

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIFELONG GUIDANCE SYSTEMS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

POSITION PAPER OF THE CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN GUIDANCE
ASSOCIATIONS' FORUM

Adopted at the founding event of the Central and Eastern European Guidance Associations'
Forum Bratislava, 22/06/2026

1. INTRODUCTION

Career guidance plays a significant role in enabling citizens to access training opportunities and the labour market. The professional associations that support practitioners in this field operate at multiple levels of the guidance system: shaping policy, developing professional standards, training practitioners, and connecting services with the people who need them. This position paper is issued by four professional associations from Czechia, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, on the occasion of the establishment of the Central and Eastern European Guidance Associations' Forum. It reflects shared analysis developed through the Central and Eastern European Guidance Associations Forum Erasmus+ project (2024–2026) and is intended as a contribution to national and European policy dialogue.

2. THE SITUATION OF LIFELONG GUIDANCE IN THE CEE REGION

Lifelong guidance policies, systems and services remain uneven in access, with persistent gaps in coverage, quality, and coordination compared to EU averages. Despite progress made through European frameworks and networks - including the work of ELGPN (2007–2015), Euroguidance cross-border seminars, and the CEDEFOP CareersNet network - regional cooperation among guidance professionals in CEE has not yet reached the level of integration seen in other European regions. Professional associations in the region are among the drivers of system development. Their activities are a condition for the continued development of quality lifelong guidance in the region.

3. THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

3.1 ACTIVITIES OF THE ASSOCIATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE MEMBERS

The research conducted across the four CEEGAF associations in 2024-2025 (Borbély-Pecze, Hloušková, Šprlák & Crăciun, 2026) provides an empirical picture of how associations work, how their members and stakeholders perceive their work and what they expect from them. Members across all four countries ranked three activities as most important: sharing information and promoting innovation in career guidance, supporting networking and collaboration among career professionals, and providing informal training opportunities including workshops, webinars, and mobility. These are also among the activities that associations fulfil most successfully in members' assessment. At the same time, the research reveals significant gaps between what members consider important and what associations currently deliver. The largest gaps concern;

- shaping national guidance systems (advocacy, legislation, ministry engagement)
- providing supervision, intervision, and mentoring
- facilitating structured professional networking and collaboration

These findings show that associations are expected to operate both as learning communities for practitioners and as political actors capable of shaping national

systems. They are delivering on the former more than the latter because many of the barriers are external: absent legislative frameworks, fragmented institutional systems, and the chronic under-resourcing of civil society organisations in the guidance field.

3.2 STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

Supporting professional development in more formalised ways, such as promoting high-quality service delivery (e.g., through ethical standards, professional guidelines), providing accreditation/certification of career practitioners, or providing supervision, intervision, and mentoring, faces external barriers specific to each country that associations are not always able to influence. These include the absence of a national system for the education and training of career counsellors, which means that the continuous professional development of career guidance practitioners is a matter of individual responsibility of each practitioner, a burden that is sometimes at least partially transferred to the associations. In some countries the national career guidance systems have become even more segmented than ever before, increasing the importance of civil associations as a connective tissue while also reducing their access to institutional resources and decision-making spaces. Stakeholders recognise the national association's credibility and potential but describe it as still perceived in some quarters as "a club of enthusiasts" rather than a systemic actor. The result, common across all four countries, is a situation in which due to the multi-stakeholder institutional system of career guidance, the systemic and lifelong approach needs to be strengthened.

3.3 ASSOCIATIONS ALREADY SHAPING NATIONAL SYSTEMS

Despite the structural barriers described above, each of our associations has direct experience of contributing to national policy and regulation. In Slovakia, ZKPRK was commissioned by the Ministry of Education to draft the National Strategy for Lifelong Guidance, and the content of its quality standard was incorporated into the national occupational standard for career counsellors. In the Czech Republic, SKPKR co-developed the national qualification and evaluation standard for the profession. In Romania, ACROM's contributions to a national competency analysis and its position papers to the Ministry of Education have fed into regulatory developments. In Hungary, MPT's communiqués and policy positions have been cited by national authorities including the Educational Authority and the VET and Adult Education Office.

