

Brussels, 17 May 2024

COST 025/24

DECISION

Subject: Memorandum of Understanding for the implementation of the COST Action “Critical perspectives on career and career guidance” (COCAG) CA23112

The COST Member Countries will find attached the Memorandum of Understanding for the COST Action Critical perspectives on career and career guidance approved by the Committee of Senior Officials through written procedure on 17 May 2024.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

For the implementation of a COST Action designated as

COST Action CA23112 CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CAREER AND CAREER GUIDANCE (COCAG)

The COST Members through the present Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) wish to undertake joint activities of mutual interest and declare their common intention to participate in the COST Action, referred to above and described in the Technical Annex of this MoU.

The Action will be carried out in accordance with the set of COST Implementation Rules approved by the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO), or any document amending or replacing them.

The main aim and objective of the Action is to critically examine careers and career guidance in the contemporary world in order to understand the complex relationship between individual psychology, technological changes, and the political economy. This will be achieved through the specific objectives detailed in the Technical Annex.

The present MoU enters into force on the date of the approval of the COST Action by the CSO.

OVERVIEW

Summary

Critical perspectives on career and career guidance (COCAG) will gather scholars across Europe and beyond to explore how careers are changing in the contemporary world and consider what response is required from public policy and practice. It will explore the following research questions. (1) How can the challenges and changes that are happening to careers in the contemporary world be understood? (2) How can policymakers respond to contemporary challenges to individual's careers? (3) How can career guidance practice adopt a more critical stance to address the changing world more effectively?

COCAG will foster debate around these questions by stimulating publication projects, brokering relationships between researchers and developing new research directions. It will also support the public communication of research insights, findings and projects to policymakers and practitioners.

Capacity building is at the heart of the aims of COCAG. The Action will support the career development of Young Researchers and Innovators within the field by providing the opportunity to build international networks, co-publish with more experienced researchers, and participate in a wide variety of activities. The Action will also support collaboration between the COST Member Countries, Near Neighbour Countries (NNC) and International Partner Countries (IPC), particularly engaging and supporting researchers from COST Inclusiveness Target Countries. Finally, it will support practitioners and policymakers engagement with research and theory in the area and the mutual exchange and expansion of knowledge and expertise.

Areas of Expertise Relevant for the Action	Keywords
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Educational sciences: Education: training, pedagogy, didactics ● Sociology: Social structure, inequalities, social mobility, social exclusion, income distribution, poverty ● Psychology: Social psychology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● career ● career guidance ● social justice ● education ● Labour market

Specific Objectives

To achieve the main objective described in this MoU, the following specific objectives shall be accomplished:

Research Coordination

- To foster debate and discussion around the three main research questions of the Action with the aim of influencing cross-European research in career guidance as well as supporting the development of new approaches to training and development within the field.
- To stimulate new research directions addressed to the three research questions and other key issues that emerge through COCAG.
- To support the public communication of research insights and findings and create dialogue between researchers, policy makers, and practitioners.

Capacity Building

- To support the career development of Young Researchers and Innovators within the field.
- To foster collaboration between the COST Member Countries, Near Neighbour Countries (NNC) and International Partner Countries (IPC).

- To facilitate practitioners, employers and national and international policymakers to engage with research and theory and increase the exchange of knowledge.

TECHNICAL ANNEX

1. S&T EXCELLENCE

1.1. SOUNDNESS OF THE CHALLENGE

1.1.1. DESCRIPTION OF THE STATE OF THE ART

The concept of career draws together work and learning and, in more expansive definitions, also brings in other elements such as family, community, leisure and citizenship (McCash et al., 2021). Career is not a single moment of decision when we choose one job over another. It is the ongoing fabric of our lives. Our careers are conducted continuously, and they develop in social and political contexts that provide contrasting opportunities and limitations.

Our careers are going through a series of profound changes. Longer-term social, and economic trends including globalisation, climate change, shifting gender roles, socio-economic and ethnic inequalities and migration are combining with short-term crises such as the banking crisis, the pandemic, and the outbreak of wars in Europe and across the world to create a major rupture in the way that individuals experience careering. Intertwined with all these changes is the neoliberal context which both shapes the labour market and encourages people to view solutions to their problems and their career management in individualistic ways. Alongside these social, political and economic changes, there are a wide range of technological trends which are also transforming society and the operation of contemporary careers. The proposed Action will attend to key technological trends such as automation and artificial intelligence, the integration of the physical and digital worlds (the internet of things), increasing digitalisation, social media and virtual reality. It will also attend to socio-technical trends around digital ownership, control and enclosure and the way in which automation interacts with existing skills needs and industrial relations.

Technology shapes career and career guidance. For example, careers were already transformed by e-learning, e-counselling, e-recruitment, and e-human resource management. The growing capacities of AI alongside the increasing ubiquity of social media and other digital and hybrid technologies continues to open up new possibilities and challenges. As these trends continue, they promise to interact with the political, social and economic trends already highlighted (see European Commission, 2020). For policymakers, new technologies offer the promise of faster, more efficient and more effective services. But such claims often remain unproven, with a major danger being the reduction of quality and the loss of the human touch. Creating the right balance between the human and the digital is a key dilemma for all public service provision including career guidance.

Amongst all these changes we are seeing profound shifts in work and learning. These changes are experienced at the level of the society, the organisation and the individual. Indeed, organisations and employers play a key role in shaping careers through specifying jobs and skills needs and through the management of human capital. Given this, the Action will engage closely with the demand side of the labour market, examining how employers are mediating macro trends and how they are interacting with career guidance policies and systems.

The COST Action “Critical perspectives on career and career guidance” (COCAG) will seek to explore all these multi-scalar changes through the lens of career studies and with a strong interest in public policy interventions that can be described as ‘career guidance’. Career studies is an interdisciplinary field which draws on psychology, sociology, education, organisation studies, economics and other fields to explore how people move through their lives, relate to others and to organisations and examine how people balance their efforts, time and agency in different aspects of their lives and across time. It acknowledges the diversity of experience that individuals have, recognising that they are often structured by class, gender, ethnicity, geography, migrant status and other factors, but also highlights the importance of recognising individual agency and trajectories. Career studies use diverse methods ranging from econometric analysis of administrative datasets to deep ethnographic studies. The proposers are drawn from across these methodological traditions and include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods researchers.

