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AccessCareer

Enhancing Inclusive Access to Career Counselling

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D4.3 Policy Recommendations

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Table of Abbreviations and Acronyms

Abbreviation	Meaning
DYPA	Greek Employment Public Service
NGO	Non-governmental organizations
HR	Human Resources
PAFED	Spanish annual employment plan indicators
SEPE	Spanish national public employment service

Executive Summary

The AccessCareer project examined how career guidance across Europe can better serve socially disadvantaged jobseekers. Based on two years of implementation and consultation with project partners and external stakeholders, this document presents 15 policy recommendations addressed to European, national and regional policymakers. Eight operate at meso level, four at macro level, and three at both.

The evidence shows that support exists but is fragmented, focused on job search, and rarely continues after placement. The central challenge is therefore not the absence of services, but the lack of fit between services and the needs of the people they are intended to serve.

The recommendations call for continuous and personalised pathways, integrated local referral networks, employer-facing incentives and support, national minimum standards for accessible guidance, and outcome-based monitoring broken down by target group. Most can be implemented within existing frameworks, with several low-cost measures achievable in the short term.

Introduction

The **AccessCareer** project has addressed the urgent need for modernising career guidance across Europe. These **Policy Recommendations** presents **key insights for policymakers at European, national, and regional levels** to enhance the effectiveness, accessibility, and sustainability of career guidance services for all individuals, particularly those navigating transitions.

The present document encapsulates the lessons learnt and recommendations collected over the two-year AccessCareer experience. The following recommendations address the main gaps as identified throughout the entire AccessCareer implementation and discussed with beneficiaries and national and European stakeholders. All project partners took part in the contribution of recommendations, as well as 9 external stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds – HR professionals, civil society workers, job seekers, training providers.

It sets out **15 policy recommendations**, 8 at meso level and 4 at macro level and 3 at both, organised under six categories: Analysis of Current Challenges, Best Practices and Success Stories, Policy Proposals for Employability of Socially Disadvantaged Groups, Strategies for Social Inclusion, Actionable Steps for Stakeholders, and Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks.

The evidence points to one central conclusion. Support for socially disadvantaged jobseekers exists, but it is fragmented, concentrated on the job search, and rarely follows the person before and after placement. The recommendations therefore **emphasise continuous and personalised pathways**, integrated local referral networks, minimum service standards, employer-facing incentives and capacity support, and outcome-based monitoring that is broken down by target group.

Throughout the document, short term refers to 0 to 2 years, medium term 3 to 5 years, and long term more than 5 years. **Meso-level** recommendations concern how local and regional services, NGOs, providers and employers deliver support on the ground. **Macro-level** recommendations concern the national and EU frameworks, funding and standards needed to make local action systematic.

Analysis of Current Challenges

The evidence collected by all AccessCareer partners points to one shared problem: disadvantaged jobseekers can technically reach employment and guidance services, but **in practice they struggle to access, navigate and stay connected to them**. Support is fragmented across services, concentrated on the job search, and not personalised or continuous enough for people facing several barriers at once. This takes three forms: barriers that keep people from reaching services, services that do not connect to one another, and support that is too thin or too short.

In Spain, Accion Laboral found that limited access to job vacancies was the most-cited barrier, that migrants' foreign qualifications often go unrecognised, and that counsellors lack training in intercultural competence and digital literacy. In Italy, Mylia shows all three forms at once: **access is uneven across territories, barriers differ by group** (language, digital skills, care support, accessibility), and services are split across employment, training, social and health systems. Learning Edge reports the same pattern in Cyprus, with limited awareness of services and difficulty navigating them. In Greece, Headway notes that even where the Greek Public Employment Service (DYPA) offers specialised counselling, people with multiple barriers may need **more intensive and continuous support** than it can provide.

The external stakeholders involved in these Policy Recommendations confirm this from the practitioner side. The clearest message is that **the problem does not end at hiring**: three employers or HR professionals name the gap after placement as the most neglected challenge, and four of nine respondents name the lack of employment support services as the main barrier. Another HR professional describes the **pressure on employers in high-volume recruitment**, who lack the time to assess every applicant and tend to favour candidates who will need less support. Others point to structural obstacles such as childcare, transport and documentation, to employer bias, and to employers' limited time and capacity to support new hires. In conclusion, the main challenge identified here is therefore not an absence of services but **a lack of fit between services and the people who need them**.

Best Practices and Success Stories

Meso-level Recommendations

1. Scale Personalised, Integrated Guidance Pathways (short term)

Public employment services should scale person-centred pathways that combine an initial assessment, an individual action plan, referral to training or complementary support, and periodic follow-up.

