

Professionalization of Vocational Roles of Public Employment Services Employees in Europe Through Competency Profiling

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The aim of this article is the development of competence profile for employment counsellors within public employment services, reflecting the recent changes and redefinition of these professional roles. This article aims to analyse the state-of-play in relation to professionalization of vocational roles of PES employees in Europe, on the basis of research conducted by the author in the years 2012–2014 for the European Commission. These studies included literature review, analysis of available research and structured survey conducted among representatives of the Public Employment Services in 22 EU countries, complemented by in-depth interviews and analysis of solutions used in PES. On the basis of this research a *European reference competence profile for PES and EURES counsellors* has been created by the author for the purposes of increasing professionalization of roles within these specific public services.

Keywords: Public Employment Services, professionalization of vocational roles, human resources management in public administration, competency profiling.

Profesjonalizacja ról zawodowych pracowników Publicznych Służb Zatrudnienia w Europie poprzez profilowanie kompetencji

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Celem artykułu jest opracowanie profilu kompetencyjnego doradców ds. zatrudnienia w publicznych służbach zatrudnienia, odzwierciedlającego niedawne zmiany i redefinicje tych ról zawodowych. Artykuł oparty jest na analizie stanu profesjonalizacji ról zawodowych pracowników PSZ w Europie, na podstawie badań prowadzonych przez autora w latach 2012–2014 na zlecenie Komisji Europejskiej. Badania te obejmowały studia literaturowe, przegląd dostępnych badań oraz autorskie badania ankietowe przeprowadzone wśród przedstawicieli Publicznych Służb Zatrudnienia 22 krajów UE, uzupełnione o wywiady pogłębione oraz analizę rozwiązań stosowanych w PSZ. Na podstawie tych badań autor opracował *Europejski referencyjny profil kompetencyjny dla doradców PSZ i EURES* w celu podniesienia profesjonalizacji ról zawodowych w tych specyficznych usługach publicznych.

Słowa kluczowe: Publiczne Służby Zatrudnienia, profesjonalizacja ról zawodowych, zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi w administracji publicznej, profilowanie kompetencji.

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1. Introduction: Towards Professionalization of Vocational Roles in Public Employment Services

A number of recent studies have focused on the “professionalization” of public employment services – particularly in relation to the work of guidance counsellors and job brokers (Cedefop, 2009; Kraatz & Ertelt, 2011). The OECD report (2004) states clearly that the work roles, qualifications and training of PES staff are not distinctive as a consequence of the fact that they perform non-specialised functions, characterised by differentiated qualification entry-level requirements as well as not adequately developed training provisions. It is further elaborated that PES jobs (especially in relation to career guidance and employment counselling) lack clear and formal qualification routes into clearly defined occupational roles, control over high-quality professional education (supply of highly qualified workers) as well as support from professional bodies (associations, training institutions and research organisations). These features therefore negatively influence one of the most distinctive feature of professionalization of PES roles, which is professional identity (CEDEFOP, 2009).

From the perspective of the field of the sociology of professions and occupations (Macdonald, 1995; Jackson, 2010), distinctive features of a profession include:

- Regulation (assessed on the existence of: formal qualifications and corresponding education; certification – e.g. examination, certification; regulatory bodies, etc.),
- Autonomy (assessed on the existence of: the degree of control of own affairs; ability to create and implement ethical standards; interest in self-development of the occupational field, etc.),
- Social status (assessed on the existence of: prestige of the profession; power and social influence; authority, etc.).

Research conducted by the European Commission (Sienkiewicz, 2012, 2013, 2014) showed that professional roles within the organizational structure of the PES in Europe (such as job brokers; employment counsellors for the jobseekers – including specialised in specific customer groups, such as young people, the elderly, those experiencing complex problems; vocational guidance counsellors; career counsellors, psychologists) are usually not distinguished as separate vocations in existing occupational classification systems¹. Due to inadequate development of all of the above, there is little evidence to treat PES vocational roles as separate professions.

However, even if the existing evidence is not in favour of the clear differentiation of PES workers occupations, one can find theoretical arguments for such distinction. The main criteria for differentiation can in fact be (Sienkiewicz, 2012):

- relative stability and sustainability of tasks undertaken in performing a given job, which requires specific knowledge and skills (specific quali-

fications and vocational knowledge/skills of an occupational group), and should lead to the fulfilment of clearly defined needs,

- acquiring a livelihood as a result of work (performing work for payment) and identification with a given occupational group.