Career studies addresses diverse themes such as automation and artificial intelligence (Akkok, 2020), decent work (Gee, 2022; Young et al., 2021), entrepreneurship, higher education (Burke & Christie,

2018; Romito, 2022), lifelong learning and the older workforce, migration (Hughes et al., 2019; Vehviläinen & Souto, 2021; Young et al., 2020), precarity (Lucas Casanova et al., 2019), schools, social inclusion (Young et al., 2019) and transitions between education, work and other life stages. It also explores how all these issues intersect with major social, economic and technological trends. What unites this work is an interest in the interface between the individual's psychology and lived experience and organisational, social and economic systems. Such work is particularly critical during periods of social and economic change as the existing 'career scripts' in which individuals are transformed necessitating new career management strategies (Bergmo-Prvulovic, 2020).

An important area of focus within the field of career studies explores the nature and impact of career guidance as a public policy intervention within the education and employment system. Career guidance is an overarching term that is used to describe a wide range of interventions which can support individuals and groups to develop their careers and shape their pathway through life, learning and work (Hooley et al., 2018). Such activities may be variously described in local and sectoral terminologies (e.g. career counselling, careers education, employability programmes), but all such activities are designed to help individuals to make learning choices, find and keep work and then manage their working lives as part of their broader lives. Career guidance supports individuals in managing their educational, social, and economic engagement and contributes to public policy goals such as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Key areas of alignment for career guidance and public policy include its capacity to support the functioning of the economy and the labour market, the education system, social mobility, social equity, health and wellbeing, pro-environmental behaviour and justice and rehabilitation.

Career guidance is an international activity which has been the concern of international policymakers. It has a global footprint and can be found in most countries but is strongest in developed economies in the Global and European North and weaker in countries such as the COST Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC). Despite its importance to policymakers, it remains weakly professionalised with very substantial variations in paradigm and implementation in different contexts. Where career guidance is delivered effectively there is good evidence that it can lead to a variety of benefits for individuals including personal well-being, success in the education system, successful transitions to the workplace, sustained employment and access to decent work and increased lifetime earnings (Kashefakdel & Percy, 2017). There is also evidence that proactively designed interventions can compensate for social inequalities and support social justice (Mann et al., 2018) and that in a period of labour market turbulence, such as the aftermath of COVID-19, effective career services can minimise inequalities, mitigate negative effects and support people to navigate a challenging transition to work.

There has been a growing movement within career studies to adopt critical approaches which address the study of careers and the practice of career guidance through a political lens informed by social justice (e.g. Arthur et al., 2013; Hooley et al., 2018, 2019; Irving & Malik, 2003). Such approaches draw on critical psychology (e.g. Prilleltensky & Stead, 2012), critical pedagogy and on social representation theory (Bergmo-Prvulovic, 2018) as well as other critical and emancipatory traditions. This strand of thinking argues that neoliberalism provides a key context which shapes individuals' careers, often in ways that are detrimental to both the individual and the social fabric (Blustein, 2019).

Career guidance can be co-opted into such governmentality and used to shape careers in line with the instrumental rationality of the labour market. However, it is also possible to imagine alternative, critical roles for career guidance which seek to develop critical consciousness and empower individuals in the face of such neoliberal rationalities. The growth of new technologies interacts with such dilemmas about the appropriate role of career guidance as it increases our capacity to access and analyse data in ways that promise to improve performance and efficiency. However, such technocratic promises are not politically neutral and beg the question as to in whose interests such technological reforms are carried out and what is lost, as well as what is gained. Critical approaches seek to subject all these assumptions to greater scrutiny and consider the inherent tensions and implicit agendas inscribed into discussions about career and career guidance.

The main goal of COCAG is to critically examine careers and career guidance in the contemporary world in order to understand the complex relationship between individual psychology, technological changes, and the political economy. The Action aims to envision a more equitable future world and bring together scholars and stakeholders in career studies to generate innovative research ideas and engage with policy and practice in this field. COCAG will surpass current knowledge by critically examining careers and career guidance in the contemporary world. It focuses on the intricate relationship between individual psychology, technological transformations, and the political economy. Furthermore, it encourages future-focused-thinking and envisions a more equitable future

world. The Action seeks to bring together scholars and stakeholders in career studies to generate ideas, develop innovative research approaches, and engage with both policy and practice.

1.1.2. DESCRIPTION OF THE CHALLENGE (MAIN AIM)

The concept of career was very useful to the sociological and philosophical traditions that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s which emphasised the idea of individualisation. From this perspective, career can be viewed as the expression of Giddens' reflexive project of the self as it asks individuals to exert their agency between increasingly boundaryless social institutions. COCAG seeks to explore whether this conception of career remains viable in a new political and economic context.

These ideas were also useful to policy initiatives which sought to emphasise the individual and to place responsibility onto individuals as social actors. The states' role was no longer to manage the labour force or to intercede with capital on the behalf of labour, but rather to build the stock of human capital through education in ways which would support growth. Individuals needed to be mobile and highly skilled and to take career decisions carefully to make the most of educational investments. Career guidance was an important technology which could be used to underpin this Action and support individuals to make good choices, stay in school and invest their resources carefully. However, critical studies of policymaking highlight a subordination of careers to market forces (Bergmo-Prvulovic, 2012) and note that many human capital interventions, such as human resource management approaches, are co-opted into becoming a technology for disciplining and governing the workforce.

Scientific gaps: Since 2008, many of the assumptions of third-way neoliberalism have been under pressure. Intensifying interest in the climate crisis, rapid technological advancement and growing migration have combined with economic crises to unsettle neoliberal certainties. Following the pandemic, this critical voice has become louder as crises around energy supply, global supply chains and the cost of living have led to further instability. It is very likely that we are entering a new phase of political economy and that as a result, the shape of careers will continue to change along with the kinds of support needed. The European Skills Agenda shows how policymakers are responding to the crisis in ways that emphasise environmental sustainability, social justice and digital transformation, but which also continue to lean on human capital theory as the fundamental basis of the approach. Yet, such policies have been unable to guarantee decent work for all despite their oft-stated aims of doing so.

