

INVESTING IN CAREER GUIDANCE

THE CASE FOR WORKERS





For the purposes of this text, **‘worker’** designates in a broad sense any person of working age carrying out an activity recognisable as work, including self-employed, or a salaried worker*, including temporarily unemployed persons in search of another job – however, this statement is mainly concerned with workers and not unemployed persons (ILO Manual).

* The adopted definition is broad and includes all workers, in contrast to ‘employees’ as workers in ‘paid employment’; where in the former meaning the incumbents hold explicit (written or oral) or implicit employment contracts stipulating basic remuneration that is not directly dependent upon the revenue of the unit for which they work.

Supporting the career development of workers is a quadruple win – for the individual, for organisations, for the economy and for society. The ongoing transformations in workplaces, occupations, economies and societies are creating pressure for workers to continuously upskill and reskill. In this context, it is fundamental to empower individuals to realise their full potential and progress vertically, horizontally, to achieve satisfaction and to find meaning in their career decisions. Career guidance improves workers' awareness of their (skills) needs, aspirations, and strengths, improves their understanding of opportunities and of the value of lifelong learning, and empowers them to take well-informed decisions. From the employers' perspective, career guidance can promote better skills use, harnessing workers' experience and contributing to productivity. It can help enterprises find, develop, and retain talent, and implement age management strategies, thereby increasing staff motivation and creating a positive work environment. Both the economy and society at large benefit from career guidance for workers as it supports the achievement of wider education and training, as well as employment and social policies, in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For instance, career guidance has the potential to steer workers, women and men equally, from declining sectors towards emerging occupations, supporting smoother and more inclusive green and digital transitions. It can be used to reach out to vulnerable groups like workers in the informal sector, workers with disabilities, workers in low-skilled jobs or in non-standard forms of employment and can potentially enhance civic and environmental awareness. However, successfully implementing career guidance for workers requires a systematic approach characterised by the elements outlined in this statement.

This leaflet advocates for quality career guidance for workers in the framework of lifelong guidance systems. Based on the collective work of the member organisations of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Career Guidance (IAG WGCG), it describes how workers can benefit and the main ingredients that contribute to quality in career guidance.

BENEFITTING FROM CAREER GUIDANCE

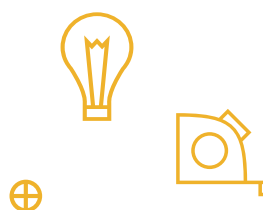
Workers are employed in a broad range of contexts, with different levels of social protection, career prospects and security, and are confronted with distinct challenges and barriers according to their gender, education, occupation, sector, disability status, geographic location, or a combination of these factors. Effective career guidance can benefit any worker as careers become more irregular, requiring more frequent transitions. Thus, workers find themselves in situations where they need to have a better reading of the labour market and the career guidance skills to deal with changing conditions, which can be particularly beneficial for the most vulnerable socio-demographic groups if the guidance provided is designed and implemented to address their needs. Evidence shows that just over 40% of respondents in the Survey of Career Guidance for Adults (SCGA) have accessed career guidance over the past five years, not only to progress in their current job but also to identify new job or training opportunities (OECD Survey 2020/2021).

Formally employed workers benefit. Their opportunities for learning and career development are linked inter alia to existing human resource management (HRM) practices and enterprise size. Workers in small firms seek career guidance significantly less than workers in large firms. Larger organisations are increasingly adopting staff planning and career development practices to effectively find, develop and retain individual workers.