These examples demonstrate that professional associations already act as de facto system actors, even within weakly institutionalised policy environments. A stable basis for a role we are already playing is needed.

3.4 EXPECTATIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS

External stakeholders surveyed in the research (policymakers, employers, educational authorities, labour market actors) want professional associations to act as competence centres capable of setting standards, ensuring service quality, representing the

profession in policy dialogue, providing expert positions on policy intentions or the current implementation, and translating international knowledge into national practice. These expectations are not always matched by current capacity, as the four associations are largely volunteer-driven, with limited or no permanent staff, and tend toward opportunistic planning models driven by funding cycles rather than strategic continuity.

3.5 THE ADDED VALUE OF COOPERATION

The creation of the CEE Guidance Associations' Forum represents an effort to develop new synergies and reinforce our action. The research makes clear that career guidance practitioners in Central and South-Eastern Europe have, until now, accumulated relatively little mutual professional knowledge despite operating in neighbouring countries with shared structural challenges. Regional cooperation allows associations to benchmark their work, identify transferable good practices, reinforce each other's legitimacy in national policy contexts, and present a collective voice in European arenas - including networks and avenues where these regional perspectives have historically been underrepresented. The Forum's work is grounded in a conviction that professional civil associations play a crucial role in lifelong guidance system development processes.

3. THE COMPETENCE PROFILES OF CAREER PRACTITIONERS

3.1 Competence frameworks as instruments of professionalisation

A competence framework defines what a career practitioner is expected to know and do. It grounds the recognition and accreditation of training programmes, establishes the basis for quality assurance, and signals to public authorities, employers, and citizens alike what career guidance is. Our research confirms that without a clear competence framework, professionalisation remains aspirational. A comparative analysis of existing national competence documents in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia, benchmarked against the Finnish National Competency Framework, reveals a region with strong traditions of frontline practice and genuine practitioner expertise, but significant and consistent gaps in the formal codification of professional standards.

3.2 COMPARISON OF CEE PROFESSIONAL FRAMEWORKS

In terms of the content of these quality frameworks, the comparative study that analysed five national documents and benchmarked it with the Finnish standard, shows that client-facing and operational competences are relatively well developed; system-level and core professional competences are systematically underdeveloped. All four national documents devote attention to direct work with clients (assessment, information provision, communication, and decision-making support). This reflects the historical trajectory of career guidance in the region, where the profession grew

primarily from frontline delivery roles in schools, employment services, and social institutions.

What is missing is the broader foundations of system-level professionalism. Evaluation of guidance services is weak or absent in three of the four countries. Research literacy and theoretical grounding, foundational to reflective, evidence-based practice, are not sufficiently present. Digital competences appear in nascent form or are absent.

3.3 DIFFERENT NATIONAL PROFILES, COMMON STRUCTURAL GAPS

Each of the four countries presents a distinct profile, shaped by its institutional history and dominant epistemic tradition. In Hungary, the authoritative document is a professional service protocol anchored in a psychological, assessment-driven tradition. Career guidance in Hungary has, over the past decade, become more institutionally fragmented, and the absence of a nationally recognised competence framework reflects and reinforces this fragmentation.

In the Czech Republic, the competence standard emphasises communication, diagnostics, and client decision-making - competences associated with counselling-based models of practice. The document is operationally detailed but does not systematically address ethics, service evaluation, or system governance.

In Romania, the occupational standard foregrounds information delivery, client assessment, and job search support, reflecting a labour market service tradition. System-level competences - evaluation, innovation, digitalization, ethical standards - are near-absent. The profession of career guidance counsellor is still in the process of achieving formal recognition, and the competence framework reflects a profession in formation rather than one with an established institutional home.

In Slovakia, the document is complex and covers professional facilitation, networking, client development, administration and management. Nevertheless, it too falls short in ethics, theoretical grounding, and evaluation.