This has led some in the careers field and elsewhere to borrow Gramsci's terminology and argue that we are in an *interregnum* where old career formations and the public policy approaches that sought to address them are dying, but that a new paradigm has yet to emerge. This has left many scholars across Europe and beyond seeking to retheorise career, to ask questions about how career fits into contemporary narratives about education, work, community and citizenship and develop new accounts which proceed from different ontological and epistemological bases (e.g., Hooley et al., 2018; 2019). An important part of this new dialogue has explored the role of national policies in education, skills, employment and related areas and asked what state and organisations' roles are in underpinning individuals' careers. This has led scholars to explore what post-crash, post-Covid, post-neoliberal and even post-human career guidance would and should look like.

Societal needs: The academic field of career studies, particularly those elements of it which are concerned with policy interventions such as career guidance have been strongly influenced by changes in policy demands in the countries in which researchers and other key stakeholders are located. This means that scholarship is often reactive and addressed to immediate policy concerns rather than taking a longer view. It has also resulted in a fragmented research culture organised around a variety of diverse national agendas and sectoral concerns (public vs. private, education vs. employment). In addition, the field has to relate to a complex and diverse profession, which has its basis in different disciplines in different countries. Opportunities for more theoretical and blue skies research have been limited. The creation of the COCAG Action will bring about a forum for international collaboration, open collaborative space and champion a range of forms of research which could support the retheorisation of career in the contemporary political economy.

COCAG will bring together a wide range of scholars working across Europe and beyond to explore these important issues. Key to this will be broadening the inter-disciplinary basis of career studies by bringing scholars into COCAG who may not identify with the field but who are researching similar themes from other perspectives. Meetings and other activities will be designed to foster interdisciplinary, multi-method working, and creative and collaborative approaches.

Engagement: COCAG will provide a vehicle for wider public and policy engagement. By increasing dialogue, COCAG will both enhance understanding of key issues and increase the impact of the field on the practices and policies that it addresses. It will seek to develop conceptual understandings of career and career guidance in response to the current political economy and the changing policy environment.

COCAG includes policymakers, employers, trade unionists and practitioners who will aid in both developing the analysis of the place of career in contemporary society and considering the wider implications of the growing critical perspective on career. Researchers and other participants in COCAG will work closely together to move the discussion beyond existing policy paradigms. COCAG will support a network of researchers to explore the contemporary relevance of the concept of career and consider how the careers of individuals, collectives and communities can be best supported. The Action will explore these through three main research questions, which will in turn provide the main conceptual framework for the work undertaken through the Action.

- 1. How can the challenges and changes that are happening to careers in the contemporary world be understood?** This includes a range of challenges and changes, such as the aftermath of the 2008 crash, COVID-19, wars in Europe and beyond, growing levels of migration, technological transformation, including the growth of AI, and the climate crisis as well as new economic models such as the green economy. This work package will explore how the shifts in the global political economy manifest through individuals' experience of work and career, shaping aspirations and shifting the patterns and scripts that careers follow. Such social, economic, technological, and political trends highlight the recursive dialectic that exists between the public world of politics and economics and the private world of the individual and their aspirations. This strand will foster and encourage utopian and counter-factual thinking about how work and career can be reimagined in more fulfilling and emancipatory ways. This research question will be used to identify key issues and develop new guidelines for career guidance which can inform the approach taken in the subsequent two research questions.
- 2. How can policymakers respond to contemporary challenges to individuals' careers?** Career guidance is primarily, although not exclusively, a public policy intervention. It is of concern to policymakers at all levels from the European Union, through national governments, to local government. It is usually mobilised through the education and skills system (leading to an important interface with European lifelong learning policy) and through the public employment system. However, it can also be found in a wide range of other places such as forms of youth work, work within the justice system and initiatives to support mid- and late- career changes. It is also important to recognise that policy making, and indeed career decision making, takes a wide range of different forms in the diverse political economies found across Europe and beyond. Massive changes and challenges to the organisation of career ask policymakers to rethink the scale, nature and deployment of career guidance policies and to rethink the role that career guidance should play in responsabilising individuals and disciplining them to market logics. This strand will include examination of how new technologies are being integrated into career guidance policies and practice and whether such changes ultimately can be demonstrated to improve the quality of career guidance. The engagement with policymakers will also be conducted in dialogue with the following research question to address the reciprocal relationship between policy and practice.
- 3. How can career guidance practice adopt a more critical stance to address the changing world more effectively?** This question will build on the findings of the two previous questions to explore the implications for career guidance practice. Career guidance draws on a wide range of theoretical ideas, technologies and practical approaches to support people in developing their careers. This strand of work will examine how the approaches that it deploys are changing and develop ideas and innovative approaches that can align it more fully with a shift towards social justice. This strand will develop and synthesise key concepts, set out a detailed research and dissemination strategy for the field to enhance its engagement with practice and forge new relationships with practitioners and practitioner representative bodies.

1.2. PROGRESS BEYOND THE STATE OF THE ART

1.2.1. APPROACH TO THE CHALLENGE AND PROGRESS BEYOND THE STATE OF THE ART

COCAG encompasses a multifaceted approach to achieve its primary objective of critically examining

careers and career guidance in the contemporary world. This comprehensive strategy can be broken down into four key pillars.

1. Establishing an open and inclusive network for collaboration: One of the cornerstones of this Action is the establishment of a robust open and inclusive network. We aim to provide a platform where scholars, experts, and stakeholders in career studies can come together, fostering collaboration and the exchange of ideas. This network will serve as a dynamic hub for professionals from diverse backgrounds, transcending disciplinary boundaries to collectively explore the complex dynamics of careers in the modern era. Key activities will include a launch conference for the whole network, scientific meetings focusing on key themes, and online and face-to-face engagement events for policymakers and practitioners.

2. Developing resources and toolkits for best practice: In our pursuit of understanding and improving career guidance, we recognise the need for practical solutions. To this end, the network is committed to developing toolkits that draw on the learning from the Action to inform policy and practice. It will address various aspects of career guidance, from assessment and decision-making to support and interventions, ensuring that individuals receive the most effective guidance on their career journeys. Key activities will include the development of an Action blog which will serve as the hub for an online community of scholars and stakeholders involved in the Action. Practitioners and policymakers will be invited to contribute to the blog, which will become a repository of cutting-edge thinking from the field, and the development of handbooks for policymakers and practitioners.

