Impact Study

Improving guidance services together

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Executive summary

The impact study presents a series of guidelines on how and why to use the Guiding Cities Model and the Checklist and also includes an analysis of the impact of their use within organisations in the field of education and guidance.

The Model and Checklist developed within the Guiding Cities project can be used to reflect upon the performance level and the quality of guidance services, to design and promote long-term strategies for the improvement of key factors in the organisation like the competencies of guidance practitioners, to support the inclusion of guidance as a strategic priority of the organisation, and to raise the visibility and awareness about the importance or scope of guidance activities, both within the organisation and to external target groups.

The Guiding Cities Model is foreseen to be a tool for organisation reflection together with the Guiding Cities Checklist. These instruments can be used to create an internal and structured space for reflection and discussion about the guidance services offered. There was a need for this reflection among guidance organisations in the GCities, 1 in 3 did not reflect on the quality level of services before the pilot survey and 64.5% did not compare or benchmark with other guidance organisations. The Guiding Cities Model and Checklist offered access to strategic reflection as well as guidance practice examples related to each Model parameter.

Within the organisations that participated in the pilot survey of the Model and Checklist, the tools were seen to have a utility for strategic reflection of 8.6 on a scale from 0 to 10. In order to ensure the highest impact possible of this activity, it is recommended to bring together representatives from different departments or different professional profiles to participate in the activity. This diversity fosters more profound reflection by allowing individual professionals to carry out a reflection and then discussing different results, opinions and perspectives. The contrast of different perspectives is seen as beneficial for having a complete, less biased view of the situation of the organisation and promotes the development of action plans for improvement.

The Guiding Cities tools do not require the guidance stakeholders to only reflect, but also to take strategic action in order to improve or re-establish priorities and guidance services. Through the Checklist, stakeholders can identify parameters of strength within the Guiding Cities Model as well as areas that need improvement. Bringing together different departments or profiles within these strategic activities allows for common work to carry out effective action.

The organisations that participated in the pilot survey are taking different actions after completing the review of the Guiding Cities Model and the reflection of the Checklist. The organisations are reviewing the types of services they offer as well as the methodologies used. They are also developing new or increased visibility campaigns to increase the awareness and accessibility of their guidance services in order to better serve their target groups, especially those at risk of Early School Leaving. The use of the Guiding Cities Model and Checklist also inspired organisations to develop evaluation procedures and tools as well as to establish permanent structures for coordination among different departments or guidance actors within the same local context in order to promote collaboration, resource sharing and the creation of common tools of practice.

The value and impact of the Guiding Cities tools overall was given a 8.3 on a scale of 0 to 10, but its long-term value can be seen in the fact that 100% of participants in the pilot survey feel that their organisation should complete the Guiding Cities Checklist or similar strategic reflection tool at least once a year, with 25.7% stating that they would recommend and benefit from the activity once every six months.

The pilot survey confirmed the usefulness of the Guiding Cities tools and most importantly, reaffirmed the benefit of bring together different stakeholders in the field in order to improve guidance services and reduce complex social problems like Early School Leaving.

Introduction

The Guiding Cities consortium developed two strategic reflection tools: the Guiding Cities Model and the Guiding Cities Checklist. The Guiding Cities Model is composed of eight parameters or dimensions. The Guiding Cities Model attempts to foster an integrated system of guidance focusing on a lifelong learning perspective, where guidance can play a central role in increasing individuals' engagement with learning, making clear pathways through learning and work, and supporting the acquisition of career management skills. This collection of parameters serves as guidelines or directions to the creation of a "guiding city".

The Guiding Cities Model focuses on citizen needs. In order to improve guidance and therefore to reduce ESL it is necessary to define a model that better articulates all the possible guidance services and resources of a community in a local context. Although guidance is a cross-sectorial field with impact on different sectors at national, regional and local levels, the evidence shows that most systems originate from a sectorial focus and do not have an inclusive national strategy. The Guiding Cities Model is composed of building blocks that when put together by the diverse actors within guidance (schools, local administrations, universities, companies, unions, parents' associations, foundations, NGOs, etc.) they construct a city or community that works together to guide its citizens and reduce social exclusion.

