

What We Learned, Where We're Going Next

Regional insights from
Global Careers Month 2025

GLOBAL CAREERS MONTH

WORK LEARNING
JOBS TRANSITIONS
EMPLOYMENT



What we learned, where we're going next

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Key messages

- The second [Global Careers Month](#) (GCM), organised under the steer of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Career Guidance (IAG WGCG) in cooperation with professional associations worldwide, brought together the global career guidance community around over 150 events across every continent, demonstrating the growing global recognition that career guidance is part of the infrastructure needed to navigate today's rapidly changing world.
- Progress since the previous [Global Careers Month](#) (2022) is visible across regions, with growing policy attention, expansion of digital provision, strengthening of professional associations, increase of cross-regional cooperation and the development of innovative approaches to meet complex societal challenges.
- Persistent challenges remain, such as fragmentation including lack of coordination in service delivery, capacity gaps among practitioners, difficulty reaching those beyond formal systems – informal workers, marginalised youth, migrants and refugees. According to regional focal points – this includes the need for contextually (and culturally) grounded approaches rather than uncritical import of standards developed in other contexts.
- Priorities identified include extending career guidance to reach those most in need, building coordinated national approaches, investing in qualified practitioners, recognising career guidance as an investment rather than a cost, securing stable earmarked funding, embedding guidance in strategic policies, adapting approaches to local cultural realities and ensuring ethical and responsible use of digital technologies (including AI).

Introduction

Global Careers Month (GCM) was organised in November 2025 under the steer of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Career Guidance (IAG WGCG), by Cedefop, the European Commission, the European Training Foundation (ETF), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). The month consisted of a coordinated series of initiatives and events from the wider career guidance (including educational and vocational guidance) and career development communities, promoted by the international agencies together with international, regional and national associations, amounting to a total of over 150 events registered in the global calendar. Many additional events took place at national and local levels. The International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG) served as an essential partner, supportively coordinating regional and national efforts through its network of association and guidance practitioners worldwide.

This brief takes a look back on GCM 2025 to provide insight into the discussions, exchanges and initiatives that took place during the month, summarising key messages at global and regional levels, drawing on the particular impressions relayed by regional partners ('focal points'). While the brief serves as a reminder of the first editions of GCM, it also paves the way for the coming third edition of GCM, with new priorities, challenges and innovations to be revealed.

The origins and objectives of Global Careers Month

Global Careers Month is an initiative of the IAG WGCG. Each of these organisations works with countries to enhance social and economic development. In 2019, one of the first acts of the working group was to publish a joint statement on the importance of Investing in Career Guidance (updated in 2021 in response to the global pandemic, and again in 2025). The joint effort reflected the fact that the need for guidance had increased sharply with people spending more time in education and training than previously including in accumulating further qualifications and credentials, and with increasing pressure on people to up- and re-skill. Other factors included the labour markets undergoing rapid transformations through digitalisation and the green transition, as well as significant demographic changes playing a role.

In 2022, the IAG WGCG reached out to various regional partner organisations around the world to organise the first ever Global Careers Month. The success of that first edition confirmed the value of creating a dedicated global space for the career guidance community.

GCM 2025, the second edition, set out with specific objectives:

- Raising awareness about the role and importance of effective career guidance in enabling access to decent work and careers, while supporting equitable and sustainable social and economic development;
- Identifying shared challenges for the development of career guidance systems as well as specificities linked to local contexts;

- Showcasing high-quality, as well as innovative solutions for successful educational, vocational and dedicated career guidance; and
- To promote career development support in diverse contexts and for learners at different stages in their career pathways including education and skills development.

Marking the initiative, the IAG WGCG updated its joint statement *Investing in Career Guidance* (2025), outlining why policymakers should invest in career guidance, what constitutes quality career guidance, and the benefits that effective guidance can deliver.

Impressions from organising partners

Regional and global focal points partnering with the second edition of Global Careers Month broadly agreed that the second edition had been successful in building on the foundations laid back in 2022, pointing towards future global initiatives. Particular emphasis was placed on the strengthening of the community of practice in career development, both at global and regional level. This was especially valued in regions where career guidance is a less established area of policy, work and research. Among the benefits cited were professional identity building, networking, creating cooperation, generating policy visibility and stimulating regional dynamics.

