



GUIDELINES FOR PROFESSIONAL GUIDANCE ASSOCIATIONS IN CEE

SUPPORTING PROFESSIONALISM AND SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

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ABOUT CEE GUIDANCE ASSOCIATIONS' FORUM

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INTRODUCTION

These guidelines are addressed to board members and active leaders of professional associations of career guidance practitioners. They draw on a substantial body of primary research produced within the CEEGAF project (Central and Eastern European Guidance Association Forum), which studied the functioning of four associations - MPT Career Guidance Division (Hungary), SKPKR (Czech Republic), ZKPRK (Slovakia), and ACROM (Romania) - between November 2024 and April 2025. They are intended as a practical reference, not as an audit tool or a set of abstract aspirations.

The document describes current practice in five selected areas, identifies the main difficulties each area presents, and proposes concrete standards and guidelines. The areas were chosen to group related functions in a way that makes sense from the pragmatic point of view for the development of the associations. The five areas are: membership engagement and community building; professional development support; professional standards and quality assurance; policy influence and advocacy; and governance and organisational sustainability.

The research confirmed that professional associations play an important and often irreplaceable role in the career guidance landscape of their countries, but they often operate on thin resources in terms of time, money, and active human capacity. These guidelines try to offer a realistic picture of where things stand at the moment of their publication and suggest directions that are very practical, demanding enough to be useful but not so ambitious as to require resources none of these associations currently have.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research that underpins these guidelines used three instruments to capture a different perspective on association functioning.

The board self-evaluation questionnaire. In the first phase, each of the four association boards completed a structured questionnaire covering five areas: practical and operational issues (membership structure, financial resources, communication tools), activities performed, external relations, internal processes, and a SWOT analysis. The questionnaire was designed jointly by the four associations in autumn 2024 and refined at a partners' meeting in Prague in November 2024. It was filled in by board members and was explicitly framed as a tool for honest self-reflection rather than for comparison or ranking. The SWOT sections in particular produced honest assessments that are used extensively in these guidelines.

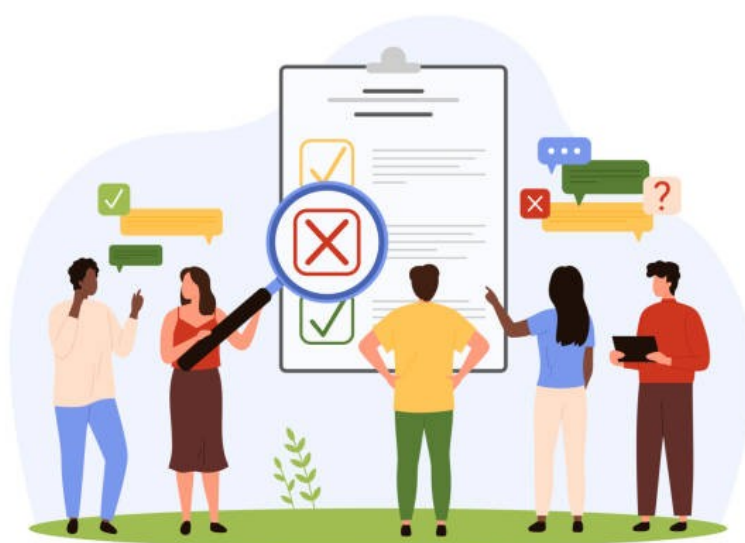
The member survey. The second instrument was an online questionnaire sent to individual members across the four associations in early 2025. Respondents rated eleven areas of association activity on two dimensions - how well their association currently fulfils each activity, and how important they consider it - on a six-point scale. Despite the limited response rate (not unusual for association membership surveys), the results provide a usable picture of member expectations and perceived gaps.

The eleven activities covered in the survey were: supporting networking and collaboration; sharing information and promoting innovation; providing informal training; providing supervision, intervention and mentoring; providing accreditation and certification; supporting quality service delivery through standards and guidelines; participating in research and development projects; promoting career guidance publicly; helping practitioners implement policies in practice; shaping guidance provision at regional level; and shaping the national guidance system through advocacy and engagement with ministries.