Therefore, from this 'occupational' perspective, the key differentiating occupational factor influencing the professional identity is the existence of specific job content and competences required to perform a job within a PES vocational role.

First of all, it is possible to identify sets of features that enable singling out professional roles in the PES from other similar professions – particularly in the private sector (e.g. recruitment specialist, career counsellor, career development specialist, etc.). The key criterion for extracting professional roles is relative stability and sustainability of the activities (range of professional tasks) performed on the job, which was separated from the others in the process of social division of labour. Implementation of professional tasks requires specific knowledge, skills and attitudes (competencies), and should lead to fulfilment of clearly defined needs (at the level of job, whole company or society). A key factor is also the professional identity of a particular professional group. From this point of view, if actions (job tasks) performed by PES professionals have a distinguished and permanent nature, require the use of specific knowledge and skills necessary for their implementation, there are arguments in favour of treating this work as a separate profession.

Similar changes in the professionalization of the PES, also affecting changes in the range of professional roles of PES employees, are also affecting Poland – with the biggest changes affecting job brokers. There are major changes designed to limit the regulation of vocations in the labour market and open these positions to interested and able individuals who do not meet formal requirements. However, these changes have not been replaced by the system that would allow for retaining high professional standards for these vocational forms. In most European countries (as opposed to Poland), the changes do not threaten professional identity of workers within the PES.

From this perspective, it is vital to analyse the state-of-play in relation to professionalization of vocational roles of PES employees in Europe. Especially interesting are the practices that lead to the increase of professional identity by clear differentiation of professional tasks and relevant competences required from PES employees. A number of sources provide evidence on the clear differentiation of tasks and relevant competencies required to perform public employment services jobs. For example NICE project (2012) provides details on core competences for career guidance and counselling professionals. A similar approach, focusing on career guidance counsellors, is provided by CEDEFOP (2009) and IAEVG (2003). There are also national level examples from Germany (Kompetenzprofil..., 2012)

and Canada (Canadian..., 2012). However, they are not specifically focused on the roles and competences of employment counsellors. Therefore, **the aim of this article is the development of competence profile for employment counsellors within public employment services.**

2. Determinants Affecting Professional Roles of PES Employees

Public Employment Services are relatively stable, organisationally distinct bodies whose functions are governed largely by legislation (both of a national, regional as well as intra-organisational character) and which support individuals and companies in broadly understood optimal functioning in the labour market. However, PES are experiencing recently a major shift both in their strategic aims, operational structures and service delivery models, which in turn affects professionals employed within their structures.

As underlined in the strategic document entitled “Public Employment Services’ Contribution to EU 2020. PES 2020 Strategy Output Paper”, the roles of PES are changing in most European states. These “fundamental changes in labour markets and society” force PES to take more active roles in supporting entire work careers of individuals – a challenge which arises from the change of perspective due to the launch and development of a new paradigm – “transitional labour markets”. As a result of global and national changes to the labour market functioning (including deepening segmentation of the labour markets, demographic challenges, erosion of internal labour markets resulting in dramatic shifts in labour turnover and shortening of in-company individual careers, etc.), employment relationships are becoming “less stable and diverse transitions are made over lifetime into, within and away from the labour market”². This in turn requires major shifts in the roles of Public Employment Services – both in terms of new activation strategies and tasks, internal organisation (with a certain inclination for improving performance of services and performance management itself), as well as reaching out to “new” target groups (workers, employers, inactive groups) “with no traditional link to the Public Employment Services”³. The new roles undertaken by PES include (among others): active investment in human capital of individuals and in workplace environments, anticipatory role in response to potential career transitions and supporting work careers by giving individuals a perspective and voice in their development, conducting public employment services through a new – holistic – approach (governance, management, stimulation, coordination and quality assurance of services, building partnerships) and provision of online tools and services to support individual career management.

These new challenges essentially need to be met by PES staff as they impose new requirements within their professional roles. As stipulated by Sultana & Watts (2005, p. 7): *“Employment advisers and career guidance staff are at the crucible of most of the transformations taking place in the PES, and their training, competence levels and motivation have a great bearing on the quality and nature of services provided”*.