GCM 2025 therefore offered a dedicated space for identifying shared challenges, advances and priorities across different contexts, professional perspectives and levels of the system, enabling both global exchange and the building of regional consensus. Discussions centred on the need to rethink the role of career guidance in the face of the shared transformations, demographic changes, the digital and green transitions and growing ecological concerns, while recognising the diversity of delivery contexts and the different paces of system development. A widely held conclusion was the importance of the ecosystem approach to framing career guidance, where strong inter-dependencies exist with other policies and stakeholders.

The opening and closing ceremonies of GCM 2025 brought together representatives of the IAG WGCG to present their perspectives on why career guidance matters. Contributions highlighted career guidance's foundation in international labour standards, evidence from international surveys showing that young people's career aspirations remain narrow, the importance of lifelong guidance and its relationship with lifelong learning, the integration of career guidance within the relevant policy frameworks such as the European Union's Union of Skills, and the role of career guidance as a bridge between learning and earning, between aspiration and opportunity. The closing ceremony reflected on four recurring themes from the month: reaching those beyond formal systems, strengthening coordination, filling capacity gaps, and fostering approaches that fit local realities.

Evolving dynamics of career guidance systems

The state of the art

Throughout this edition of Global Careers Month, knowledgeable experts in their fields/roles discussed how career guidance systems have developed in their regions and shared perspectives on current trends. At global level, progress was evident in all regions since the first GCM in 2022, with differing emphases reflecting the maturity of national systems and locally available resources. Following the Month, regional focal point representatives shared their views, which were published, respectively per region, in the December issue of the IAEVG Magazine (IAEVG, December 2025).

In higher income countries, attention was drawn to progress in the consolidation of career guidance as institutional and policy infrastructure. In Europe events highlighted how the Union of Skills framework integrates career guidance across its four pillars: building skills for life, upskilling and reskilling, skills circulation and recognition, and attracting and retaining talent. Career guidance professionals are increasingly positioned as important partners in achieving skills policy ambitions. The European event in Latvia explored how different countries are developing lifelong guidance systems, with frameworks emerging to assess system readiness and identify areas for development. In Oceania, North America and Europe, discussions reflected the continued development of service delivery, including the deepening integration of career guidance with mental health support, trauma-informed practice and culturally responsive approaches.

In middle-income and developing countries, exchanges reflected on the increased policy attention dedicated to career guidance. In Latin America, a growing regional forum of discussion has been consolidated, led by professional associations and research institutions, with a focus on building locally grounded conceptual foundations. In Uruguay, progress was reported in building public institutional infrastructure for career guidance within social policy, with multiple ministries coordinating employment centres, vocational training and disability services. In East Africa, a case study of rural employment services in Kenya's Turkana and Garissa counties demonstrated that structured career guidance integrated into existing national employment structures can achieve measurable outcomes. In the MENA region, professional associations and regional networks are emerging, working to establish career development as a recognised profession with appropriate standards and qualifications.

In Southern Africa, discussions underscored that career guidance must be understood within the reality of very high youth unemployment. Events in the region challenged conventional notions of employability, unpacking employment, entrepreneurship and 'subsistence' (livelihood focus) as equally valid forms of (or leading to) decent and meaningful work. Youth-led contributions proposed including entrepreneurship and practical skills alongside academic subjects in curricula and investing in changing attitudes across generations.

Critical developments and innovations in focus

Participants also discussed current developments that deserve particular attention given their strategic relevance.

In Latin America, discussions highlighted a growing critique of imported frameworks, with researchers arguing that guidance developed in affluent, stable labour markets often fails to address regional realities of high informality and precarious work. The call was for a shift from regulatory approaches toward emancipatory practices grounded in social justice, intercultural guidance and co-construction of knowledge. The importance of moving towards a national lifelong guidance strategy was emphasised, while mental health integration in career guidance emerged as a cross-cutting theme, with practitioners recognising that career support must address psychological dimensions alongside practical preparation.