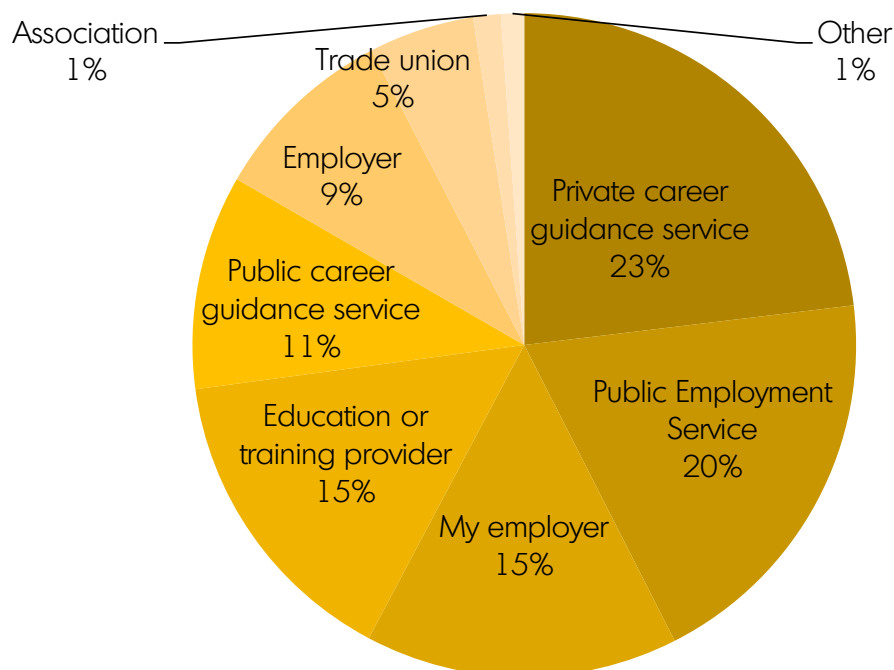
Career guidance is instrumental in (a) reconciling workers' individual career aspirations with business strategy concerns while promoting well-being, (b) facilitating transformations at work by enabling workers to train and adjust to the introduction of new technologies or new processes, (c) supporting the refocusing of lives and careers, allowing individuals to make decisions that enable them to perform new functions or move jobs and occupations. It can play a role in supported employment measures and accessing reasonable accommodations at workplaces, also facilitating community partnerships and awareness of external support services including self-help tools. This nevertheless implies that workers have access to career guidance in a safe environment that they can trust, and that aims at meeting their needs and interests. Solutions to connect career guidance and HRM in enterprises are being explored in the framework of the EU project 'CONNECT!'.

Formally employed workers in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) benefit. MSMEs constitute over 90% of businesses, employ over 70% of the global workforce, and tend to have a less strategic and more informal view of staff management, having fewer available resources and generally providing fewer formal opportunities to employees to train and advance their careers. Building career guidance opportunities in SMEs can help generate career development pathways for employees and quickly adjust employees' skills to ongoing challenges. This however requires targeted programmes and financial and non-financial support to improve staff management practices like voluntary accreditations for employers who invest in their staff (Investor in People initiative, UK). It also requires ensuring the validation of informally and non-formally acquired skills through on-the-job learning and in-company training. In many countries, employer organisations play a central role in supporting MSMEs, while FOREMCyL, the Foundation of the Trade Union 'Comisiones Obreras' of Castilla y León in Spain, is an example of a systematic trade union approach to support workers.



In many countries, workers can access services provided by public employment services (PES). In the EU, career guidance is increasingly visible in PES. Evidence about PES in the EU neighbourhood and central Asian countries, however, shows that PES employees are often more focused on job intermediation and are sometimes not trained to provide quality career guidance and advice services or are overwhelmed with supporting registered unemployed people without adequate resources. Sufficiently resourcing PES is therefore key in providing access to workers (see ILO Convention 88) while creating a positive image of PES services for workers, for example by separating service areas for unemployed people and workers, proved to be a successful approach in Poland. In Germany, the nationwide rollout of lifelong vocational guidance by PES resulted in the hiring or training of 450 additional advisors between 2020 and 2022, through funding provided by employee and employer unemployment insurance contributions (OECD, 2022). Also, strengthening close cooperation and coordination with employer, worker and other civil society organisations as well as non-formal adult learning providers and private employment services is an important measure to reach out to workers with diverse needs. Outreach needs to increase overall.