3. Stimulation of opportunities for COST ITC and Young Researchers and Innovators (YRI): The global landscape of careers and work is continually evolving. To stay at the forefront of this dynamic environment, this Action emphasises the stimulation of opportunities for all Action participants, and especially for COST ITC and YRI. By uniting researchers and institutions from different countries, the Action will harness collective expertise to investigate emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities in career development and support the transfer of expertise and capacity to the COST ITC. This collaborative approach will enable us to generate a deeper understanding of the global implications of career choices and offer insights into the evolving political and economic factors influencing careers. Key activities will include the production of a new edited volume exploring the new career paradigm, developing the literature beyond the state of the art and examining appropriate responses for policy and practice; the production of a journal special issue with a focus on YRI; Short-term scientific missions designed to support YRI to develop their careers. This will enable researchers to build international networks and identify opportunities for collaborative publication and funding bids. It will also enable the production of a future-focused research agenda towards the end of COCAG, synthesising what has been learnt and setting out the next steps. Such an agenda should be designed to encourage substantive thinking about future themes, methodological innovation and developments in the communication of research and the engagement of policymakers and practitioners.

4. Training and education initiatives: Recognising the pivotal role of education and training in career development, this Action places a strong emphasis on professional development. The Action is committed to offering training and education programs tailored to various stakeholders, including researchers, career counsellors, educators, and policymakers. These initiatives will equip professionals with the knowledge and tools necessary to navigate the complexities of modern career guidance effectively. Key activities will include career accelerator events (including an annual summer school) for YRI, webinars, the development of online resources and other forms of online collaboration, and the production of briefings, digests and evidence-based case studies.

1.2.2. OBJECTIVES

1.2.2.1. *Research Coordination Objectives*

- 1. To foster debate and discussion around the three main research questions of the Action with the aim of influencing cross-European research in career guidance as well as supporting the development of new approaches to training and development within the field.** It will stimulate publication and dissemination projects and support the development of relationships between researchers at different career stages, and those working in different countries, traditions and sectors.
- 2. To stimulate new research directions addressed to the three research questions and**

other key issues that emerge through COCAG. This will strengthen the evidence base and provide policymakers and practitioners with direct access to the latest insights.

3. **To support the public communication of research insights and findings and create dialogue between researchers, policy makers, and practitioners.**

1.2.2.2. Capacity-building Objectives

1. **To support the career development of Young Researchers and Innovators within the field.** Participants will have the opportunity to build international networks, co-publish with more experienced researchers and participate in the establishment of consortia running for competitive funding, through contributing to a wide variety of capacity-building activities including conferences, summer schools, knowledge sharing and transference activities, and Short-Term Scientific Missions.
2. **To foster collaboration between the COST Member Countries, Near Neighbour Countries (NNC) and International Partner Countries (IPC).** A key focus will be engaging and supporting researchers from smaller states and the COST ITC who do not have a strong domestic community of practice.
3. **To facilitate practitioners, employers and national and international policymakers to engage with research and theory and increase the exchange of knowledge.** This objective will build capacity and forge new networks between the scientific and policy and practice communities.

2. NETWORKING EXCELLENCE

2.1. ADDED VALUE OF NETWORKING IN S&T EXCELLENCE

2.1.1. ADDED VALUE IN RELATION TO EXISTING EFFORTS AT EUROPEAN AND/OR INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

Career studies is a broad academic field which encompasses people working in the education of careers professionals, human resource professionals, teachers, and other professional roles. It also encompasses the work of psychologists, sociologists, economists, educational scientists and organisational researchers who view career as a primary theme in their research. It is a fundamentally inter- or cross-disciplinary field. The network broadens the core disciplinary basis of the field beyond education and psychology to support inter-disciplinary collaboration around complex themes. This kind of interdisciplinary work leads to innovative research capable of examining diverse issues and challenging existing paradigms. and diffusion of professional identities within the field. This is evidenced by the fact that no cross-European network is devoted to fostering research and critical career and career guidance.

COCAG will work closely with several existing networks including the *International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance* (IAEVG), which is strongly focused on practice, the *International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy* (ICCDPP) which is strongly focused on policy, and the *European Society for Vocational Designing and Career Counselling* (ESVDC) and the *Network for Innovation in Career Guidance and Counselling in Europe* (NICE) which are both established academic networks which respectively focus on psychological research in the careers and vocational field and on the training of career professionals. All four of these are relevant stakeholders, but do not take the broad and critical perspective that is outlined in this Action. They also do not have the resources or capability to coordinate major publication projects.

In addition, COCAG will also need to work closely with the *European Doctoral Programme in Career Guidance and Counselling* (ECADOC) which provides a vehicle for pan-European networking and development of doctoral researchers in career studies. ECADOC is strongly committed to developing Young Researchers and Innovators (including PhD students) from diverse countries, and especially from the COST ITC. The collaboration with ECADOC will primarily take the form of the collaborative organisation of a summer school programme for Young Researchers and Innovators.

2.2. ADDED VALUE OF NETWORKING IN IMPACT

2.2.1. SECURING THE CRITICAL MASS, EXPERTISE AND GEOGRAPHICAL BALANCE WITHIN THE COST MEMBERS AND BEYOND

The initial network includes both large and small states, those with strong traditions of research in career studies and more emergent countries and is drawn from the north, south, east and west of the continent. This kind of broad-based network will be essential to answering the Action research questions and completing the identified objectives as it will ensure that the network has a broad perspective and includes countries with different political traditions, levels of economic strength and engagement in career studies and the delivery of career guidance.

2.2.2. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS

The initial network of proposers involves a wide range of stakeholders. This initial stakeholder network will be augmented through reaching out through the academic and practitioner networks and to a range of other key stakeholders, as follows.