From the Guiding Cities Model, the Guiding Cities consortium defined a self-evaluation questionnaire for guidance organisations to complete in a reflective analysis in order to define where the organisation can position itself with respect to the Guiding Cities Model and to strategically plan improvements for guidance within the organisation and interaction with users and other organisations in the field of guidance, education and employment. This tool for organisational diagnosis is the Guiding Cities Checklist. The tool is a collection of thirty-four statements which a professional in the field of guidance answers about his/her organisation. The results give the opportunity to analyze areas for improvement based on the eight parameters of the Guiding Cities Model and to connect with best practices collected from different countries and contexts that are distributed among the different aspects of the Model. The Checklist was not developed to be a test or certification of services, but rather as a tool for reflection that hopes to give a diverse range of organisations ideas and support to strategically plan, revise and expand their guidance services.

Between January and June of 2016 the partners of the Guiding Cities project carried out a pilot survey with the tools, testing them with different types of organisations in the fields of education and guidance. In total, 45 organisations participated in the pilot survey and further use of the Checklist that were both public and private entities. The profile of the organisations was very diverse: municipal guidance services, regional guidance services, associations, primary and secondary schools, university guidance services, non-profit organisations and foundations that offer information and guidance, among others. The following table describes

the organisations that participated in the pilot survey and posterior further use of the Guiding Cities Checklist.

Organisations that participated in the pilot survey and use of the GC Checklist

	Organisation	Description	Number of participants
1	Ajuntament de Granollers	City council – local government of a city of 59.930 inhabitants.	4 participants (staff of the city council): 2 technical officers of education service, 1 guidance councelor of young people service and 1 guiding officer of economic development service
2	Ajuntament de Badia del Vallès	City council – local government of a city of 13.550 inhabitants.	5 participants (staff of the city council): 1 Director, 2 technical officers of education service, 1 educational guidance counselor, 1 employment guidance counselor
3	Ajuntament de Sabadell	City council – local government of a city of 207.440 inhabitants.	6 participants

2 technical officers of education, 1 guidance counselor of the young people service, 2 guidance counselors of the economic development service, 1 technical officer of social services |
4	Ajuntament de Premià de Dalt	City council – local government of a city of 10.310 inhabitants.	2 participants: 1 technical officer of young people service and 1 technical officer of employment service
5	Ajuntament de La Garriga	City council – local government of a city of 15.760 inhabitants.	1 participant: 1 technical officer of educational service
6	Ajuntament da Barberà del Vallès	City council – local government of a city of 32.550 inhabitants.	1 participant: 1 technical officer on economic development service
7	Ajuntament de St. Vicenç dels Horts	City council – local government of a city of 28.100 inhabitants.	1 participant:1 technical officer on education
8	Consell comarcal del Vallès	Intermediate local	1 participant: 1 technical

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	Organisation	Description	Number of participants
	Oriental	government that represents a group of 43 municipalities	officer on young people service
9	Ajuntament de Cardedeu	City council- local government of a city of 17.938 inhabitants	2 participants: 2 technical officers of training and employment service
10	Educaweb	Private enterprise	5 participants (2 managers, 3 counselors
11	Fundació Barcelona Formació Professional	Foundation	4 participants (1 manger, 3 counselors)
12	Institut de Torreroja	School	4 participants (1 coordinator, 3 teachers)
13	Institut l''Estatut	School	1 participant
14	Center for vocational guidance in school of Acharnai	public career office	1 (teacher – manager)
15	Labour Employment Office	public organisation	2 counselors
16	Institute of Career Guidance and Counselling (IEPAS)	NGO	3 (2 counselors, 1 manager)
17	KME – center of learning	private enterprise	1 counselor
18	2nd high school of Athens	School	1 teacher – manager
19	1st vocational school of Athens	School	1 teacher-manager
20	2nd chance school of Athens	School	1 teacher – manager
21	KESYP of Athens	Public career office	1 counselor
22	2nd vocational school of Athens	School	1 teacher – manager
23	1st high school of Acharnai	School	1 teacher – manager
24	6th high school of Acharnai	School	1 teacher – manager
25	Gymansium of Thrakomakedones	School	2 teachers
26	Metrica - Siena	Local vocational training center carrying out also guidance services for schools	2 guidance practitioners
27	Pluriversum - Siena	E-guidance and support for career guidance at school	3 guidance practitioners and coordinator
28	Regione FVG	Regional guidance services	1 coordinator of the guidance services and 1 practitioner

