

Education and Skills

RAISING COGNITIVE AND WORKPLACE SKILLS OF ADULTS

- ▶ Raising cognitive and workplace skills of adults in Mexico is a multidimensional challenge which requires improving education at early stages of life, increasing the demand for higher skills in the labour market, and upskilling the adult population.
- ▶ Despite steady improvement in educational attainment, more than 60% of the population aged 25 to 64 years old in Mexico had an educational attainment below upper secondary, the highest proportion among OECD countries (the OECD average is 21.1%).
- ▶ Women in Mexico are more likely not to be in education, employment or training (NEET) and be left out of the labour market, limiting their development and use of skills. 33% of women 15 to 29 years old are NEET, four times the rate of men of the same age.
- ▶ 46% of Mexican adults are low performers in both numeracy and literacy, compared to an OECD average of 16%.
- ▶ Adult participation rate in job-related, formal and non-formal education and training in Mexico is 23%, compared to an OECD average of 40%. The participation rate of women is ten percentage points lower than men.
- ▶ 75% of Mexican adults indicate that they are not willing to participate (more) in education, against an OECD average of 45%.

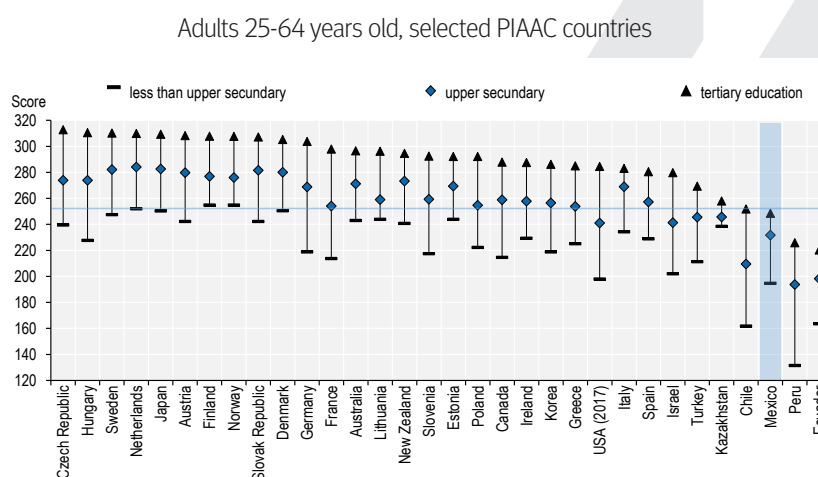
What's the issue?

Raising cognitive and workplace skills of adults in Mexico is a multidimensional challenge. On one hand, Mexico needs to ensure that youth today develop the skills required for the workforce of tomorrow. On the other hand, while developing skills of youth are a longer-term effort, more can be done to incentivise the development of skills in the workplace of the current workforce.

Access and participation in initial education remains unequal. Improving access to high-quality early childhood

education and care (ECEC) is still an important challenge, and despite recent increases in enrolment rates and education attainment of Mexicans, upper-secondary drop-out rates remain high. As a consequence, Mexico has one of the lowest shares of tertiary-educated population across OECD countries. Also, and despite some recent improvements, the share of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) is one of the highest among OECD countries, and Mexican women are four times more likely to be NEET than men.

Mean numeracy scores of employed adults, by educational attainment, are low



Source: OECD calculations based on OECD (2019), Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC 2012, 2015, 2018), www.oecd.org/skills/piaac

Education and training quality remain an important challenge. Mexico's performance on most indicators of skills development is lower than in most OECD countries. Results from the OECD Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA), show that the performance of 15-year-old students in reading, mathematics and science is among the lowest of OECD and partner countries participating in PISA. Results from the OECD Survey of Adult Skills 2019 (PIAAC), in which Mexico participated for the first time, show that 50.6% of adults 25 to 64 years old have low proficiency in literacy (the OECD average stands at 19.7%) and 60.1% have low performance in numeracy (against an OECD average of 23.5%). In addition, for the average Mexican, the use of numeracy in everyday life or at work is also less frequent than the OECD average, though still higher than in Ecuador, Kazakhstan or Peru.

Adult education can play an important role in equipping Mexicans with relevant skills for the labour market. However, adult participation in formal and non-formal, job-related education and training in Mexico is estimated at 23%, one of the smallest proportions among OECD countries (the OECD average is 40%). This participation is ten percentage points smaller for women than men, one of the biggest gender gaps among OECD countries. 75% of Mexican adults responded either that they did not participate and did not want to participate, or that they did not want to participate more in formal and/or non-formal education. While this can at least partially reflect low returns to training or low demand for more complex skills in the Mexican economy, the difference with the OECD average (at 45%) is high.

Why is this important for Mexico?

Mexico has an open economy and a strong macroeconomic framework, however, it also has low levels of growth, low levels of productivity and high levels of inequality and informality. One important factor behind these disadvantages is the low levels of skills of its people. Skills are vital in enabling individuals and countries to thrive in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world. People with strong skills that use them fully and effectively at work and in society are more productive and innovative, can enjoy higher civic and political engagement, better health outcomes and a higher quality of life.

In addition to ongoing efforts to improve access to and quality of initial education, Mexico should take concrete actions to foster greater participation in adult learning. Mexico can help adults to overcome shortcomings in their skills sets and better respond to changing labour market needs.

What should policy makers do?

- ▶ Ensure that youth today develop the skills needed for the workforce and society of tomorrow. This policy effort requires commitment and action in improving the education system over the longer term.
- ▶ Improve skills is a multi-sectoral policy effort that includes policies on education, economic development, labour and product market reform, and technological change and innovation.
- ▶ Give priority to improving quality of compulsory education.
- ▶ Focus education spending on pre-primary, primary and secondary education to increase the capacity and quality of schools in deprived areas.
- ▶ Provide targeted support for children from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, linked to continued participation in education.
- ▶ Increase the quality of and access to early childhood education and care, particularly for low-covered regions and children from disadvantaged backgrounds, which would be a cost-effective way to boost educational outcomes.
- ▶ Improve teacher professional development opportunities.
- ▶ Incentivise adult skills development by making participation in formal and non-formal education accessible and flexible, paying particular attention to improving access for women. This can be achieved by putting the needs of adults and employers at the centre of education and training design, tailoring programmes to learners' specific needs and contexts, addressing gaps in adults' foundational skills, harnessing technology to make learning more accessible and tailored, and responding to specific skills needs in the economy and society.
- ▶ Improve participation and collaboration of all stakeholders (most importantly employers) to build skills policies that are relevant now and in the future, and that increase the demand for higher skills.
- ▶ Improve incentives for the provision of, and participation in, formal and non-formal education and training of adults. This could include financial incentives, such as tax refunds, social security rebates, or subsidies for employers and individuals involved in training, and boost programmes connecting education and the labour market.



Further reading

OECD (2019), OECD Skills Strategy 2019: Skills to Shape a Better Future, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264313835-en>.

OECD (2019), Skills Matter: Additional Results from the Survey of Adult Skills, OECD Skills Studies, OECD, Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1f029d8f-en>.

OECD (2017), OECD Skills Strategy Diagnostic Report: Mexico 2017, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264287679-en>.

OECD (2017), OECD Skills Strategy Policy Note: Mexico 2017.

OECD (2019), OECD Economic Surveys: Mexico 2019, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/a536d00e-en>