

Intelligence MEMOS



From: Tingting Zhang

To: Labour Force Observers

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Re: **LET'S EMBRACE A GOLDEN AGE FOR CAREER GUIDANCE**

As digital technology and the green transition sweep through Canada's labour market, career navigation becomes increasingly complex and increasingly important to help both employed and unemployed people.

This makes the availability and quality of career guidance services, which aim to help individuals transition from education to work, unemployment to work, or manage their careers, ever more vital.

For example, about [one in five](#) Canadians work in jobs that were at high risk from automation three years ago, even before the advent of artificial intelligence, which is leading to further significant changes. Many employers in finance and manufacturing (64 percent and 71 percent respectively) in several countries, including those in Canada, are addressing their skills needs primarily through retraining and upskilling existing employees, according to a recent OECD [survey](#) of employers and workers. In addition, [3.1](#) million Canadian jobs (15 percent of the labour force) will be disrupted in the next decade as Canada transitions toward a net-zero economy, affecting the demand for skills.

And the lack of information about alternative employment opportunities and barriers to labour mobility or job-related training can lead to skills mismatches in the labour market, according to one C.D. Howe Institute [paper](#). Using career guidance services can help prevent or reduce these mismatches.

However, Canada has the lowest use of adult career guidance services, according to an OECD international [survey](#) of Career Guidance for Adults. Only 19 percent of Canadian adults used career guidance services over the past five years, just half the average across 10 participating countries in the survey.

Canadian adults who are less likely to use career guidance services are:

- The employed compared to the unemployed;
- Those who perceive their labour market positions to be vulnerable;
- Women, low-educated adults, older adults, and those who live in rural areas;

Conversely, those concerned about their career prospects in other countries were more proactive in seeking guidance services. In addition, Canadian adults are less likely – 27 percent versus 40 percent – than their international peers to seek professional advice when they want to progress in their current job.

Lack of awareness, motivation, and time, are among reasons for lower uptake of career guidance, with the time commitment cited as the more significant obstacle for Canadian workers.

Meanwhile, career guidance options for the Canadian working-age population are [limited](#), in large part because government-run counselling has historically targeted unemployed people.

Beyond raising awareness about the utility of career guidance, Canadian governments need to devise means to actively reach out to vulnerable adults in their communities and workplaces. Initiatives in Australia and the Netherlands offer good international [examples](#) of how this can work.

To increase guidance uptake, career services need to become more flexible and compatible with work and family responsibilities to address barriers related to lack of time.

Qualified career guidance professionals are also crucial. They provide information about job vacancies, work search strategies, and skills assessments. Increasing and standardizing professionalization should become a priority.

At the same time, workers and counsellors need better and more timely reliable labour market information. Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey provides monthly information on the supply side, but current data on wages, job vacancies, and skills and education requirements is lacking. In addition, having access to regional labour market information is critical. For example, some regions of Southwestern Ontario, like [Windsor](#), London, and Hamilton, provide a broad range of resources and have adopted a tool that provides better local labour market information for job seekers and employers. Users can easily access services such as job boards, career explorer, sector maps, and skills demand reports. Similar innovations should be introduced across the country.

Career guidance services serve as a compass to workers in the job market. Improving their use to help Canadian workers navigate their careers is critical for economic development, especially in an era when demographics are shrinking the labour force.

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