

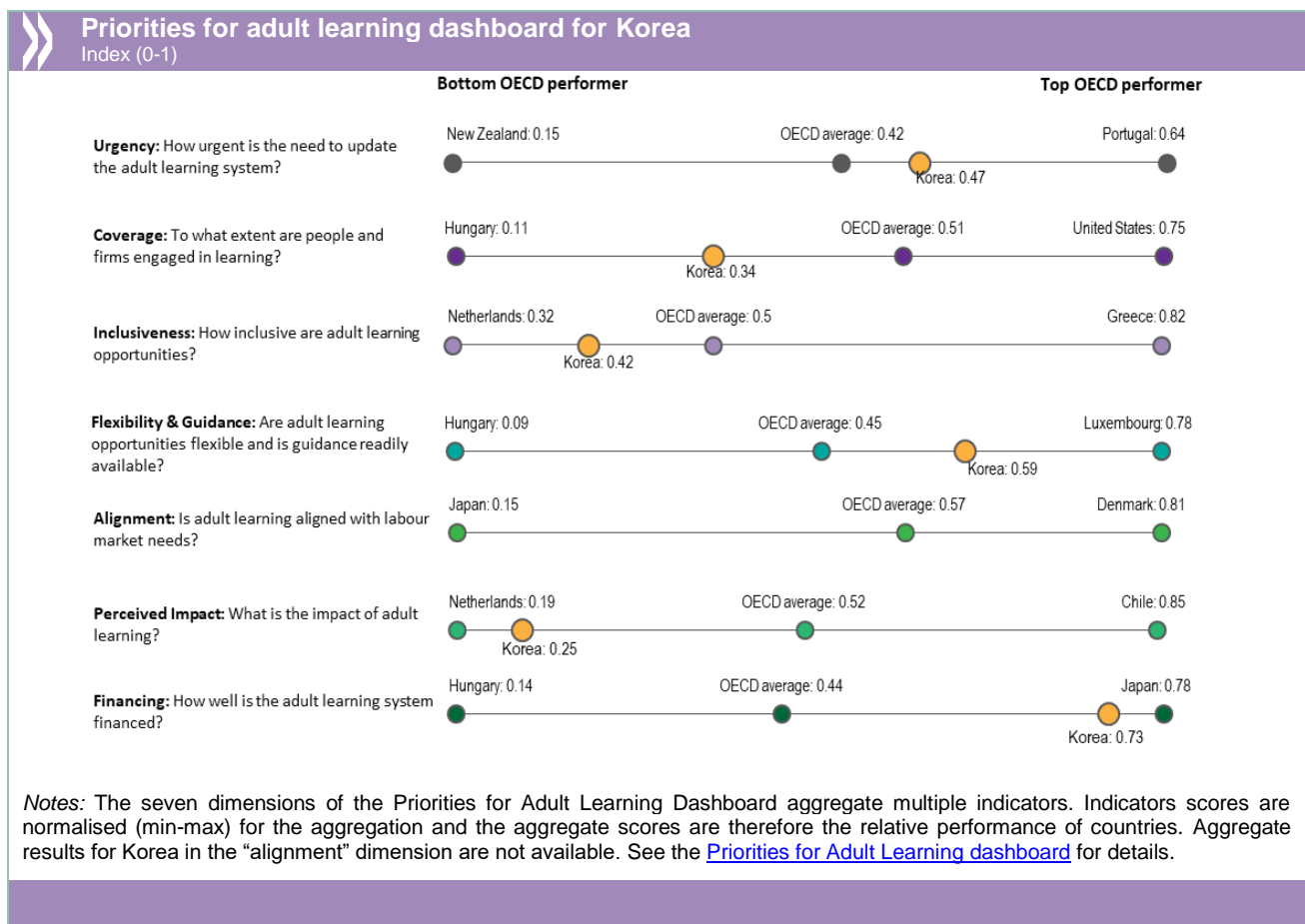


How future-ready is the Korean adult learning system?

The world of work is changing. Digitalisation, globalisation and population ageing are having a profound impact on the type and quality of jobs that are available and the skills needed to perform them. The extent to which individuals, firms and economies can reap the benefits of these changes will depend critically on the readiness of adult learning systems to help people develop and maintain relevant skills over their working careers. To explore this issue, the OECD has developed a new [dashboard on Priorities for Adult Learning \(PAL\)](#) for comparing the readiness of each country's adult learning system to address future skill challenges.

