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LIFELONG CAREER GUIDANCE IN FRANCE

In 2020, the European Union, through the Osnabrück Declaration, made lifelong career guidance a central focus to support citizens' adaptability and employability in a constantly evolving labour market. The declaration aimed to enhance access to career guidance services for all, integrating digital tools and promoting a personalized approach. This framework reinforced the idea that career guidance should be incorporated into education and training strategies. During the French Presidency of the Council

of the European Union in 2022, the focus was placed on ensuring equal access to career guidance for all European citizens. However, the French system still maintains a distinction between initial and continuing pathways. This distinction is reflected in the guidance system, which, although aligned with the European lifelong career guidance strategy, adopts a differentiated approach: initial guidance falls under the Ministry of National Education, while continuing guidance is the responsibility of the Ministry of Labor.

Reforms initiated since 2018, notably the «Avenir professionnel» law, have strengthened individuals' autonomy in their career paths. In the field of continuing guidance, tools such as the Personal Training Account and the

Career Development Counselling, now digitalized, enable individuals to better manage their professional growth throughout their lives. In the field of initial guidance, platforms have also been created to connect stakeholders and the public.

In 2024, career guidance policies are characterized by increasing territorialization, with Regions playing a key role in implementing guidance programs, in collaboration with the State. This decentralization allows for a more tailored response to local needs. A large number of public and private training organisations are involved in career guidance, targeting specific groups (young people, jobseekers, employees in transition), but this sometimes complicates access to services. Cooperation between national and regional operators aims to ensure a uniform and coherent coverage of career guidance services across the country.

In this new brochure, Euroguidance-France presents the main features of the French career guidance system in 2024: strategies, stakeholders, and resources, while highlighting recent reforms and current challenges.

DEFINITION OF CAREER GUIDANCE



Career guidance, understood as a continuous process, enables individuals—at any age and throughout their lives—to identify their abilities, skills, and interests, to make informed choices regarding education, training, and employment, and to manage their personal life paths across learning, work, and other settings where they can develop and apply their competences.

Guidance encompasses a wide range of individual or group-based activities, including access to information, counselling, skills assessments, personalized support, and learning opportunities designed to develop decision-making and career management skills.

Definition adopted by the Council of the European Union in its Resolution of 21 November 2008.

The French Education Code¹ defines career guidance as “the result of a continuous process through which each student in lower and upper secondary education develops and implements a personal learning and career plan, based on their aspirations and abilities.”

At the international level, UNESCO describes guidance as a process that “enables individuals to become aware of their personal characteristics and to develop them in view of making informed educational choices (...) at all stages of life, with the dual aim of contributing to personal responsibility and social development.”

Since the early 2000s, under European impetus, support for individuals of all ages has been encouraged to help them build learning and career pathways that allow for training, employment, and the ability to adapt to transitions. In France, this has shaped a comprehensive approach to lifelong guidance, which includes free, complete, and objective access to information on occupations, training opportunities, qualifications, career prospects, and salary levels. It also encompasses high-quality counselling and guidance services, organized within coordinated networks. These services are part of a public guidance system that actively promotes gender diversity in career choices and works to combat stereotypes.

Career guidance services play a key role within lifelong learning systems. They enable individuals to better understand the range of opportunities available to them and to make informed decisions throughout their professional and personal development.

¹ French Education Code, Article D331-23, amended by Decree No. 2019-218 of March 21, 2019.

POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

A national/regional balance

Right to information and guidance

According to the legislation, every individual has a fundamental right to be informed, advised, and supported in their career guidance. This right is concretely implemented through the establishment of the Regional Public Career Guidance Service since 2014. Coordinated by the region, this service brings together various career guidance actors at the regional level. It is designed to provide personalised and high-quality support for everyone, whether for discovering careers, training opportunities, or job prospects, while considering local specificities.

Role of Regions in Career Guidance

The law of September 5, 2018, on the freedom to choose one's professional future significantly strengthens the roles of the Regions, particularly by entrusting them with the responsibility of organizing informational activities aimed at students, apprentices, and higher education students. These activities cover a variety of topics, including careers, available training, and gender equality in the workplace. The Regions work closely with the educational psychologists of the Ministry of National Education, as well as teachers trained for this informational task, to ensure that every young person benefits from a comprehensive, practical, and relevant career guidance pathway.

