

Which are the most important Personal Branding & Employability skills needed by young people in order to get easier on the job market?

With this question, posed to career counselors, hr managers and employers across 6 different European countries the Brand4Careers project has started its actions in order to identify the essential career skills that young people in Europe should develop in order to foster their employment and their smooth transition from higher education to world of work.

According to European Commission (2020), “young people deserve all possible opportunities to develop their full potential to shape the future of the EU and to thrive in the green and digital transitions”. However, even before the Covid crisis, the social and economic integration of young people was an ongoing challenge and they often face difficulties to enter the labour market. This situation has been worsening by the coronavirus pandemic.

The Global Survey on Youth and COVID-19 prepared by ILO Youth Team (2020) explored the early impact of pandemic on the lives of young people (aged 18–29) with regards to employment, education and training as well as to, mental well-being, rights and social activism. With the receipt of over 12,000 responses from young people in 112 countries, the study found that the impact on young people to be systematic, deep and disproportionate and unless urgent action is taken, young people will suffer severe and long-lasting impacts from the pandemic. Specifically for employment and education, this study suggested that “targeted and large scale employment policies are needed in order to protect a whole generation of young people from having their employment prospects permanently scarred”. As for education and training, among other policies, improvement and modernizing job counseling and career guidance, increase investment in digital solutions for practical skills will diminish the risk of delaying or the failure of the transition from school to work

Similar, in a more recent report 6 international organizations (Cedefop, European Commission, Unesco, ETF, ICCDP, OECD (2021) mention that globally “..Covid-19 has deeply disrupted demand for workers and accelerated patterns of automation and digital transformation that are radically changing the character of work and increasing risks of joblessness and precarious employment. Moreover, globalization, demographic trends and growing efforts to create greener economies are changing the character of demand for skills in labour markets around the world”. Then, they share their vision of the strategic role of career guidance can play in this changing world and in helping people of all ages and backgrounds to navigate the storm.

Based on a flash joint international survey, designed to provide a snapshot of how career guidance policies, systems and services were adapting and coping with Covid pandemic the 6 international organizations (Cedefop, European Commission, Unesco, ETF, ICCDP, OECD), concluded that “In light of the growing negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on national labour markets and people’s lives and livelihoods, the role of career guidance has become ever more important to individuals, families, communities, the workforce, employers and society”.

Respondents confirmed the potential of career guidance to contribute to the recovery in terms of efficient investment in education, skills development, labour market efficiency and social inclusion. Importantly, they highlighted the role of career guidance in supporting and enabling distance and blended learning. Also, they referred to systems adaptation with the supply or provision of blended forms of career guidance and the move towards remote forms of delivery. (Cedefop et al, 2020)

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

The lockdown triggered the use of web-based interactive guidance tools and services (e.g. video-communication with counsellors, YouTube-live or webinars with chat function, and facilitation), even in countries where these technologies were not previously common in guidance delivery pg in Germany. The extent of ICT infrastructure and level of lifelong guidance system development have had a strong influence on how (and if) guidance services and careers learning have been delivered will shape the further development of policies and plans, and other steering tools.

Also, the particular value of online platforms during the time of the Coronavirus pandemic and longer periods of lockdown has become apparent. Depending on their scope, these platforms can include a relatively comprehensive offer for a structured process of information and decision-making for identifying optimal choices for education and training and job searches nationally and/or across Europe, or within adult learning, for all people who have access and the necessary technical equipment at home.

Career counselors from different European countries shed light to different aspects as for the use of ICT in career guidance and how this crisis transformed career counseling service. Some concrete examples are the following

This crisis has jump-started the process of improving both online services and the counselors' experience to use technology to enhance career services. It introduced new ways and new mentalities of reaching and working with individuals. Counselors from Malta who work in the education and employment sector emphasized the importance of reaching out to their students/jobseekers through different channels (telephone, emails, chat, Facebook, Zoom, video conferencing) etc. However, they also expressed their concern that since dealing with video conferencing/sessions are quite frequent – some aspects such as GDPR, online recording issues and rights and obligations for both the clients and the career guidance practitioner need to be re-examined.