A gap score was calculated for each activity. A high gap score, where members consider something important but rate the association's fulfilment as low, signals an area that deserves particular attention. The three activities with the highest gap scores were providing supervision, intervention and mentoring; shaping the guidance system at national level; and supporting networking and collaboration. These findings inform the emphasis given to certain topics in the guidelines below.

External interviews and focus groups. The third strand involved interviews with decision-makers and focus groups with a wider range of practitioners and institutional representatives. Between autumn 2024 and spring 2025, the research teams in the four countries conducted 13 individual interviews and 7 focus groups with a total of roughly 75 participants. In Hungary, interviewees included senior officials from the National Educational Authority and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry; in the Czech Republic, an academic, a private counsellor, a confederation of industry representative, and a regional education authority official; in Slovakia, representatives of the employers' federation, public employment services, and the Ministry of Education; in Romania, a mix of counsellors from university and school settings, researchers, and private service providers. The interviews and focus groups were designed to capture the "outside view" - how the associations are perceived by non-members, and what the broader guidance landscape looks like from the perspective of other actors.

Together, the three instruments produce a rich picture of the work and perceptions of the associations. A more detailed results and methodology are available in a [published article](#).



THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS IN NATIONAL LIFELONG GUIDANCE SYSTEMS

In the four countries covered by this research, career guidance systems are "sectoral" and "fragmented" - terms that appear consistently in the research material, regardless of country. There is no single authority responsible for lifelong guidance in any of the four countries, and coordination between the education, employment, and social sectors remains weak or absent. The table below summarises the basic landscape.

Country	National LLG strategy status	Other career guidance NGOs	National Guidance Forum
Hungary	Sectoral, fragmented	Two major NGOs, others partial	Abolished 2012
Czech Republic	Sectoral, coordination efforts underway	Three active NGOs	Established 2010; weak in practice
Slovakia	Sectoral, fragmented	ZKPRK is the sole active practitioner association	No (two failed attempts: 2008, 2014–15)
Romania	Sectoral, fragmented	Romanian Counsellors Association (ACROM)	None

In this context, professional associations carry a weight of expectations disproportionate to their size. They often function as one of the few cross-sectoral spaces where practitioners from schools, public employment services, higher education, the non-profit sector, and private practice can meet, exchange, and reflect together. They are usually the only organisations specifically concerned with career guidance as a professional field, as opposed to institutions that provide career guidance as one service among many.

The research found that all four associations perform two basic functions. The first is *professional community*: giving practitioners a place to share, learn, and not feel alone in work that is often marginalised or misunderstood within the institutions that employ them. The second is *advocacy*: communicating the value and specificity of career guidance to policymakers and the wider public. Both functions are described as important by members and by external stakeholders. External stakeholders consistently asked for more from these associations than community and information-sharing. They want associations to act as competence centres - places that bridge research, European developments, and national practice. They want associations to set and uphold professional standards and to be consistent partners in policy dialogue. The challenge is to create sufficient support and structured mechanisms that would allow the associations to meet these expectations

GUIDELINES FOR PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS IN CAREER GUIDANCE

AREA 1: MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Information-sharing and networking are the two activities where associations perform best in their members' estimation. In the member survey, "sharing information and promoting innovation, new trends and tools" was rated the highest-fulfilled activity and "providing informal training" came second. Members value these things: the most frequently cited benefits of membership were professional growth, networking, access to relevant information, and a sense of belonging to a community of practice.

That said, there is a clear gap between what members want from networking and what they are getting. The importance of "supporting networking and facilitating collaboration" was rated near the top of the importance scale, while fulfilment came in much lower.

Across all four associations, 55% of members describe themselves as passive - they participate in activities but are not actively involved. Only 18% see themselves as fully active in association life. The boards' own self-evaluations noted the problem from the other side, noting "unequal engagement from members", "lack of perceived added value for many members," "lack of structured feedback mechanism from members," "irregular communication with members" and "insufficient tools for using the know-how and experience of members to spread inspiration."

ASSOCIATIONS' STRENGTHS

The practices catalogued by the four associations show creativity in community building.

