



February 2019

www.oecd.org/employment/skills-and-work/adult-learning

Key facts about job-related training across the OECD



Skill needs are changing constantly in response to digitalisation, globalisation and population ageing. And yet **only around 40% of adults participate in training in a given year.**



Those most in need of training to find or keep a job are least likely to train. Only around 20% of low-skilled adults participate in training, compared with over 40% of medium/high-skilled adults.



Only 40% of workers in jobs with a significant risk of automation participate in training compared with 59% of workers in jobs with a low risk.



The training adults receive is not always perceived as being useful. Only around **half of those who participated in training find their training very useful for their job.**



Almost 50% of adults **neither train nor want to train.** A further 11% would like to participate, but do not because of a lack of time, money or employer support.



Not all training is for learning new skills. **Compulsory training, such as on health and safety, today absorbs 21% of training hours on average across OECD countries.**

Adult learning systems are under pressure

Digitalisation, globalisation and population ageing are having a profound impact on the type and quality of jobs that are available, as well as on the kinds of skills needed to perform them. The extent to which individuals, firms and economies can benefit from these changes critically depends on how ready adult learning systems are to help people develop relevant skills for the changing world of work.

Automation is expected to affect increasingly complex tasks in the near future. Recent OECD research suggests that, should current machine learning technology become widespread, 32% of jobs across the 32 countries analysed are likely to see significant changes in how they are carried out and a further 14% of jobs could disappear altogether (Nedelkoska and Quintini, 2018^[5]).

Deepening globalisation also has a profound impact on skill needs in the labour markets. Evidence from advanced economies suggests that increasing participation in global value chains raises the demand for high-level skills needed to specialise in high-tech manufacturing industries and in complex business services. Global value chains can also lead to jobs being offshored, especially at the low-end of the skills spectrum (OECD, 2017^[6]).

Simultaneously, population ageing is putting pressures on adult learning systems. In some

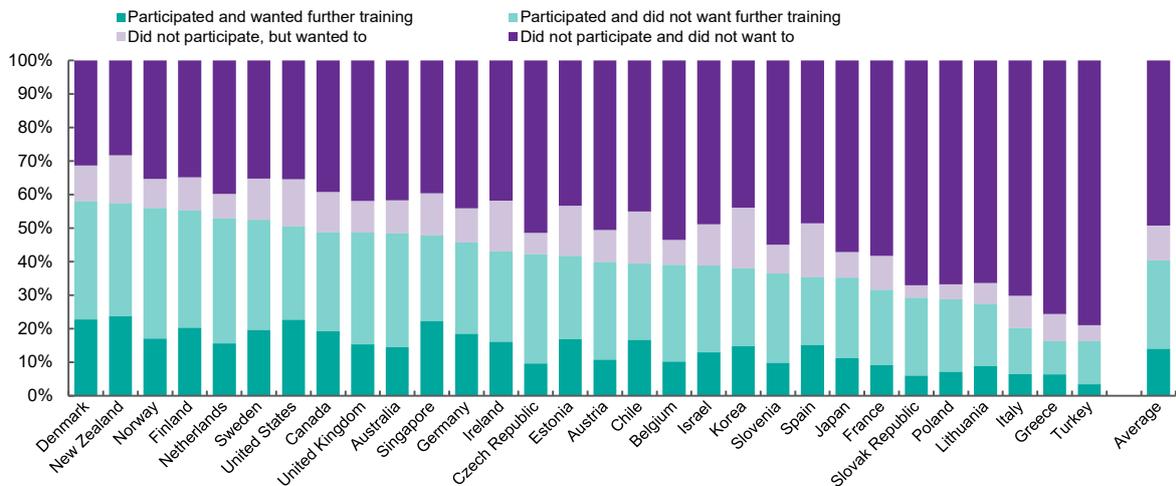
countries (i.e. Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, Portugal) there are already more than three older persons (65+) for every ten working-age adults (15-64). This share will increase in the coming decades in all OECD countries. This could lead to shortages of labour, as large cohorts of workers retire, and will affect skill needs through changes in consumer demand for goods and services. As people live longer and work longer, they will require better training opportunities throughout their careers.

Beyond these mega-trends, low current basic skill levels among adults are another key challenge that needs to be addressed by adult learning systems. On average across the OECD, 26% of adults are only able to complete very basic reading and/or mathematical tasks. An even higher share (37%) have no or very limited digital problem solving skills.