In Asia, a joint webinar series highlighted how demographic decline, disruptive technology and social exclusion are creating combined pressures that call for career guidance to be positioned as 'social infrastructure'. This is an essential systemic intervention that safeguards human dignity, supports belonging, and bridges the gap between education and the evolving world of work for all learners, including the most vulnerable. In this connection, the concept of work-based learning was proposed not merely as a vocational alternative, but as a systemic strategy applicable to all students, bridging the gap between classroom theory and workplace reality and serving as an instrument for equity.

In Oceania, discussions focused on how career development can support refugees and migrants beyond initial job placement toward sustainable career development. The combination of narrative career counselling and systems thinking was presented as a more culturally responsive approach to working with people from collectivist cultures who have experienced protracted displacement. The need to integrate career development expertise into multidisciplinary resettlement teams was highlighted, alongside advocacy for career development as part of refugee integration and economic participation.

In the MENA region, a key question was addressed: is career development a profession, or merely a collection of activities? Events examined ethical and professional standards, pathways for qualifying practitioners, and the role of institutions in ensuring quality services. A recurring theme was the need for assessment tools validated for local contexts (applicable for local populations), and the importance of engaging with family systems in contexts where career decisions are collective rather than individual. Regional collaboration was emphasised, since no single country has sufficient scale to develop comprehensive career development infrastructure on its own.

Discussions in North America emphasised the advocacy role practitioners can play wherein there are calls for the redefinition of success metrics beyond immediate job placements toward enabling sustainable employment aligned with the client's values, enhancing the confidence to navigate future disruptions. Equally, the importance of strategic policy advocacy was emphasised. Career development professionals are encouraged to translate their frontline expertise into language that resonates with funders, employers and legislators, rather than limiting advocacy to professional networks.

In Europe, the still evolving understanding of lifelong guidance was a recurring theme, with consensus that guidance should support people throughout their lives and not just at transition points, requiring coordination and cooperation across education, employment and social services. Discussions also addressed the relationship between career guidance and sustainability, including how practitioners can help individuals reflect on the environmental and social dimensions of their decision-making and work choices. The sustainability of the profession itself was highlighted, with

emphasis on practitioner development, professional standards and recognition of guidance as public infrastructure.

What key challenges remain for the regions?

Discussions on challenges reflected varying levels of system maturity and resources across regions, while also surfacing cross-cutting themes around cultural diversity, inclusion and technological change.

While career guidance is gaining policy attention, all regions acknowledged that career guidance is still a fragmented field in most countries, with valuable work taking place in many settings as well as innovation, but often without coordination or an overarching strategy. Comprehensive career guidance policies and strategies remain rare, and funding is often limited and not earmarked. This fragmentation was seen as reducing quality and impact, contributing to its low policy profile, given that career guidance is understood to be more effective when delivered coherently across the life-course. The low profile is perceived by some as greatly due to a low understanding of the value and benefits of guidance but also reflects structural barriers including the absence of earmarked funding, lack of integration into mainstream education, employment and social policies, the predominance of paraprofessional delivery in many settings, and governance structures that do not yet recognise guidance as an essential public service.

Access to career guidance remains patchy. Few adults actually use career guidance or are aware of its existence and only about half of students have access to career guidance at school. High informality in low and middle-income countries means people have limited access to labour market policies and, by extension, career guidance. The prevalence of micro and small enterprises, which typically lack dedicated human resources functions and structured approaches to career and workforce development compounds this challenge. Unlike larger employers who may offer internal mobility pathways and skills development, information from the discussions indicate that SMEs rarely provide employees with the conditions that facilitate career growth, making external career guidance services all the more important for this segment of the workforce. Across the regions, informal workers, marginalised youth, migrants, refugees and those facing service gaps need support most but are often least served. While many countries have expanded digital service provision, digital platforms alone cannot address these gaps, with the digital divide is a major problem in many regions.