Careers Week (Slovakia): ZKPRK, together with Euroguidance Slovakia, has since 2017 coordinated a nationwide umbrella initiative in which schools, employers, career centres, and NGOs register their own career guidance events on a central website and map. The initiative does not require ZKPRK to organise events directly, instead, it provides the infrastructure (website, visual identity, a practical guide, and national promotion) while the actual events are designed and run by participating organisations in their own contexts. In 2017, the first edition attracted 46 events in 21 towns. Since then, the format has extended to a 3–4 week period concentrated around a "career week," and the association awards prizes for the most inspiring local events. The key lesson documented in the practice record is the value of "central coordination and infrastructure, but decentralised ownership": ZKPRK sets the frame and ensures visibility; the practitioners create the content. (See: cee-guidance.eu/practices/)

Coffee with a Career Guidance Counsellor (Slovakia): A second Slovak practice worth noting in detail is this series of free public events held in cafés and community spaces across multiple cities. In the 2022/23 series, 10 events were organised across Slovakia, engaging 14 counsellors and 82 participants. The format is a one-hour group workshop followed by

optional short individual consultations. The association provides a common introductory presentation, shared visual identity, a registration system, and national social media promotion (including paid targeted advertising in some years). The local counsellors (association members) design the workshop content themselves and book the venues. The practice was originally developed partly to give freelance members a way to promote their services while providing a public good.

Annual Conference of Career Counsellors (Romania and other countries): ACROM organises an annual national conference lasting 2–3 days, in partnership with universities, which has attracted between 100 and 200 participants per edition consistently. The conferences have featured internationally known experts (including Prof. Mark Savickas in 2021 and Prof. Ronald Sultana in the NBCC Romania partnership edition), and have resulted in position papers submitted to the Ministry of Education and contributed to regulatory developments. The model of institutional co-hosting with a university as the anchor partner allows the association to organise large-scale events without a permanent infrastructure, while giving the host institution visibility and access to practitioners.

Day for Career Guidance (Czech Republic): SKPKR has since 2023 organised an annual full-day event for career counsellors from schools and private practice. Participants pay a small fee that covers costs; presenters are typically members promoting their own tools and approaches. The format is financially self-sufficient, informal, and structured around sharing. Topics covered in recent editions have included labour market transformations, digital tools in guidance, ethics, gender stereotypes, and green guidance. Post-event materials and slides are published on the association's website for those who could not attend.

KEY DIFFICULTIES

Even with these established formats, two recurring problems were identified. The first is *reach*: all four associations concentrate most of their activity at national level, with very limited regional presence. The "Coffee with a Counsellor" practice found that "in some regions, organising counsellors were sometimes disappointed due to a low number of participants" - a consequence of weak regional networks and the difficulty of mobilising local members without a dedicated person on the ground. The second problem is *passivity*: all four boards describe the challenge of members who pay (or don't pay) fees and receive newsletters but rarely come to events, never contribute, and gradually disappear from the membership list without explicit resignation. The board self-evaluations repeatedly identified "lack of structured feedback from members" as a weakness, addressing this requires more than an occasional survey.

GUIDELINES FOR AREA 1: MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

Establish at least one regular community format that runs without project funding and involves members as contributors. Having at least one established community format that happens regularly at a fixed time, requires no special funding to run, and involves members as contributors rather than only as audience. The [Day for Career Guidance](#) in the Czech Republic and the summer/winter schools in Slovakia are examples of this type of event. The annual conference common to all four associations serves a different purpose - it is a larger, more formal occasion, important for visibility and professional identity but not a substitute for regular, lower-barrier contact. Where national-level events are inaccessible to members in other regions, online formats can be used, or smaller, regional meetings.

Create structured feedback mechanisms beyond member surveys. Communication with members should be two-directional, as opposed to newsletters and social media posts that are one-directional by nature. Each association can develop at least one format that allows members to contribute: open calls for topics for the next event, a shared space for resources and tools (as the [bibliography and database of career guidance literature](#) in Hungary), a question or dilemma circulated for peer response, or something similar.

