



## Global Careers Month

### Challenges, opportunities and priorities

#### Key messages

- The Global Careers Month rallied the global career guidance community around a successful series of events reflecting on current developments, challenges and priorities.
- Significant developments at system and practice level exist in all Regions, carried by policy initiative, research and engaged practitioners. Intensification in career education, digital delivery, inclusive and context sensitive delivery are trends, alongside more advanced funding, stakeholder cooperation and embeddedness with other policy areas. The degree of system development and pace of change are nevertheless very diversified.
- Challenges remain high, especially in lower income economies, with career guidance still being a fragmented offer, with low policy profile in many countries. Access to quality services is still low in many countries, with lack of career learning programmes, low cultural sensitivity and with digital provision having an uneven impact. Professionalisation of services is still low in many Regions, with low availability of training or standards. Socioeconomic uncertainty remains in many areas of the globe with youth and vulnerable groups requiring more intensified support.
- Priorities identified during events include the need to promote lifelong career guidance approaches, based on universal access and service coordination. This requires strong stakeholder cooperation, including with social partners, cross-policy integration and service embeddedness. Strong investment in practitioner and teacher capacitation, based on standards and associative capacity are deemed fundamental. Harnessing the potential of digital technologies requires an inclusive approach, capacity building, investment and a good balance with in-person service. More and better peer cooperation, research, monitoring and evaluation are seen as key to raise quality, alongside the development of more inclusive and culturally sensitive approaches.

**Read more about the above in the sections to follow**



in diverse contexts and for learners at different stages in their educational and career pathways;

- Disseminating research undertaken by the collaborating agencies on the design and delivery of effective career guidance.

When consulted over the results of the GCM, there was a generalised regional and global agreement that the Month had been remarkably successful in achieving its objectives, especially considering that it was its first edition. One aspect that was particularly emphasised was the fact that the initiative rallied the community of practice in career development, both at global and regional level. This was particularly relevant in Regions where career guidance is less of an established area of policy, work and research. Particular benefits noted were the opportunity for professional identity building, networking opportunities, creating cooperation, generating policy visibility and stimulating regional dynamics.

#### ► **Key Partners of the Global Careers Month**

- International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG)
- International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy (ICCDPP)
- Asian Regional Association for Career Development (ARACD)
- Canadian Career Development Foundation (ccdf)
- Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA)
- CareerLab Armenia
- Career Advisory Tools International
- East Africa Career Development Association (EACDA)
- Euroguidance Network
- Fundación OCIDES
- South African Career Development Association (SACDA)
- The National Youth Policy Institute (Republic of Korea)
- Ukrainian Association of Career Guidance and Educational Advising.

The Month provided a privileged space to identify common challenges and priorities emerging from different contexts, professional viewpoints and levels of the system, opening the doors for not only a global exchange, but also the generation of regional consensus. There was a rich discussion around the need to rethink the role of career guidance in the face of digital transformations and growing ecological concerns, while at the same time understanding the specificity of contexts of delivery and different paces of system development. One key shared conclusion was the need to frame career guidance as part of a larger ecosystem, where strong inter-dependencies exist with other policies and stakeholders.

Significantly, discussions held during the month, as relayed in the sections below, allowed for the identification of regional specificities, regarding not only challenges, but also important innovations and research. Different demographic conditions, socioeconomic structures and trends and cultural characteristics increasingly require contextualised methodologies and tools.

The career development community had an opportunity to also shine a light over the value of career guidance in the eyes of stakeholders, careers practitioners and supporting institutions. Examples were provided on the increasing importance of career guidance to support successful and meaningful learning for youth and adults, enhancing workers and learners' career management skills in the face of crisis and technological change, and to enable career pathways in enterprises.

Participants noted that, in the future, the GCM can be an opportunity to provide a stage to zoom into a few initiatives that may have global applicability and impact.

## **Current dynamics of career guidance systems**

### **The state-of the art**

During the month of activities, gathered experts reflected and exchanged about what is the current

state of development of career guidance systems in their regions and arrived at important insights. At global level significant system evolution was noted across the board, with different emphasis that mostly reflect the maturity of national systems and the level of resources locally available.