Similar, counselors from Romania, expressed the need to reflect on the role that digital technology should have in the future of education and career guidance, e.g. for personalisation of learning/career guidance. AI powered systems could have helped teachers, students and parents, employers and unemployed people navigate the range of digital learning resources out there if they were more available and ready to use. Employers should move recruitment online and make more development activities virtual however efficient tools to host job fairs online are also needed

Turkish colleagues emphasized that there are skills that need to be prioritized in guidance interventions during crisis and the most important thing is to help people become more resilient. The counsellors are in a good position to help explore feelings of their clients in order to support their general well-being, in a more holistic approach.

The main conclusion of the Cedefop's joint international study (2020) is "The pandemic can constitute an opportunity for governments to pay further attention to and rethink career guidance provision from a systemic perspective. There could be reviews of career guidance service provision, with a view to new configurations of such public services in the longer term. This might include actions to develop career guidance that moves from information delivery to more collaborative approaches enhanced by using technology, integrated in the services, and underpinned by adequate career management skills development strategies".

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

At the same time, European Commission announced the “Youth Employment Support: a Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation” where among other policies proposed “Career management trainings in formal education and training to prepare young people for a volatile, precarious world of work and to explain possible steps in finding a job or receiving support” as a priority operation in order to support youth employment and avert a new youth employment crisis.

In these circumstances and in absolute adjustment to this scope, the Erasmus + Program titled “Enhancing career management skills through the development of personal brand” has been funded by EU. 7 partners (2 companies active in ICT-enabled E&T and knowledge dissemination, 4 Higher Education Institutions and 1 NGO providing career guidance) from 6 different European Countries (Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Italy, UK) will work together for 2 years on common goals and having a dual aim

- a. To create a "blended guidance" methodology in online career management training useful for career counselors of higher education institutions to assist young students and provide innovative forms of counseling
- b. to introduce personal brand as a new method in career management training, that will help job seekers access the job market of their preference

The expected results are:

- Personal Branding Skills and Actions Identification: This framework comprises the definition of soft skills and relevant actions necessary for developing a personal brand.
- Create the “CV generator”: An online tool that will “profile” learners by identifying their personality elements. It will then organize the information on the CV according to the skills that characterize them the most.
- Guide on Personal Branding: A guide that will be addressed to career guidance counselors/coaches, enabling them to develop online activities relevant to personal brand. The Guide will contain information and guidelines that will help counselors/coaches incorporate the CV Generator into their training approaches. Furthermore, the guide will propose several online tools that can be used during distance learning, enabling them in this way to adopt a digital approach.

In this way, the project will help 2 main target groups

Higher Education Students

- Identify their main skills and characteristics, which is important not only in their career path but also in their personal development
- Improve their soft skills
- Develop a successful personal brand that will follow them through their career
- Define the job market relevant to their skills and knowledge
- Be confident when applying for a job
- Have an online CV generator at their disposal that will profile them and categorize the information given according to their profiles.

Career guidance counselors/coaches

- Gain new digital tools and learning methodologies for assisting young people to foster their employability
- Adopt digital technologies in their training
- Acquire new skills and competences

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

“**BRAND4CAREERS**” is an Erasmus+ KA2 Youth Project, financed by the European Commission (Project Number: 2020-1-UK01-KA226-HE-094634) The project started in June 2021, with the duration of 24 months.

If you are interested in our program, you may visit our webpage <http://brand4careers.eu/>

References

European Commission (2020). “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social committee and the Committee of the Regions - Youth Employment Support: a Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation”

Cedefop, European Commission, ETF, ICCDPP, ILO, OECD, UNESCO (2020). Career guidance policy and practice in the pandemic: results of a joint international survey – June to August 2020. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/318103>

Cedefop, European Commission, ETF, ILO, OECD, UNESCO (2021). Investing in Career Guidance. Revised Edition.

https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-09/investing_in_career_guidance.pdf

Cedefop (2020). Note on lifelong guidance and the COVID-19 pandemic: Responses from Cedefop’s CareersNet.

ILO (2020). Youth and COVID-19: Impacts on jobs, education, rights and mental well-being. Survey Report https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_753026.pdf

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.