The national framework for career guidance

To ensure the coherence and effectiveness of the actions implemented, a national reference framework was signed in May 2019. It outlines the respective roles of the State and the Regions within educational institutions and clarifies the ways in which different actors in the public career guidance service collaborate. In line with this framework, the State supports informational activities in schools, enabling students to better understand careers, available training, and possible pathways. The Regions, in turn, develop resources tailored to local specificities and organize informational activities on regional opportunities in terms of training and employment.

Enhanced support for high school students

Since the start of the 2019 school year, high school students have benefited from a specific 54-hour annual support program to help them prepare for their entry into the first year of high school and to make informed choices regarding specialties or training that align with their professional goals. This support is provided in close collaboration with educational teams and families, ensuring that each student can engage in an exploratory process of the professional world and areas of


study. The goal is to offer them a structured framework to reflect on their ambitions, identify their interests, and evaluate the available options. This support is designed to assist young people in progressively building a plan, considering their personal aspirations, potential, and the realities of the job market.


Complementary actions to support career guidance


In addition to school-based support, several initiatives are in place to encourage students to explore the world of work and discover specific professions. These include career exploration weeks, job discovery days, as well as work placements and observation periods in businesses and higher education institutions. These activities help students become more familiar with professional realities and deepen their reflections on their future career paths. They also aim to challenge stereotypes related to gender, social background, or other factors, to promote a more open and diverse approach to career guidance.

The three main areas of career guidance

Career guidance for students is based on three main educational areas aimed at preparing them as effectively as possible for their professional future:

 **Discovering the professional world and understanding occupations:** Helping students understand the various sectors of activity and the related professions.

 **Knowing available training and career prospects:** Providing clear and precise information about the training opportunities at all levels and the associated employment prospects.

 **Developing a personal career plan:** Supporting each student in the creation of their personal career project, based on their interests, abilities, and the opportunities offered by the education system and the labour market.

INITIAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Main career guidance services for initial education

For young people and students, career guidance services fall under the Ministry of National Education ; they cover the entire country.

Information and Guidance Centres (CIO): The Information and Guidance Centres (CIO) offer free services to all individuals, with a primary focus on students and their families. Their main activities include providing information about education, vocational training, qualifications, and professions, offering individual counselling, and facilitating exchanges and discussions among educational system partners. The psychologists working there (PsyEN) are also present in secondary schools (middle and high schools). They support students in developing skills for lifelong career guidance. At the same time, they organize and coordinate the delivery of information to students regarding self-awareness, activities for exploring the economic and professional world, in collaboration with educational teams. Four CIOs, linked to the European Euroguidance network, provide an international dimension to career guidance, supported by academic-level Europe CIOs. The **National Office for Information on Education and Professions (ONISEP)** plays a key role in developing and disseminating a wide range of career guidance resources.

The National Office for Information on Education and Professions (ONISEP), a state-operated organization, has two complementary missions: to inform and support. ONISEP provides reliable and comprehensive information to all audiences (professionals, educational teams, young people, and families) about professional activities, occupations, and training and qualification systems. In order to support the development of the competence to build a learning pathway and a professional project, ONISEP creates, produces, and disseminates resources, tools, and educational systems aimed at young people and all those who guide them in their decision-making. The primary goal of these two missions is to enable young people to envision a positive future while developing their skills in career guidance.



The SCUIO-IP (University Career Guidance and Information Services) are university career services for students, often associated with professional integration support offices. Their main activities include providing information about university programs, offering support through tutoring and guidance, assisting with academic pathways and professional projects through individualized counselling and advice, providing support for career changes starting from the first year, aiding in internship searches, and organizing workshops and providing information on professional integration.




The Youth Information Network has reception centres throughout the country to address the informational needs of young people regarding daily life, careers, internships, scholarships, housing, language programs, volunteering opportunities, and civic service activities. They also provide guidance for career and educational orientation.

Career exploration: Since the start of the 2023 school year, all middle schools offer activities related to career exploration for students in the 4th cycle. Starting in 2024, these activities, such as company visits, mini-internships, and meetings with professionals, will be available to all levels within the 4th cycle, with resources from ONISEP, regional councils, and professional sectors.