Personalised pathways already work within public provision. Spain's Programa Orienta, run by SEPE (the national public employment service), and Italian practice built on skills assessments, action plans and mentoring show that the model is feasible. An HR professional describes the AccessCareer model as effective because support is “practical, individualised and continuous” and because employers are supported alongside jobseekers. Indeed, effectiveness depends on support that is practical, individualised and continuous, and on co-design with counsellors and target groups, which makes services more responsive to real needs.

Public employment services and national and regional authorities should make this the default model for disadvantaged users, with co-design built into its development and review.

2. Scale Mentorship and Job-Coaching Initiatives (short term)

NGOs, schools and training providers should expand mentoring and small-group coaching for disadvantaged jobseekers and newcomers.

Mentorship and coaching are consistently identified as the type of initiative most worth scaling. The examples are practical and small in scale: mentoring in schools helps newcomers adapt, and small-group mentoring and training builds digital competence. They also answer the lack of mentorship and peer support that undermines inclusion at work.

NGOs, schools and VET providers should expand such formats, which are simple to organise locally.

3. Embed Employer Partnerships and Counsellor–HR Cooperation (short-medium term)

Employment services and employers should link career counselling directly to employers through apprenticeships, skills-based recruitment and a practical guide to inclusive recruitment.

Effective practice connects support to real employers. Apprenticeship schemes, recruitment based on transferable skills instead of employment gaps, with close counsellor and HR cooperation and follow-up support makes employment more sustainable. Employers need practical tools to do this on inclusive recruitment covering accessible job descriptions, selection practices and onboarding – such as the model of the AccessCareer Practical Tools.

Public employment services and private-sector employers should build these links into everyday practice, and an employer guide would offer a concrete first product for organisations working with disadvantaged groups.

Macro-level Recommendation

4. Scale Integrated Training-to-Subsidised-Employment Programmes (medium term)

National authorities should scale programmes that combine skills development with subsidised employment for people furthest from the labour market.

Greece offers the clearest example: a programme run by DYP combines 80 hours of training with 12 months of subsidised employment for Guaranteed Minimum Income beneficiaries and homeless people. Subsidies work because they reduce employers' hiring risk, create real work

opportunities and prevent unpaid labour. They work best with clear information, easy access, training and follow-up for both employer and employee.

National authorities should scale such programmes with simple access rules, built-in follow-up and links to training.

Policy Proposals for Employability of Socially Disadvantaged Groups

Meso-level Recommendations

5. Individual Employability Pathways: Needs Identification, Plans and Post-Placement Follow-Up (medium term)

Employment services should identify support needs at registration, give each person facing multiple barriers an Individual Employability Plan that is reviewed periodically, and fund follow-up on workplace adaptation after placement.

People facing multiple barriers need more intensive and continuous support than standard services provide, yet needs are rarely identified systematically at registration and support often ends at placement. Skills-profiling, and a periodically reviewed plan is a standard first step for migrants with unrecognised qualifications. Follow-up is the most neglected element: success means people remain employed and progress, not only that they are hired.

This recommendation also works at macro-level, depending on administrative structures. National and regional authorities and public employment services should build profiling, plans and follow-up during the first months of employment into their employment strategies.

6. Expand Vocational Training Linked to Employers, with Childcare Support (short-medium term)

Training providers and local authorities should expand practical vocational training tied directly to employers, supported by childcare as an enabling measure.

Career counsellors underlined that training linked directly to employers is the most promising route into work, because skills match real labour market needs and can be supported before and after recruitment. Childcare is a precondition for taking part at all, particularly for women and for people without informal family networks, and it remains underestimated in public debate.

Training providers and authorities should expand employer-linked training and pair it with childcare, so that people with care responsibilities can participate.

Macro-level Recommendation

7. A Mixed Employer-Incentive Model (medium term)

National authorities should combine subsidies for inclusive hiring with regulatory requirements.

Practitioners favour combining positive incentives with regulatory requirements over relying on either alone. The most concrete measures are hiring subsidies, which offset uncertainty about a new hire's productivity, and incentives for skills-based and inclusive recruitment. However, neither instrument would be sufficient without targeted training and economic support.

National authorities should design a mixed model and test whether subsidies alone are enough.

Strategies for Social Inclusion

Meso-level Recommendation

8. Formalise a Multi-Stakeholder Inclusion Coalition (medium term)

Educational institutions, community organisations, trade unions and civil society should have a defined role in advancing inclusion, alongside employers and government.

Throughout AccessCareer activities, it became clear that no single actor is seen as sufficient to deliver inclusion. The evidence points to a broad group with complementary roles: educational institutions for skills and early orientation, community organisations for outreach and trust, trade unions for workplace rights and accommodation, and civil society for advocacy and feedback. Authorities should convene these actors in a standing coalition with clear functions.

Macro-level Recommendation

9. Introduce Minimum Accessibility and Inclusion Standards for Publicly Supported Career Guidance (medium term)

National authorities should define common minimum standards covering accessible information, plain language, reasonable accommodation, language support, digital-access assessment, personalised plans and clear referral arrangements.