- **International organisations.** Most international organisations with an interest in education, skills and employment are also interested in career guidance. The publication of *Investing in Career Guidance* in 2019 and then its revision in 2021 served as a public statement of support for the area. The Action plans to involve a wide range of European organisations and agencies from the European Commission (EC) to other European agencies and programmes such as the European Training Foundation (ETF), Euroguidance, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), the European network of Public Employment Services, and European Employment Service (EURES). We will also reach out to organisations with a remit beyond Europe such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), UNESCO, the World Association of Public Employment Services (WAPES) and the International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy (ICCDPP), an international NGO that works with policymakers to develop career guidance policy.
- **Local and national policymakers.** In developing this Action, a wide range of local and national policymakers whom participants in the Action have links with were identified. The aim will be to leverage these local policy connections to engage policymakers across participant countries.
- **Social partners.** *Employers* play a critical role in mediating large-scale social trends in ways that shape people's careers and in providing support for career guidance policies, but which is often overlooked. The network includes researchers with strong employer networks who focus on employers' perspectives. We will also reach out to national and European networks of employers to engage them. *Trade unions* are also critical to the organisation and delivery of career guidance. Trade unions are both social partners involved in the formation of career guidance policy and, in some countries, actively involved in the delivery of career guidance for their members. The network includes researchers with a strong interest in trade unions as well as some partners based in trade unions themselves.
- **Practitioners.** The partners will also build links with practitioner networks including professional associations and other communities of practice.

3. IMPACT

3.1. IMPACT TO SCIENCE, SOCIETY AND COMPETITIVENESS, AND POTENTIAL FOR INNOVATION/BREAKTHROUGHS

3.1.1. SCIENTIFIC, TECHNOLOGICAL, AND/OR SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS (INCLUDING POTENTIAL INNOVATIONS AND/OR BREAKTHROUGHS)

People's careers have been and will continue to be in a process of substantial transformation. Existing structures of career development have been shaken repeatedly and may not be fit for purpose in the future. Challenges posed by artificial intelligence and automation, homeworking, and the climate crisis have come on top of periods of neoliberal shrinkage of the state and the social and economic crises of 2008 and 2020. In such a position concepts like career need to be rethought and reimagined and policies and practices that are rooted in this concept also need to be reimagined.

COCAG will aim to bring about impact in four inter-linked areas: paradigmatic, policy, evidence and efficacy and practice. These four areas will cut across the research questions outlined in Section 1.1.2, but with the first research question primarily addressing the shifting paradigm, the second primarily addressing policy issues, and the third primarily addressing practice and evidence. The breadth of stakeholders involved in the Action will be critical in realising its impact. The fact that as well as involving researchers from Europe and beyond, it also includes policymakers, practitioners and key intermediaries means that it has a ready-made network through which stakeholders can be engaged and findings disseminated beyond the academic bubble.

The Action will be managed through three Working Groups, with the Action MC focused on co-ordination and synthesis (see Section 4).

<p>Paradigm shift. The Action will open a scientific and public discourse about the nature of career in the twenty-first century. It will use the opportunity presented by a large international group of researchers to explore local phenomena comparatively across Europe and beyond. It will scrutinise the concept of career and reconceptualise and recontextualize it for likely futures. This theoretical and paradigmatic debate will then underpin the impacts that will be delivered across the Action.</p>	<p><i>Short-term impact:</i> Sparks theoretical debate.</p>
	<p><i>Long-term impact:</i> Influences the public and scientific conceptualisations of career and stimulates the development of new models and frameworks.</p>
<p>Policy. The Action will surface the key policy logics that guide European, national and local policymakers engagement with career and career guidance. The Action will build on this to begin the process of developing new policy ideas and approaches that engage with social justice and contemporary environmental concerns.</p>	<p><i>Short-term Impact:</i> Identifies existing policies.</p>
	<p><i>Long-term Impact:</i> Shapes equitable and sustainable policies</p>
<p>Practice. The Action will explore the nature of contemporary career guidance practice. Through dialogue between scientists and practitioners across multiple countries, including the COST ITC, new critical and innovative approaches will be developed. The Action will inspire more self-reflective interventions and increased awareness of the socio-political and economic implications of practice</p>	<p><i>Short-term Impact:</i> promotes Innovative practices, and the exchange of ideas around key issues, trends and paradigms in career guidance, for example by exploring how the growth of digital and AI-mediated career guidance presents opportunities and challenges for practice.</p>
	<p><i>Long-term Impact:</i> Cultivates socially conscious career guidance that, in turn, could lead to more effective and ethically grounded career guidance services.</p>
<p>Evidence and efficacy. By gathering the career studies community together through the COCAG Action, we anticipate strengthening the articulation of the evidence base in this area and learning from the evidence of what works what does not work, and what seems promising internationally.</p>	<p><i>Short-term Impact:</i> Gathering the Career studies community and strengthening the volume and evidence base research</p>
	<p><i>Long-term Impact:</i> Advances evidence-based career guidance.</p>

3.2. MEASURES TO MAXIMISE IMPACT

3.2.1. KNOWLEDGE CREATION, TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

The Action focuses on three research aims which address the re-conceptualisation of the concept of career, the policy implications of this and the implications for practice. By bringing together a large group of innovative thinkers and researchers around these questions, existing ideas can be systemised and new knowledge generated.

By assembling the career studies community, the Action aims to increase researchers' connectedness

across countries and disciplines and increase the possibility of cross-European and comparative work. In particular this will play a critical role in the transfer of capacity to the COST ITC. This will build the collective capacity of the field, generate new synergies and support researchers to develop consortia participating addressing calls for competitive funding in both national and European contexts.

A key cohort within COCAG will be Young Researchers and Innovators (YRI). Through summer schools, publication opportunities, networking and the opportunity to become part of the leadership of COCAG, we will provide YRI with a wide range of opportunities for their career development, enabling them to transfer knowledge to their countries, organisations, disciplinary areas and practice communities. Given the focus on careers this will also provide us with a key opportunity for COCAG to be self-exemplifying and demonstrate the power that career guidance and other forms of career support can offer to the development of YRI careers. This will include running activities such as mentoring, mobilities, trainings and summer schools and providing support with the development of their career plans. This will support YRI to enhance their capacity for self-reflection, opportunity awareness, decision-making and their ability to make transitions beyond early career status.