Clearly communicate the added value of the membership. Associations should be explicit about what membership offers. Several boards noted that members struggle to articulate why they are members, and the member survey found a "clear call for more consistent communication, recognition of contributions, and enhanced visibility of the association's impact." This could take a form of formulating a simple answer to "what do I get from being a member?" and updating it on a regular basis (annually).

Address visibility as a strategic priority. Some stakeholders and practitioners do not know that associations existed or what they offered. Associations need a consistent public story about who they are and why it matters, communicable in one or two sentences that can be used in the communication media and in contact with partners and stakeholders.

Approach inactive members with direct, personal asks rather than open calls. The research found that members are willing to take on tasks *"if they were approached personally and given a specific role."* Open calls require self-selection; a specific invitation ("Would you facilitate one session per year?") can facilitate member engagement.

AREA 2: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Informal learning such as [workshops, webinars, training events](#) is the important part of the offer of all four associations and the area where members are most satisfied. All four boards describe professional development support as a core mission. However, some other structured forms of professional development such as supervision, intervision, and mentoring received the lowest fulfilment score in the entire member survey and the highest importance-to-fulfilment gap. The boards themselves acknowledge this and see "professional development and training for members" as an area of marked interest. Some also state that "members do not use the activities offered for further professional growth" as a weakness, which points not only to the supply of activities but to whether they are well-matched to members needs.

ASSOCIATIONS' STRENGTHS

The clearest example of professional development in the region is ZKPRK's accredited training programme, which has trained approximately 170 career guidance practitioners since 2021. It combines theoretical foundations with practical skills training, is led by experienced practitioners who are association members, and is officially accredited in a context where no other systematic CPD pathway for career guidance exists. A complementary format is summer and winter schools, which combine professional content with a community-building function. The SWOT analysis describes these events as creating "a sense of community and also allowing the introduction of innovative practices in guidance." They are not accredited and are lighter in format (typically 2–3 days) but they maintain continuity of contact between members outside the formal training programme.

The Czech association developed [C-Course](#): a free, multilingual e-learning for career practitioners developed through an Erasmus+ project. The course offers four flexible modules covering labour markets, professionalism, career education, and the evolving role of guidance professionals. As a free online resource, it is accessible to practitioners who are not members of any association.

In Hungary, the MPT Career Guidance Division has produced policy guidelines and professional positions, and its webinars have accumulated over 5,000 views. The division also supported publication of a career guidance handbook covering career choice, orientation, and education – an example of how a practitioner association can contribute to the knowledge base of the field even without dedicated research infrastructure.

KEY DIFFICULTIES

The absence of a national system for the continuous professional development of career guidance practitioners in most of the four countries creates a structural problem for associations. There is no licensing requirement, no formal CPD portfolio, and no external incentive for practitioners to invest time in professional development beyond what they personally feel motivated to do. In this context, the association's informal offer competes with practitioners' limited time without offering the kind of recognition that would make the investment tangible.

Supervision and intervention are particularly underdeveloped. All four boards list them as important but acknowledge they are not providing them in any organised way. The research suggests that this is not simply a resource question: it also reflects uncertainty about who is responsible for this function and about whether practitioners in these countries have a culture of peer reflection developed enough to engage with supervision in any formal sense. In some countries, supervision is primarily associated with psychotherapy rather than guidance practice.

GUIDELINES FOR AREA 2: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

Develop at least one structured peer professional development format that does not depend on project funding. Intervention as a structured peer consultation on practice cases without an external supervisor can be run by experienced members at almost no cost. Participants can work on real professional dilemmas, cases, or questions.

Develop and maintain a shared resource repository accessible to members: documented tools, methodological guides, case studies, and reading materials are valued and sought for resources for practitioners. A "member zone" or curated resource database is an opportunity, as showed in the [hungarian online library of resources](#).

Pursue accreditation of existing professional programmes in partnership with universities or national accreditation bodies. One concrete suggestion was to make professional events "into official training opportunities - for example accredited, credit-bearing higher education courses." In a context where CPD is not mandated, official accreditation gives practitioners a tangible incentive. an accredited or formally recognised training programme already exists, the association can work to embed it more in the national qualification framework. Where no formal training programme exists, associations can at least document and share the competency baseline they believe career guidance practitioners should meet.