The quality of guidance varies because no common baseline exists. Evidence from Italy and Cyprus points to the same solution: minimum standards on accessible information, language support, reasonable accommodation, digital-access assessment and referral, backed by counsellor training on bias and intercultural competence. A national baseline reduces territorial disparities while preserving regional delivery models, and treats inclusive guidance as integral to employment policy, not a separate service for specific groups.

National authorities should adopt such standards in phases, which requires coordination between ministries and services but not legislative reform.

Actionable Steps for Stakeholders

Meso-level Recommendations

10. Train Career Counsellors in Intercultural Competence and Digital Literacy (short term)

National and regional authorities, NGOs and private-sector training providers should mandate intercultural-competence and digital-literacy modules for public and third-sector career counsellors.

Career counsellors themselves report insufficient intercultural and digital training, which limits their support for migrants and individuals with low digital literacy. This is a precondition for the minimum standards in Recommendation 7 to work in practice, and it is a simple, low-cost measure that can be delivered within two years, independent of the wider standards process. The AccessCareer training materials could be implemented within such formation.

Authorities, NGOs and training providers should add these modules to existing counsellor development pathways.

11. Build Local Integrated Referral Networks, Starting with a Pilot and a Published Service Map (short-medium term)

Regions and municipalities should formalise referral networks linking employment services, training providers, social services and civil society, starting with one local partnership that maps existing services and pilots a common pathway of assessment, action plan, referral and follow-up.

Career difficulties are tied to wider barriers such as language, digital access, housing, transport, childcare and unrecognised qualifications, which counselling alone cannot solve. Services fail when people must navigate them alone. Partners in three countries independently propose the same remedy, referral networks linking existing services without creating a parallel structure, and the same first step: a shared, regularly updated map of services covering target groups, eligibility, accessibility, languages and referral procedures, tested through a small pilot.

Local authorities, public employment services and NGOs should lead the pilot with a simple, data-protection-compliant protocol, which generates evidence for wider replication.

Macro-level Recommendation

12. Policymaker Priorities and Removal of Implementation Blockers (short-medium term)

Policymakers should enforce existing anti-discrimination law, expand hiring subsidies and tax incentives, simplify documentation and eligibility requirements, speed up recognition of foreign qualifications, and provide dedicated funding, change-management support and accountability mechanisms.

Policy priorities point to implementation more than new invention: enforcing existing anti-discrimination law, expanding hiring subsidies and tax incentives, and simplifying documentation and eligibility requirements. Matching unrecognised foreign qualifications and subsidies to sustain people in work are system-level solutions that only national action can solve. The obstacles to acting are equally practical: lack of funding, organisational resistance to change and absent accountability.

Authorities should act within existing frameworks and pair these priorities with earmarked funding, change-management support and accountability tied to monitoring.

Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

Meso- and Macro-level Recommendations

13. Adopt a Core Outcome Set, Including Longer-Term and Tool-Specific Indicators (short-medium term)

Employers and employment services should track retention, wage progression, wellbeing and career advancement, and national frameworks should add longer-term outcomes and the impact of digital tools.

Monitoring indicators should capture what happens after work placement, as placement rates alone miss whether people are included and progress: retention, wage progression, wellbeing and career advancement. AccessCareer partners add two extensions: tracking the impact of digital tools within national indicators, such as within Spain's annual employment plan indicators (PAFED), and longer-term measures such as share of participants in employment after 6 months. Employers and employment services should adopt the core set of indicators now, and authorities should extend their frameworks with the longer-term measures.

14. Monitor Equitable Access, Referrals and Progression by Target Group (medium term)

Publicly supported guidance should track reach and the quality of the pathway, broken down by target group and territory where data-protection rules allow.

Monitoring should judge whether services include and benefit disadvantaged groups, not only how many people they reach. Partners in Italy and Cyprus propose the same indicators: users reached, individual action plans, referrals, completed activities, user-reported accessibility and usefulness, and progression to education, training or employment. Results should be analysed by target group or needs assessed where data-protection rules allow, with a focus on improving skills.

Authorities and employment services should adopt a common indicator set, without which the standards and networks proposed could not show their impact.

15. Set Tracking Responsibility and Cadence (short term)

Employers should track continuously, public authorities and independent evaluators should verify, and formal reviews should take place at least every six months.

Responsibility for indicators tracking is best shared to ensure transparency and accountability. Internal monitoring by HR or employers' management is a starting point, but independent verification and by public authorities would allow to ensure data is not mishandled and to include progress findings into employment services. Civil society involvement would also ensure the capture of participants' experiences. Continuous monitoring, six-monthly reviews, and an annual evaluation allows the early detection of problems with enough time to see outcomes such as retention.



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