Internships: 9th-grade students complete a one-week internship to explore the world of work and the diversity of professions. In 10th grade, a two-week internship in June allows them to further explore careers and prepare for their orientation choices. These experiences aim to broaden their knowledge of professions and the realities of work. They also help students reflect more effectively on their career plans. These internships are eligible for individual mobility, subject to certain conditions.

<https://1eleve1stage.education.gouv.fr>

«1 young person, 1 solution» program: This plan aims to provide a solution for every young person aged 15 to 30. It mobilizes a range of resources: employment incentives, career guidance, training, support services, housing, and financial assistance for young people in difficulty. The goal is to offer a response to all situations, ensuring that no one is left behind.

 **Inclusive education:** The aim is to ensure quality education for all students, considering their individual characteristics and specific educational and pedagogical needs. Making knowledge and learning accessible is a fundamental issue of equity. The second phase of inclusive education strengthened this support by introducing several measures:

- All children can enrol in a school and training pathway.
- Health professionals can intervene in educational institutions, strengthening cooperation between the national education system and the medico-social sector.
- Specialized teaching assistants are trained to address disability situations and ensure educational success.
- Support hubs for schooling are responsible for implementing the common law for all and providing guidance for the educational paths of all students.

Parcoursup: At the heart of the Bac-3 to Bac+3 continuum, the transition from secondary to higher education is facilitated through registration on Parcoursup. In the context of a wide range of higher education offerings, this platform provides indicators on access conditions, prerequisites, programs, further study opportunities, and professional integration, all designed to assist high school graduates in making informed decisions about their educational path. Parcoursup also collects data about the student and records their applications, including requests for a gap year. In France, higher education is subject to entrance selection or limited quotas, giving Parcoursup a key role in managing applications, which are made available to higher education institutions.

CONTINUING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Career Development Counselling

The **Career Development Counselling** (Conseil en Évolution Professionnelle / CEP) is a free support service available to all workers. This service offers personalised guidance to help individuals reflect on their career projects, whether it involves career change, career progression, or skills development. The CEP provides tailored support to meet the needs of its users, assisting them in identifying training or funding opportunities. It is managed by **France Compétences**, the national authority responsible for regulating professional training and apprenticeships in France. France Compétences plays a central role in coordinating and financing training schemes, ensuring their accessibility and quality. A separate CEP is also available for job seekers, managed by various organizations such as **France Travail**.

The Professional Interview

The **Professional Interview** is a legal obligation for employers, designed to support employees in their career progression. Since the 2014 professional training law, this review must be offered every two years to all employees, regardless of the size of the company. The aim is not to evaluate performance but to discuss career growth opportunities, particularly in terms of skills development, qualifications, and career mobility. Every six years, a more comprehensive assessment is required to ensure the employee has benefited from relevant training, guidance, or career progression initiatives. Employers must also fulfil their training obligations, with penalties for non-compliance.



Skills Assessment

A **skills assessment** is a service that allows individuals—whether employed, unemployed, or self-employed—to analyse their professional and personal skills, as well as their aptitudes and motivations, to define a career project or a training plan. Since 2024, this service is fully integrated into the **Personal Training Account** (*Compte Personnel de Formation / CPF*), which can be used to fund the skills assessment. It is accessible to all workers, providing personalised support to reflect on one's career path, identify strengths, and explore career development opportunities. As a career management tool, the skills assessment supports lifelong career orientation, encouraging both professional retraining and progression in employment.



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Support for Job Seekers

Support for job seekers is now provided by **France Travail**, which has replaced **Pôle emploi**, as well as by the **Missions Locales**. Support for job seekers with disabilities is provided by **Cap Emploi**. For executive-level job seekers, support is organised by the **Association for the Employment of Executives** (*Association Pour l'Emploi des Cadres / APEC*). France Travail plays a central role in guiding job seekers by helping them define and implement their career project. By offering personalised advices, France Travail enables individuals to access training opportunities, find suitable job offers, and develop the skills necessary for long-term integration into the labour market. The Missions Locales specifically assist young people aged 16 to 25 who face difficulties, providing tailored support to facilitate their professional and social integration. Together, these institutions aim to maximise the chances of returning to employment through individualised support and tailored resources.

