

The viamia service Career assessment for adults in Switzerland

Summary

Background

One of seven measures to boost the potential of the domestic Swiss workforce, the vocational, study and careers guidance product viamia was launched nationwide on 1 January 2022. The aim of viamia is offer regular assessments of the professional and personal situation of those aged 40 and over. Factoring in the changing requirements of the labour market, this analysis enables any necessary action to be taken at an early stage to ensure that these individuals remain employable in the long term.

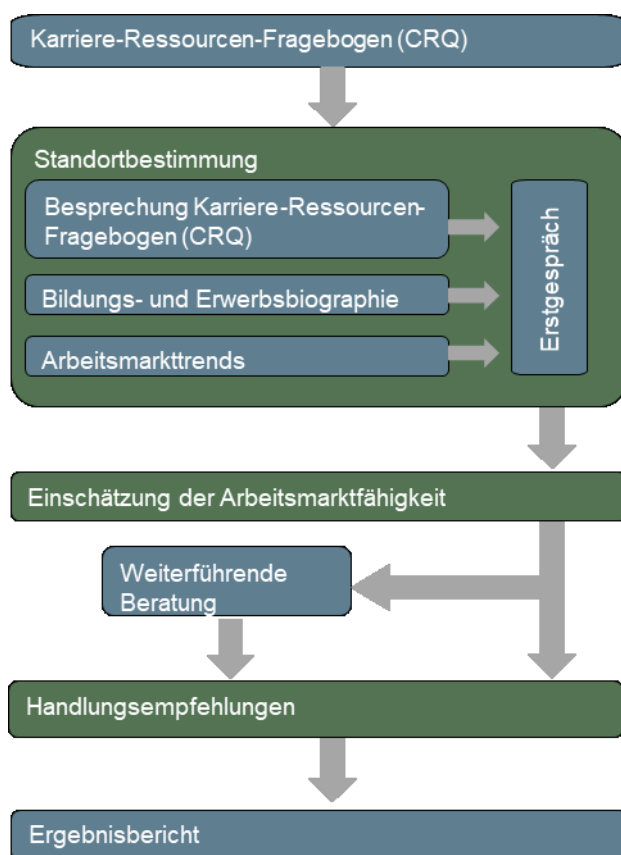
The nationwide introduction of viamia was preceded by a **pilot phase** in 2021, during which projects were run in eleven cantons: Bern, Basel-Stadt, Basel-Landschaft, Fribourg, Geneva, Jura, Ticino, Vaud, Valais, Zurich and Zug. This pilot phase also involved an evaluation of the implementation and impact of viamia, as well as its content and tools. This baseline report covers the assessment by Ecoplan of viamia's implementation and impact. The content and tools used were appraised by Prof. Andreas Hirschi, whose findings are presented in a separate report.

The viamia service

viamia counselling services offer adults aged 40 and over a free assessment of their current situation. Participants follow a clearly defined **process** based on the GUIDE¹ counselling model used by the vocational, study and careers guidance service of the Upper Valais. They have a personal counselling session with a study and careers guidance counsellor to determine their employability. Counsellors analyse the career resources questionnaire (CRQ) and qualifications and experience profiles that participants have completed in advance, and discuss these with them in the context of the changing requirements of the labour market. Together, participant and counsellor identify specific measures to maintain or improve employability. More in-depth counselling sessions are agreed if necessary. After the final meeting, outcomes are set out in a report that is provided to the participant.

¹ For further information (in German) on the GUIDE model, please refer to the website of the Upper Valais vocational, study and careers guidance service: <https://www.vs.ch/web/bsl/beratungskonzept> [as at 01.12.2021].

Figure I viamia elements and instruments



Source: Original Ecoplan flow chart. Legend: tools in blue, elements in green.

Übersetzungen:

Karriere-Ressourcen-Fragebogen (CRQ)	Career resources questionnaire (CRQ)
Standortbestimmung	Assessment of situation
Besprechung Karriere-Ressourcen-Fragebogen (CRQ)	Discussion of CRQ
Bildungs- und Erwerbsbiographie	Qualifications and experience profile
Arbeitsmarkttrends	Labour market trends
Erstgespräch	First session
Einschätzung der Arbeitsmarktfähigkeit	Employability assessment
Weiterführende Beratung	Further counselling
Handlungsempfehlungen	Recommended action
Ergebnisbericht	Outcome report

viamia should be regarded as a national product, the **implementation of which is the responsibility of the cantons**. As the competent specialist body the KBSB/CDOPU (Swiss conference of heads of vocational, study and careers guidance) has drafted supporting guidelines and recommendations, and offers the cantons a range of foundational information. However, Switzerland's federal structure means that viamia is not implemented in the same way everywhere. The key factors underlying this variation are the services that already exist at cantonal level, and differing regional economies and their component sectors and labour markets. The pilot cantons also differ in the way

the projects were organised and especially in the way in which viamia was understood as a project, not to mention the degree of administrative support offered. These differences are reflected to some extent in the evaluation findings.

The viamia service is free of charge for participants. Its **financing** comes from a flat-rate fee of CHF 1,200, 80% of which is paid by the federal government and 20% by the cantons. This fee is paid per case, regardless of the number of counselling sessions involved. Each canton also receives one-off seed funding of CHF 8,000 to set up the viamia framework and promote the service.

Evaluation process

A mix of qualitative and quantitative methods were used to answer the evaluation questions:

- **Survey of participants** on two or three occasions: following the first counselling session, at the end of the last additional session if more were held, and a good six to eight weeks after the counselling process was completed.
- **Survey of counsellors** on two occasions: following the first counselling session and at the end of the last additional session if more were held.
- **Evaluation of case data from the cantons:** data from the case management system covers sociodemographic information on clients, as well as details of the duration and number of counselling sessions, including preparation and follow-up time, per case.
- **Focus groups** in all eleven pilot cantons, involving the cantonal project managers and selected counsellors.
- **In-depth interviews** with cantonal project managers on specific topics, primarily how viamia was organised within the pilot canton, and financing.

