

# Life Transitions and Disability: A Scoping Review of School-to-work Guidance in an Inclusive Perspective

The research aims to explore the current state of sectoral studies in Italy on school-to-work guidance from an inclusive perspective, by conducting a scoping review. School to work guidance aims to support all students, particularly those with disabilities (Mura, 2018) in their journey towards adulthood and in the realisation of their own life project (Giacconi et al., 2020). It's about supporting these individuals during transitional phases (Canevaro, 2017) and empowering them to find opportunities to identify and select from various possibilities offered by the local community and society at large. In this sense, school to work guidance contribute to promoting process of self-determination (Wehmeyer M.L, 1996) and preventing phenomena of social exclusion. From this perspective, school to work guidance could function as a formative and inclusive tool in a lifelong and lifewide dimension (Aiello, Sabatano, Capodanno, 2023), indispensable constracting school dropout and educational failure (MIUR, 2018). Preliminary findings suggest that only a limited number of relevant studies exist. This comprehensive review examines how school-to-work guidance has been conceptualized from an inclusive perspective in Italian literature over the past decade, attempting to identify predominant theoretical frameworks, their evolution, and emerging trends.

*Keywords:* school – work guidance, disability, scoping review, inclusive education, quality of life

## Introduction

The research aimed to explore the current state of sectoral studies in Italy on school-to-work guidance from an inclusive perspective, by conducting a scoping review.

The research was conducted in Italy, using the PRISMA 2020 model (Page MJ, McKenzie JE , Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al, 2020) and consulting the multidisciplinary databases ProQuest and Zenodo and the search engine Google Scholar. For our purpose, we only considered Italian-language scientific publications in open source from the last ten years, which referred to a population segment between 14 and 30 years of age consisting of persons with disabilities. This scoping review, which is part of a broader research project, aimed to examine the various conceptual approaches from the past decade regarding career guidance in Italian educational settings, highlighting prevailing theoretical frameworks, their evolution, and emerging perspectives. The objective is to identify theoretical models and practices currently implemented in school contexts, while also enabling the identification of barriers and facilitating factors involved in the implementation of such guidance programs.

1 The research question underlying this scoping review is the following: How  
2 is school-to-work guidance conceptualised in the Italian scientific literature of  
3 the last ten years?

4 The opening section presents an introduction followed by a literature review  
5 examining how the construct of guidance, particularly school-to-work guidance,  
6 has been theorized up to the present. Subsequently, a methodology section  
7 outlines the research methods employed, databases consulted, and key  
8 characteristics of the investigation. Two further sections address the results and  
9 their discussion, with a final paragraph dedicated to conclusions.

## 11 **Literature Review**

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14 School-to-work guidance pathways contribute to the process of identity  
15 construction and consolidation within which experiencing different professional  
16 roles promotes the development of students' own life projects, due to the  
17 centrality of the personal and social value of work itself. (Giaconi, 2015; Caldin,  
18 Scollo, 2018). In this sense, life transitions may represent a middle ground, a  
19 space between "no longer" and "not yet" (Demetrio, 1997, p.17) that often brings  
20 with it experiences of disorientation and confusion (Malaguti, 2019). This  
21 perspective suggests the need to test oneself in real-life contexts, in order to  
22 enhance personal and working skills, becomes particularly important for people  
23 with disabilities (Caldin, Scollo, 2018).

24 This is essential in the phases of transition to adulthood and in the process  
25 of self-determination, considered as "la capacità di scegliere fra varie  
26 opportunità e di impiegare quelle scelte per determinare le proprie azioni  
27 personali" (Deci e Ryan, 1985, p.38, in Cottini 2016, p.16). However, people  
28 with disabilities often remain trapped in stereotypical representations that  
29 describe them as fragile, immature individuals not able of taking on the active  
30 social roles typical of adulthood (Lascioli, 2001; Lepri, 2011). Frequently,  
31 stereotypical representations have negative repercussions on the professional  
32 lives of people with disabilities and their career prospects (Caldin, Scollo, 2018).  
33 As a matter of fact, people with disabilities often are excluded from the labour  
34 market and this exposes them to the risk of experiencing conditions of poverty  
35 and social exclusion. It is estimated that in 2021 only 30.1% of men and 19.3%  
36 of women with disabilities had an educational qualification equivalent to at least  
37 upper secondary education (Giovannone, 2022). Data shows that in 2021, only  
38 28.9% of people with disabilities aged 15 to 64 were employed (Giovannone,  
39 2022). This percentage drops to 25.4% for the year 2023, compared to data for  
40 the five highest- ranked European countries, which range between 41 and 56  
41 percent (ILO, 2023).