Also the internal Public Employment Services characteristics – such as operational structure, priority tasks, activation strategies – strongly influence the division of work to be performed by PES employees. One can define a clear link between PES characteristics, job profiles (tasks) of professionals and corresponding competences (Fig. 1).

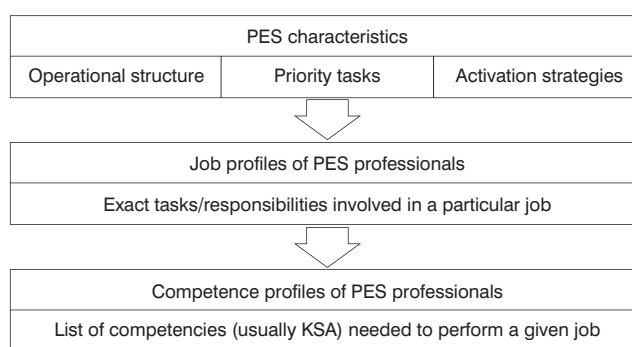


Fig. 1. Interrelation of PES characteristics, job content and competence requirements for PES professionals. Source: own development based on Sienkiewicz (2012).

As evidenced above, the job profiles of PES professionals (defining the job content) influence the competency requirements for these position holders. From this perspective, the job content and competency requirements are interrelated. Thus, usually, the description of competencies and other job characteristics form a job description – a useful tool to communicate key functions of the job as well as to shape effectiveness of employees through clear definitions of the job requirements and underlying characteristics needed to perform a job in an effective way.

3. Competence Profiles as Tools for Building Professional Identity

New challenges imposed on PES due to their changing strategic role influence the job requirements of all PES professionals, affecting their professional identity. Analyses of the author identified a significant gap in relation to the professionalization of vocational roles in European Public Employment Services (PES). One of the significant tools to support professional identity in changing environments is competency profiling (mod-

elling). Competency modelling focuses on describing a set of attributes that are specifically linked to an organization's business strategy and goals (Brannick, Levine, 2007). These characteristics, including knowledge, skills, abilities (KSA), and other traits like physical attributes, values, motives, etc. are important predictors of individual employee effectiveness in the workplace (McClelland, 1973; Boyatzis, 1982). There is growing evidence of competency modelling use in the public sector, from the perspective of increasing the effectiveness of public service delivery (Ennis, 2008).

There is a growing body of evidence, both at the national and international level, on the use of competency frameworks in relation to PES professional roles. One of the examples of national PES levels is the Netherlands, where apart from the existing job profiles (in the form of job descriptions covering purpose of the position, behavioural competences, results areas, key activities and expected results) the PES service (UWV Werkberijf) adopted a **role-portfolio approach** (Sienkiewicz, 2012). The role description focuses on the outcomes of work, the technical competencies required to do it and the behaviours expected of PES employees (behavioural competencies) (Table 1).

A similar, competency-based approach is presented by *Kompetenzprofil für Beratende* from Nationales Forum Beratung in Bildung, Beruf und Beschäftigung (nfb) and Forschungsgruppe Beratungsqualität am Institut für Bildungswissenschaft der Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, which provides a detailed description of competences required from guidance counsellors in Germany.

There are also examples of international developments in relation to competency modelling that relate to PES professional roles. As an example, the CEDEFOP report (CEDEFOP, 2009) presents a core **competence framework** for career guidance roles, comprising:

1. foundation competences (focusing on communication, ethical, needs analysis and IT skills),
2. client-interaction competences (focusing on career development, assessment, learning and counselling skills), and
3. supporting competences (focusing on networking, self-organization, research, evaluation and self-development skills).