SKILLS PORTFOLIOS

In a constantly changing world, skills portfolios have become essential tools. They allow individuals to structure, highlight, and showcase their knowledge, skills, and personal attributes. These portfolios provide a comprehensive view of an individual's journey, integrating competencies acquired through both formal frameworks (education, training) and informal experiences (volunteering, personal activities).

As professions evolve rapidly and learning becomes a lifelong process, these tools are gaining popularity. They offer a quick and effective way to highlight the richness and diversity of skills, going far beyond traditional qualifications and diplomas.

One of the pioneering initiatives is **Europass**. Created in 2005 and modernised in 2020, this European platform offers a structured framework for documenting and showcasing competencies. It allows users to create an online profile, generate CVs and cover letters, access skill suggestions, benefit from a personal storage space, and explore job and training opportunities across Europe.

In France, Europass has inspired initiatives such as the **Avenir(s) Programme by Onisep**, which helps young people build their professional projects by identifying their skills, interests, and aspirations. Another example is the **Skills Passport from the Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations**, designed to support workers in managing and evolving their careers.

Supported by many institutions, these initiatives are key assets in an economy where success relies on flexibility and lifelong learning.

<https://europass.europa.eu/fr>

<https://www.onisep.fr/avenir-s>

<https://competences.moncompteformation.gouv.fr/actualites/bienvenue-sur-votre-passeport-de-competences>

PROFESSIONALISATION OF CAREER COUNSELORS

The training of PsyEN and heads of

The status of **National Education psychologists**, Education Development and Career Guidance (PsyEN EDO) is governed by a decree (2017). These professionals work in a wide field ranging from guidance towards studies and careers to mental health in schools (middle and high schools) and universities, where their roles may vary. Attached to a **Career Guidance and Information Centre (CIO)**, they provide advice for students, families, and school heads. Some focus on specific missions related to policies or target groups (higher education, disability, Europe, justice).

Holding a master's degree in psychology, they become civil servants after passing an exam followed by a year of university training combining coursework and internships in companies and CIOs. This training covers economic, educational, and psychological aspects and prepares them to conduct career counseling interviews, psychological and psychometric assessments, and manage problematic school situations (bullying, school dropout, mental health, crises). Others are hired on fixed-term contracts and are trained on the job.

Since 2018, the overall guidance of students has also been supported by teachers, especially at the end of educational cycles (post-3rd grade, post-2nd grade, post-high school). Their training is uneven: it takes place at universities that train teachers (Inspe) and locally through public organizations (Canopé, EAFC). The **M@gistere** portal of the Ministry of Education provides them with access to online training modules.

Training of adult guidance professionals

In continuous guidance networks, professionals can be employment advisers, job counsellors, study managers, or training advisers. There is no single reference framework for these roles, and therefore no standardized training to prepare for these jobs.

Once recruited, it is the network to which the practitioner belongs that is responsible for their professional development. Many service providers offer tailored programs for this purpose.

The **Carif-Oref** contribute to the professionalization of actors in networks related to reception, information, guidance, integration, training, and employment:

- They organise information sessions on regional policies related to employment, training, and career guidance,
- They offer professional development activities to enhance the skills of professionals on various topics: knowledge of the public, territories, their socio-economic perspectives, project and training engineering, pedagogy, digitalization of training, etc.,
- They encourage the sharing and dissemination of best practices,
- They use various action methods: in-person, remotely (webinars, self-training modules, podcasts...).

USEFUL WEBSITES

www.euroguidance-france.org Website of the French Euroguidance network, for the European dimension of guidance and the promotion of mobility.

www.orientation-pour-tous.fr The national portal for lifelong guidance (information on initial and continuing education offerings, professions, guidance structures, etc.).

www.monorientationenligne.fr An online career guidance service for young people.

www.onisep.fr The network of youth information centres.

www.cidj.com Le réseau des centres d'information de la jeunesse.

www.apec.fr A website dedicated to executive employment – job offers, orientation tools.

www.unml.info Portal of the National Union of Missions Locales (UNML): a representative and federating union of the network of Missions Locales and other integration organizations.

www.capemploi.com Portal of the national network of Specialized Placement Organizations serving people with disabilities.

www.intercariforef.org Portal of the Carif-Oref network, responsible for information and the professional development of actors involved in adult guidance.

www.francetravail.fr Website of the national employment agency.

www.centre-info.fr Association with a mission to provide information on vocational training and apprenticeships for training professionals.