The Action will also pay close attention to the gender balance in the Action, working groups and key activities. Like many other applied fields related to human-centered professions, career studies is an area which is dominated by women, but in which men are disproportionately likely to fill the more senior roles. Through careful monitoring, the Action will seek to notice, report and reflect on and address these gender-based issues of representation.

The Action is designed in a participatory way to engage practitioners, employers and policymakers. It will offer a vehicle for increasing all participants engagement in the evidence and theory around career and career guidance, both by providing them with access to scientific information and analysis and engaging them as equal partners in meetings and events. This will support knowledge transfer as stakeholders will be able to make better use of the resources provided by the research community. It will also strengthen two-way links and support ongoing dialogue. This may ultimately stimulate new research ideas and open opportunities for sustaining the network collaboration beyond the Action lifetime.

3.2.2. PLAN FOR DISSEMINATION AND/OR EXPLOITATION AND DIALOGUE WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC OR POLICY

The idea of close engagement with both policy, employers and practice is built into the Action's core aims. This is a participatory effort in which scientific researchers, policy makers, employers, and practitioners all have a role. This is not just about dissemination in the traditional sense but rather about building a network in which there is a mutual exchange of knowledge and ideas between different kinds of stakeholders, facilitating the transference of knowledge and its exploitation.

Where stakeholders have already signed up as initial proposers, they will be engaged as full participants of the network and encouraged to get involved in specifying working groups, undertaking and supporting research and engaging in knowledge transfer. Where they have not been yet engaged, the Action will hold consultation webinars to present the Action and explore possibilities for further engagement. Stakeholders will be encouraged to engage with the Action as participants in events and the authoring of outputs, as critical friends providing insights and triangulating the assumptions that are emerging through the Action with those that are utilised in policy and practice. They will also be asked to trial outputs and findings and to aid in the dissemination of these outputs within their own networks.

As Action outcomes emerge, a range of online, local and international dissemination channels will be utilised drawing on the embedded relationships of the network and supporters. A Science Communication plan will be developed during the first year of the Action. This will then support the creation of dedicated dissemination plans for each type of stakeholder. The following table provides a high-level summary of key dissemination approaches.

Category	Dissemination strategy
<i>Direct users</i>	
Researchers in the field of career guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Holding a launch conference and scientific meetings within each Working Group. - Development of an Action blog which will serve as the hub for an online community of scholars and stakeholders. - Disseminating the outcomes of the Action through other conferences in related fields. - Organising online conferences, webinars and Working Group meetings where researchers can be involved in discussions regarding career development. - Publishing books and other studies that contribute to the scientific development of the field.
Policy makers and NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organising conferences, workshops and webinars where they can be involved in discussions regarding issues affecting career development, potential solutions for public policy, quality assurance and the monitoring and evaluation of career policies. - Publishing targeted policy briefs regarding topics that are relevant for policy makers.
Practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organising conferences and webinars where they can be involved in discussions regarding up-to-date and innovative career development approaches, social inclusion in career development, the use of technology in career development including addressing social media, AI and other new technological developments. - Publishing a practitioner handbook.
<i>Indirect users</i>	
The general public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Publishing on social media user-friendly posts, infographics and articles to promote the results and outputs of the Action.

4. IMPLEMENTATION

4.1. COHERENCE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE WORK PLAN

4.1.1. DESCRIPTION OF WORKING GROUPS, TASKS AND ACTIVITIES

There will be three major streams of activity, corresponding directly to the main research questions. All Working Groups (WGs) will be organised in similar ways and deliver a similar range of outputs. However, each WG will organise activities to respond to the research questions that they are focused on and work with different stakeholder groups as appropriate. The WGs will be carefully constructed to ensure that they are diverse in terms of geographical location, career stage, discipline and methodological paradigm.

- **Working Group 1 (WG1): The challenges and changes in career in the contemporary world.** WG1 will explore how the careers of individuals are changing and developing in response to wider shifts in the social, technological, political and economic context. It will also examine how career trajectories and aspirations are changing and how these shifts may impact the political economy. The WG will primarily be focused on the scientific community, seeking to identify and clarify understanding and evidence in the area. Key activities will include webinars, summer school, scientific meetings, the drafting and publication of research digests, and the development of Short-Term Scientific Missions, Virtual Mobility Grants, ITC Conference Grants, and Dissemination Conference Grants for Young Researchers and Innovators.
- **Working Group 2 (WG2): Policy responses to contemporary challenges to individuals' careers.** WG2 will explore policymaker's engagement in a range of different initiatives designed to support or shape the careers of individuals. This will include an examination of career guidance policy but will also look more broadly to examine how the concept of career is addressed in wider labour market and educational policy. For example, by addressing how career guidance integrates with lifelong learning policies or is used to manage fluctuations and uncertainties in work. This WG will work closely with policymakers, linking them up to the key scientific experts in the field. Key

activities will include webinars, summer school, scientific meetings, a policymakers meeting, the drafting and publication of policy focused publications, and the development of Short-Term Scientific Missions, Virtual Mobility Grants, ITC Conference Grants, and Dissemination Conference Grants for Young Researchers and Innovators.

- **Working group 3 (WG3): Critical practice in career guidance.** WG3 will examine how critical ideas and perspectives are taken up in the practice of career guidance and related educational and labour market practices. It will also explore how career guidance practitioners respond to shifts in the political economy and policy including looking at environmental change and increasingly multi-cultural and diverse societies. This WG will engage directly with practitioners, facilitating mutual exchange between career guidance practitioners and scientific experts. Key activities will include webinars, summer school, scientific meetings, the drafting a practice focused meeting, the publication of a practitioner handbook, and the development of Short-Term Scientific Missions, Virtual Mobility Grants, ITC Conference Grants, and Dissemination Conference Grants for Young Researchers and Innovators.

These WGs will provide a structure for COCAG. Each WG will be led by a WG Leader and one or more Vice-Leaders supporting the development of activities and outputs associated with that strand. There will also be an Editorial Committee focusing on the development of a new edited volume of writing addressing the focus of COCAG and another Editorial Committee made up of Young Researchers and Innovators, which will explore the possibility of developing a journal special issue aimed at Young Researchers and Innovators.

