



European
Commission

EC-OECD Forum



Making adult learning work for the future

EUROPEAN VOCATIONAL SKILLS WEEK



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Employment
Social Affairs
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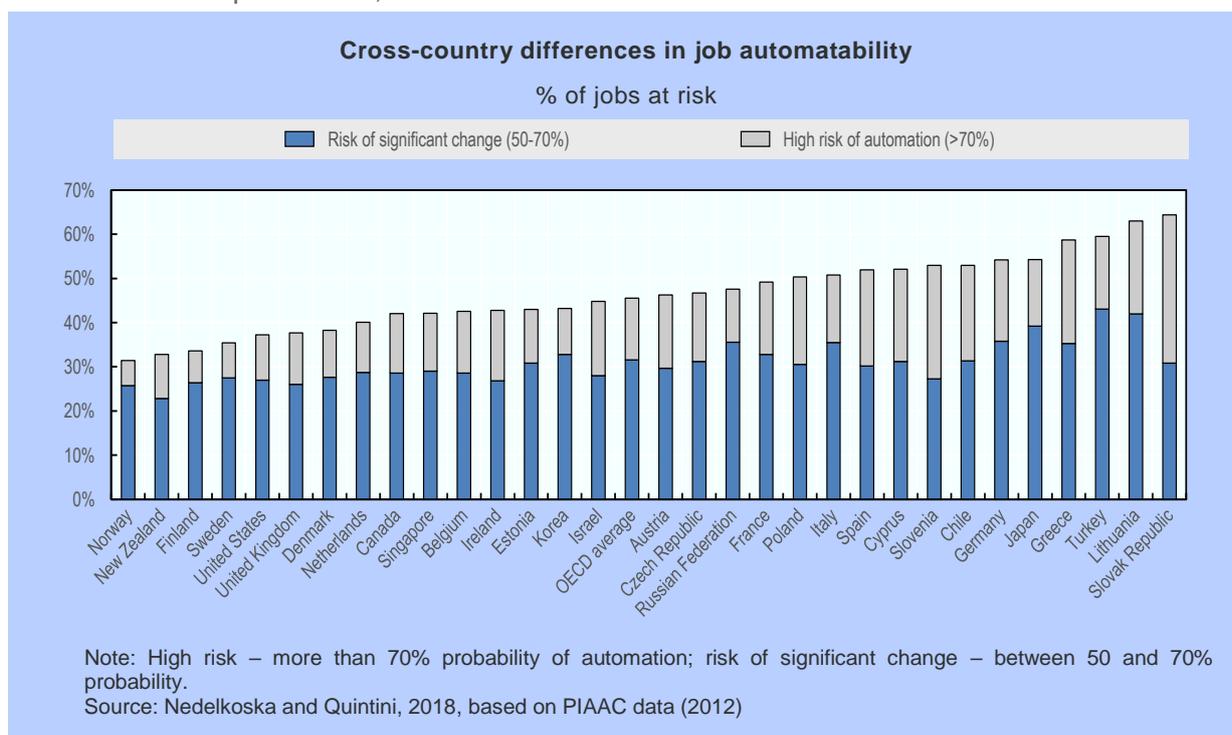
Megatrends are changing the world of work

The world of work is changing. New technologies, deepening globalisation and population ageing are affecting the type of jobs that are available and the skills required to do them. OECD estimates suggest that 46% of workers are at risk of either losing their job or seeing it change significantly because of automation over the next two decades (Nedelkoska and Quintini, 2018). Workers in advanced economies are likely to need more complex skillsets for jobs that focus on combinations of tasks that cannot easily be offshored or automated. They will also retire later than they used to.

Simultaneously, new organisational business models and worker preferences have led to new forms of work, such as platform and casual work (Eurofound, 2018). These new forms of work deviate from traditional permanent, full-time and

dependent employment, which has stimulated a lively debate about access to training programmes, social protection and collective bargaining for workers in these situations.

The extent to which individuals, firms and economies can harness the benefits of these profound changes critically depends on the readiness of skill development systems to help people develop and maintain relevant skills for this new world of work. Up-skilling and re-skilling enable workers to keep abreast of the skill demands in the labour market, to increase their employability and to stay socially included (EC, forthcoming). At the same time, a skilled workforce makes it easier for firms to develop and introduce new technologies and work organisation practices, thereby boosting productivity and growth in the economy as a whole.