In higher income countries attention was drawn to progress over the last few years in the development of regulation, training for practitioners and progress in digital technologies. Discussions held in North America, Europe, Southeast Asia and Oceania, highlighted the consolidation of career guidance as an institutional feature. This process was discussed with reference to the development of frameworks for career management skills in education, of service delivery standards and of occupational standards for practitioners, alongside the widening and improvement of available training including in-service continuing professional development and cooperation.

The digitalisation of career guidance services was a much-discussed transformation, accelerated during COVID and supported by relatively high levels of digital literacy, connectivity and access to equipment in higher income countries. Tools such as individual career portfolios are becoming pervasive and progressively support the integration of career guidance with other areas of the skills system and the labour market, facilitating, for example referrals for training, certification and recognition of prior learning, labour market matching platforms and access to individual financial incentives.

In middle income and developing countries exchanges reflected upon an increased policy attention to career guidance. In Latin America, an increased regional forum of discussion has been growing led by professional associations and research institutions, consolidating concepts and visions about how to develop services and tools to achieve it. Despite lower levels of system maturity in some countries, there are also developments at institutional level with countries with more mature systems taking the lead, with ripple effects at regional level. Such is the case of the development of occupational standards and the establishment of professional bodies in Southern Africa, or the growing integration of professionalised career guidance in general education, vocational training and public employment services in Eastern Europe,

Central Asia and Western Balkan countries. Regional associations tend to play a key role in the promotion of cross-national peer exchange and the dissemination of key methodologies and tools.

### **Critical developments and innovations in focus**

Participants in the GCM also discussed current developments that deserve particular attention given their strategic relevance. In Latin America discussions particularly highlighted the fact that concepts that are new to the regional context are being introduced in both policy and practice fora, such as career development, adaptability, life design, career readiness, social justice, culturally sensitive and gender equality approaches, and digital literacy.

In Southern African and Middle East and North African (MENA) countries there was a strong emphasis on the progressive development of occupational and practice standards and the establishment of national professional bodies in the countries of these regions. One fundamental aspect debated was the growing importance of regional cooperation for the success of this process, by allowing the dissemination of practices implemented by lead countries.

The reinforcement of career guidance and career learning in education was noted as a current area of reinforcement. In South-East Asia there are growing efforts to increase the employability and career management skills of students, with increased investment in youth work readiness programmes for job search, application and workplace integration. This effort comes alongside measures for the reinforcement of career education and the capacitation of teachers to support career learning across all levels of education.

In recent years, higher education institutions have notably increased their efforts in this area, particularly through the introduction of mentoring for undergraduate students, especially in Latin America. Several MENA countries have also successfully established partnerships with partners in North America and Europe to develop national programmes and services to increase the career readiness of both secondary and higher education

students, with the support of digital platforms and improved careers services.

In Latin America, South-East Asia and Europe, the expansion of digital and hybrid provision in career guidance as well as in career education at school was highly emphasised as a relevant development. Debates on the theme in Southern Africa clearly noted that there is a need to combine digital with face-to-face practice and low-tech solutions, such as radio shows or itinerant face-to-face services currently implemented in the region, especially in vulnerable environments.

Discussions in South-East Asia also highlighted how during COVID-19 voucher schemes for workers that combine access to career guidance with flexible training solutions, facilitating upskilling, re-skilling and career transitions.

Reflections in Eastern Europe and Central Asian meetings highlighted the need for a change in professional identity from “inspector (in PES and schools)” to “counsellor”, from “providing orientation” to “providing lifelong guidance and supporting the development of career management skills to empower people”. Regional frontrunners are Georgia based on their state standards for effective professional consultation and career planning services and authorisation standards for educational institutions and Armenia thanks to their central career development and career guidance centre developing methodologies, tools and training experts and with even a dedicated state budget for one full-time career guidance practitioner per VET centre and rolling out career education in all formal education. Northern American discussions noted that practitioners have a mindful and growing advocacy role, engaging in community development, providing support to vulnerable groups in their interactions with institutions and organisations and responding to wider socioeconomic challenges. In Oceania, Southern Africa and Latin America there was also a focus on the need to respond to local communities and cultures, through the development of indigenous models for career development. These still emergent models, progressively develop their own approaches, with context responsive methodologies, tools and certifications to provide significant service to diverse populations.



