

# 1. EDUCATION LEVELS AND STUDENT NUMBERS

## How many adults take part in education and training?

- Across the OECD, over 40% of the adult population participates in formal or non-formal education in a given year.
- The extent of participation varies considerably between countries, from less than 15% of adults in Greece and Hungary to over 60% in New Zealand and Sweden.
- Adults with higher levels of pre-existing education and younger adults are more likely to take part in education and training.

### Significance

Continuing education and training for adults is essential to upgrade workers' skills and enhance an economy's overall skill level. This is especially important as economies grapple with trends such as globalisation, changing technologies, the shift from manufacturing to services and more flexible management practices that increase the responsibility of lower-level workers. Changing demographics are also a major challenge: as societies age, people will need to work till later in life, hence developing the skills of older workers will be essential. With this background, this spread examines the extent to which the working age population is participating and investing in education and training.

### Findings

Across the OECD, more than 40% of the adult population (25-64 years) takes part in at least one formal or non-formal education activity each year. Participation rates vary considerably: they stand at less than 15% of adults in Greece and Hungary; less than 25% in Italy and Poland; 50% or more in Finland, Norway and Switzerland; and over 60% in New Zealand and Sweden.

The degree of participation also varies between different groups of workers, notably between younger and older adults and between adults with higher and lower levels of educational attainment.

In most countries, younger adults (25-34 years) are the most likely to take part in education and training and older workers (55-64 years) least likely (49% against 27%) (see Table C5.3c available online only in *Education at a Glance 2011*). A number of factors may be at play: Older workers may place less value on acquiring new skills and employers may offer them fewer training opportunities.

In addition, education and training is more prevalent among the highly educated. In the OECD countries surveyed, participation in formal or non-formal education is more than 20 percentage points higher among people who have attained tertiary education compared to those with only upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education. In turn, the latter has a participation rate 18 percentage

points higher than those who have not attained upper secondary education (see Table C5.3a in *Education at a Glance 2011*).

Gender differences in participation are generally small and are equal to or greater than five percentage points in only eight countries. In Estonia, Finland, Slovenia, Sweden and the United States, participation rates are higher for women; in the Czech Republic, Germany and the Netherlands they are higher for men (see Table C5.3b, available online only in *Education at a Glance 2011*).

### Definitions

Data presented here is based on a special OECD data collection. Data for non-European countries were calculated from country-specific household surveys. Data for countries in the European statistical system come from the pilot EU Adult Education Survey, covering 29 countries. Formal education is defined as education provided in the system of schools, colleges, universities and other formal educational institutions and which normally constitutes a continuous "ladder" of full-time education for children and young people. Non-formal education is defined as an organised and sustained educational activity that may take place both within and outside educational institutions and caters to persons of all ages.

Information on data for Israel:  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

### Going further

For additional material, notes and a full explanation of sourcing and methodologies, see *Education at a Glance 2011* (Indicator C5).

Areas covered include:

- Participation in job-related non-formal education, by gender and labour force status.
- Mean hours in non-formal education, by gender, educational attainment and labour force status.

### Further reading from the OECD

*Recognising Non-Formal and Informal Learning* (2010).

