

Survey on starting career in M&E – synthesis of results

Introduction and methodology

The aim of this short survey was to provide useful information to anyone who is eager—as I am—to start a career in MEAL or M&E.

The participant pool consisted of members of four LinkedIn groups: The NGO World (466,691 members), Monitoring and Evaluation Professionals (89,171 members), Monitoring & Evaluation for Development (13,221 members), and Empleo y Voluntariado en ONG (26,194 members). The survey—which is available on my GitHub—was created using Google Forms and asked participants questions about demographics; education, training, and languages used on the job; experience and employment status; additional questions about consultancy work; where to find a job in MEAL or M&E (job development); challenges faced at the beginning of their careers; and, finally, key advice for aspiring M&E/MEAL officers. The data were collected from 01/02/2026 to 26/02/2026.

Additional notes:

When the percentages add up to more than 100%, the questions allowed for multiple answers, and all graphs were created using the embedded functions in Google Forms.

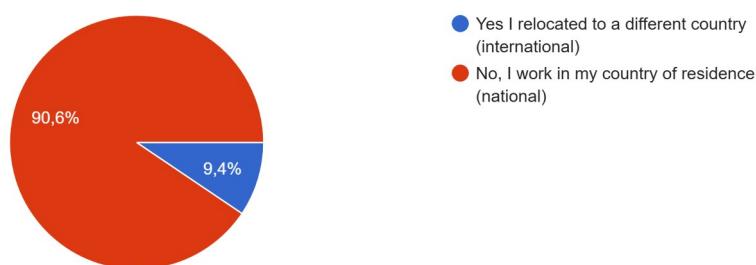
Results

Personal information

The participation was limited ($n= 53$) despite the high rate of people who has read the post – 12000+ impressions. Most of the participants are between the ages of 30–39 (47.2%), followed by 40–49 (22.6%) and 18–29 (17%). Most of them work in meridional Asia (India: 13.2%; Pakistan: 11.3%), Africa, and the Middle East (>20%). The absolute majority of them are nationals (90.6%).

Do you currently work in a country different from your country of residence?

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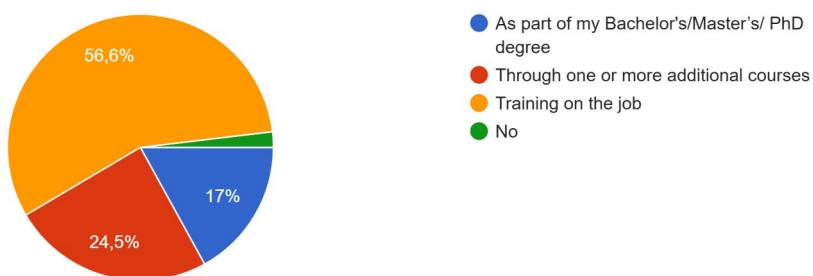


Education, Training, and Languages

Most of the participants have acquired a Master's (69.8%) or a Bachelor's (24.5%), mostly in the fields of Social Sciences (28.3%), Economic and Business Management (22.6%), and Environmental and Climate Studies (13.2%). They have also acquired specific training/courses in M&E or MEAL (56.6%), as part of their academic formation (24.5%), or on the job (17%). Many of the participants work in their mother tongue (35.8%), with English being the most commonly used language (94.3%), followed by French (11.3%) and Spanish (5.7%).

How did you get your first specific training in M&E / MEAL?

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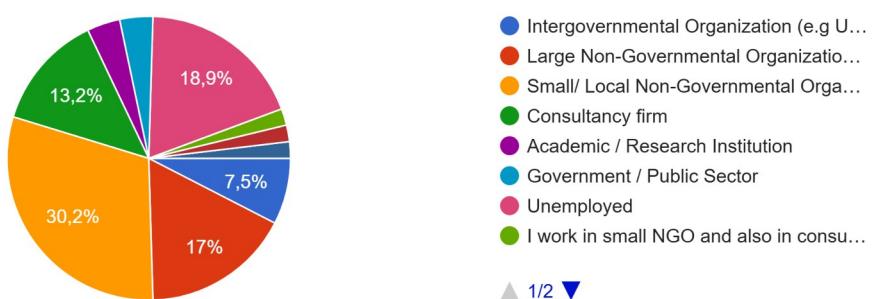
Experience and Job Status

Most of the respondents have 5+ years of experience (58.5%; 2–5 years: 22.6%; 0–2 years: 18.9%) and found their jobs through networking (32.1%), online job platforms (49.1%), and recruitment agencies (18.9%).