Use of viamia

In the first ten months the viamia counselling programme was completed by 2,218 individuals in the eleven pilot cantons. This corresponds to approximately 1.14 viamia counselling sessions per thousand adults aged 40 to 65. In other words, the service reached 0.11% of its target group in the pilot cantons. The total figure up to the end of the pilot phase is put at just under 3,000 people.

Two counselling sessions are held on average, but in around 45% of all completed programmes viamia counselling ends after only the first session. Two sessions are requested by 30% of participants, while 15% take up a third and only 10% request more than three. Sessions last for an average of 160 minutes in total. Added to an average preparation and follow-up time of 134 minutes, each case takes up approximately five hours. Session numbers and case duration differ considerably between cantons, however.

A look at the sociodemographic profiles of viamia counselling clients to date reveals that they are typically female, Swiss, 47 years old, in employment, well educated, and in the view of guidance counsellors very highly employable. In fact, employability is rated as high or very high in more than half of cases. Only around one in ten participants is assessed by counsellors as having poor or very poor prospects on the labour market. Participants give their main reasons for seeking viamia counselling as continuing professional development or reorientation. The former is stated by 67% of those joining the programme.

Figure II **viamia compared with the general population and past vocational, study and careers guidance clients aged 40+**

Participants	CH	Past guidance	viamia
Total	3,099,319	8,225	2,218
Women Men	50%	64%	66%
Swiss Non-Swiss	50%	36%	34%
Compulsory schooling	74%	76%	86%
Upper secondary level	18%	19%	1%
Tertiary level In	47%	46%	35%
employment	34%	35%	63%
Unemployed	77%	57%	88%
Not in employment	3%	33%	1%
	20%	10%	12%

Sources: CH = misc. FSO statistics, Past guidance = Eichenberger (2020), viamia = own data. Note: Data covers only those aged between 40 and 65.

In terms of demand the launch of viamia can be judged a success overall. However, in its pilot phase that demand was weighted heavily towards well-educated individuals, and women in particular. To date, the service has hardly been used at all by less qualified workers.

The viamia service – feedback and satisfaction

From the organisational perspective the viamia implementation went well. Participants rate the processes surrounding counselling sessions as simple and easy to understand, and award the service as a whole an average score of 5.4 out of a total of 6. More than 97% describe viamia as fairly to very helpful, and 95% of clients would recommend it. This positive overall assessment is also reflected in feedback on the individual elements of the service. These were also judged to be helpful across the board, although participants were slightly more critical of the CRQ and discussion of labour market trends than they were of the other elements.

In focus group meetings counsellors proposed a variety of improvements, but they were very satisfied overall with viamia and its elements. They do take a rather more critical view than viamia clients, however. In particular, far more counsellors assess the discussion of labour market trends as less helpful or not helpful at all.

Feedback on the financing mechanism for viamia was also essentially positive. The flat-rate fee system is broadly accepted, especially since the average 294 minutes spent per person is more than met by a case fee intended to cover six hours at CHF 200. The evaluation therefore offers no compelling reason to adjust this flat-rate fee.

Impact of viamia

The objective of the viamia service is to improve or maintain the individual's employability and thereby to raise the labour market potential of 40 to 65-year-olds. These overarching aims can be judged to have been met if the individuals concerned have taken the action determined in their viamia counselling sessions, and they believe that they have met their personal objectives. The participants themselves rate both the implementation of set measures and target attainment highly, meaning that most participants achieved their defined goals. Following their counselling sessions participants also believe that they have a better understanding of their professional options and goals, and are motivated to plan their careers actively going forward. viamia can therefore be said to have a positive impact on participants. There is no information to date on its longer-term impact, however.

Little can be said at the present point in time about the impact of viamia on the wider guidance counselling sector. For most cantonal vocational, study and careers guidance services viamia is a useful addition to their existing range of counselling products. viamia also has a generally positive effect on the visibility of cantonal guidance services, with most of those taking up the offer being new clients. The evaluation does not give any indication of the impact of the new service on private service providers, however.

Conclusion and recommendations

After over a year of operation the introduction of the viamia service can be regarded as a success. The evaluation findings show that implementation in the eleven pilot cantons went very well. This is backed up by the high levels of satisfaction with viamia among counsellors and clients alike. Pleasing demand also confirms that the service meets a real need.

The evaluation findings are also positive where the impact of viamia is concerned. At the personal level, clients largely achieve their desired goals, and they believe that they have improved or at least consolidated their high degree of employability.

While the conclusions of the evaluation are entirely positive, a variety of analyses and discussions identified the individual factors of viamia's success, and areas in which it might improve. These have already been examined by the project managers and implemented as part of the national rollout. The recommendations can be summarised as follows:

- Improvements to viamia as a product:
 - Specify the aims of the counselling session in advance
 - CRQ to be tailored to different target groups and its wording revised
 - Report to be revised to make it shorter and its content more flexible
- Targeted marketing to those with few qualifications
 - Work alongside employers and unions
 - Diversify promotional efforts
 - Communications appropriate to the target group
- Maintain a long-term presence for viamia with nationally coordinated campaigns
- (Continue to) ensure access for target groups
 - Free service an important factor
 - Open to all
 - No rules on the number and duration of sessions within cantons
- Create a shared understanding of viamia as a product and the term 'employability'
 - Central communication and resource provision by KBSB/CDOPU
 - Provision of training and platforms for exchange
 - Training offensive among counsellors
- Optimise resource use
 - Early-stage resource planning