	Organisation	Description	Number of participants
29	Università di Pavia	University - Education Science department	1 professor and 1 researcher in career guidance field
30	IC Lastra Signa	Lower secondary school	1 Teacher
31	Fabriano - Comunità Montana Esino Frasassi- Servizio Informagiovani	Municipal Youth information Center	5 practitioners
32	Apofil	Local Guidance and Training agency of Province of Potenza, carrying out training and guidance services	1 coordinator
33	Università di Camerino	University – Guidance service	2 guidance practitioners
34	Associazione Nodi	Guidance and Training agency (professional freelance counselors)	2 guidance practitioners
35	Ciofs Piemonte	non-profit organisation involved in training and guidance services in Piemonte Region	1 guidance practitioner
36	Informagiovani di Perugia	Youth information center involved in guidance services with schools	2 guidance practitioners
37	Università di Palermo	University	1 researcher
38	Istituto Caselli, Siena	High school	1 teacher
39	IIS San Giovanni Bosco, Colle di Val d'Elsa - Siena	High school	1 teacher
40	Regione Marche	Regional guidance services	1
41	Prahova County Centre for Psychopedagogical Support	The Centre provides school counselling services through individual or group sessions for pupils, teachers, and pupils parents	Aprox. 20 school counsellors
42	Centre for Psychopedagogical Support of the Municipality of Bucharest	The Centre provides school counselling services through individual or group sessions for pupils, teachers, and pupils parents	2 practitioners

	Organisation	Description	Number of participants
43	Association explorerKid	The association provides career counselling services for students and training for career counsellors.	1 manager and practitioner
44	Step by Step School	The school provides alternative education and provides guidance and counselling services for the pupils being in risk of school drop out	1 manager, 2 practitioners
45	"M. Viteazul" National College	High School preparing students in real branch and provides counselling services	1 practitioner

The participating organisations in the pilot survey received guidelines and support throughout the testing process, whether it was through face-to-face meetings, web meetings, telephone or email support. The support consisted in the following basic structure with the phases divided according to the needs and profile of the organisation:

- Presentation of Guiding Cities Project
- Presentation of the Model
- Reflection on the organisations objectives, expectations and needs to fill out the checklist
- Completion of the Pre-Survey Questionnaire online
- Completion online of the checklist
- Immediate reflections and debate
- A new review of the checklist and the results
- Review of best practices in selected parameters
- Reflection on next steps and strategic planning/objectives
- Completion of the Post-Survey Questionnaire online

Why use the Guiding Cities Model and Checklist?

The Guiding Cities Model and Checklist are designed for any organisation that dedicates fully or in part to academic and career guidance services. The Model and Checklist can be used to reflect on the performance and quality of services. The tools are also beneficial in the design and promotion of the establishment of long-term strategies for the improvement of key factors within an organisation (staff, skills, resources, the use of ICT tool, etc.). The Guiding Cities Model and Checklist are also useful for promoting and supporting efforts to incorporate academic and career guidance as a clear strategic priority of an organisation and to support its inclusion in governing documents.

Guiding Cities Model and Checklist methodology brings together different profiles and professional and the result can be internal organisational awareness about the importance of guidance and its role in fighting against complex issues like Early School Leaving. The increased visibility and awareness, however, is not limited to the organisation completing the checklist. The Guiding Cities tools can also be used to increase the visibility and valorisation of the guidance services within the local context.

How to use the Guiding Cities Model in organisational reflection

The Guiding Cities Model can be used within organisational reflection to create and internal and structured space for reflection and discussion. The Guiding Cities Model and Checklist offer a reason to reserve time for an evaluation and reflection on the guidance services offered by an organisation. This organisational reflection has the highest potential when it brings together representatives of different departments or professional professionals within the same organisation, or, guidance and educational professionals from different organisations in the same local context.

To be more effective as a reflection tool in organisations, the Checklist should be filled in by different members of the same organisation and then discussed internally or with the help of an external consultant to reach a general overview of the organisation. When the results of the Checklist are done by more than one professional from an organisation it allows for the comparison and discussion of different perspectives and realities across the organisational or professional roles.

The Checklist has generated discussion and reflection within the organisations that participated in the pilot survey. These reflections were not only used as a one-time event, but have catalysed further action and reflection. For example the Methodical Commission of the Prahova County Centre for Psychopedagogical Support (Romania) has concluded that the

results of the checklist should be incorporated in the development of the managerial plan of the Centre in the next school year.

The Guiding Cities Model and Checklist are not only tools for reflection, but also useful for developing plans for improvement and organisational changes. Overall, the Checklist is a tool for supporting the design of actions for the improvement of the services and for monitoring the services within a local area. With the advantage of a methodology that promotes the active participation of different professionals, this tool can also be used for supporting the coordination of local guidance systems.