Also, one significant recent development of this approach is the work of the Network for Innovation in Career Guidance & Counselling in Europe (NICE). *NICE Handbook for the Academic Training of Career Guidance and Counselling Professionals (2012)* provides details on core competences for career guidance and counselling professionals. Five distinct roles within career guidance and counselling have been defined:

- Career Educator – who supports people in developing their own career management competences,
- Career Information & Assessment Expert – who supports people in assessing their personal characteristics and needs, then connecting them with the labour market and education systems,

Role portfolio		
Area	Role	Description
People	Partner	Builds on relations with employers in which an atmosphere arises where the employer does not begrudge the adviser his successes. Is partner of preferred and non-preferred employers and catalogues their needs. Transforms these needs into opportunities and options and links these to own objectives and own supply of jobseekers. Forges ties on the basis of trust and interest in the business of the employer. Forms an unbreakable one-two with the role of Salesman.
	Relation builder	Like a chameleon, builds and maintains relations within and outside UWV that are necessary to attain the joint objectives. Invests intensively in this relation (these relations) to bring about a sense of cooperation and co-ownership.
	Enforcer	Where appropriate ⁴ , monitors the agreements that have been made with an employer on the efforts he is required to make to keep a jobseeker sustainably in employment. Identifies contraventions and misuse of legislation and regulations. Cooperates with the roles of Partner, Relation builder and Connector.
	Developer	The senior adviser who contrasts the functioning of the individual adviser with the applicable professional and quality standards to help the adviser grow and develop.
Market & WORK	Networker	Creates cooperation on the basis of the willingness of employers and third parties to take the plunge with UWV and one another. Initiates and utilises options in the people-work-income triangle. Knows where (potential) employers 'are', where the labour market is for jobseekers and which parties play a role in providing jobseekers with a place in the labour market.
	Connector	Recognises and achieves cooperation between the various executive and support internal and external parties. Connects these parties proactively in order to bring jobseekers and employers together.
	Salesman	Inspirational entrepreneur who places difficult or very difficult to place jobseekers sustainably in vacancies, whether or not on the basis of cooperative agreements or as part of an arrangement. Adjusts the employer's initial demand in order to be able to fill places from among the available supply. Acts in close cooperation with the Partner
Resources	Information manager	Gathers and assesses internal and external information. Uses this information to make the most of opportunities and options to set up and implement cooperative agreements and arrangements and assess them for feasibility. Provides insight into own efforts in and contributions to attaining the objectives.
	Work pre-parer	Builds with employers and other parties on agreements and procedures with mutual (financial) dependence. Considers with parties how to make agreements attractive. As financial engineer, deploys schemes and pathways in such a way that the interests of employers and other parties are served as well as possible.

Quality manager	The senior employer services adviser who monitors the quality of provision of employer services in the people-work-income triangle. Tests, evaluates and initiates activities to ensure quality within own employer service point or own labour market region. Has a clear overview of the quality and quantity of results of the advisers, particularly in complex arrangements.
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Competencies										
	PEOPLE				MARKET & WORK			RESOURCES		
	Partner	Relation builder	Enforcer	Developer	Networker	Connector	Salesman	Information manager	Work preparer	Quality manager
Business competencies:										
Client orientation	•		•				•		•	•
Cooperation		•		•	•	•	•	•	•	
Results orientation		•	•		•		•	•	•	•
Job competencies of (senior) adviser:										
Motivating/encouraging		•		•		•				•
Flexible behaviour	•	•	•			•	•		•	
Networking				•	•	•				
Market orientation					•	•		•	•	•

Tab. 1. Role portfolio and relevant competencies in PES professional roles in the Netherlands. Source: UWV WERKberdijf Netherlands, based on Sienkiewicz (2012).

- Career Counsellor – who supports individuals in understanding their situations, so as to work through issues towards solutions,
- Programme & Service Manager – who ensures the quality and delivery of Career Guidance and Counselling (CGC) organisations' services,
- Social Systems Intervener & Developer supports clients (even) in crisis and works to change systems for the better.

For these career professional roles three levels of competence have been proposed (career adviser – basic level of competence; career guidance counsellor – higher level of competence in the professional roles of career guidance and counselling; career expert – substantial authority, scholarly and professional integrity, autonomy and innovation), with clearly defined “level descriptors” for the definition of competences (NICE, 2012).

The abovementioned international examples mostly focus on career guidance and counselling roles, which are just one of the roles performed by PES professionals. However, the majority of the tasks of PES are performed by employment counsellors (client advisers) who provide services to both jobseekers and employers. Therefore, it was necessary to fill this evident gap in the competency frameworks for PES professional roles.