42 Considering the above, it would seem appropriate to highlight how is  
43 important to promote the implementation of orientation itineraries specifically  
44 designed to support people with disabilities in the difficult phases of transition  
45 and all that they entail.

1 In this sense, school - work guidance is not a new topic. In fact, over the  
2 years increasing attention has been paid to the issue and institutions committed  
3 to building ad hoc itineraries to support all those going through moments of  
4 transition, especially students. From the 1990s, interest in school guidance  
5 pathways in Italy has grown significantly in both quantity and quality grown,  
6 expanding beyond their previous limitation to middle schools. Specifically,  
7 Circular Ministerial 160 with Ordinance 159 of May 11, 1995, and Circular  
8 Ministerial 197 of June 2, 1995, extended these interventions to all school cycles.  
9 Later, Ministerial Decree 245 of July 21, 1997, incorporated university contexts  
10 as well. Law 107/2015, also known as 'Buona Scuola', marked important  
11 progress by structuring previous attempts to connect educational and  
12 professional environments through the implementation of school-to-work  
13 alternation programs.

14 Also worth mentioning are the 2019 Guidelines for Transversal Skills and  
15 Guidance Pathways and the 2022 Guidelines for Guidance, which aim to  
16 consolidate the interaction between the first and second cycle of education,  
17 focusing on the enhancement of students' potential and talents and the  
18 construction of a customised Life Project. Emphasis is placed on the need to  
19 promote the pursuit of scholastic success for all students, in an inclusive  
20 perspective that does not take into account social, cultural, socio-economic  
21 differences, by strengthening scholastic guidance, vocational guidance and  
22 training aimed at job placement.

23 School to work guidance aims to support all students, particularly those with  
24 disabilities (Mura, 2018) in their journey towards adulthood and in the  
25 realisation of their own life project (Giacconi et al., 2020). It's about supporting  
26 these individuals during transitional phases (Canevaro, 2017) and empowering  
27 them to find opportunities to identify and select from various possibilities  
28 offered by the local community and society at large. In this sense, school to work  
29 guidance contribute to promoting process of self-determination (Wehmeyer  
30 M.L, 1996) and preventing phenomena of social exclusion. From this  
31 perspective, it involves offering people with disabilities the possibility to direct  
32 their lives consciously, becoming primary causal agents in their own futures,  
33 while lower forms of dependence that limit their autonomy and undermine their  
34 sense of self-efficacy: “accedere ad alcuni ruoli tipici dell'età adulta, tra cui il  
35 lavoro, favorisce la concreta transizione verso il mondo degli adulti e  
36 l'acquisizione di maggiori responsabilità che richiedono un distacco  
37 emancipativo dall'immagine infantile e di protezione familiare, nonché da quella  
38 di utente da riabilitare” (Malaguti, 2019, p. 328). In fact, when one is involved  
39 in the process of educating young people with disabilities, either as family  
40 members or as educational agencies, there is a risk of limiting their potential and  
41 hindering their autonomy and self-determination, out of fear that their goals  
42 might be too difficult to achieve. (Dainese, 2023). On the opposite, family,  
43 school, and society may implement guidance strategies aimed at fostering in  
44 people with disabilities the belief that they can improve and collaborate  
45 effectively with those around them, while remaining aware and conscious of  
46 their potential (Friso, Caldin, 2022).