While 18.9% of them are unemployed, most work in small NGOs/local organizations (30.2%) or consultancy firms (13.2%). Other well-represented organizations are intergovernmental (7.5%) and large non-governmental organizations (17%).

Where do you currently work? (if not employed, please choose 'Unemployed')

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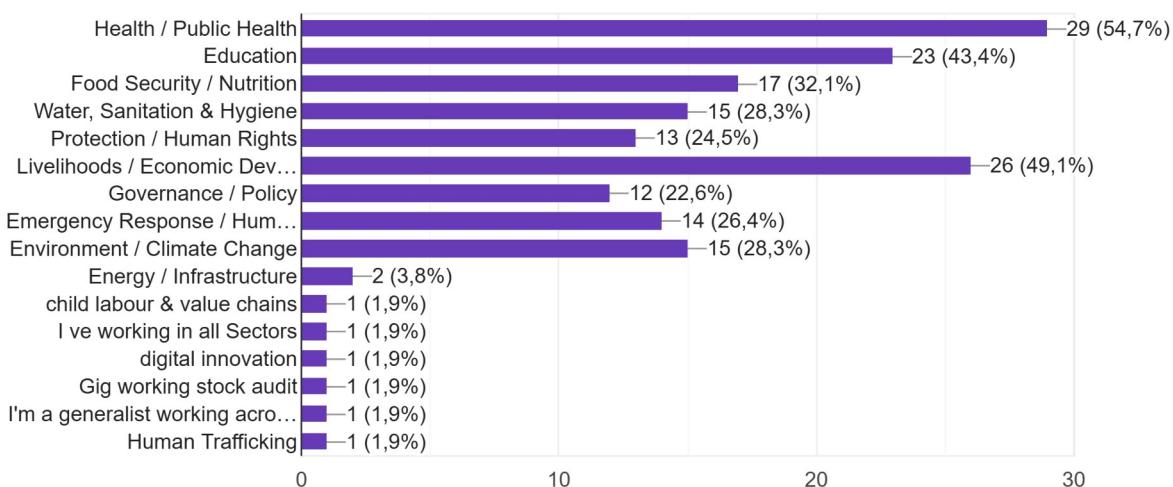


Note: items in the legends, pertaining to 'private sector' and 'Christian NGO', are not shown.

Job roles are spread mainly across mid-level officer/specialist (35.8%), senior manager/team lead (20.8%), junior officer/specialist (13.2%), and consultant (11.3%), while all considered sectors are well represented: health (54.7%), education (43.4%), food security/nutrition (32.1%), water, sanitation & hygiene (28.3%), protection/human rights (24.5%), livelihoods/economic development (49.1%), governance and policy (22.6%), emergency response/humanitarian assistance (26.4%), and environment/climate change (28.3%).

In which sector(s) do you apply your M&E/MEAL work? (if unemployed, please indicate the last sector(s) you worked in) Multiple selections possible

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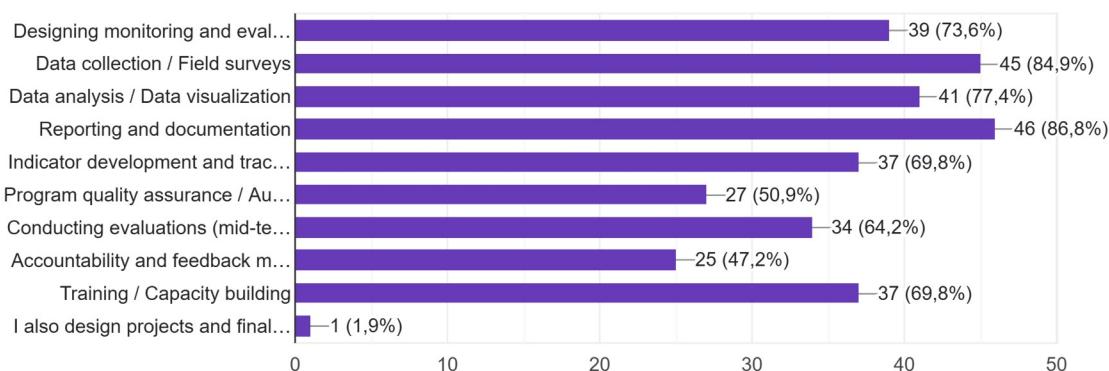