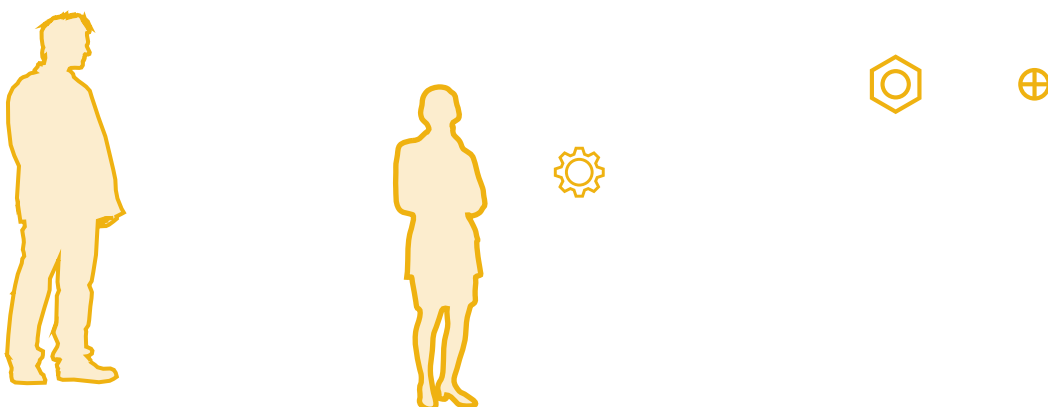
Providers of career guidance for workers: Percentage of workers who spoke to a career guidance advisor over the past five years, by provider



Note: Average for the eleven countries covered by the SCGA: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, New Zealand and the United States. Data refer to the last time the respondent spoke to a career guidance advisor. Source: OECD 2020/2021 Survey of Career Guidance for Adults (SCGA)

Informal workers benefit. Career guidance can play a life-changing role for workers in the informal economy, by supporting transitions into formal activities and entrepreneurship, by helping to upgrade traditional learning programmes like informal apprenticeships, and by enabling access to certified training and to recognition of prior learning. However, informal workers are among the most under-served groups: they rarely receive support from their employer or seek career guidance from PES, even in countries where they are eligible irrespective of their labour market status.

This is a concern since informal workers constitute more than half the global labour force. The group includes own-account workers and employers in their own informal sector enterprises, family/ domestic workers, members of informal producers' cooperatives and employees holding jobs without any formal employment relationship. Informal workers frequently work without safety and lack access to social protection and employment benefits. Many workers in the informal economy are women and young girls performing domestic work, with reduced access to learning and formal work opportunities. There are frequently gaps in career support to informal workers since they are often not covered by existing active labour market policies and services. In addition, social support and training interventions tend to neglect the role of career guidance in enabling access to critical information and in the development of a career identity and strategy. Access to online services providing guidance and information on occupations, labour market trends, training aids, assistance to enter the formal labour market, etc. as well as guidance provided through popular radio programmes can be part of the solution (ETF 2020a). Active outreach to informal workers is even more critical.



Workers in non-standard forms of employment benefit. Workers in temporary employment, part-time and on-call work, temporary agency work, disguised employment, including dependent self-employment, represent a growing share of total employment, partly due to the multiplication of online and platform work ('gig economy'). While research in Eastern Europe suggests that platform work has created a wide range of new employment opportunities characterised by increased flexibility in terms of working schedules, working time and locations, and that platform work contributes both to improving existing skills on the job and to developing new skills, formal skills and career development opportunities within platforms are limited. Workers engaged in platform work are often recognised not as workers but as service providers or pushed to informality. In many cases, workers depend on a small number of clients for their income, with very little autonomy and high direct control by contractors. Providing access to career guidance is therefore essential to facilitate access to skills validation, continuous learning and professional opportunities, to support entrepreneurial ambitions of individuals accompanying mentoring on finance and business strategy, and to provide access to professional networking and specific credentials that may prove to be highly valuable. Reaching out to workers in non-standard forms of employment is therefore essential.