1 Interventions aimed at providing orientation itineraries, therefore, aim to  
2 contrast school drop-out, to ensure the active participation of the people by  
3 enhancing their desires, expectations and choices (Legislative Decree 62/ 2024)  
4 and to stem phenomena of social exclusion. In light of these considerations, it  
5 seems necessary to develop interventions that consider the deepest dimensions  
6 of the person to help them interpret the reality that surrounds them and encourage  
7 them in project choices that meet their need for growth and development (Mura,  
8 2018). In this sense, school to work guidance serve as a formative and inclusive  
9 tool in a lifelong and lifewide perspective, «nella sua duplice accezione attiva e  
10 riflessiva, di orientare e orientarsi, richiama, da una parte il procedimento  
11 individuale di cercare una direzione e, dall'altra, il procedimento sociale del  
12 cercarla “insieme”» (Aiello, Sabatano, Capodanno, 2023, p. 170).

13 School to work guidance is therefore an indispensable tool in preventing  
14 school dropout and educational failure (MIUR, 2018). It enables students to  
15 orient and reorient themselves and promote their ability to “poter-essere-se-  
16 stessi”, (Aiello et al., 2023). Supporting young people during their education,  
17 particularly those with disabilities, appears crucial, as the failure to recognize  
18 and develop individual talents and inclinations may compromise educational and  
19 professional success. (MIM, 2023).

20 Given all these premises, it seems essential to investigate how guidance is  
21 conceptualised in the scientific literature in order to understand the theoretical  
22 development and reference models in the field of guidance for people with  
23 disabilities.

24 The main aim of this scoping review is to examines how school-to-work  
25 guidance has been conceptualized from an inclusive perspective in Italian  
26 literature over the past decade, attempting to identify predominant theoretical  
27 frameworks, their evolution, and emerging trends. This review may serve as a  
28 foundation for future studies aiming to analyse the consistency between the  
29 identified theoretical models and practices actually implemented in school  
30 contexts. Furthermore, it might help identify both obstacles and facilitating  
31 elements involved in the implementation of such guidance pathways.

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## Methodology

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The research was conducted in Italy, using the PRISMA 2020 model (Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al, 2020) and consulting the multidisciplinary databases ProQuest and Zenodo and the search engine Google Scholar. For this purpose, only Italian-language scientific publications available in open access from the past decade were considered. This time interval represents a period of sufficient duration to identify possible theoretical evolution in field studies. The search terms used were: school-work orientation AND disability. Regarding the target population, this review reports on studies focusing on young adults with disabilities, with particular attention to literature involving individuals in the 14-30 age range. This specific demographic segment was selected because people in this period

1 navigate transitions between different developmental stages, culminating in the  
2 transition to adulthood. These transitions are especially crucial for people with  
3 intellectual disabilities as they establish the foundations for their future  
4 (Malaguti, 2019).

5 The research question this study attempts to answer is: How is school-to-  
6 work guidance conceptualized in Italian scientific literature from the past  
7 decade?

8 The first data resulting from the exploratory survey of the selected databases  
9 reveal a limited availability of relevant studies.