Within the context of the Province of Barcelona 4 of the 9 municipal guidance services that participated in the pilot of the Guiding Cities Model and Checklist involved in the various meetings and sessions guidance professionals from more than one area or department. In the Catalan context there are different municipal areas that offer guidance services: education, youth and employment. Municipal technicians from social services can also be involved, depending on the circumstances or needs of a specific project. These municipal services took advantage of the Guiding Cities pilot survey to promote and strengthen coordination among the different areas.

In the Greek context, public organisations in some cases face high difficulties in organisational matters, or in keeping up with the changes that need to be made so as to address their clients, because of bureaucratic reasons or financial problems. Therefore in such organisations, there are no standard methodologies or tools on which they can count so as to reflect on how they perform or to compare their results to other similar organisations.

In the Greek case, there were 2 schools, a vocational high school and a 2nd chance school, that after using the Checklist, realized that they need additional support in organisational matters. To be more specific, in both schools they found out that they don't have a specific evaluation system for their services and therefore the evaluation is dependent on the willingness of the individual practitioner. The guidance practitioners felt that the Checklist helped them with an overview of evaluation matters, which was not foreseen before completing the Checklist. In this way, the Checklist operated as a compass on how to organize their services and specifically their evaluation system, as it gave them guidelines that these organisational matters could be done in a more specific and pre-defined way.

Developing an action plan based on the Checklist

The Guiding Cities Model and Checklist are strategic tools for reflection, but also for strategic planning. With the results of the Checklist in hand, organisations can move from reflection to action.
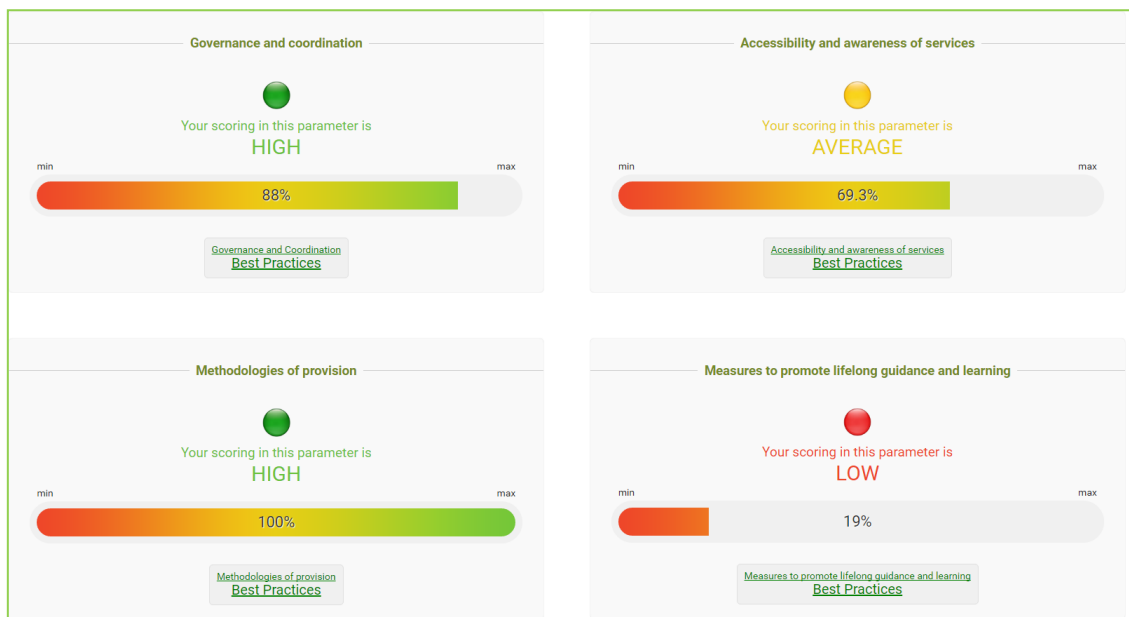
The results of the checklist offer a stoplight graphic to help professionals to quickly identify areas of strength and improvement. The Checklist is divided into sections based on the parameters of the Guiding Cities Model. The individual results screen allows for a quick photo of where the practitioner feels the organisation is strong and where improvements are needed.