Where no national CPD framework exists, advocate for its development while providing structured alternatives in the meantime. Associations cannot create a national framework alone, but they can demonstrate through their own practice what a coherent professional development pathway looks like and use that as evidence in advocacy.

AREA 3: PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The member survey scores indicate that members consider the activities around recognition and accreditation as important, but rate their associations' performance in them as less satisfactory. Some external stakeholders described the ideal association as one that "sets standards, ensures quality of services, promotes further education, and can engage in dialogue with the government." For them, associations should become "competence centres" and they all emphasised the need for a clear professional standard. Focus group participants often say that the associations should serve as a guarantee of quality and professionalism. This framing means that membership should be a signal to external parties (employers, clients, policymakers) that the practitioner or organisation takes the quality and professionalism seriously.

The research also found the negative consequence of the current absence of standards. "Lack of clear regulation at the professional level with developed and monitored quality standards leads to the development and expansion of 'opportunists' who come to compensate for the lack of specialists and offer career counselling services under various names."

ASSOCIATIONS' STRENGTHS

The most developed and documented example of association-led quality standards work in the region is the [Slovak quality standard](#) developed by ZKPRK, which began as a participatory initiative in 2016 and went through multiple phases before being incorporated into the national qualification system in 2024–25. The process started with a strategic meeting of ZKPRK followed by consultation with more than 25 practitioners and stakeholders. The association then conducted international benchmarking and developed international partnerships through an Erasmus+ project to learn from organisations that had already built certification systems. Assessment was designed as self-evaluation supported by case studies and optional mentoring, using a developmental approach. The COVID-19 crisis interrupted the adoption phase, and the standard was ultimately absorbed into national regulation through a different route than originally planned. Rather than being adopted voluntarily by the practitioner community, its content was incorporated into the occupational and evaluation standard for the national career counsellor qualification – a different outcome than intended, but a more durable one. All associations are actively involved in promoting high quality practice and lobbying for professional recognition.

KEY DIFFICULTIES

A part from the fragmented policy governance, the structural problem in this area is also that professional standards developed by voluntary associations carry no formal enforcement weight unless they are recognised by public authorities. An association can write the most rigorous ethical code in the region, but if employers are not required to hire practitioners who comply with it, and if there is no body authorised to sanction non-compliance, the standard is a statement of values rather than a quality mechanism. The advocacy work in Area 4 and the standards work in Area 3 are inseparable.

A second difficulty is the fragmented professional identity of the membership itself. In all four countries, career guidance is practised by people with very different educational backgrounds and employed in very different institutional settings - school counsellors, employment advisers, university careers staff, private coaches, HR professionals. Getting agreement on what "quality" means across this diversity is difficult, and several boards noted in their SWOT analyses that the heterogeneity of their membership base makes it hard to agree on priorities.

GUIDELINES FOR AREA 3: PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

In this area we describe possible steps of how professional association can stimulate a development in the field of professional standards and quality assurance.

Adopt a written ethical code, make it publicly available, and establish it as a condition of membership. This can be seen as the minimum viable professional standard.

Publish a professional competence profile for career guidance practitioners. A short document stating what the association considers the core knowledge, skills, and reflective capacities of a qualified practitioner is a starting point that gives members a self-development reference, communicates the association's professional position to outside actors, and forms the foundation for any later accreditation work.

Foster self-assessment and developmental approaches for quality. For associations and countries that have already developed a competence profile or ethical code, the next step can be to create a self-evaluation tool that practitioners can use independently. In the case of Slovakia, the tool developed by ZKPRK, despite its acknowledged complexity, was taken seriously by the national qualification authority and incorporated into official regulation. Any tool of this kind should be piloted with a small group before wider dissemination, and feedback should be used to simplify rather than expand it. It can also be useful to organize mentoring and peer intervention by experienced practitioners as a way for quality development.