4. Development of the European Reference Competence Profile for PES and EURES Counsellors

Studies conducted in the years 2012–2013 for the European Commission (Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion) revealed a lack of suitable reference competence profile to be used for the purpose of professionalising employment counsellors roles within EU public employment services. The analytical paper on *Job profiles and training for employment counsellors* (Sienkiewicz, 2012) provided an overview of the specifics of job profiles, competence requirements and training programmes available for employment counsellors in public employment services in Europe. The analysis indicated that a number of key commonalities and differences existed in job and competence profiles, as well as in the training of employment counsellors. Therefore, the **methodological approach** employed focused on the analytical and comparative perspective aimed at gathering organisational (PES) specific practices and understanding the mechanisms and context within analysed countries. The research process comprised several stages depicted in Figure 2. The main stages of the process have been described below.

During the **desk research phase**, a broad range of sources have been used in order to analyse the issue of competences required from the PES employment counsellors, including:

- up-to-date literature on the issue of competence profiling practices of PES regarding employment counsellors,
- recent research findings focusing on EU Member States' national and comparative analyses as well as good practices from outside the EU,

- information provided and gathered directly from PES in EU Member States in the form of available documentation such as job/competency profiles, tasks descriptions, training and development regulations/statutes, etc.

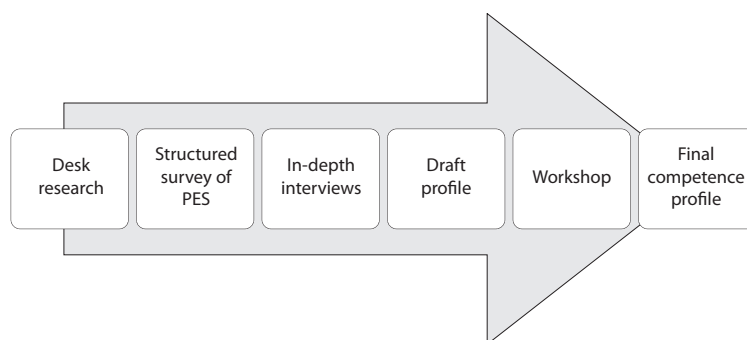


Fig. 2. Stages of the research process for the preparation of the competence profile for employment counsellors. Source: own development.

These inputs on competency frameworks and profiles for counsellors have been analysed in two main ways:

1. Analysis of the lists of competences required from employment counsellors and their groupings;
2. Content analysis of competency descriptions (where available) in order to identify behavioural indicators.

The analytical framework for the literature and available research analysis has been prepared by the author, which allowed for a structured analysis of each document. For example, for the analysis of current research in this area a concise “fiche” for each study has been prepared, outlining shortly the time frame/date of the study, source/research institution, territorial coverage (national/international), aims/research problems, methodology and key findings (focusing on key competencies and training provided to employment counsellors). The structured analysis was also used for the literature review (covering key definitions, competences expected from employment counsellors). The key findings of this analysis were used directly in the preparation of the first draft of the competency profile as well as in formulation of the research questions for the further research process.

In preparing the profile a clear emphasis was placed on primary data collection and the development of a comparative evidence base for analysis of the models of competence profiles. As the existing data sets and systematic evidence were scarce, the information had to be gathered directly from PES both through the analysis of available documentation as well as direct research. The major source of information was a **structured survey of 22 PES**⁵

completed in mid-2012. This survey was focused on job profiles, competence requirements and training programmes of employment counsellors who deliver employment guidance and counselling in Public Employment Services in Europe. The questionnaire was sent to selected PES representatives, who forwarded it to be completed by the relevant persons within the national Public Employment Service with knowledge of the issue of job/competence profiles and training for employment counsellors. The questionnaire was mainly composed of closed questions, including 9 comprehensive questions on competency profiles of employment counsellors. For the purpose of the comparability of results, the survey included the definition of the competency profile used in the survey: *“Competency profile is a list of the competences (commonly organised within categories of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes) needed to perform on the given job well, or sometimes the description of the employees having those competences. Competency profile usually defines competencies in a descriptive way, providing behavioural indicators and dividing each competence to several levels of proficiency”*. PES representatives were also asked to send additional information such as examples of job and competency profiles, training curricula for employment counsellors⁶. Results from this survey served as one of the major sources of information, adding to findings from other sources reviewed within the study.