Workers in late career stages benefit. Many countries face the challenge of an aging population. The prolongation of working lives requires frequent re- and upskilling to avoid skills obsolescence. Career guidance helps workers prepare for late career stages, by allowing for redeployment in new functions, facilitating reskilling/ upskilling and maximising their contribution, while preserving quality of life and motivation at work. For enterprises and career guidance systems, career guidance can also empower age management policies when used strategically and facilitating ethical and effective succession management. Unfortunately, access to career guidance is less frequent for older workers, calling for policy to stimulate provision and awareness among potential users. Australia has several programmes that target mid-career adults who face disruption or job transition that have been successful in connecting workers with upskilling and reskilling opportunities and new employment (OECD, 2022).



Displaced and migrant workers benefit. Workers migrate either in search for better opportunities or due to forced displacement, often to countries they are unfamiliar with. There is a gap in economic and humanitarian migrant career support, which is not consistently integrated in migration services, migration agreements, or refugee support. Career guidance upon arrival, as offered for instance in Sweden, and pre-departure where possible, can help individuals make more informed choices on where to migrate to, how to prepare, how to integrate in the host-country society and labour market, or how to return to the country of origin. In the case of humanitarian migrants, career guidance can also be provided in hotspots, refugee camps and other contexts, to help individuals identify training and employment opportunities in the host country, like in the case of Moldova.

Female workers benefit. Local culture can weigh down on women's prospects to develop careers and to explore possibilities outside domestic work. If well integrated with gender equality policies for employability and skills development, career guidance can play a key role in increasing women's access to decent work opportunities. For example, impartial guidance for women about how to access decent work opportunities, including in science, technology, engineering and mathematics occupations, can play a substantial transformative role over livelihoods and perceptions. Return to work initiatives for parents who left jobs to care for children or for relatives can also integrate career guidance especially to help overcome loss of confidence and contact with the labour market.



QUALITY CAREER GUIDANCE

Understandings of the role of work and careers differ across cultures. While in some countries, work and career are frequently seen as central for individual achievement, the value of work can be more community or family based in others. The notion of career may be alien or new to some cultures or in potential conflict with traditional roles and values. It is important that worker support departs from local understandings and opportunity structures which communicate using international career guidance concepts but remains in tune with local culture.

Clearly, no one-size-fits-all solution exists. Each country has a different context and needs to develop its own support system that fits its needs. However, career guidance for workers must be a priority for the state. Since it is challenging for PES or any single provider to cover all user groups and deliver adequate services, countries should develop an alliance strategy with other service providers, even cross-sectoral, to cover workers on its territory, because publicly funded provision is limited, especially in low and middle-income countries, and costly private services can exclude groups. In addition, strengthening provision, raising quality, and reviewing funding and governance mechanisms is key, especially in low and middle-income countries to support the development of career management skills.

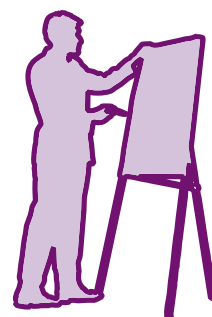
GOVERNANCE

✔ A strategic approach to career guidance for workers is needed in the context of ongoing structural changes, especially through developing national lifelong guidance strategies and integrating guidance into wider policies on lifelong learning, skills development, employment, education, youth, gender equality, social inclusion, and national digital ecosystems; e.g., the Finnish cross-sectoral strategy provides evidence of a systemic approach with specific actions and plans to reinforce major key features of the guidance system, including digitally, so that continuous learning supports all, including workers.

✔ A multi-actor and lifelong learning-oriented approach to career guidance is needed, which may include public-private partnerships, partnerships and cooperation agreements between providers to reach workers most in need of career guidance, all of which requires shared quality standards; for example, in Türkiye, over ten stakeholders in education, training and the labour market have signed an MoU as a basis for a national guidance forum.

✔ Appropriate financial support to access career guidance is required because (a) private provision of career guidance services can be costly and risks excluding those who need career guidance the most; innovative funding approaches (entitlements, incentives) are needed to support low earners, e.g. career vouchers (Flanders, Belgium, or individual learning accounts, France); (b) scaling up services requires more funding, including for outreach activities that foster engagement of currently under-served groups and for service infrastructure, including online; e.g. mobile employment centres (Kazakhstan), and the Khetha radio programme (South Africa) used by the public employment service to provide career guidance 'for all citizens regardless of geographical position or socio-economic status' through a weekly 30 minutes live radio programme in all 10 official languages, reaching a largely rural population aged 15 to 65 (3.1 million listeners/week) in a cost-effective way.