The [Priorities for Adult Learning \(PAL\) dashboard](#), and the report [Getting Skills Right: Future-Ready Adult Learning Systems](#) assess how ready adult learning systems are to address these challenges. The future-readiness of countries adult learning systems is assessed 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. It focuses on adult learning that is job-related, i.e. that is expected to have an effect on productivity at work.



Chart 1. Participation and willingness to train differs substantially across countries
% of adults, OECD countries



Notes. (i) The average refers to the unweighted average of OECD countries participating in PIAAC. (ii) Training refers to formal and non-formal job-related education and training. (iii) The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

Source: Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) 2012, 2015.

The Priorities for Adult Learning dashboard shows that all countries have room to improve the future-readiness of their adult learning systems, but for some countries these challenges are bigger and more pressing than for others.

Many adults do not train

To cope with the increased skill demands of a knowledge-based economy, access to good training opportunities will become more important

Yet, there is significant room for improving the coverage of adult learning systems. According to data from the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), only 41% of adults in the OECD participated in training in a given year. There are many factors limiting participation. Around half of all adults in the OECD neither participated nor wanted to participate in adult learning (Chart 1) because they were not offered valuable training options, they lacked motivation or were discouraged by the barriers they face. A further 11% wanted to participate, but did not because of a variety of obstacles. Barriers to participation include lack of time due to work (29%) or family reasons (16%), lack of financial resources (16%), inconvenient time or location of the learning opportunity (12%), and lack of employer's support (7%).

Disadvantaged adults tend to train even less

What is more, disadvantaged adults, who arguably are those in most need of training, are least likely to participate. Adults with low skills, for example, are 23 percentage points less likely to train than those with

medium/higher skills. Other groups that are typically falling behind in adult learning include older people, low-wage workers, workers in SMEs, temporary workers, and the unemployed (Chart 2).

Training quality matters...

For training to have a positive impact on skills development, it needs to be of good quality. Today, too many adults are not fully satisfied with the training they undertake. According to PIAAC data, only half of participants across the OECD found their training very useful for their job, with levels being as low as 24% in Japan and 31% in Korea. More needs to be done to help adults access training that will help them achieve better employment outcomes. To ensure high quality training, it is crucial to identify what adult learning programmes work, for whom and why. Unfortunately, quality frameworks and quality assurances processes for adult learning are underdeveloped in many countries. Monitoring and evaluations of adult learning programmes are also scant.

...and so does alignment with labour market needs

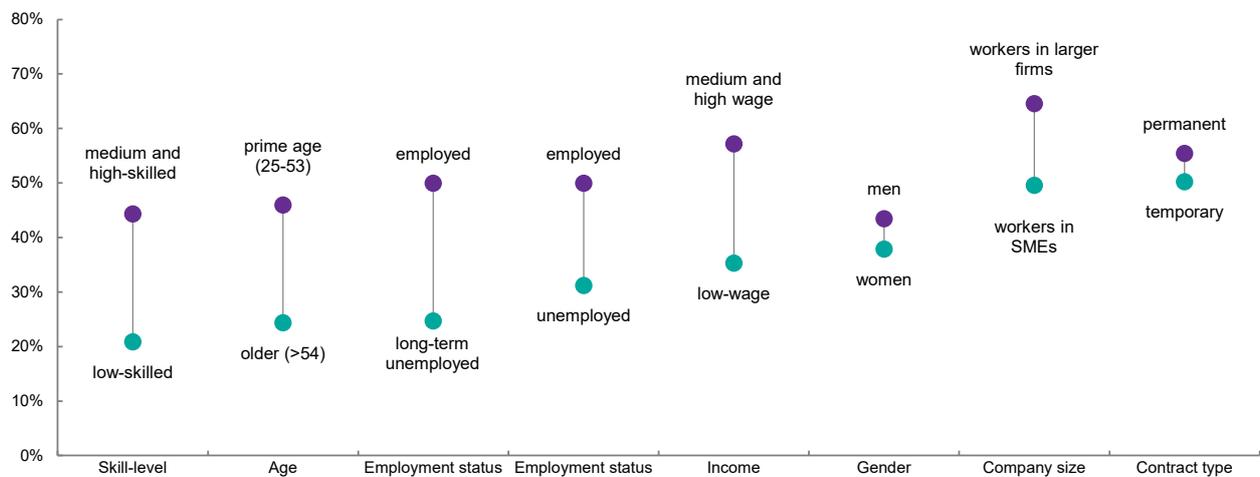
To effectively support the career progression of individuals, adult learning also needs to lead to skills that are aligned with labour market needs.