The study also comprised **telephone in-depth interviews** with relevant stakeholders within selected European PES. In total 8 interviews lasting on average 1 hour were conducted. Although the survey described above provided certain comparative overview on the issue, the in-depth interviews were aimed at the preparation of a number of ‘case study’ examples on practices being used in Member States. Countries for the telephone interviews were selected on the basis of the questionnaire submitted – especially in relation to interesting information that required further investigation. The idea behind the in-depth analysis was finding the contrasting approaches taken and establishing the rationale behind the differences.

On the basis of the interview, the analysis of the contrasting approaches included:

- the approach the country has taken to the issue,
- the rationale for using this approach,
- the added value of the approach and whether this has changed in recent years (and why),
- the positive outcomes achieved by the approach.

For example, within the issue of the existence of specific vs. standardised job and competency profiles, countries with and without specific profiles for employment counsellors were analysed in order to elaborate on why different countries sought to create different profiles for different types of counsellors (or to have the same profile for all counsellors). Therefore, the analysis allowed for the deepened understanding of the logic and context of the approach adopted to competency profiling for employment counsellors.

Despite the existing differences in job and competence profiles among PES in Europe revealed by the study, the analysis proved that it is possible to create a basic common profile for the key tasks and competences required of employment counsellors. The *core* tasks relate to employer services (tasks focused on placement, networking and sales, organising) and to jobseeker services (tasks focused on placement, counselling, information provision and administration and monitoring); both require specific sets of skills. It was also revealed that *soft* skills are increasingly important to facilitate contact with clients and other stakeholders in employment service delivery. The study crystallised comparable core competences which are common to most Member States in relation to the work of employment counsellors and which constituted a **draft competence profile** (Table 2).

The initial (draft) competence profile was discussed with EU PES during the **workshop**. It was revealed that, due to major shifts in the roles of PES (towards services focused on activation and facilitation of transitions), the counselling and guidance elements in the work of employment counsellors were prioritised, leading to a job profile that combines the roles of a broker, a counsellor, a social worker and further includes administrative tasks. This broad approach requires counsellors to have interdisciplinary knowledge comprising hard and soft skills in order to find a balance between administrative and customer service competences. It was also concluded that a standardised, enumerative list of common competences for PES counsellors would be hard to prepare, taking into consideration the different starting points and operational structures of employment services in EU countries. However, a certain set of key competences could be and has been developed in relation to minimum standard of employment service delivery, working around country differences. Therefore, the theoretical observation formulated in the OECD report of 2004 (*“there is a common core of knowledge and skills required by practitioners in all areas of career guidance”*) has been empirically confirmed.

As a consequence, on the basis of the above analyses as well as information acquired from national PES structures, **the final version of the European reference competence profile for PES and EURES counsellors** (Sienkiewicz, 2014) has been prepared as a separate document. The aim of this step was to describe and concretise core competences in an operational way so that they could easily relate to PES core tasks and serve as a reference tool for employment counsellors. This was achieved through:

- 1) preparing a comprehensive competence framework for PES and EURES counsellors;
- 2) dividing competences in the framework into three distinctive areas, grouping competences around major tasks performed by employment counsellors; and
- 3) describing competences in an operational way, by providing a general competence description as well as detailed behavioural indicators.

TASKS			
	Area:	CORE	ADDITIONAL
Services for jobseekers	Tasks focused on placement	• Initial interviewing of individual jobseekers • Job search assistance • Networking with other stakeholders, providers	• Registering unemployed (formal registration process)
	Tasks focused on counselling	• Assessment (profiling) of the jobseeker's strengths/weaknesses and the adequate need for support • Preparation of an individual action plan • Referral to appropriate ALMP measure/provider (e.g. specialist assessment, training) • Group sessions for jobseekers • Guidance on career planning/development	• Use of specialised IT and other tools for assessment • Planning of ALMPs
	Tasks focused on information provision	• Providing information on available job offers • Information about ALMP measures • Providing telephone/on-line job information and assistance • Providing and maintaining on-site and on-line information on available job openings	• Provision and up-keep of on-site and on-line information on available training/ALMPs
	Tasks focused on administration and monitoring	• Monitoring of implementation of LAP • Maintaining direct, in-person contact with registered jobseekers • Maintaining contact with registered jobseekers through telephone/e-mail	• Monitoring in case of referral to another provider/ training
Services for employers	Tasks focused on placement	• Filling of vacancies/ selection of candidates • Filling of place for apprenticeship or work placement • Follow-up of placement	• Vacancy intake/registration
	Tasks focused on networking and sales	• Actively searching for new job offers at employers (networking with employers) • Informing employers about ALMP/support (e.g. subsidies, support to integrate the disabled)	• Consulting about age management, human resources, gender issues, etc.