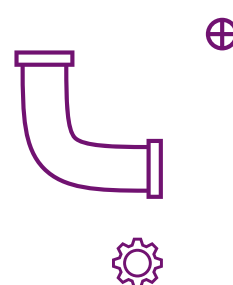
✔ Funding mechanisms can mobilise private participation via levy-based funding, e.g. in South Africa, the tripartite Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) administer training funds resulting from employer levies to implement the National Skills Development Strategy and encourage skills development in specific economic sectors. They also develop sector skills development plans and provide career information for employees. The SETA for the manufacturing sector, merSETA, is currently expanding the use of next-generation tools for guidance, such as virtual reality, gaming,



online, social media networking on emerging occupations and developing an 'Indigenous Career Management System' to ensure that both employed and unemployed learners in rural areas embark on the merSETA learning programmes and qualifications based on interest and understanding of their own aspirations.

QUALITY OF SERVICES & ACCESS

- ✔ Given the diversity of providers, quality assurance and qualification requirements for career guidance providers and practitioners like the Serbian and Canadian career guidance standards are required to ensure services meet workers' needs at different stages.
- ✔ Building on experience from Covid-19 to maintain services (digital, telephone, radio, TV), developing the correct balance of remote and physical services to meet the needs of workers is crucial; it is necessary to secure investment for the introduction of user-friendly self-service infrastructure and identify opportunities to enhance cooperation with other actors to this end, while at the same time ensuring digital literacy and closing the digital divide.
- ✔ Integrating career guidance and recognition, validation and assessment of prior learning (RPL) services is key, and supplementary tools that might support access to validation arrangements in the future need to be explored, including e-portfolios, skills passports and electronic badges. For example, the Icelandic IDAN education centre focuses on increasing competences within companies among employees, supporting processes for recognition of prior learning, as a well-established practice supported by social partners, departing from regulated professions; beneficiaries are provided with career guidance and are encouraged to complete studies based on their skills validation results.
- ✔ Monitoring and evaluation are key, and approaches need to consider cooperation among actors in the collection of system-wide qualitative and quantitative data, feedback loops, use of user

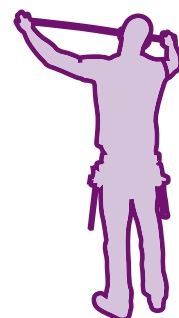


feedback involving practitioners, and the creation of meaningful outcomes and process indicators for system and service improvement using quality frameworks (Cedefop, 2022).

✔ Quality labour market information systems are one key ingredient for sound career guidance that takes labour market developments into account as well as skills needs (e.g. Canada, Sweden); in countries with insufficient data and high informality, guidance fora are needed at local level, bringing together municipalities, local PES offices, employers, worker representatives, sectoral organisations, adult learning providers, civil society organisations, etc. These can be a source for guidance on skills and service needs, including on entrepreneurship opportunities in the labour market (e.g. Municipality Career Guidance Council in the city of Peja, Kosovo*). Coordination and partnerships between the national and regional levels, with social partners and training and guidance providers, help facilitate the flow of information, including on the labour market, as demonstrated by Czechia's career guidance in the Moravian - Silesian Region.

INCLUSIVENESS AND AWARENESS OF SERVICES:

✔ More than half of workers who do not access career guidance say that they do not need it, or they are not aware of any services available (OECD, 2020/21); for under-represented groups, low-skilled workers, women, rural workers or older people, and informal sector workers, awareness raising and outreach are crucial to encourage access; users of guidance need to understand what career guidance is for and what benefit it brings to them to create awareness of the move from 'skills matching' towards 'supporting meaningful lives', which makes services attractive for all; this, however, requires advocacy and practitioners have a role to play in creating this new image of the service.