OECD Priorities for Adult Learning dashboard

The PAL dashboard compares the future-readiness of countries' adult learning systems in seven dimensions: i) urgency, ii) coverage, iii) inclusiveness, iv) flexibility and guidance, v) alignment with skill needs, vi) perceived training impact, and vii) financing. The dashboard focuses on adult learning that is job-related, i.e. adult education and training that is expected to have some effect on performance and productivity at work.



Korean PAL results

Action on the adult learning front is needed urgently in Korea, more so than in many other OECD countries. The old-age dependency ratio is expected to increase from 18% in 2015 to 66% in 2050, one of the largest increases in the OECD, suggesting that a

growing share of adults will need reskilling at all ages to cope with longer working lives. New technologies are changing skills needs in the labour market, with 43% of workers facing a significant risk of automation, i.e. they are either very likely to see their job disappear altogether or to experience significant

changes in the way it is performed. Older Koreans are in a particularly vulnerable position to cope with structural change. Korea has the largest difference in basic skills proficiency between 16-24-year olds and 55-65-year olds in the OECD area. Less than 10% of older adults have the digital problem-solving skills needed in today's labour market compared with almost 65% of youth.

Korea needs to improve the coverage and inclusiveness of its adult learning system. According to the OECD's Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), 38% of adults participated in job-related learning (OECD average 41%) during the previous 12 months. This share drops to 20% for older people (>54) and 15% for low-skilled adults.

Further efforts are also needed to improve the impact and quality of Korea's adult learning system. According to the PIAAC survey, only 31% of training participants found their training very useful for their job, the lowest level in the OECD after Japan.

Despite these weaknesses, the Korean adult learning systems has several strengths. First, Korea is a good performer in the area of flexible learning provision and guidance. For example, a large share of training participants (39%) reported in the PIAAC survey that one of their trainings was organised as distance learning (OECD average 19%). This could be leveraged to increase participation, particularly among groups that face significant barriers to participation in terms of time and location.

Second, financing constraints do not appear to weigh heavily on the provision of training by firms or participation by adults. Only 11% of adults in the PIAAC survey who wanted to participate in (more) training, did not because training was too expensive.

Future-ready adult learning policies

Korea has already put in place several policy initiatives to ensure that adults have (equal) access to high-quality training opportunities that are aligned with labour market needs. These include:

- *Coverage and inclusiveness*: the HRD Ability Magnified Programme (CHAMP) facilitates collaboration between SMEs and large companies in providing training.
- *Flexibility and Guidance*: the Korean HRD-Net website provides a wealth of information on training programmes, including on the duration of the course, the costs, the employment rate and average wages of graduates, and satisfaction.
- *Alignment*: The training account system for job-seekers in Korea partially subsidises training costs. The size of the subsidy increases when training is related to areas with strong skill demand.
- *Financing*: some unemployed and non-regular workers who attend vocational training for at least three weeks can receive a loan at a low interest rate of 1%. Employers purchasing training equipment or establishing training facilities can obtain a government loan for up to 90% of costs, to be repaid within ten years.
- *Governance*: Korea has embedded in legislation (Framework Act on Employment Policy) provisions to ensure that adult learning programmes do not overlap and are complementary.

The OECD report [Getting Skills Right: Future-ready adult learning systems](#) provides a wide range of good practice policy examples from OECD and selected non-OECD countries that could serve as inspiration for Korea to improve further the future-readiness of its adult learning system.

What can policy makers do?

- ▶ *Improve the coverage and inclusiveness of adult learning* by helping disadvantaged adults – such as older people and the low-skilled – overcome barriers to training, and encouraging employers, especially SMEs, to offer training to workers.
- ▶ *Assist the transition of adults employed in jobs undergoing structural changes*, by providing targeted support measures and training initiatives;
- ▶ *Align the training content more strongly with the skill needs* of the labour market, for example by collecting and making better use of skill assessment and anticipation information.
- ▶ *Improve the quality and impact of training provision* by encouraging the use of work organisation practices which raise returns to training in line with productivity.

Further reading in the “Getting Skills Right” series:

[Future-ready adult learning systems](#)
[Engaging low-skilled adults in learning](#)
[Creating responsive adult learning systems](#)
[Making adult learning work in social partnership](#)

Data

Explore the [Priorities for Adult Learning dashboard](#)

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