The network management will be carried out by the Action Management Committee (MC), led by the Action Chair. An Action Core Group to support the Action MC will be established, including the Action Chair, Vice-Chair, WG Leaders, plus standard leadership roles of COST Actions.

4.1.2. DESCRIPTION OF DELIVERABLES AND TIMEFRAME

As described above the Action will have three working groups which will address the Action research questions. In addition, the Action MC will lead activities designed to pull together the outputs of the Working Groups, assure the quality of the outputs and deliverables and ensure the overall coherence of COCAG. Detailed timelines for these WGs are set out below in the Gantt chart. All activities will be designed as mobilities, with the aim being to hold a series of face-to-face meetings to connect researchers involved in COCAG. However, the Action will also explore both how to make all meetings hybrid and how best to capture key content in ways that might be useful to a wider audience (e.g. by filming keynotes).

The following list sets out the deliverables (D) and related tasks (T) for the Action and the three WGs.

Action MC, supported by the Core Group

- **T1. Developing a framework for monitoring and evaluation of the Action [Due by M3].** Developing an approach that can be used across the Action to monitor participation, outputs and impacts. This will support the preparation of the progress and final scientific reports of the Action.
- **T2. Development of a framework for Young Researchers and Innovator mobilities [Due by M6].** Agreeing a range of Short-Term Scientific Missions, Virtual Mobility Grants, ITC Conference Grants, and Dissemination Conference Grants that should be offered across the Action.
- **T3. Developing a framework for science communication, dissemination and exploitation of the Action results.** The concrete output will be a Science Communication plan developed during the first year of the Action [D1, due by M8] and updated throughout the Action lifetime.
- **T4. Development of the COCAG website [Due by M8].** Action website created and launched. The web-site will be regularly updated and all its materials archived and preserved at the end of the Action to ensure continued access to all COCAG materials [D2, Due by M48].
- **T5. COCAG scientific launch [Due by M9].** COCAG will be launched through a scientific conference which will set out the foci for the network and provide opportunities for participants to meet and shape the future work of the network. Following this launch event a position paper will be created setting out the philosophical underpinnings and key terrains for exploration in the

COCAG Action [D3, M14].

- **T6. Development of an edited volume on critical perspectives on career and career guidance.** An editorial group will be drawn from COCAG to lead the development of book proposal, run a call for contributions and make a proposal to a major publisher [Due by M12]. The editorial group will then lead the editing of the volume and the submission of the book [D4, Due by M44].
- **T7. Young Researcher and Innovator journal special issue.** An Editorial Committee of Young Researchers and Innovators will be identified and connected to more experienced mentors [Due by M12]. This group will develop a proposal for a special issue of a high-quality journal which can be developed and published through the course of the Action. The aims of this special issue will be both scientific (to advance the research aims of COCAG) and also to build the capacity of the Young Researchers and Innovators involved [D5, Due by M44].
- **T8. Research synthesis.** The Action will draw together the findings of COCAG and to propose a detailed and future focused research agenda. It is anticipated that this process will begin in the final year of the Action [Due M40] and will lead to a final publication which will identify key themes, methodological approaches and intersections with policy and practice that could guide future research [D6, Due by M48].
- **T9. Development of a programme of webinars.** In addition to face-to-face events, COCAG will deliver a series of webinars across the period of the Action. This programme will be agreed and launched in M12. Webinar materials made accessible on the Action web-site shortly after their organization, with each WG organizing at least one webinar per year [D7, Due by M48].

WG1: The challenges and changes in career in the contemporary world.

- **T10. YRI summer school [Due by M12].** The Working Group will co-ordinate a week-long summer school for Young Researchers and Innovators. This summer school will provide Young Researchers and Innovators with opportunities to present work, receive mentoring and teaching from more experienced colleagues in COCAG and form an international community of practice that will underpin future collaboration and career development.
- **T11. Scientific meeting [Due by M18].** The Working Group will hold a face-to-face scientific meeting focusing on the theme of the changing nature of career in the 21st century. This will then lead to the development of a research digest which will highlight key issues and research in the field. This review paper will be designed as a stimulant for the work of the rest of COCAG, demonstrating the state of the art [D8, Due by M24].

WG2: Policy responses to contemporary challenges to individuals' careers.

- **T12. Summer school [Due by M27].** The work programme will co-ordinate a week-long summer school for Young Researchers and Innovators. This summer school will provide Young Researchers and Innovators with opportunities to present work, receive mentoring and teaching from more experienced colleagues in COCAG and form an international community of practice that will underpin future collaboration and career development.
- **T13. Scientific meeting [Due by M32].** The Working Group will hold a face-to-face scientific meeting focusing on the theme of the policies and politics of career guidance. They will invite proposals for papers from COCAG participants and organise the meeting.
- **T14. Policymakers meeting [Due by M36].** The Working Group will also organise a meeting of European and national policymakers to discuss their engagement with the scientific community and their use of evidence and insights in the policymaking process. The meeting will explore the new intersections between European policymaking, national and local policymaking and scientific knowledge, in relation to the current societal changes, and the ways our network can best respond. The meeting will include invited contributions from policymakers and researchers and will be designed to support the development of dialogue between the two. A key area of discussion will be the integration of an understanding of social justice into career guidance policymaking processes. This will then lead to the production of a publication for policymakers [D9, Due by M38]. This will draw on the scientific and policymakers' meetings to create a short publication for policymakers at the national, European and international levels. This publication will set out key issues and findings from the research literature and options for policymakers. The publication will highlight key issues and dilemmas faced by policymakers in addressing societal crises and

explore the feasibility of social justice as an underpinning principle for future policy making in this area. Following the creation of a draft a wider group of policymakers and policy-engaged scholars will be asked to comment on it and provide input on its development. The final publication will then be distributed to policymakers across Europe.

