

Executive summary

Career guidance is a fundamental policy lever to help adults successfully navigate a constantly evolving labour market through advice and information on job and training opportunities. Most adults who do not train say that there was no training offer that they wanted to take up (82%). This may reflect a lack of understanding of the importance of training in today's labour market, or difficulties in identifying suitable training opportunities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the importance of career guidance services as many adults have lost their jobs and require assistance identifying suitable career options in a labour market that has changed profoundly. The pandemic has had an impact on both the supply and demand for skills. On the supply side, low-skilled adults have been disproportionately represented among those who lost their jobs. Many will need to upskill or retrain to find work. On the demand side, the crisis is likely to accelerate the adoption of digital technologies and automation, increasing demand for high-level skills. Career guidance can facilitate re-employment by identifying new job opportunities and proposing relevant training.

To better understand adults' experience with career guidance and the barriers they face, the OECD carried out an online survey in six countries (Chile, France, Germany, Italy, New Zealand and the United States). According to the survey, four out ten adults spoke to a career guidance advisor in the previous five years. Contrary to perceptions that career guidance concerns mainly young people in school, these results suggest that there is actually substantial demand for career guidance among adults. Most adult users speak to a career guidance advisor at least twice. The most frequently reported reasons for seeking career guidance are to receive help looking for jobs (32%) and to learn about education and training options (25%).

However, many of the same groups who already face labour market disadvantage and low training participation use career guidance less. The largest gaps are found between prime-age individuals (25-54) and older people (age 55+) (22 percentage points), followed by adults living in cities and in rural areas (14 percentage points), high- and low-educated adults (11 percentage points), men and women (8 percentage points) and the employed and the unemployed (2 percentage points). Workers in occupations with a high risk of automation are also less likely to use career guidance than those in occupations with a lower risk of automation. The differences between groups reflect a mix of attitudes towards career guidance, awareness of available services, and how career guidance initiatives are targeted. For instance, the small difference between the employed and the unemployed reflects that career guidance is often part of the re-employment support offered by public employment services.

Most adults who do not use career guidance services report that they do not feel they need to (57%). Older adults and less-educated adults are over-represented in this group. Another 20% of non-users report that they were not aware that career guidance services existed. A third sizeable barrier related to the lack of time for work or personal reasons (11%). Reaching out to disadvantaged adults to connect them with available services could improve training participation rates and labour market outcomes for these groups.

Three-quarters (75%) of adults who receive career guidance report being satisfied or very satisfied with the guidance they receive. But while most adult users (70%) experienced an improvement to their

employment, education or training status within six months of receiving guidance, only 22% said that guidance was useful in achieving that outcome. Policy guidelines for improving the quality of services are summarised in the box below.

Public employment services (PES) and private providers represent the two largest providers of career guidance services for adults (24% and 22% of adult users, respectively). Other significant providers include education and training institutions and employers. Each provider has its strengths and weaknesses. For example, the PES offers free counselling that is increasingly accessible to employed workers, who have historically not been eligible for PES support. However, satisfaction with PES guidance is generally low, possibly owing to overburdened counsellors lacking the time and funding to personalise advice. Private career guidance providers offer an alternative, but disadvantaged adults may not be able to afford such services, unless they are publicly subsidised. Career guidance outcomes are strongly correlated with the type of provider. Career guidance provided by employers or employer associations is found to be linked to positive employment outcomes and provision by education and training providers is positively associated with participation in training programmes.

Face-to-face delivery remains the most common channel to receive career guidance (63% of adults), though other channels started to take precedence during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, face-to-face services were suspended, and providers took steps to strengthen distance services (by phone, online). In many countries, online career guidance portals became popular sources of up-to-date information on labour market changes. Early evidence suggests that the inevitable shift to remote delivery of career guidance during the pandemic could have had a small negative impact on employment outcomes of beneficiaries, and it likely worsened access for adults with poor digital skills and those without a reliable telephone or internet connection.

Coordinating the many actors involved in career guidance policy is a challenge. Together, Ministries of Labour and Education and the PES are the bodies most commonly responsible for adult career guidance across OECD countries. Responsibilities are also split across levels of government. Various mechanisms are used to support coordination, including national career guidance strategies, legislation, advisory bodies, and working groups.

Career guidance services are heavily subsidised in surveyed countries. Services are sometimes available for free, or vouchers or subsidies are available to reduce the cost of career guidance for adults and employers. Most adults (74%) who receive career guidance do not pay at all for the service. Permanent employees are most likely to pay for career guidance services, while adults outside of the labour force and the unemployed are least likely to pay. This makes sense given the substantial public benefit to these groups receiving career guidance, and possibly re-entering employment.