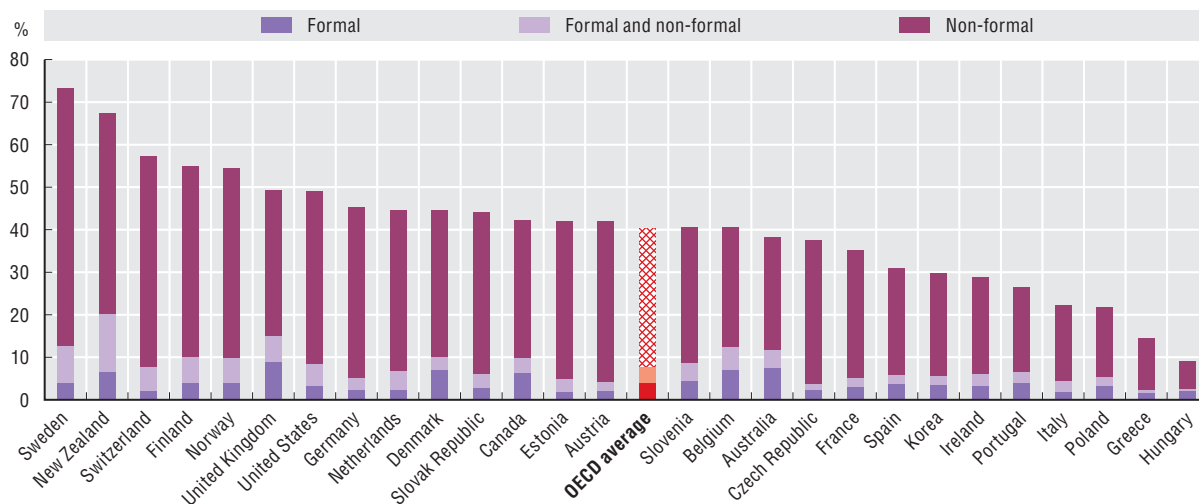
*Education and Training Policy – Qualifications Systems: Bridges to Lifelong Learning* (2009).

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## How many adults take part in education and training?

Figure 1.16. **Participation in formal and/or non-formal education, 2007**

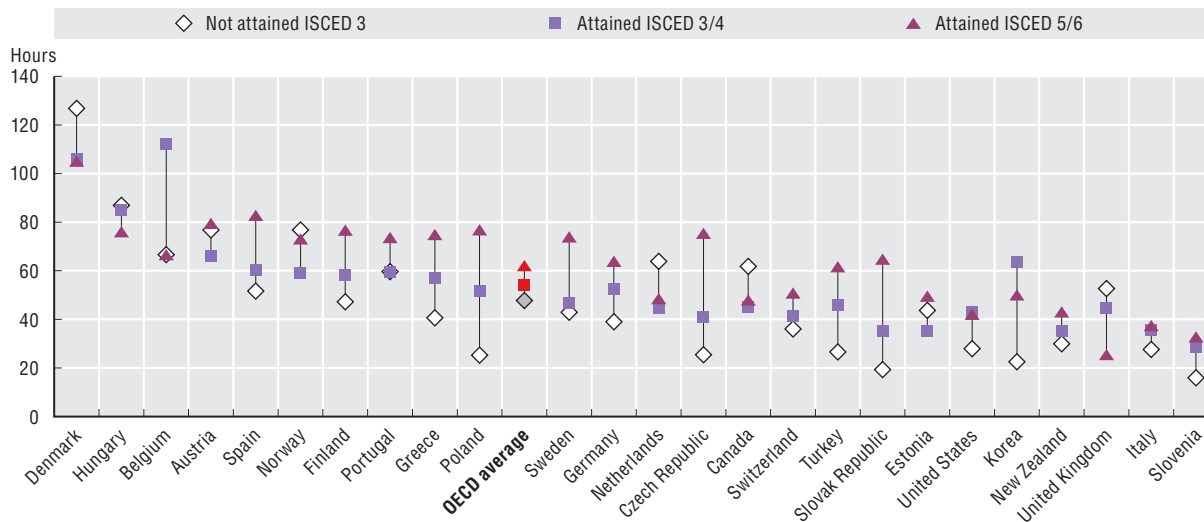
This figure shows the percentage of 25-64 year-olds who take part in formal or non-formal education. Across the OECD, the average participation rate is 41%.



Source: OECD (2011), Education at a Glance 2011, Table C5.3a, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932464942>.

Figure 1.17. **Average hours per employee in job-related non-formal education, by educational attainment, 2007**

This figure shows the average hours spent per employee who takes part in non-formal education, by level of educational attainment. People with higher levels of educational attainment tend to participate more in furthering their education. Countries are ranked in descending order for the hours of instruction for all levels of education combined.



Source: OECD (2011), Education at a Glance 2011, Table C5.2a, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932464847>.



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