Beyond the challenge of conceptual clarity on what career guidance means within policy circles, there is a parallel issue linked to the lack of culturally grounded theories and approaches. Discussions across Oceania, Latin America, Asia, Africa and the MENA region noted that most methodologies and tools are based on assumptions developed in industrialised Western cultures, as indicated previously, that may not align with collectivist cultures, contexts of high informality in the labour market, precarious work and protracted displacement. Researchers and practitioners in Latin America highlighted the need for a shift from 'regulatory approaches' which help individuals adapt to existing systems toward emancipatory practices grounded in social justice, intercultural guidance and co-construction of knowledge between practitioners and those they serve. These reframing challenges the field to interrogate whose knowledge counts and whose realities are central in guidance theory and practice. In the MENA region, the absence of locally validated assessment tools

was underscored. In Southern Africa and Oceania, discussions focused on the need for strength-based, capacity-building approaches that recognise diverse populations as active stakeholders in their own career development.

The capacity building of practitioners remains a persistent challenge across regions (e.g., competencies reflected in [IAEVG standards](#)). In many countries, the majority of practitioners are paraprofessionals, and the shortage of professionally trained practitioners tends to result in lower quality provision. North American discussions highlighted that career professionals' wages often fall short of living costs and that funding for career services lags behind other OECD countries. In Southern Africa, regional events noted that practitioners frequently struggle with work conditions and access to stable income. The question of whether career development constitutes a profession or merely a collection of activities was debated directly in the MENA region.

The rapid advance of artificial intelligence is simultaneously creating opportunities and disrupting traditional career pathways and necessitating changes for career service approaches alike. Discussions in Asia pointed to data suggesting a decline in entry-level recruitment following the adoption of generative AI, indicating that the first rung of the career ladder is vanishing for younger generations, so guidance is called upon to better support workplace integration and exposure, and new thinking about progression. Regional events noted that career services must respond proactively. This included building digital literacy among practitioners, developing ethical frameworks for AI use in guidance, and harnessing AI tools to reduce systemic inefficiencies such as fragmented service information and weak outcome tracking while maintaining the relational and human dimensions of guidance that remain irreplaceable. Career guidance systems face both the challenge of helping individuals navigate these disruptions and the opportunity to harness digital tools for improved service delivery, while ensuring that digitalisation is socially just, equitable and culturally resonant. At the same time, as indicated previously, growing ecological concerns and the broader sustainability agenda are creating opportunities for considering new dimensions to career guidance. Debates among professionals and researchers in Europe increasingly invite reflection in the career field on addressing how work patterns contribute to environmental sustainability or damage and on supporting reflective decision-making.

What were the main priorities voiced in 2025?

During the closing and drawing on the contributions of the focal points, regional coordination, and the events organised, the priorities for system and practice development were discussed, also reflecting on the role of context. As expected, the priorities reflect the identified long-standing challenges, with suggestions on how to provide critical responses with several priorities for policy requiring attention.

- **Reach people where they are.** Extend career guidance beyond formal systems to reach informal workers, marginalised youth, migrants, refugees and those most in need of support. Working through existing structures, national employment authorities and services, local partners, community organisations, increases funding sustainability. Creating ad hoc initiatives or parallel systems may lead to coordination challenges and disrupt service provision when project funding ends, or lead to collapse of the system.
- **Build coordinated national approaches.** Fragmented services cannot meet current challenges. Countries need integrated strategies that bring together stakeholders across education, employment and social services and beyond, in cooperation with workers' and employers' representatives. Well-coordinated lifelong career development support should be promoted with a reinforcement of both public and private services and increased stakeholder cooperation, embedding career guidance in a strategic way in key services.
- **Invest in qualified practitioners.** Career services depend heavily on the professionals who deliver them, even when provision is supported by rapidly evolving technologies. Training, professional development and quality standards must be prioritised, including digital competence and culturally responsive practice. The establishment of professional bodies ensuring certification, the development and application of occupational and service delivery standards and the capacity building of teachers as career development practitioners were noted as key priorities.
- **Recognise career guidance as an investment.** Quality career guidance can reduce costs associated with reactive measures and contribute to improved labour market outcomes. Starting career education as early as in primary schools throughout all school grades can make the difference throughout the lifespan. It should be recognised as an investment rather than a cost, with robust monitoring and evaluation and use of evidence to enable continuing improvement.
- **Secure stable funding.** Career guidance normally requires earmarked budgeting within national frameworks rather than ad hoc or project-based funding. This includes training of professionals, adequate infrastructure, operation of services and assuring decent work and living conditions for practitioners in all contexts. Drawing from pooled funding mechanisms, social protection funds and associated initiatives such as learning entitlements can help.
- **Embed career guidance in strategic policies.** Career guidance should be appropriately integrated into or part of growth policies, sectoral policies, skills development, social protection and employment strategies, rather than treated as an add-on or lost between policies.
- **Adapt approaches to local realities.** Theory and practice must be culturally responsive, with communities involved in designing resources and services. Countries should be