AREA 4: POLICY INFLUENCE AND ADVOCACY

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Shaping the national guidance system through advocacy, participation in legislative processes, and communication with ministries has the second-highest gap score in the member survey. Members consider it important but rate their associations' performance as unsatisfactory. In Slovakia, the board self-evaluation shows some activity: the association was commissioned by the Ministry of Education to draft the National Strategy for Lifelong Guidance; it contributed to the Law on Lifelong Learning passed in 2024 (which introduced individual training accounts that can fund guidance); and it led the drafting of the national occupational and evaluation standards for career counsellors. But the same self-evaluation notes that "good relations with the ministries and PES are based mainly on personal relations, but not fixed consultation mechanisms" and that contact with regional authorities is "opportunistic." The contacts built over years are vulnerable because they depend on specific individuals rather than on institutional arrangements such as national guidance forum.

In Romania, ACROM rates its advocacy performance comparably higher. The association contributed to a national analysis of career counselling competencies and legislative proposals through a POCA (EU operational programme for administrative capacity) project, participated in public consultations on legislation affecting the counselling profession, and submitted position papers to the Ministry of Education. The SWOT analysis notes, however, that "participation in policy consultations with the Ministry of Education" saw limited member engagement, partly because "some school counsellors feared potential changes to their employment status."

In Hungary, the MPT Career Guidance Division describes "a significant and active professional lobbying and opinion-forming activity," producing communiqués sent to the Ministry of Education, the National Educational Authority, and the National VET and Adult Education Office. The Division's YouTube channel and website (llg.hu) serve as reference points for the professional community and have been cited by public bodies. At the same time, the national career guidance system has become "more segmented than ever before" since the 2010s, and the National Guidance Forum was abolished in 2012, leaving the Division without an institutionalised entry point for policy engagement.

In the Czech Republic, SKPKR has participated in the National Guidance Forum and contributed to the creation of the national qualification and evaluation standard for career counsellors. But the forum itself is described by external stakeholders as "lacking real influence on decision-making and policy coordination". The Czech qualitative research shows that the focus on the regional level is more important, as regional strategies usually pay more attention to career guidance than documents at the national level.

The external interviews in all four countries show that associations are respected as representing the professional community, but they are not yet consistent, structured actors in national policy processes. Some formulate that the the associations are moving from being seen as "a club of enthusiasts" to being seen as a "systemic actor"- but the transition is incomplete and depends on maintaining personal relationships with officials who may change.

ASSOCIATIONS' STRENGTHS

One documented advocacy trajectory runs as follows: the association publishes articles, opinion pieces or communiqués about the national guidance system; these establish associations credibility and expertise with ministry officials; this leads to an informal relationship and potential formalisation of consultation and coordination structures, where the association has an important place. This trajectory illustrates that evidence-based public communication (website articles, position papers, communiqués) and informal relationship-building are the preparation for formal policy advocacy. Building a case publicly, over time, creates the conditions in which ministries come to associations rather than the other way around.

KEY DIFFICULTIES

The central difficulty is that all four associations are small, volunteer-run organisations. Consistent policy advocacy requires time, continuity, and expertise in navigating public administration, a capacity that volunteer-run organisations struggle to maintain and that is often concentrated in one or two persons.

A second difficulty is the mismatch between the speed of association processes and the speed of policy processes. Consultations are often announced with short notice; working groups require ongoing participation; legislative drafts need rapid responses. Associations without permanent staff or clear internal decision-making protocols struggle to respond.

Third, in some countries, the legal and political framework actively limits NGO influence in public education and public employment services.



GUIDELINES FOR AREA 4: POLICY INFLUENCE AND ADVOCACY

Define a small number of specific, written policy objectives and track progress against them. Each association can set itself a small number of specific policy objectives and document them in writing. Moving from "Strengthening the profile of career guidance" to something more operational like "Inclusion of career guidance in the next revision of the national education law" or "establishment of a formal consultation mechanism between the association and the Ministry of Labour" is useful, because specific objectives can be tracked, communicated to members, and evaluated.

Build structured, recurring contact with relevant ministries. A simple annual briefing document summarising the state of career guidance as the association sees it, sent at a regular time each year to relevant ministry contacts, is a low-cost way to maintain visibility and signal that the association is a consistent actor. Associations should state clearly that they want to be involved in working groups during the design phase, not only at the consultation stage. Where a forum does not exist, the association should maintain the question of its establishment on its public agenda. The existence of a forum is not a precondition for advocacy, but it would reduce the current dependence on personal relationships.