Example template for strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths	Weaknesses

Checklist stoplight results:

From the starting point of the stoplight, the individuals involved in the Checklist evaluation activity should review the short-term and medium-term goals of the organisation. The revision of the goals of the organisation is a key step to the reflection because it should serve as an overall framework for the continual improvement discussion.

Under the framework of the goals of the organisation, the participants should brainstorm possible actions and measures that can be taken to improve the areas in need or to maintain or reinforce areas of strength.

Once actions and measures have been collected through brainstorming, evaluate the feasibility of carrying out the proposal. The proposals should be evaluated according to the available financial resources, time available of the needed personnel and the know-how of the team. Once the evaluation is complete the actions to be carried out should be selected. For each action the specific activities to be carried out and the person(s) responsible for managing the activity should be specified so that the activities combined meet the pre-established short-term goals.

Example template for action plan:

	Actions	Owner	Checkpoints
1			
2			
...			

Following these steps will result in a GCities strategic action plan. The results generated by this activity: the strengths, the needed improvements, other reflections and the defined action plan should be included in governing and strategic documents of the organisation so that it is reviewed, followed-up upon, and given organisational visibility.

Follow-up actions to work towards a Guiding City

What type of strategic actions can organisations expect from the Guiding Cities tools? The organisations that participated in the pilot survey planned to take a variety of actions related to the different parameters of the Guiding Cities Model.

Based on the results and following discussion some guidance services decided to carry out a thorough review of the guidance services offered to each target group and analyse the adequacy of the methodologies used in each case This type of action can be used to both review and structure services as well as to identify gaps and needs for specific target groups.

Reflection on the visibility and target group awareness of the academic and career guidance services of the organisations resulted in plans for new communication campaigns directed towards target groups as well as increased general visibility of the organisation and its services.

Two parameters that were widely identified for improvement within the pilot survey are "Common framework and quality standards" and "Evaluation of performance and effectiveness". Many organisations reflected upon the lack of evaluation protocols and tools to measure the quality and effectiveness of the guidance services that they carry out. Quality assurance and evaluation of performance and effectiveness is a key area for guidance services to further develop in their way towards a guiding city.

Organisations also saw a long-term benefit of coming together for the Guiding Cities Checklist completion and are creating structured spaces for professionals in the field of guidance from different departments or different organisations from the same local area to periodically meet and coordinate for the general improvement of guidance.
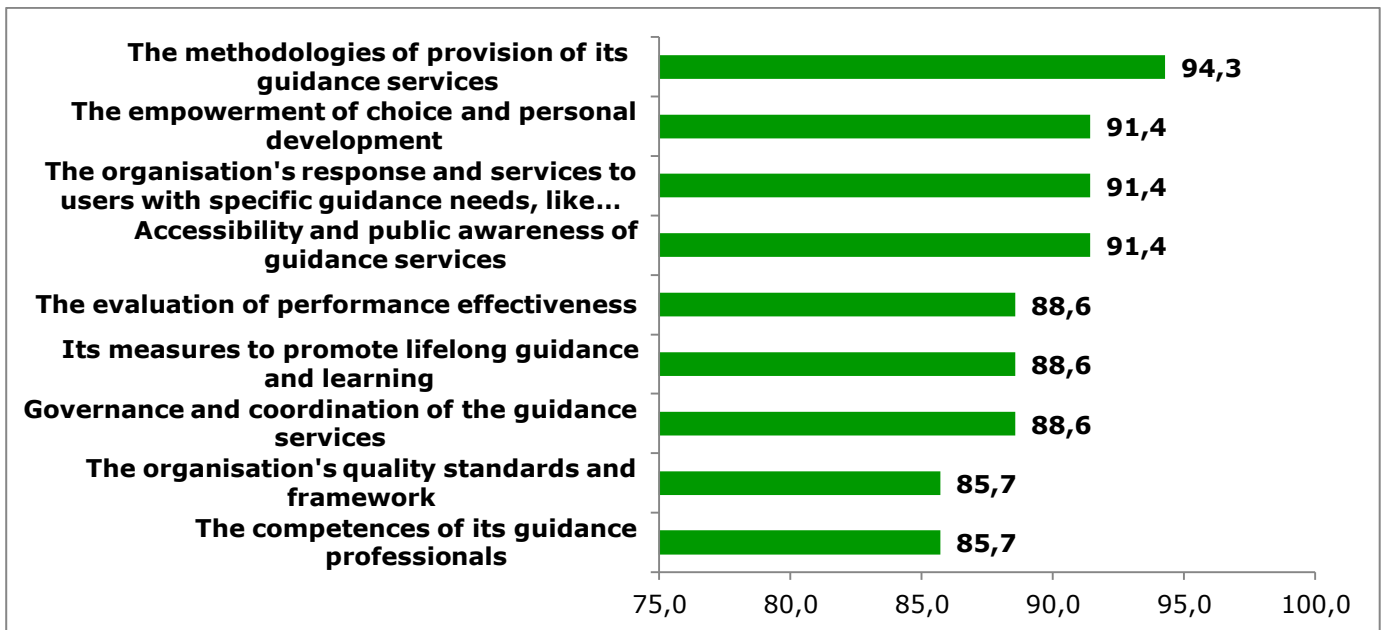
The organisations also felt that the creation of common tools and resources was a clear action to be taken after reflecting together on the services of each organisation. These organisations are now working together to share resources, tools and best practices.