- ✔ Combining outreach with guidance service provision, like in the case of municipal social and youth workers, non-formal adult learning providers and civil society organisations, prepares for engaging informal or low-skilled workers into formal learning and formality.
- ✔ A universal design approach helps ensure accessibility of services for persons with specific barriers and needs to maintain employability and wellbeing at work. For example, since 2023 day centres for workers in Greece have been integrating mental health support and career guidance services.
- ✔ Ensuring gender equality is another key role for career guidance. Examples include the role model initiative of the Western Balkans Regional Cooperation Council 'Choose STEM future', the 'Rebuilding Better Project' peer programme in Thailand, where inspirational women and role models join peer sessions and share their experience with other women, and enhancing female leadership through training and workshops for both managers and female staff in companies to create awareness of opportunities and a supportive company culture (Japan, International Organisation of Employers).
- ✔ Inclusiveness can also be ensured through Employment-Intensive Investment Programmes (EIIP) that support interventions through reconstruction and rehabilitation of destroyed infrastructure and improvement of the environment and community assets. An integrated approach to job creation in Iraq allows workers employed through EIIP interventions to develop demand-driven skills and access career guidance and other employment services.

SETTING UP AND/OR SCALING UP SERVICES

- ✔ Unions stand to play a key role in providing career guidance and advice in cooperation with employers, governments and other civil society actors; for instance, the Singaporean Employment and Employability Institute (e2i) is an initiative of the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) to support national skills and lifelong learning initiatives, offering career guidance services, supported by the NTUC Job Security Council, a network of companies that provides



information about job vacancies and jobs that are being phased out. This enables support to be tailored to at-risk or displaced workers. A network of Career Ambassadors also provides career guidance support through a network of 'touchpoints' in community services.

✔ Employer organisations, especially those representing industry sectors and SMEs, play a key role in career guidance provision. For example, in Austria, the regional Chamber of Commerce of Tirol supports companies in their internal human resources development by offering employee counselling and talent assessment, as well as staff development support. A map of future workplace competences was developed as a basis for dialogue about the future with business managers and employees to support staff skills development.

✔ Employers have a role in facilitating access to services, for example by hiring independent guidance counsellors to support their staff in times of changing skills requirements. In Japan, the government has developed the Career Dock, which can be used by firms to help employees navigate internal career opportunities. Sweden offers outplacement services with tiered offers, which can be used by workers facing job loss.

✔ Non-formal adult learning providers and civil society organisations can serve as partners in career guidance for workers, acknowledging their existing role, especially in reaching the most vulnerable workers. For example, Tafakur (Jordan) and Mujawarat (Palestine) are integrated career and life skills learning programmes to increase employability among low-skilled and vulnerable adults (DWW International and ETF) in order to increase readiness of uptake of trainings under active labour market policies.

✔ Building on experience from Covid-19, increased focus must be placed on support for maintaining and fostering employment-to-employment transitions, including through targeted information and guidance, for example on the digital, green, blue, care and orange economy.



✔ ICT-based career services, including self-help tools, are valuable, especially in delivering career information, such as labour market and skills intelligence, and in linking to online counselling for those with access. Digital tools can facilitate access and networking, collaboration and peer learning – if used ethically – for users and practitioners, like in Finland, and can help with management of resources, collection of evidence and with monitoring client progress. It is important that stakeholders consider all factors such as relevance, context and applicability in decisions on adopting ICT-based services and practices.



KEY SOURCES FOR FURTHER READING



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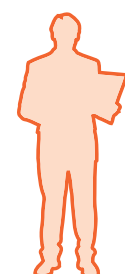
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Inter-agency collaboration

The Inter-Agency Working Group on Career Guidance (IAG WGCG) is composed by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), the European Commission (EC), the European Training Foundation (ETF), the International Labor Organisation (ILO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and World Bank (WB).

The working group aims at

- ✔ exchange of plans and ideas,
- ✔ coordination of activities and messages, and
- ✔ developing and implementing joint activities and products.

A flagship initiative of the working group is the Global Careers Month, with its first edition in 2022. For further details please visit: <https://www.skillsforemployment.org/skpEng/iagevent>.