		Tasks focused on organising	• Group sessions for employers • Organisation of speed dating/ job fairs	
COMPETENCES				
CORE		ADDITIONAL		
• Knowledge of current labour market situation and trends • Knowledge of ALMP measures/concepts • Assessment and matching skills • Communication and interviewing/counselling skills • Ability to motivate and inspire clients • Teamwork/cooperation • Client orientation • Stress resistance • Patience, understanding and the ability to listen non-judgmentally • Flexibility • Knowledge of service-specific tools/activation practice • Knowledge of disadvantaged groups in the labour market • IT skills • Planning and organising skills • Problem recognition and solving skills • Negotiation skills • Trust building ability/reliability • Information finding and analysis skills		• Knowledge of vocational structure and vocational classifications • Knowledge of labour law • Knowledge of human resources management • Knowledge of performance measurement/controlling • Knowledge of the gender aspects • Knowledge of hard and soft skills assessment tools • Knowledge of social case management problems • Assessment of psychological and social profiles • Skills relating to employer services • Group facilitation skills • Ability to work independently • Innovativeness/creativity		

Tab. 2. Draft common job and competency profile for employment counsellors. Source: Sienkiewicz, 2013.

The reference competence profile for PES and EURES counsellors has been divided into three competence areas:

- I. Foundational competences (practitioners' general values and skills);
- II. Client interaction competences (working with jobseekers and employers);
- III. Supporting competences (systems and technical).

Foundational competences represent practitioners' general characteristics and skills that are relevant to a number of different tasks and situations. Thus, they should be required from all employment counsellors, disregarding possible differences in corresponding roles or performed tasks (for example, specific groups of clients a given counsellor usually deals with, such as young unemployed or long-term unemployed). **Client interaction competences** (working with jobseekers and employers) represent the broadest area of competences, clearly linked to tasks performed by employment counsellors on a daily basis. The last area of competences embraced by the profile includes **supportive competences (systems and technical)**. These represent both competences to deal with technological aspects of the work (ICT) as well as service and country-specific competences (Table 3).

I. Foundational competences (practitioners' general values and skills)		
1. Professional conduct	F1	Ethical practice
	F2	Continuous development and improvement
	F3	Responsibility and reflected use of discretion
	F4	Teamwork/cooperation
2. Client orientation	F5	Communication skills
	F6	Ability to recognise and respond to clients' diverse needs
3. Dealing with pressure/change	F7	Stress resistance/ability to work under pressure
	F8	Planning and organising skills
	F9	Flexibility/ability to adapt
II. Client interaction competences (working with jobseekers and employers)		
Part 1: PES counsellors		
1. Counselling and individual action planning	C1	Practical knowledge of individual action planning including promotion of career management skills/employability
	C2	Counselling: patience, understanding and the ability to listen non-judgmentally
	C3	Ability to motivate clients
	C4	Ability to conduct resource-oriented assessment
	C5	Problem solving skills
	C6	Ability to make justified referrals to appropriate measure/provider

Tab. 3 cont.

II. Client interaction competences (working with jobseekers and employers)		
2. Management and monitoring of integration / activation processes	C7	Ability to combine administrative & monitoring role with counselling
	C8	Ability to monitor individual action plans and activation processes
	C9	Management of complex integration strategies/processes (case management)
3. Facilitating placement of jobseekers	C10	Assessment and matching skills for job placement
	C11	Information finding and analysis skills
	C12	Human resources management knowledge
	C13	Basics of intra-European EURES placement services
4. Facilitating recruitment services for employers	C14	Sales and negotiation skills
	C15	Working with employer associations/representatives
	C16	Building long-term relationship (customer binding)
	C17	Basics of intra-European EURES recruitment services
Part 2: EURES counsellors		
5. Client interaction in provision of EURES services	C18	Knowledge of counselling, placement and recruitment services of EURES counsellors
	C19	Ability to work in partnership with other EURES partners
	C20	Knowledge of living and working conditions as preconditions for mobility
	C21	Knowledge of EU labour market
	C22	Knowledge of health and social insurance regulations in EU countries
	C23	Advanced intercultural/diversity skills
	C24	Linguistic skills
	C25	Knowledge of EU and national structures and programmes supporting mobility
III. Supporting competences (systems and technical competences)		
1. System competences	S1	Corporate identity and commitment to service
	S2	Ability to represent a public authority in communication with clients and other actors
	S3	Networking and partnerships
	S4	Knowledge of employment services systems
2. Service/country specific knowledge	S5	Knowledge of labour market situation/education and VET/occupations
	S6	Knowledge of disadvantaged groups in the labour market