Firms are one of the key providers of adult learning opportunities, and as such they need to become better at delivering the training they need to grow their business. The assessment of skill needs is an



Chart 2. Disadvantaged adults receive little training in most countries

% of adults participation in training, OECD countries



Notes: Average of OECD countries participating in PIAAC.

Source: Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) 2012, 2015.

important first step to achieve this objective. Although on average across European OECD countries in 2015, 69% of firms (with more than ten employees) assessed their future skill needs, very few employers used this assessment to guide their training choices. Indeed, there is often weak alignment between firms' identified skill needs and the training activities actually offered (OECD, 2019).

Another key challenge is that much training today is concentrated on compulsory training, such as health and safety. According to data from the Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS), compulsory training absorbed 21% of training hours on average across European OECD countries, reaching over 30% in the Czech Republic and Italy. While this training is necessary, it should not substitute for adult learning opportunities that allow adults to develop skills that help them progress in their careers.

In order for adult learning systems to be aligned with skill needs, training also needs to reach workers at most risk of job loss or displacement. More can be done in this area. Only 40% of workers with jobs at significant risk of automation participated in training, compared to 59% of workers with jobs at low risk of automation. The same is true for workers in occupations that are in surplus in the labour market. This is worrying, because it is exactly these groups that need training the most to prepare for the future of work.

Adult learning policies

The report [Getting Skills Right: Future-Ready Adult Learning Systems](#) sets out a comprehensive policy agenda to strengthen the future readiness of each country's adult learning systems. It suggests that:

- 1) The coverage and inclusiveness of adult learning must be improved by helping adults make informed choices, tackling barriers to participation and encouraging employers to offer training;
- 2) Training content should align more strongly with the skill needs of the labour market by collecting and making use of skill assessment and anticipation information;
- 3) The quality and impact of training provision must be enhanced by assessing the quality of providers, making quality information publicly accessible and encouraging the use of work organisation practices which raise returns to training;
- 4) Adequate and sustainable financing should be put in place, including through public funding and incentives for employers and individuals to contribute; and
- 5) Governance mechanisms must be strengthened to improve vertical and horizontal coordination between different actors involved in the adult learning system (see Box for further information).

What can policy makers do?

Improving the coverage and inclusiveness of adult learning

- ▶ *Enable adults to make informed choices about education and training* through: information campaigns that promote the benefits of adult learning; career guidance, face-to-face or online, to help adults identify potential new jobs, assess their skill gaps and inform them on the training available to make the transitions.
- ▶ *Address barriers to participation* through: online and modular training courses to address time and distance barriers; training leave to take time off from work; financial incentives to make training more affordable; recognition of prior learning to reduce entry barrier for the low-skilled.
- ▶ *Encourage employers' engagement in adult education and training* through: better information about the benefits of training; building HR capacity to offer training; financial incentives.

Aligning the training content more strongly with the skill needs of the labour market

- ▶ *Collect and use information on current and future skill needs* to design adult learning policy more strategically based on good-quality evidence.
- ▶ *Steer individuals and providers' training choices* towards skills in demand by: providing labour market information and guidance; setting incentives for providers to develop courses in line with labour market needs.
- ▶ *Design targeted programmes* for adults whose skills are likely to become obsolete in the future, such as those working in car manufacturing, the transport sector or financial services.

Improving the quality and impact of training provision

- ▶ *Collect information about the effectiveness of training providers and programmes.*
- ▶ *Build the capacity of providers* to implement quality assurance systems.
- ▶ *Share information on quality and effectiveness of programmes and providers*, including through certification and quality labels.

Putting in place adequate and sustainable financing

- ▶ *Ensure adequate public financing of adult learning systems* in line with the social benefits that are generated.
- ▶ *Incentivise employers* to contribute to the financing of adult learning, through subsidies, tax incentives, loans, job rotation schemes and some forms of training levies.
- ▶ *Compensate adults* who face barriers to training for direct course costs and indirect costs of learning, such as foregone wages, transport and child care costs through subsidies, tax incentives, individual learning accounts, paid training leave, and loans.

Strengthening governance mechanisms

- ▶ *Strengthen coordination in the adult learning system*, including between ministries, different levels of government, and with social partners and other relevant stakeholders.

Further information

This policy brief is based on OECD (2019), [Getting Skills Right: Future-Ready Adult Learning Systems](#), OECD Publishing, Paris, and the [Priorities for Adult Learning \(PAL\) Dashboard](#).

References

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This work was prepared with the support of the JPMorgan Chase Foundation

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