

Executive summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the Canadian labour market, deepening existing divides and changing the demand for skills. Already prior to the pandemic, labour demand was changing due to the adoption of new digital technology, population ageing, globalisation and decarbonisation. The skills needs for jobs in growing sectors and industries are often not the same as those required for jobs that are at risk of automation or outsourcing. In this context, many adults are being challenged to consider alternative career paths, and to upskill or retrain.

A growing body of international evidence suggests that career guidance has the potential to support successful employment transitions: not only from the education system to the labour market, but also from unemployment to employment, and from declining to growing sectors. In this way, it can support the post-pandemic recovery by facilitating career transitions and bolstering the labour market participation of vulnerable groups.

This study takes stock of career guidance services for adults in Canada, and puts them into international perspective. It relies on new international survey evidence from the OECD Survey of Career Guidance for Adults (SCGA), interviews with key Canadian stakeholders, and policy questionnaires completed by federal and provincial ministries.

Adults in Canada use career guidance services less than adults in a number of other OECD countries. According to the SCGA, only 19% of Canadian adults used a career service over the past five years. This is nearly half of the average across countries in the survey (39%). The lower use of career services in Canada reflects that Canadian adults are less likely than their international counterparts to seek guidance when choosing a study or training programme (19% versus 31%), or when they want to progress in their current job (27% versus 40%). Employed adults in Canada are also less likely to use career services than the unemployed, which is not the case in other countries. The most common reason that adults stated for not using career services was not feeling the need to, and this is in common with other countries in the survey. Unlike in other countries, however, adults in Canada were more likely to report that they did not have enough time due to either work or family/childcare responsibilities.

Low-educated adults, older adults and those living in rural areas in Canada are less likely to use career guidance services than other groups, common to what is also observed in other OECD countries. This is a source of concern, since these groups often experience intersecting barriers to employment and face a higher risk of skills obsolescence and job automation than other groups more involved in career guidance. In Canada, inclusion in service provision is a particularly pressing issue: contrary to those in other OECD countries, adults in Canada who feel negative about their future labour market prospects are actually less likely to seek career guidance than those who feel more positive. More active outreach and a better targeting of services is essential to support greater use of career guidance by vulnerable groups. In Australia, for instance, Victoria's public employment services sends "advocates" out into the community to connect with vulnerable adults wherever they are, including in libraries, community centres, public housing foyers, shopping centres and other places offering community services. At the same time, the European pilot project GOAL demonstrates how active outreach and addressing the complex needs of vulnerable groups through career guidance can be effective in raising their participation in adult learning, even if it requires considerable investment.

The most common providers of adult career services in Canada are government-run employment services and private career guidance providers. Government-run employment services delivered by the provinces have a job matching focus, and tend to target unemployed adults. Employed adults are more likely to consult career services offered by private providers, though these come at a cost. Adults who face a high risk of job automation tend to be older and lower-skilled and may not be able to afford these private services. In the current context of rapidly changing demand for skills and the need to reach out to workers ahead of job loss, this is a significant gap in service provision. Experiences from Germany and Flanders (Belgium) show how government-funded employment services can take a more proactive approach by building their capacity to serve both unemployed and employed workers.

In Canada, the responsibility for adult career guidance policy is shared between different levels of government and stakeholder bodies. Policy-making on adult career guidance is shaped by federal-provincial funding agreements relating to employment services, cross-ministerial co-operation through working groups, and the work of different stakeholder bodies to support policy co-ordination. However, there is no strategic development of career guidance policy on a federal or provincial level. Some OECD countries, such as Australia, Ireland, and Norway have dedicated public bodies to co-ordinate career guidance across ministries and levels of government.

Canada performs well compared to OECD countries with respect to the quality of career guidance, though there is room to improve consistency in service provision. Adults' satisfaction with career services in Canada is on par with other countries, and adults in Canada were more likely to indicate that career guidance services were useful to achieving reported employment and training outcomes. The report explores a number of ways Canada could make quality improvements in order to maintain this strong performance. Provinces could be more systematic about monitoring outcomes in line with long-term policy objectives. Nova Scotia Work's performance-related funding and Saskatchewan's use of the PRIME Employability Assessment Tool are innovative examples in this regard. Career guidance advisors could also be better supported in navigating and drawing meaningful insights from complex labour market information, possibly through regular training sessions about labour market developments as is done in France and Belgium. Finally, Canada is an OECD leader in the development of a competency framework for Career Development Professionals, which is the basis for the pan-Canadian certification for career guidance advisors currently under development. Supporting the implementation of this voluntary, pan-Canadian certification could help to establish a common standard of practice that might also improve consistency in service delivery within and across provinces and territories.

The box below summarises nine recommendations to strengthen co-ordination of adult career guidance policy in Canada, to encourage greater and more inclusive use of adult career services, and to promote high-quality service provision.

Key recommendations

Strengthen co-ordination of career guidance policy and provision

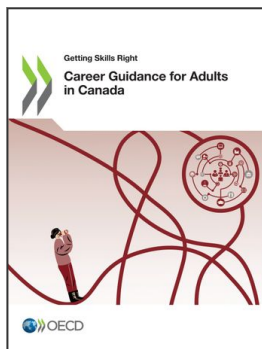
- Federal, provincial and territorial governments should co-ordinate, possibly through the Forum of Labour Market Ministers or another body designated with this co-ordination role, to develop a strategy for adult career guidance in Canada.
- Strengthen the capacity of the provincial government-run employment services to create proactive career guidance opportunities for adults in employment at risk of job loss or with poor career prospects.
- Improve co-operation between training providers, government-run employment services and employers with the objective of supporting the provision of neutral career and training guidance for adults.
- Government-run employment services should continue to offer a mix of face-to-face and remote guidance services, but expand face-to-face provision to meet client demand when sanitary conditions permit.

Fostering a greater and more inclusive use of career guidance services

- To raise awareness about career guidance services, provinces and territories should strengthen referrals between public services and launch a media campaign.
- Provincial and territorial governments should dedicate funding to actively reach out to vulnerable adults in their communities and workplaces and better target career guidance services to their needs.

Promote high-quality career guidance service provision

- Provinces and territories should systematically monitor the outcomes of publicly-funded career guidance services in line with long-term policy objectives.
- Provinces and territories should strengthen training for advisors providing career guidance in publicly-funded services, especially on the use of labour market information.
- Federal, provincial and territorial governments should in co-ordination support and fund the implementation of a voluntary, pan-Canadian certification for career development practitioners.



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