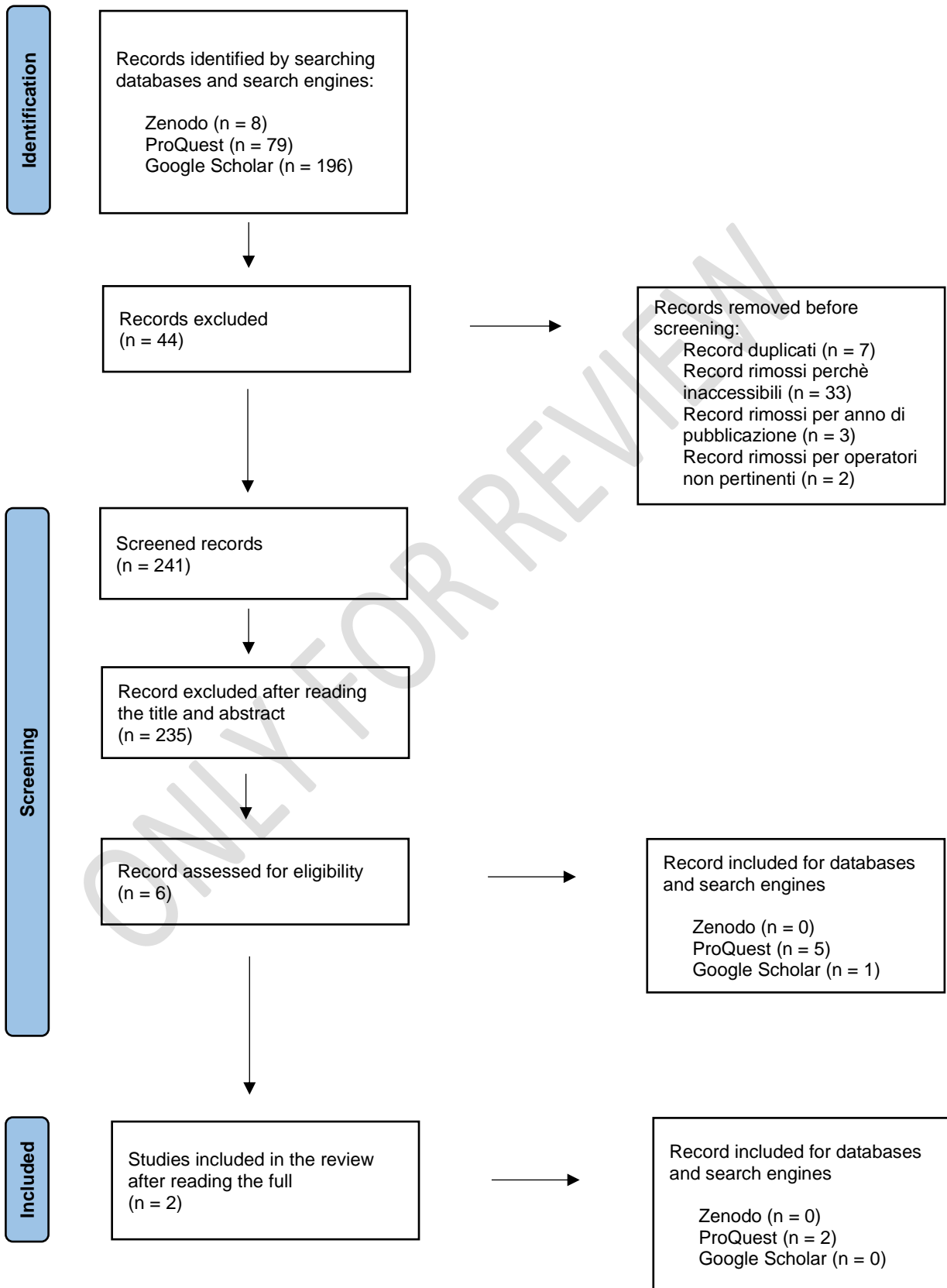
10 Initially the search was also conducted in the multidisciplinary Scopus, Iris,  
11 Francis&Taylor and EBSCOhost databases and in the disciplinary Eric database,  
12 which however did not provide any results. The search string used was ‘school-  
13 to-work orientation AND disability’.

14 In both the Zenodo and ProQuest databases, as well as the Google Scholar  
15 search engine, the same search string was applied. For the Zenodo database, the  
16 Open filter was employed, resulting in 8 results; for the ProQuest database, the  
17 Last 10 years filter was used, which provided access to 79 resources. In the  
18 Google Scholar search engine, the filters 2015-2025, scientific articles, and  
19 pages in Italian were applied. This search returned 196 results. From the total of  
20 283 publications found, 277 articles were excluded, restricting the analysis to  
21 only 6 considered relevant, 5 of which emerged from the search conducted in the  
22 ProQuest database and 1 identified in the Google Scholar search engine. The  
23 results were first analyzed by examining the titles and abstracts. Papers were  
24 accepted as relevant when they satisfied all the inclusion criteria: relevance to  
25 the topic, target audience, time window, country of reference, article type, and  
26 open access availability.