supported to develop what they need at their stage of development, and in this context, guarding against the uncritical import of standards. Shifting the paradigm towards more contextualised approaches with higher concern for socioeconomic inequality, cultural diversity and social justice was a high priority across regions.

- **Ensure ethical and responsible use of digital technologies.** Harnessing the potential of AI and digital tools requires capacity building, inclusive approaches, a good balance with in-person service and attention to the digital divide. Ethical guidelines must be regularly reviewed to reflect the realities of contemporary practice.

Conclusion: The future of IAG WGCG Global Careers Month

The Global Careers Month has assumed its place as a recurring initiative. The second edition in 2025 was well received, and participants expressed a clear wish for the initiative to continue. Constituting a unique, dedicated space where guidance was positioned front and centre, 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 also an example of fruitful collaboration by the institutions under the umbrella of the IAG WGCG 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, resources, and generous involvement of those who voluntarily organised national and regional events and those who shared event outcomes. Debates were held to discuss challenges and solutions in a spirit of open exchange and cooperation. In 2025, the IAG WGCG, together with IAEVG and its regional partners, provided a productive space for all stakeholders to make their valuable contributions. This was particularly important considering the spotlight is not always focused on the field's specific concerns or advances.

To ensure appropriate targeting, impact and engagement, Global Careers Month intends to be held at regular intervals and to continue to rely on collaboration with its international and regional partners. It is expected that the third edition will build on these foundations, encouraging participants to apply key insights in practice and to look ahead with excitement and interest to the next opportunity for exchange and collaboration focused on the field of guidance and career development. Finally, this effort enables to connect career guidance more effectively with education, training and employment policies and initiatives while maintaining alignment of these efforts with the wider guidance ecosystem.

The **Inter-Agency Working Group on Career Guidance (TVET IAG - WGCG)**, established by UNESCO in 2021, currently comprises the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), the European Commission (EC), the European Training Foundation (ETF), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the World Bank (WB). The Working Group aims at exchange of plans and ideas, coordination of activities and messages (focused on career guidance) and developing and implementing joint activities and products – drawing from work in each Agency. It advocates for lifelong career guidance in light of global developments that open doors to new opportunities for individuals, but also pose common challenges to education, training and labour-market systems.

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Careers Month 2025

Global Careers Month (GCM) has enjoyed two editions since 2022, most lately organised in November 2025 under the steer of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Career Guidance (IAG WGCG), by Cedefop, the European Commission, the European Training Foundation (ETF), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

The month offered a coordinated series of initiatives and events focused on career guidance and career development, promoted by the international agencies together with international, regional and national associations, and events at national and local levels. The International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG) partnered with GCM, supportively coordinating regional and national efforts through its network of association and guidance practitioners worldwide.

This brief revisits GCM 2025 to provide insight into the discussions, exchanges and initiatives that took place during the month, summarises key messages, drawing on the impressions of regional partners ('focal points'). It is expected that future editions will build on these foundations, encouraging participants to apply key insights and to anticipate the next opportunity for structured exchange and collaboration, with excitement and interest.

Finally, this effort enables more effective integration of guidance as part of other education, training and employment policies and initiatives while maintaining a consistent link with the guidance ecosystem.

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