening with vulnerable individuals even seems to be a highly motivational element for these professionals.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that Portuguese career counselors and vocational guidance practitioners would prefer to work within a closer network environment and obtain more knowledge about the best practices used in other European countries. The curiosity around ACCEnT project was notorious among the research participants, which seems to be an added value for its further implementation.

II. ANNEX AND APPENDIXES

ANNEX I – References

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