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**Identification of sources via databases and search engines**



## Results

A more in-depth analysis of the literature reviewed, which included examining each work in full showed that only two of the initially selected articles met the research criteria. Finding such limited research on school-to-work guidance for people with disabilities leads to different possible explanations. One possibility is that guidance is a relatively new area of study in academic research. However, this is not the case, as references to the concept of guidance appear as early as Presidential Decree 416/74 *Istituzione e riordinamento di organi collegiali della scuola materna, elementare, secondaria ed artistica*, which established the district school council, whose task was also to organise school and career guidance activities.

Rejecting this hypothesis, the scarcity of contributions might instead be attributed to the use of different terminology when referring to the concept of guidance. Moreover, the topic of school-to-work orientation is often included in the broader discourse on guidance paths in general. These also include purely scholastic guidance itineraries, which concern the vertical transition between one school grade and another or horizontal between different courses of study, and career guidance itineraries, aimed more at an adult audience wishing to orient or re-orient themselves in the labour panorama.

Specifically, two articles qualified as eligible for this research: *The employability potential of young disabled adults in Campania: negotiation between resources and obstacles* by Valentina Paola Cesarano and Maura Striano and *Quality of life and professional orientation for people with intellectual disabilities: a case study in Lombardy* by Emanuela Zappella. Both papers were found in the ProQuest database.

*The employability potential of disabled young adults in Campania: negotiation between resources and obstacles* presents exploratory-descriptive research examining the employability potential of 200 people with disabilities between ages 18 and 30, equally distributed between males and females. The study includes motor, sensory, and cognitive disabilities. This contribution conceptualizes guidance as an educational need fundamental to developing an individual's professional project. The disabilities examined were motor, sensory and cognitive. In this contribution, guidance is theorised as an educational need underlying the process of defining an individual's professional project. It is identified as an accompanying action for the person, gradual and constant over time. Such a vision of the guidance process invests the school with the responsibility to promote the development of transversal competences, expendable in a lifelong perspective (Botes, 2023), and to interact with the other actors involved, such as the community and the family, to collaborate in the predisposition of an individual Life Project that promotes the principle of self-determination of each person and “una graduale presa di coscienza di sé, delle proprie caratteristiche” (Dainese, 2023, p. 72).

The article named *Quality of Life and Vocational Guidance for People with Intellectual Disabilities: A Case Study in Lombardy*, is a case study on the process of professional inclusion of a girl with Down Syndrome, starting from

1 the last three years of secondary school up to the time of her employment. The  
 2 vision of guidance that emerges from this article invests it with a fundamental  
 3 role in accompanying young people with disabilities in the transition from school  
 4 to the working context, focusing on the need to understand and enhance the  
 5 subject's potential.

## 8 Discussion

10 Although limited in number, the articles reviewed still offer valuable  
 11 insights worth considering.

12 In the article "Quality of Life and Vocational Guidance for People with  
 13 Intellectual Disabilities: a case study in Lombardy," the term "career guidance"  
 14 appears alongside discussions of school-work alternation pathways leading to  
 15 employment. This difference in terminology might suggest to readers that the  
 16 guidance approach described focuses primarily on job placement, possibly  
 17 overlooking personal aspects. However, attention to individual characteristics is  
 18 supported through references to guidance paths as 'person-oriented projects.'  
 19 This suggests a consensus on the necessity of placing young people at the center  
 20 of guidance pathways, viewing these as preparation for the workforce that begins  
 21 with individual potential, aspirations, and desires. Both contributions reflect this  
 22 person-centered vision. Furthermore, it emerges that in the pathway to  
 23 employment for young people with disabilities, if, on the one hand, they can  
 24 benefit greatly from specially designed orientation itineraries, which are thus  
 25 configured as facilitators of the process, on the other hand, they often have to  
 26 face barriers which sometimes could represent insurmountable obstacles. These  
 27 obstacles, which often come from stereotypes and stigmas, play a significant role  
 28 in the exclusion of people with disabilities from the labour market, who are  
 29 considered unattractive from a professional point of view. This is also supported  
 30 by the reduced range of skills that young people with disabilities can boast of in  
 31 most cases, as there is no guidance system that supports and enhances their  
 32 employability and that aims to face "il fenomeno dello skill mismatch, quale  
 33 mancanza di corrispondenza tra le competenze possedute dal lavoratore con  
 34 quelle richieste dal mondo del lavoro" (Botes, 2023, p. 111). This leads to the  
 35 fundamental role entrusted to schools, which can be seen in both contributions.  
 36 On one side, it is seen as an opportunity for young people to put themselves to  
 37 the test and become aware of the possibilities offered by the context around  
 38 them, "in esse [le scuole], infatti, sempre più dovrebbe attuarsi una pedagogia  
 39 dei ruoli, coniugata con esperienze realizzate in contesti diversificati, che  
 40 permetta situazioni e occasioni inedite, oltre a quelle della famiglia, della scuola  
 41 o del Centro occupazionale" (Friso, Caldin, 2022, p. 49). On the other side,  
 42 instead, it is invested with the responsibility of orienting and providing skills  
 43 useful for the professional insertion of learners.