Almost all participants work in monitoring (94.3%) and evaluation (86.8%), while learning (69.8%) and accountability (49.1%) are less represented.

The activities mostly performed are data collection/field surveys (84.9%), reporting and documentation (86.8%), followed by data analysis and visualization (77.4%), frameworks design (73.6%), training and capacity building (69.8%), indicator development and tracking (69.8%), and conducting evaluations (64.2%).

Which M&E/MEAL activities do you perform most frequently (or did you perform more frequently, if unemployed)? Multiple selections possible

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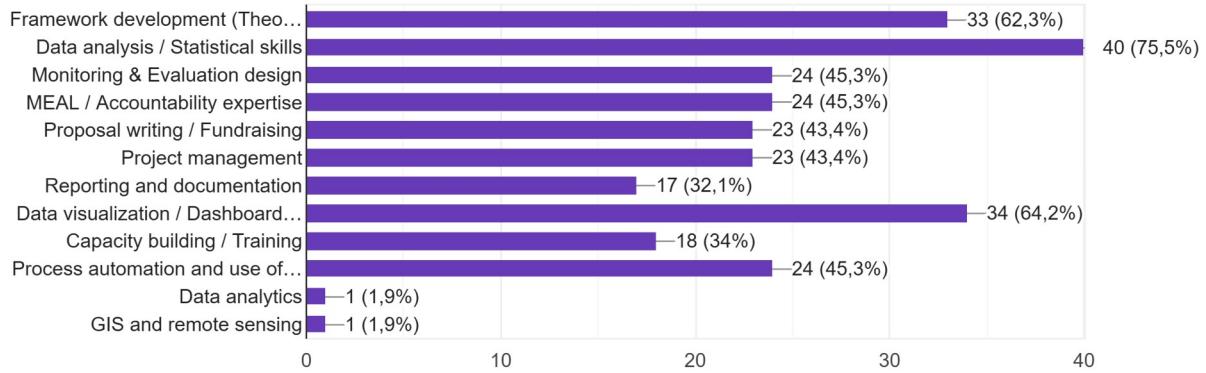


On the data side, quantitative and qualitative data analysis are evenly represented (17%), while the majority of respondents employ mixed methods (66%).

As for the most demanded skills in the future, the participants indicated framework development (62.3%), data and statistical skills (75.5%), and data visualization skills (64.2%).

In your opinion, which skills will be the most in demand in the future?

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Mostly, in their jobs participants employ a mix of standardized and custom tools (67.9%).

Consultancy

Among those who have worked as consultants (64.2%), most of them work sporadically (73.9%), with the majority having 2 to 6 months between contracts (50%); 0–2 months (22.7%) and 6–12 months (27.3%) are the other categories. Only 21.4% regard consultancy as their main activity.

Regarding employees, participants report that the most job opportunities in consultancy have been offered by international NGOs (70%), donor agencies (30%), contracts (30%), and the United Nations (20%).

Job Development

Online job platforms (75%), social networks (67.3%), employers' websites (51.9%), and recruitment agencies (40.4%) are considered the most effective ways to find a job in MEAL, followed mainly by word of mouth (34.6%) and volunteer experience (26.9%). Most of the participants attribute importance in finding a job to networking (67.9%) and being physically present in the country of intervention (very important: 32.1%; somewhat important: 50.9%).

Challenges Faced at the Beginning of the Career

Overall, the main obstacle was accessing the first job due to a lack of experience, combined with limited practical knowledge of MEAL systems and frameworks, insufficient training and mentoring, and poor understanding and support of the MEAL role within organizations.