Many adult learning systems are not future ready

With the majority of people affected by these changes already in the workforce, adult learning systems should play a key role in up-skilling and re-skilling. Herein also lies the challenge: today as in the past, adult learning is the weak link in the lifelong learning agenda (OECD, 2005). In many countries, adult learning systems continue to lack focused attention and resources, compromising their ability to address future skill challenges.

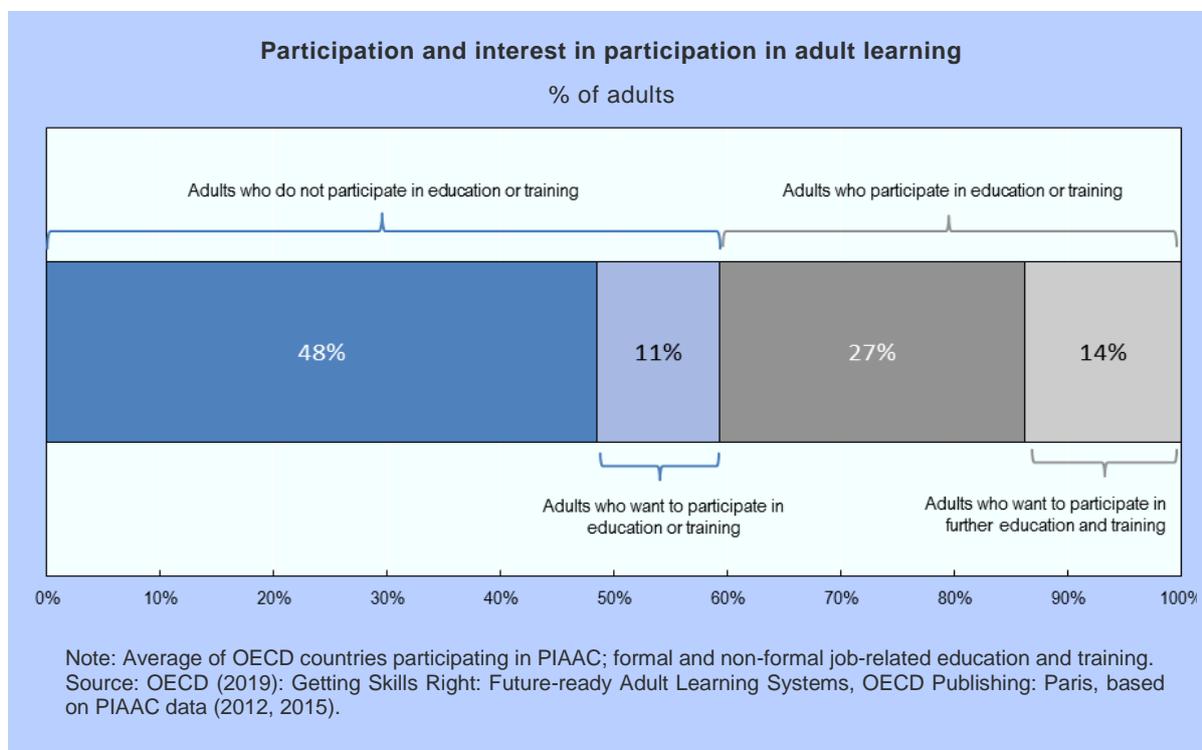
Participation in adult learning is limited

Forthcoming OECD research (OECD, 2019) shows that 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 surveyed countries participate in formal or non-formal job-related training in a given year. A further 11% would like to participate in training but do not for different reasons.

Policy efforts must focus on those individuals who want to take up adult learning opportunities, but currently face a variety of obstacles to do so.