44 In the end, what emerges in both articles is the important function played by  
 45 guidance as a starting point in the predisposition of the Life Project, identifying  
 46 employment as one of the most important indicators of the person's Quality of



1 Life level. In fact, “I contesti lavorativi possono divenire veri e propri luoghi di  
2 promozione dell’autodeterminazione, questione prioritaria per una buona qualità  
3 di vita che promuova un progetto di vita coerente e autentico” (Friso, Caldin,  
4 2022, p. 52). To this aim, it is necessary to set up a Life Project according to an  
5 ecological approach, which requires the collaboration and co-participation of  
6 various actors and the commitment of everyone, at various levels, in the  
7 construction of interventions that support people with disabilities throughout  
8 their lives. It is for this reason that guidance and, specifically, school-work  
9 guidance courses are of great importance: these allow the boy or girl in a  
10 condition of disability to look around, become aware of their abilities and  
11 potential and, in line with their desires and personal aspirations, understand what  
12 opportunities are offered by the context in which they are inserted, becoming the  
13 main actors of their own Life Project.

## 14 15 16 **Conclusion** 17

18 This research may suggest some insights about the role of school work  
19 guidance from an inclusive perspective. Guidance may serve as an important  
20 tool to help students with disabilities develop their Life Projects and improve  
21 their wellbeing and quality of life. School-to-work guidance programs appear  
22 very important during specific developmental stages. School-work guidance  
23 pathways, specifically, seem to fit at a critical moment in students’ development.  
24 Such itineraries, in fact, become necessary in what is one of the most important  
25 transitional phases in an individual's life, that is the passage from adolescence to  
26 adulthood, as well as the passage from a delimited and protected context such as  
27 school to a much broader and sometimes disorientating one such as the world of  
28 work. In this complex phase, therefore, an ad hoc designed guidance pathway  
29 can prove to be an important trump card both from the point of view of the  
30 educational agencies, which would thus be able to move in the direction of full  
31 socio-educational inclusion of people with disabilities, and from the point of  
32 view of all students, and specifically young people with disabilities, as it would  
33 allow them to become aware of themselves, of their natural talents and  
34 propensities and, at the same time, to realise the opportunities offered by the  
35 territory and the social context in which they are inserted in order to better  
36 interweave them with their own desires and personal aspirations in the  
37 construction of a Life Project in which they are the real protagonists.

38 The scoping review methodology used in this study reveals important  
39 considerations about school-to-work guidance research. The limited scientific  
40 literature discovered suggests this area remains largely unexplored and requires  
41 additional studies.

42 Furthermore, in attempting to address the research question guiding this  
43 study—how school-to-work guidance is conceptualized in Italian scientific  
44 literature from the past decade—it appears that guidance may be understood as  
45 an educational need fundamental to developing the Life Project of people with  
46 disabilities. It seemingly serves an important function in supporting young

1 people with disabilities through challenging transition phases they encounter  
 2 throughout their lives. Based on this question and these preliminary findings,  
 3 future research might explore whether and how school-to-work guidance  
 4 pathways are actually implemented in Italian schools and, potentially, identify  
 5 challenges encountered, as well as factors that might hinder or facilitate the  
 6 process.

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