Specifically, the following **topics** emerged:

1. Lack of Experience and Difficulty Entering the Sector

The most frequently cited challenge was obtaining the first job due to the requirement for prior experience. Many started as volunteers or faced difficulties finding opportunities, also due to funding cuts, preference for international experts, or few available vacancies.

2. Limited Technical and Theoretical Knowledge of MEAL

Many reported an initial insufficient understanding of key concepts (inputs, outputs, outcomes, impact), MEAL frameworks, logframes, indicators, KPIs, and monitoring systems. Several highlighted a gap between academic theory and practical application.

3. Lack of Training, Mentoring, and Guidance

The absence of initial training, structured support, or mentoring made it difficult to develop practical skills and understand the daily responsibilities of the role.

4. Technical Skills and Data Management

Some struggled with statistical software and data management systems (SPSS, STATA, MIS), data cleaning, statistical analysis, and understanding the information needs of projects.

5. Limited Understanding and Support for MEAL from Organizations and Colleagues

Often, MEAL was poorly understood or seen as a control tool rather than a support function. Some employers did not clearly understand MEAL requirements, lacked standardized systems, or faced resistance from program teams.

6. Operational and Systemic Challenges

These include poor data quality, inadequate systems, limited resources and funding, difficulties in stakeholder engagement, and a weak culture of evidence-based learning.

7. Transition from Other Sectors or Non-MEAL Backgrounds

Some found it difficult to enter the sector coming from other fields or without a specific academic background in M&E or statistics.

Key Advice for Aspiring M&E/MEAL Officers

The main recommendation given by participants to those who want to enter in the field of MEAL, is to combine theoretical and practical training, gain field experience, develop transferable skills, and seek mentorship and networking to understand both the data and the program context.

Summary of Practical Advice for Aspiring M&E/MEAL Officers:

1. Continuous Learning and Education:

- Take online courses, diplomas, PGDs, and certifications
- Read manuals, organizational guides, and books on MEAL
- Study statistics, data analysis, GIS, and software such as Excel, Power BI, Stata, R, or Python

2. Practical and Field-Based Learning:

- Do internships, trainee positions, or small practical assignments
- Work with real tools: logframes, indicator tracking, dashboards, questionnaires
- Learn to turn data into programmatic decisions

3. Understanding Programs and the Bigger Picture

- Learn the programmatic side of projects before focusing on MEAL
- Understand the results framework, indicators, and objectives vs. outputs
- Be aware of the operational context and processes driving projects

4. Mentorship, Networking, and Learning from Experts

- Find a mentor or work alongside senior evaluators
- Participate in networks, shadowing, and cross-sector collaborations
- Study experiences from organizations such as Save the Children and the International Rescue Committee

5. Developing Transferable Skills

- Project management, theory of change, reporting, and communication
- Systematic approach and attention to detail
- Curiosity, commitment, perseverance, a strong work ethic, and passion for data

Limitations and Concluding remarks

The participation rate of the survey was very limited, making the results non-generalizable. Some redundancies are present in both the questions and the answers, and some items could have been formulated more clearly to avoid conceptual overlap between questions and/or response options within the same question.

Despite these limitations, the results provide useful insights into starting and developing a career in MEAL. Most respondents started from a degree in Social Sciences, Economic and Business Management or Environmental and Climate Studies; jobs are mainly found through online platforms, recruiters, and direct contact with organizations, and networking is considered important both for obtaining a first job and for subsequent career opportunities. It comes as apparent that it is easier to work in small NGOs and local organizations, and networking overall is considered as an important mean for one's career.

Another important aspect concerns the relevance of technical training such as in data analysis, statistics, and data visualization.

The challenges faced by respondents at the beginning of their careers, as well as the key advice provided, highlight the need to develop both technical and transferable skills. There is a clear need to strengthen the technical dimension of the role—both in terms of data analysis and data quality management—and to foster an organizational culture attentive to evidence. This should be combined with a solid understanding of the practical application of theoretical frameworks and of the broader project processes within which MEAL functions operate. Continuous learning and professional development are essential, with an emphasis on self-learning due to the limited opportunities for mentoring and learning from experienced professionals reported in the responses, which are both regarded as important pathways of professional development, when available.