This report is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 presents findings on the coverage and inclusiveness of career guidance services based on the OECD Survey of Career Guidance for Adults (SCGA). Chapter 2 maps the providers of career guidance for adults and describes how services are delivered (e.g. face-to-face, online, by telephone). Chapter 3 reviews survey evidence on the quality of career guidance services, and discusses policy options for improving the quality and impact of services. Chapter 4 describes how OECD countries coordinate the many stakeholders involved in governing career guidance. It also considers funding, and how the cost of guidance is shared among governments, adults and employers.

The box below summarises policy priorities for countries to consider. Drawing from a policy questionnaire distributed to Ministries of Education and Labour, it identifies a set of high-level policy guidelines to improve provision and service delivery, coverage and inclusiveness, quality and impact, as well as governance and funding. Further detailed analysis of the institutional set up and economic context would be required at the country level to identify country-specific policy recommendations to strengthen career guidance for adults.

Policy guidelines for adult career guidance systems

Provision and service delivery

- *Expand availability of career guidance services, while ensuring that providers have the capacity* (i.e. advisor time, training and funds) to meet the specialised needs of distinct groups (unemployed, employed, inactive). Providers who specialise in providing job search assistance for unemployed and inactive adults may not have the capacity to meet the career guidance needs of employed adults, who primarily seek guidance for career progression or changing jobs.
- *Deliver career guidance through a range of communication channels.* Remote delivery (via telephone, videoconference, text messages, and online services) allows countries to meet demand for career guidance services at a reduced cost, and may improve access for adults living in rural areas. But remote delivery should not replace traditional face-to-face delivery. Doing so would deny access to adults with poor digital skills, or those who do not have a telephone or internet connection. Based on regression analysis and previous literature, face-to-face delivery is generally more effective than remote alternatives in bringing about positive employment outcomes.
- *Establish or strengthen existing online career guidance portals.* Online career guidance portals need to be user-friendly and aggregate information from different sources in one place. They should include information on skill needs, education and training programmes, quality of training providers, as well as training costs and financial incentives available (e.g. subsidies, tax exemptions). This information could provide a powerful motivation for workers finding that their jobs are at risk to look for further career guidance services. Offering the possibility to interact with career guidance advisors in real time makes portals more user-friendly and can increase their effectiveness.

Coverage and inclusiveness

- *Raise awareness* about the availability and usefulness of career guidance services. Countries can organise media campaigns, or develop registers of career guidance providers that include information on their costs, location, and communication channels (e.g. face-to-face, telephone, online).
- *Reach out to disadvantaged groups* including older jobseekers and the low skilled. These groups face difficulties finding good quality jobs, are under-represented in training participation, and could benefit from career guidance services. For example, trade unions could play a stronger role by helping at-risk workers to identify their training needs and arranging suitable learning opportunities within their companies. A sector-based approach may be an effective way to target adults in sectors hard hit by COVID-19.

Quality and impact

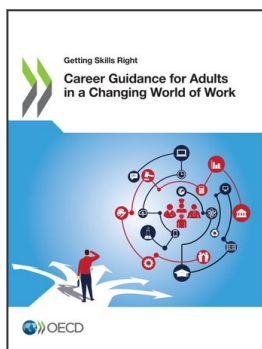
- *Establish quality standards* in service delivery that describe the basic requirements for how career guidance is provided. Accreditation against such standards could be a requirement for receiving public funds, or a voluntary means of quality improvement for providers.
- *Professionalise career guidance advisors* through competency frameworks to standardise their training and qualifications, and to provide a means to benchmark their skills.
- *Use high quality skills assessment and anticipation information* to steer adults towards skills in demand and provide the means for career guidance advisors to stay current about the labour

market. Adults can benefit from information about flexible career pathways that enable transitions from one occupation to another while focusing training on their skill gaps.

- *Tailor career guidance to individual needs.* Assess adults' skills using skills profiling tools, in order to provide personalised advice about career and training pathways. Providing adults with a personalised career development roadmap strongly increases the likelihood that they will achieve employment (by 25%) and education and training outcomes (by 7%), according to a regression analysis.
- *Monitor outcomes* by requiring providers to collect and share outcome data on a regular basis. Consider linking public funding to performance indicators, based on collected data.

Governance and funding

- *Improve coordination with all actors* involved in career guidance. National career guidance strategies provide momentum and often the funding to achieve priorities, while local implementation allows career guidance providers to adapt services to local labour market conditions and to take advantage of local networks of employers, training providers, and other service providers.
- *Ensure adequate public funding* for adult career guidance systems, in line with the social benefits that are generated. Target subsidies at groups who are under-represented in the labour market and in training participation (low-skilled, older jobseekers).
- *Incentivise employers and adults to contribute* to the funding of career guidance, in line with the private benefits they receive. One option is to make career guidance an eligible expenditure under financial incentives intended for adult learning (e.g. vouchers, subsidies and employer levies).



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