3.4 PUTTING THE RESEARCH TO WORK: GUIDELINES FOR OUR OWN ASSOCIATIONS

Alongside this position paper, the Forum has published a repository of good practices and tools for practitioners and *Guidelines for Professional Guidance Associations in CEE*, which is a practical reference document addressed to our own boards and members. It sets out, what the research found, where each of our associations currently stands, and what concrete steps are realistic for organisations of our size and resources across five areas: membership engagement, professional development, quality standards, advocacy, and governance. The findings of this research are not only a basis for external advocacy but a working tool we are already applying internally. It also means that when we ask governments and European institutions to recognise associations as partners and to support the development of professional standards, we are doing so from a position where we have already started putting our own practice in order.

4. OUR COMMITMENTS AND CALLS TO ACTION

We commit, through the Forum, to:

- 1 sustain and deepen the regional exchange of good practices in career guidance;
- 2 support the professionalisation of career guidance and the establishment of legal and ethical frameworks where these are absent or incomplete;
- 3 make mobility and learning opportunities available to practitioners in our member countries;
- 4 continue to develop and update the shared guidelines for association practice and the repository of good practices;
- 5 support our mutual efforts in professionalizing career guidance in our countries;
- 6 contribute country-level knowledge and region-level perspectives to European processes, including CEDEFOP CareersNet, IAEVG, and other relevant bodies.

We call on national governments and European institutions to:

- 1 recognise professional associations as legitimate partners in the development and implementation of lifelong guidance policy;
- 2 establish or restart functioning mechanisms for associations and other actors to have a standing way to contribute, either in a form of national lifelong guidance forums or other;
- 3 create conditions that allow civil society associations to sustain their contribution to national LLG systems without being dependent on short-term project funding alone;
- 4 invest in the accessibility of guidance services, with particular attention to vulnerable groups;
- 5 support the development of system-level analysis and policy-focused dialogue across the CEE region.
- 6 The Forum acts as a coordination mechanism for collective action rather than a delivery structure, maximising policy impact without requiring dedicated financial resources.

5. AN OPEN PLATFORM

The Forum is open to other professional associations active in the field of career guidance in the CEE region. We invite colleagues from countries not yet represented to engage with us, attend our events, and consider joining this cooperation.

Adopted by the founding associations of the CEE Guidance Associations' Forum — MPT Career Guidance Division (Hungary), SKPKR (Czech Republic), ZKPRK (Slovakia), and ACROM (Romania) - Bratislava, 22 June 2026.

Published elements of the joint research agenda during the last 1,5 years:

Borbély-Pecze, T. B., Hloušková, L., Šprlák, T., Crăciun, M. (2026). *Career Guidance in the Central and South-Eastern European Region: The case of four countries via the lenses of non-governmental organisations*. *Opus et Educatio*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.3311/ope.43780>

Borbély-Pecze, T. B., Crăciun, M., Deac, V., Freibergová, Z., Hloušková, L., Juhász, Á., Martinkovič, M., Mullerová, A., Suhajda, C. S., Šprlák, T., & Tolli, K. (2026). *Guidelines for Professional Associations in Guidance in CEE: Supporting Professionalism and System Development*. Central and Eastern European Guidance Associations' Forum (2026). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20691308>

Memorandum of Cooperation and Position Paper, signed in Bratislava on 22 June 2026.

Borbély-Pecze T. B., & Suhajda Cs. J. (2026). *Pályorientáció és civil szféra a posztszocialista Közép-Kelet-Európában*. *Civil Szemle*, 23(3), 47-68. <https://doi.org/10.62560/csz.2026.03.3>

Borbély-Pecze, T. B., Hloušková, L., Suhajda, C. J., Šprlák, T., & Deac, V. (2026). *Benchlearning comparison of competence frameworks for career guidance practitioners in Central and Eastern Europe*. *Discover Education* (in press)

ABOUT CEE GUIDANCE ASSOCIATIONS' FORUM

This memorandum is the result of the Central and Eastern European Guidance Associations Forum project, funded by the Erasmus+ programme (2024-1-SK01-KA210-VET-000249838). This project is a partnership between the Association for Career Guidance and Career Development, Slovakia, MPT Career Guidance Division (Hungary), Association for Career Guidance and Career Development (Czech Republic) and ACROM (Romania).

Views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union, SAAIC or any of the partner organisations. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



Funded by
the European Union



CEE Guidance Forum

www.cee-guidance.eu

contact@cee-guidance.eu