Produce and circulate professional position papers. Several stakeholders in the research specifically requested position papers. Associations should develop the capacity to produce concise, accessible documents directed at decision-makers: a policy brief of two to four pages presenting a specific issue, the evidence behind it, and a concrete ask. Several board self-evaluations expressed interest in learning from partner associations how this is done. Hungary's example of communiqués sent to ministries and national authorities is one model; the Romanian experience of producing formal position papers through the POCA project is another. Both should be documented and shared within CEEGAF.

Establish regular, brief and public annual activity reports. This is not primarily an accountability mechanism, but a communication one. A public record of what the association did in a given year communicates credibility to ministries, potential partners, and potential members, all of whom are deciding whether the association is worth engaging with.

Focus also on work with regional authorities. Regional education authorities, employment offices, and regional development bodies sometimes have more operational flexibility and more immediate need for expert partners than central ministries do. Associations that focus exclusively on national-level advocacy may be bypassing entry points where their expertise is more readily welcomed and where influence is more achievable.

Use the CEEGAF cooperation for joint advocacy. A shared position from four professional associations carries more weight than any single national document. The research produced through this project constitutes evidence base for a first joint output (position paper).

AREA 5: GOVERNANCE AND ORGANISATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This area does not appear as a separate category in the eleven-item member survey, but it cuts through all five areas. In terms of member stability, the qualitative research identified a problem of high turnover of career guidance practitioners in the field in some countries. This is driven by a lack of long-term support, stability and opportunities for professional growth that causes early-career practitioners to leave. This limits the pool of potential members, board volunteers, and engaged participants. Associations can provide a strong peer community, access to professional information and frame membership as a support structure for people new to the field, which can be helpful to sustain membership.

All four associations are primarily volunteer-run. SKPKR (Czech Republic) has 36 members, of whom 14 paid fees in 2024; its activities are almost entirely funded by membership fees, which cover around 95% of its budget. ZKPRK (Slovakia) has 230 members but few paid fees in 2024, with grants (primarily Erasmus+) covering 80% of the budget and training fees another 18%. ACROM (Romania) has around 100 members with membership fees covering 80% of its budget. The MPT Career Guidance Division (Hungary) functions as a section within a larger association (the Hungarian Pedagogical Society), which gives it some administrative infrastructure but also limits its operational independence; 100% of its budget comes from within the parent organisation. Financial sustainability is a systemic concern. Non-renewal of membership and board and burn-out of the most engaged members are threats associations face, as are declining number of members and low willingness of members to participate in activities in some countries. Over-reliance on individual commitment creates vulnerability in terms of leadership transition and project continuity and a risk of exhausting the psychological energy of the membership.

On planning, the picture is similarly mixed. ZKPRK adopted a formal strategic plan for 2025–2030 in March 2025, which identifies nine strategic goals (strengthening cooperation, organising traditional activities, organising public events, youth support, international cooperation, professionalisation of career guidance, expanding service availability, strengthening training, and international integration) and was presented to the general assembly for adoption. However, self-evaluation also notes that on the operational level, functioning is "either based on previous regular activities... or on opportunities (projects, job fairs, ad-hoc cooperations)." Having a strategic document and actually planning from it are two different things.

ACROM has developed more internal governance structure: updated statutes, an ethical codex, defined internal processes for advocacy and member relations. SKPKR's governance processes are largely unchanged which reflects both stability and possible stagnation. The Hungarian division, embedded within MPT, has an operational manual adopted in 2024, signed by members.

KEY DIFFICULTIES

The gap between nominal membership and paying, active membership is a common governance problem across most of the four associations. Strategic planning without

operational follow-through is a related problem. Setting ambitious goals at a general assembly every two or three years and then reverting to the previous year's activities in practice is a pattern all four boards describe with self-awareness. The concentration of key functions in few people consistently identified as a threat in all four SWOT analyses creates two risks: if those individuals leave, the organisation loses its memory and its relationships; and while they are present, they may limit the development of others.