Copyright: Marcel Crozet / ILO

## What are the key challenges?

The debate around challenges reflected differences in degrees of system maturity and resources, but also included important debates around cultural diversity and gender. Higher income countries, especially in Europe tended to emphasise how **limited understanding of practices in other countries and regions** may hamper system and practitioner professional development. The growing, but still limited cooperation and peer-learning among practitioners, researchers, and policy makers was highlighted.

Despite its growing policy importance, all regions reflected **that career guidance is still a fragmented field in most countries**, with uncoordinated provisions that operate in policy silos. This was reflected as being undesirable and leading to lower quality impacts, for a provision that is understood as being more effective if provided coherently across the life-course. Participants in events pointed out that career guidance still has a **low policy profile greatly due to a low understanding of its value and benefits** in several policy fields, public administration, private organisations and among those who are in a position to invest in career guidance. This points to the fact that investment in monitoring and evaluation of careers services is also still scarce. While there is an issue of lack of conceptual clarity and agreement on what career guidance is within policy fora, there is also a parallel issue linked to the **lack of culturally grounded theories and approaches**. Discussions in Oceania, South-East Asia, Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Latin America

noted that there is still an absence of approaches that can effectively address, contexts and challenges outside Europe and Northern America, although the situation is changing. Many pointed out that most methodologies and tools are based on inadequate or difficult to apply dominant theories and practices based on industrialised western cultures and societies, in the face of high cultural diversity and extensive variation of norms and convention across and within countries. Researchers and practitioners in Latin America also highlighted those issues linked to **interculturality, gender and disability are still not sufficiently taken into account** in the development of approaches.

**Access to career guidance remains very patchy in LMIC** and existing services and delivery channels either do not reach the ones who need it, are not adapted to their needs or are too expensive, in the absence of free provision. For example, discussions in MENA countries highlighted that services are frequently not available in the language of ethnic groups with low proficiency in the most nationally representative languages. While many countries have made considerable efforts to expand or adapt to digital service provision, their impact remains irregular and unequal, especially in underserved and underdeveloped areas, where **infrastructure and bandwidth are insufficient and digital literacy weak**.



Copyright: Marcel Crozet / ILO

Despite an economic upturn in higher income economies, it was well noted in South-East Asia regional conferences that **socioeconomic uncertainty remains high in LMIC**, with a lingering impact of COVID-19 and natural disasters, affecting

transitions from school to work and in the labour market. Youth was one of the groups in strong focus, due to the way they were deeply affected by the disruption caused by the pandemic, with potential scarring effect especially among graduates. **Support to educational transitions through career education and guidance remains weak in many countries**, alongside weakly structured development career management skills and workplace-oriented skills in education and training.

**Capacitation of practitioners remains a big challenge** especially in developing countries, with low professionalisation mostly due to the lack of qualifications, training offer and systematic provision of work methodologies and tools. MENA discussion noted that the majority of practitioners in the Region are “paraprofessionals” and that the shortage of professional practitioners tends to result in a lower quality provision. This issue is partly created by the **unavailability of occupational standards, recognition mechanisms, credentials and specialisation tracks** into career guidance practice at several level and contexts. These challenges were extensively discussed in Southern Africa, where regional conferences also noted that practitioners frequently also struggle with work conditions and access to stable income, especially in rural areas. Similar concerns were debated in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where the conference was focused around the topic of “professionalization of career guidance practitioners” where weak access to continuing professional development for guidance practitioners was highlighted.

### What are the main priorities?

Organisers of the GCM were actively engaged in debating priorities for system and practice development in the near future. As expected, the priorities reflect the identified challenges, adding suggestions on how to provide critical responses. Many contributors during the GCM discussed the continued need to **raise awareness about the value of career guidance** with policymakers and society, by highlighting its contribution to wider socioeconomic targets. North American and

European discussions particularly noted the need to **reinforce identity and community-building** within the field of career development towards greater professionalism, innovation and visibility. Suggested actions include the intensification of peer learning activities networks, as well as the creation of programmes, projects and opportunities for exchanging practices and building collaborative structures for practitioner competence building. MENA discussions also emphasised the need to **intensify research, as well as transparent, independent monitoring and evaluation** of services to enable continuing and cumulative improvement. This is a particularly important issue for countries where career guidance activities are very dependent on project-based initiatives and donor funding. Retaining technical documentation and an appraisal of services becomes fundamental to use these initiatives to establish stable provision. There was a debate across regions that emphasised the need to prioritise **lifelong career guidance approaches** that provide coherent support and enable universal access. Discussions emphasised that well-coordinated lifelong career development support should be promoted with a reinforcement of both public and private service and increased stakeholder cooperation. It was suggested that stronger synergies are promoted between policy, research and practice, engaging diverse groups into consultation, development and delivery. **Embedding career guidance in a strategic way in key services such as recognition of prior learning** was frequently focused as an urgent measure that requires strong stakeholder cooperation and capacity-building. This approach was seen as preferable to the frequent narrow and uncoordinated focus on specific transition moments in education or limited support to typified social protection beneficiaries.