Impact of the Guiding Cities Tools

Before the training in the Guiding Cities Model and the completion of the Guiding Cities Checklist, the organisations were asked to describe their use of the strategic and reflection tools within their organisation broadly and also with regard to their guidance services. 1 in 3 organisations did not reflect upon the quality of their guidance services before accessing the Guiding Cities' tools. 1 in 4 organisations did not have mechanisms to review their evaluation procedures. 2 in 3 organisations did not compare or benchmark the guidance services they offer with those offered by other guidance organisations or services. 1 in 5 organisations did not have access to guidance practices from other organisations for reference and inspiration.

Once the organisations had been through the Guiding Cities Model and Checklist we asked them to evaluate the usefulness of the products as reflection tools. The following chart shows the percentage of respondents that declared that the Checklist is useful for reflection on different organisational and strategic aspects within guidance services.

The usefulness of the GC Checklist as a reflection tool

The methodologies of provision of its guidance services	94,3
The empowerment of choice and personal development	91,4
The organisation's response and services to users with specific guidance needs, like...	91,4
Accessibility and public awareness of guidance services	91,4
The evaluation of performance effectiveness	88,6
Its measures to promote lifelong guidance and learning	88,6
Governance and coordination of the guidance services	88,6
The organisation's quality standards and framework	85,7
The competences of its guidance professionals	85,7

Number of organisations responding: 31

94,3% of respondents felt the Checklist was useful for reflection upon the methodologies they use within their guidance services. Over 90% also felt that the tool was useful to reflect upon the empowerment of choice and personal development within guidance services and upon the organisation's accessibility and response to user with specific needs like Early School Leaving. The Checklist was seen as less useful, with a significant 85,7% of respondents, for reflection upon quality standards related to guidance services and the competences of professionals dedicated to guidance tasks.

Overall, on a scale from of usefulness from 0 to 10, the Checklist was given a rating of 8,6 in its contribution to strategic reflection around improving guidance services. Similarly, the pedagogical tools offered by the Guiding Cities project were given an evaluation of 8,3 on a scale from 0 to 10.

Evidence of the impact of the Guiding Cities tools is the fact that 100% of respondents to the survey declare that the Model and Checklist should be used by their organisation for strategic reflection at least once a year. More than 1 in 4 respondents (25,7%) stated that the Guiding Cities Checklist would be useful for their organisation once every six months.

The impact of the Guiding Cities strategic reflection tools is also seen in the follow-up actions taken by the guidance and education organisations afterwards. The shift from reflection to

action to improve the guidance services and their response to Early School Leaving, among other complex problems, is a clear impact as the organisations move towards building Guiding Cities. Approximately 50% of the organisations and professionals that completed the Checklist planned to carry out specific action plans based on the results and reflections of the pilot survey.

Conclusions

The Guiding Cities Model and Checklist have been tested by a widely diverse group of organisations and stakeholders that dedicate themselves to guidance and education services. This broad group of organisations that serve different target groups and with distinct competences have confirmed its usefulness for strategic reflection.

The Guiding Cities tools do not only require stakeholders within the field of guidance and education to reflect, but to also take strategic action in order to improve academic and career guidance services.

The methodologies offered by the Guiding Cities project confirm the need and usefulness of bringing together stakeholders in order to fight against complex problems, like Early School Leaving. The majority of all participants within the activities of Guiding Cities valued the bringing together, contrast, discussion and common action among different stakeholders within education and guidance in a local context as the most valuable and lasting impact of the Guiding Cities.