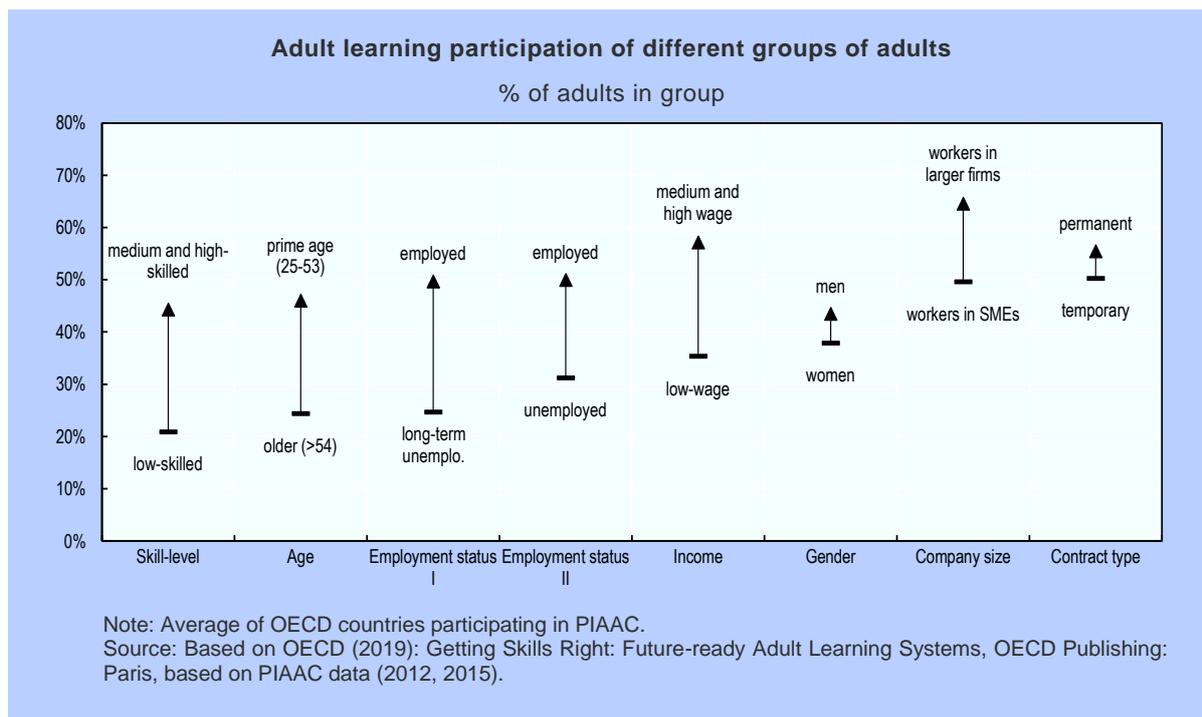
Equally important, around half of all adults (48%) neither participate nor want to participate in adult learning and it will be crucial to find effective ways to motivate this part of the population.



Inclusiveness can be improved

What is more, the individuals likely to be the most affected by the changes in the world of work are under-represented in training. Large participation gaps exist between adults who are long-term unemployed and those in employment

(25 percentage points), adults with low skills and their more skilled peers (23.4 percentage points) and between those earning low wages compared to those on medium-high wages (21.8 percentage points).



Better alignment with skill needs is needed

The content of job-related adult learning also needs to align better with the changing skill needs of the labour market. Data to illustrate this point is limited, but some evidence of a lack of alignment exists.

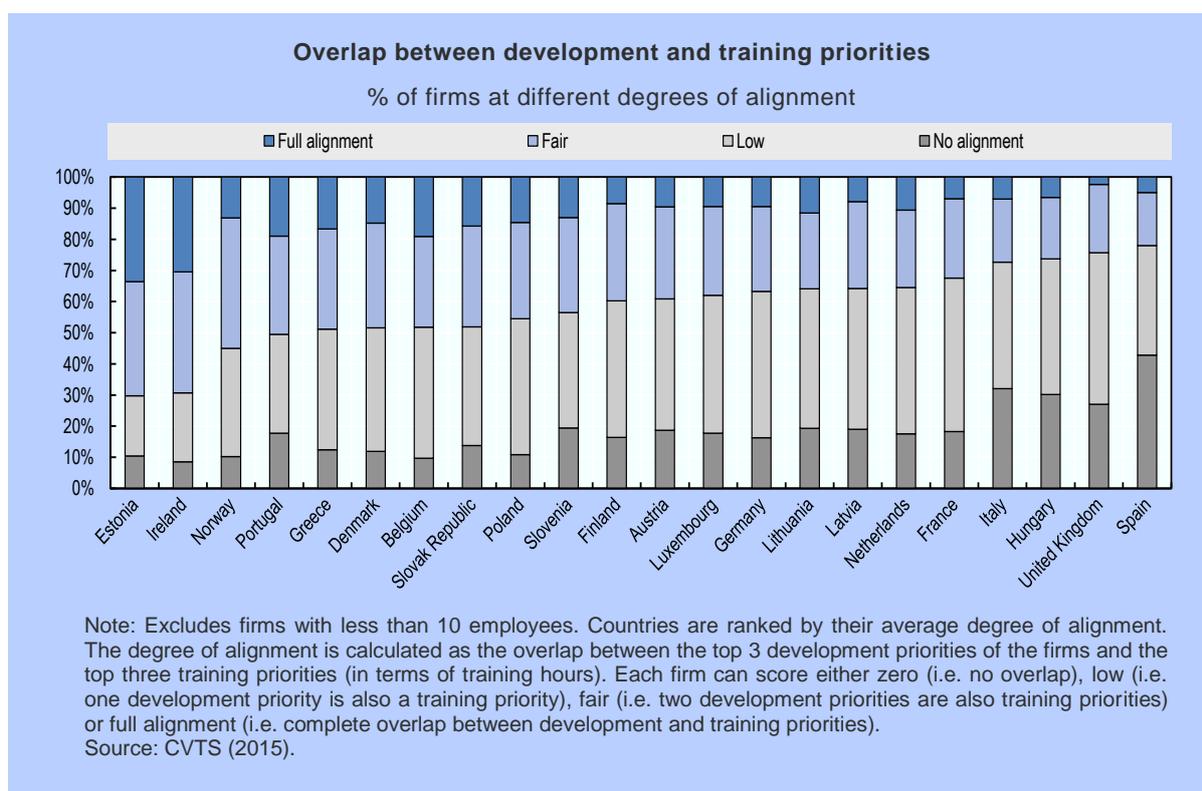
For example, new OECD analysis shows that workers with significant risk of job automation participate less frequently in adult learning than other workers (OECD, 2019). The same is true for workers in occupations, which are in surplus in the labour market. This is worrying, because it is exactly these