WG3: Critical practice in career guidance

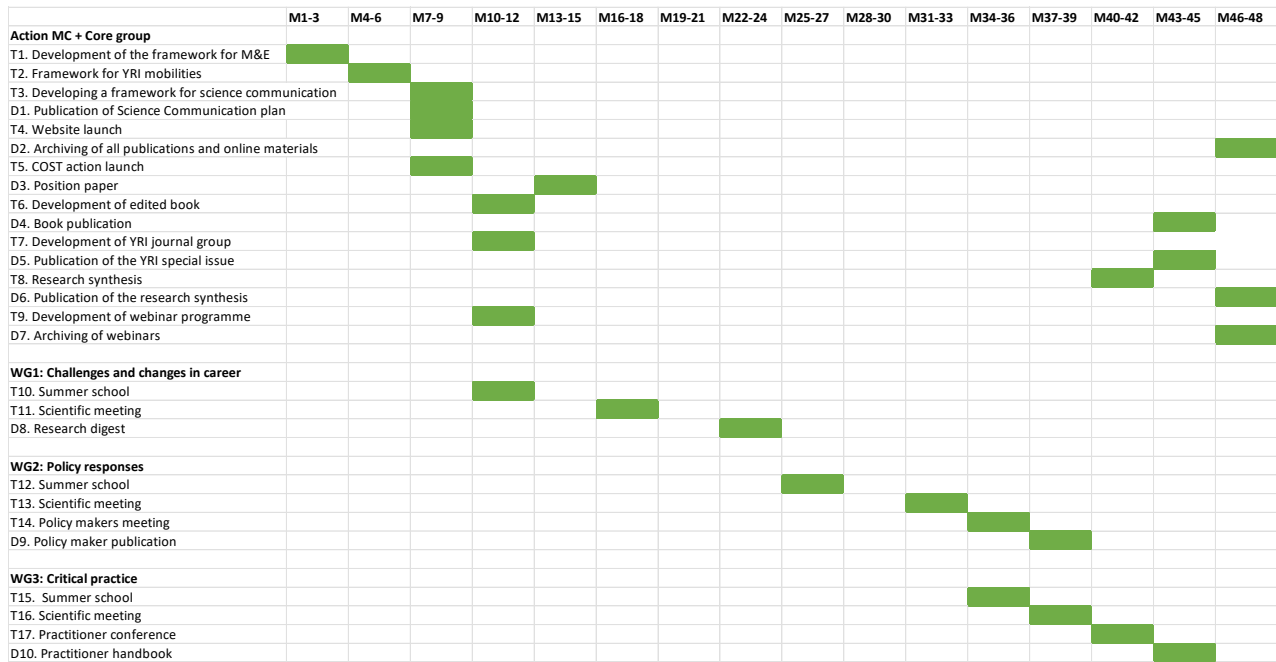
- **T15. Summer school [Due by M36].** The Working Group will co-ordinate a week-long summer school for Young Researchers and Innovators. This summer school will provide Young Researchers and Innovators with opportunities to present work, receive mentoring and teaching from more experienced colleagues in COCAG and form an international community of practice that will underpin future collaboration and career development. A key focus for this summer school will be how research can learn from and inform practice and relate effectively to practitioners.
- **T16. Scientific meeting [Due by M38].** The working group will hold a face-to-face scientific meeting focusing on the theme of critical practice in career guidance. They will invite proposals for papers from COCAG participants and organise the meeting.
- **T17. Practitioner meeting [Due by M42].** a meeting of practitioners to discuss their engagement with the scientific community and their use of evidence and insights in career guidance practice will be organised. Speakers are expected to be drawn from a mix of practitioners and researchers, with the event designed to support dialogue and mutual learning. Insights gained from this meeting will be combined with those from the Scientific meeting to create a practitioner handbook **[D10, Due by M44]**. The working group for this strand will work with a group of practitioners to create a handbook for practitioners drawing out key themes from the research and presenting key ideas for effective practice. The aim of the handbook will be to translate current cutting edge thinking about career guidance and social justice into a series of approaches that can be utilised by practitioners in a variety of contexts. A draft version of this handbook will be sent out to a wide range of practitioners for feedback and input.

4.1.3. RISK ANALYSIS AND CONTINGENCY PLANS

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Contingency
Drop out of participant(s) in leadership roles	Low	Medium	Leaders and Vice-Leaders will be identified for each of the Working Groups associated to the thematic strands, and for the main publications. This will mean that COCAG has a strong structure for leadership and addressing the loss of any key personnel.
Network members drop out	Low	Low	The initial network brings together 127 partners. While some participants will play a more active role in the leadership of COCAG, it will not be dependent on any single member. If any member drops out, they can be replaced.
Working Group loses critical mass	Low	Medium	Each of the Working Groups requires a critical mass to function effectively. If one working group proves to be unpopular or loses a number of members, it would weaken the Action. Participants' interests will be considered to develop the working groups. The Action will also actively manage the WGs and transfer members between them where necessary.

Working Group/s make insufficient progress	Low	Medium	Each of the Working Groups will have a WG leader and Vice-Leader who will be responsible for coordinating its activities and ensuring engagement. These Action leaders will be well-placed to identify where a lack of engagement exists and to take appropriate Actions. In addition, the Action MC, supported by the Core Group, will monitor the progress of each of the working groups and other key structures (such as editorial groups) and address any challenges.
COVID-19 or other crisis disrupts plans for mobilities	Medium	Medium	A key theme of the Action is the volatility of the political economy. Given this, it would be unsurprising if a political, economic or public health event disrupted the activities of COCAG. We are practiced in contingency planning. Each event or activity will develop a risk register and consider the feasibility of switching the event online, moving its location or holding it in a hybrid format as well as other relevant contingencies.
Challenges in engaging policymakers or practitioners	Low	Medium	A key aim of this Action is to support engagement with policy and practice through a wide range of approaches including webinars, physical meetings, websites and publications. Engagement from all stakeholders will be monitored carefully to adjust the level and nature of engagement accordingly.
Publisher rejects book proposal or the special issue focused on Young Researchers and Innovators	Medium	Low	COCAG contains many researchers who have extensive publication records and good relationships with publishers. However, rejection is part of the publication process. Identifying a range of alternative publication options will be part of our publication process.
Technological problems	Low	Low	COCAG makes extensive use of a range of web technologies to support collaboration and information sharing (website, blogs, webinars etc). When working across so many institutions it is anticipated that there may be some issues with compatibility. We will aim to use freely available public tools where possible and test all technologies deployed within the Action before they are implemented and made public.

4.1.4. GANTT DIAGRAM



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