Tab. 3 cont.

III. Supporting competences (systems and technical competences)		
2. Service/country specific knowledge	S7	Knowledge of labour market policy, ALMP measures/concepts for activation
	S8	Performance management, monitoring and evaluation
3. Technical skills	S9	ICT skills and ability to work in a context of blended service delivery
	S10	Information management skills

Tab. 3. European reference competence profile for PES and EURES counsellors. Source: Sienkiewicz, 2014.

5. Conclusions

As a result of the analysis, core competences of employment counsellors have been concretised and described in an operational way. In this way, these competences can be related to PES core tasks and serve as a reference tool for PES and EURES services.

This reference tool can serve as a tool for **professionalising employment counsellors roles in EU PES**. The competence profiles can serve as a focal point in all skills-related activities for PES professionals. More precisely, the key competencies set out in the profile can (and should) be the basis of:

- recruitment activities for new PES professionals, as the key competences of the candidate (their scope and level in relation to the level specified in the profile) become major selection criteria,
- development activities for PES professionals, on the basis of regular competency gap (and excess) analysis in relation to the expected levels of competence in the profile,
- development of training programmes for PES professionals, by choosing training approaches and techniques (on-the-job, off-the-job, active learning, mentoring/coaching) on the basis of the competence in question and the learning outcome to be achieved,
- development of performance appraisal for PES professionals, by providing general descriptions and behavioural indicators included in the profile for the associated knowledge, skills and abilities required to perform the tasks effectively,
- development of career paths for PES professionals, by allowing for better structuring of a career path and creating real possibilities for on-the-job development, directing the careers of PES professionals to be more 'in-depth' (professional) than hierarchical.

Thus, the European reference competence profile presented in this article can support the professionalization of services provided by PES employees. Consequently, the professionalization of the services delivered by PES

employees would help the recognition of its distinctive features, leading to the recognition of PES roles as important occupations in their own rights.

During the research process, the clear need for future research was identified. Apart from employment counsellors, the Public Employment Services are staffed with a broad range of professionals including: payment officers, special employment counsellors for young people, special employment counsellors for those with complex problems, career guidance counsellors (for young, adults or both), (vocational) psychologists. Apart from career guidance counsellors, these roles have not yet received adequate attention in relation to competence profiling. Therefore, future research should focus on broadening the scope of competency profiles to cover all groups of vocational roles represented in PES. Only then could the interrelations of roles be revealed, serving the ultimate goal of increasing PES effectiveness.

Endnotes

- ¹ Some resemblance to the tasks performed by PES employees can be found under three separate unit groups of occupations of International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO 08): Personnel and careers professionals (code: 2423) and Training and staff development professionals (code: 2424) and Social work and counselling professionals (code: 2635). Similarly, in O*NET (the classification system of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the US Department of Labor), one cannot find exact occupational categories for these professions. Again, there are three major classificatory groups under which the tasks resembling the ones of PES workers can be found, namely: Educational, Guidance, School, and Vocational Counsellors (code: 21-1012.00), Human Resources Specialists (code: 13-1071.00) and Social and Human Service Assistants (code: 21-1093.00).
- ² Public Employment Services' Contribution to EU 2020. PES 2020 Strategy Output Paper, p. 3.
- ³ Ibidem, p. 4.
- ⁴ For example, part-time unemployment, use of wage cost subsidy, adaptations at the workplace (special measures), etc.
- ⁵ Austria, Belgium (including two answers from FOREM and VDAB), Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Romania, Hungary, Malta, Slovenia, Spain and United Kingdom.
- ⁶ These could be sent in their original languages and were translated for the purpose of the study.

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