groups that most need training to prepare for the future of work.

Data from the European Adult Education Survey (AES) indicates that only two in three adults who participate in job-related adult learning think that it helped them achieve positive employment outcomes, including to i.) get a (new) job, ii) increase their salary, iii) get a promotion, iv.) get new tasks or v.) better perform in their present job. More has to be done to help participants achieve the employment outcomes they aspire to when taking part in adult learning.

Firms, as key providers of adult learning opportunities, need to become better at delivering the training they need to grow their business. Notably, data from the Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS) shows that when comparing the top three skills that enterprises report as important for the development of the firm to the three most important skills targeted in

training activities, these only fully align in 13% of all cases. A further 30% of firms have a fair amount of alignment between skill needs and offered training. This means that in more than 50% of firms the training provided does provide the skills the company needs for its development only to a limited extent.



What way forward?

All countries can and must do more to improve the future-readiness of their adult learning systems. While the priorities for policy action will differ across countries, five key considerations are relevant in most contexts:

Making adult learning work for everyone

There is a need for increasing general participation in adult learning, while making it more inclusive. Support needs to

be tailored to the different groups currently excluded (EC, 2015). Policy-levers to induce change in this area include improved information and guidance on adult learning; flexible learning provision; targeted financial incentives; and the recognition of prior learning.

Taking skill needs into account

To improve the alignment of adult learning with the skills needed in the labour market it is essential that high-quality information

on skill needs is available and that it feeds into adult learning policies. Key policy-levers include designing incentives that steer training choices towards skills in demand (OECD, 2017); and targeted programmes for adults whose skills are likely to become obsolete.

Making quality a priority

Quality lies at the heart of every effective adult learning provision. Key policy-levers to make improvements to quality include the introduction of quality criteria and standards, as well as close monitoring and evaluation of adult learning provision.

Securing adequate financing

Adult learning receives less funding than other education areas and many countries report declining investment due to tight government budgets. While there is no benchmark for a sufficient level of resources, it is certain that a healthy mix of financing includes contributions from governments, employers and individuals. Policy-levers include financial incentives for individuals and employers to encourage greater investment in training.

Putting in place governance that works

Adult learning systems are not cohesive but are made up of fragmented sub-systems (Desjardins, 2017). These involve several policy areas and levels of

government, and a diverse set of stakeholders from employers to unions to training providers. Future-ready adult learning systems require raising the readiness of all components of the system, and improving the coordination and collaboration between them.

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What are the key challenges for adult learning systems in your country? How do megatrends exacerbate these issues? Which megatrends are most relevant to your context?
- If incremental change is not enough to address the challenges of the future, what kind of transformation does the adult learning system in your country have to undergo? What would a future-ready system look like in your view? Are there any plans for reform in this direction?
- What existing or potential practices can meet the outlined challenges? What would need to be in place for them to work at scale?