Alongside a lifelong approach, discussions in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Oceania also highlighted the need to **shift the current career development paradigm towards more contextualised approaches** and services with a higher concern for socioeconomic inequality, cultural diversity, gender and disability issues. **Enhancing access to career guidance towards a universal entitlement** was a high priority under

discussion, especially for vulnerable and marginalized individuals and persons with disabilities with diverse profiles.

The need to **professionalise career guidance** was a much-debated issue together with the quality assurance of its delivery. Discussions placed high priority on the need **to invest in initial training and continuing competence building** among career guidance practitioners and other career development professionals. Regions emphasised diverse skillsets, including interculturality (Oceania, Latin America), adaptability, reflection, flexibility and social justice (Europe), life skills (Eastern Europe, Central Asia).



Copyright: Lord R. / © ILO/Richard Lord

For effective training and continuing professional development of practitioners to be successful, the discussion in Southern Africa highlighted the need to establish professional bodies for practitioners

ensuring certification, as well as the development and application of occupational and service delivery standards. **Capacitation and registration of interested teachers** as career development practitioner in the entry-level category was also noted as a key priority, especially in countries with low degrees of professionalisation.

A key enabling factor and priority discussed was the need to guarantee **stable funding of services and for practitioners at all levels and in every relevant context**, with priority to marginalised communities. This includes training of professionals, adequate infrastructure, operation of services and assuring decent work and living conditions for practitioners in all contexts. The use of alternative financing such as resources for national training funds or social impact bonds managed by professional bodies, were debated as solutions. Discussions also emphasised the need to create higher level qualified positions for practitioners at all schools, colleges, and universities to effectively coordinate career development activities.

Another key priority in focus was the **need to generate pedagogically adequate early exposure to career learning opportunities**. It was suggested that career education should be promoted in an adjusted way, from primary education onwards throughout all levels, combining core and transversal competence development/life skills learning with career education. Career education should provide experiential learning opportunities and access to entrepreneurial learning, promoting knowledge about the world of work and successful school to work transitions. Cooperation of education and training institutions with social partners were seen as a key ingredient for success at all levels of education.

While digital means were discussed as an important development and opportunity, it was discussed in several conferences that **further capacitation of practitioners and services to harness the potential of digital means is necessary**. During the closing of the GCM it was also noted that the exciting development of digital technology should not shadow the need for human touch in career support, particularly to address the needs of vulnerable individuals and groups. It was voiced that **digitalization of services needs to be socially just,**

**equitable, environmentally sensitive, and culture resonant**. More efforts and investments should be made to offer complementary low-tech solutions in underserved areas and to **bridge the digital divide**, by addressing structural disadvantages linked to weak infrastructure, low digital skills and reduced access to digital equipment by many vulnerable beneficiaries.

## Future of the Global Careers Month

The Global Careers Month is here to stay. It was a success and participants have expressed the wish for it to be a repeated initiative. It brought together regional and international stakeholders working with career guidance and career development support, and it attracted participants from different countries and parts of the career guidance world.

It was an example of fruitful collaboration by the institutions of the inter-agency career guidance working group who promote policy development through their joint vision and synergies. This joint vision, however, could only be transformed into real gains for stakeholders working in the field through the engagement, contributions and generous involvement of those who voluntarily organised national and regional events and reported their outcomes of the regional events. Debates were held to discuss challenges and solutions in a spirit of open exchange and cooperation. The GCM and the IAG merely provided a productive space for all stakeholders to make their valuable contributions.

To ensure appropriate targeting, impact and engagement, the GCM will be held with a minimum of 3 years apart in editions and will rely on collaboration of the IAG with its international and regional partners.



**On the IAG WGCG**

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.