GUIDELINES FOR AREA 5: GOVERNANCE AND ORGANISATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Adopt a multi-year strategic plan with priorities defined independently of project funding.

Projects should serve the strategy, not generate it and opportunistic and project-focused functioning can limit the strategic vision and function of the association. These strategic plans should be specific to make their achievement measurable, and they should be communicated to members and partners.

Distribute governance across the board. Governance should be distributed across the board where possible. If the president carries most of the external relationships, most of the institutional knowledge, and most of the operational load, the association is very fragile.

Include capacity-building in project applications. EU projects are currently the main available funding. Using them to build something that outlasts the project cycle (documented processes, board training, communication infrastructure, financial reserves, resources for members) can be directly included in the project design. **Formalize and automatize members and membership fees management.** Fee collection should be taken seriously as an administrative task, not left to goodwill. Several boards noted "manual collection of membership fees with low return." Simple technical solutions such as automated reminders, online payment can reduce the friction and improve the return. An association should know, at any given time, its nominal membership count, the number who paid fees in the last year, and the number who engaged in any activity.

CROSS-CUTTING CONSIDERATIONS

Professionalism culture: The research found that members of all four associations "lack professional certainty and a shared professionalism culture." This reflects the real fragility of career guidance as a field in some countries, where the profession has weaker legal recognition, often no mandatory qualification, and no strong tradition of reflective practice. Building shared professional identity happens through the activities associations already organise - events where practitioners meet peers from different contexts, materials that articulate what the field is, and the experience of being taken seriously as a professional community. It is slow work, and all five areas in these guidelines depend on it.

The lifelong guidance concept: The research found that the EU concept of lifelong guidance is not always well understood among career guidance practitioners and stakeholders. The common deflection ("anyone can give advice") has direct consequences for resources, recognition, and the quality of services that citizens receive. Communicating the substance of the lifelong guidance concept is a task that associations should treat as ongoing public communication rather than as something that will eventually get resolved at policy level.

Social equity. Transnational data confirm that people with low socioeconomic status have much worse access to career guidance services than those with more resources. Several activities and initiatives focused on promoting access to guidance and inclusive practices were identified in the [repository of good practices](#), and as associations develop their activities and advocacy positions, access for underserved groups should be a consistent lens.

Emerging fields such as green guidance. Associations are able to create space to engage with emerging themes - AI in guidance, green jobs, work-life balance. ZKPRK has been among the first associations in the region to engage seriously with [green guidance](#) - the integration of climate, nature, and sustainability into career guidance practice. [ACROM's 2024 conference](#) addressed AI in counselling. This is also a way of increasing the credibility of the associations among stakeholders and policymakers.

Using the CEEGAF partnership. The shared knowledge accumulated through the CEEGAF research represents a good base to build on. It can be used in advocacy documents, in communications with international bodies such as Cedefop and the IAEVG, and in applications for future funding. The four associations aim to sustain the cooperation beyond the project cycle, even if only through informal coordination: sharing good practices, consulting on significant advocacy decisions, and appearing together at European events where the regional voice of Central and Eastern European career guidance practitioners can be heard.

CONCLUSIONS

The picture that emerges from this research highlights the richness of the functions, activities, and services delivered by the associations despite a context of limited institutional support. All four organisations have built strong professional communities, which provide a valuable foundation for the implementation of these guidelines. The research also reveals both challenges and opportunities for further development, including formally recognised opportunities for professional development, supervision and mentoring, legislated quality standards, and policy influence that does not depend solely on the efforts of a handful of personal contacts. These findings outline important avenues for the future work of the associations over the coming years.

The cooperation of the four associations within this project has enabled them to identify not only a common set of challenges but also a shared agenda, centred on a regional framework for collaboration, the benchmarking of activities and quality standards, a joint advocacy position, and a shared resource base for peer learning and professional development opportunities.

The challenge now is to transform this shared vision into sustained collective action. By building on the momentum created through this project, we have an opportunity to strengthen the profession, amplify its voice, and create lasting structures that will benefit both practitioners and the communities they serve in our region of Central and South-Eastern Europe.





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