

# 1. EDUCATION LEVELS AND STUDENT NUMBERS

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

- Across the OECD, more than 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 more than 60% of adults in New Zealand and Sweden to less than 15% in Hungary and Greece.
- 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 increase an economy's overall level of skills. This is especially the case as economies cope with trends like 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 go on working for longer, so developing the skills of older workers will be essential. Against that background, this spread looks at 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 to 64) takes part in at least one formal or non-formal education activity each year. Participation rates vary considerably: They stand at more than 60% of adults in New Zealand and Sweden; 50% or more in Finland, Norway and Switzerland; less than 25% in Italy and Poland; and less than 15% in Greece and Hungary.

There are also variations in participation 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 to 34) are most likely to take part in education and training and older workers (55 to 64) least likely (50% against 27%) (see Table A5.1a in *Education at a Glance 2010*). A number of factors may be at work here: Older workers may place less value on acquiring new skills and employers may offer them fewer training opportunities.

Participation is also greater among people with higher levels of education. On average for the OECD countries surveyed, participation in formal or non-formal education is 20 percentage points higher for people who have attained tertiary education than among those

with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education. In turn, this latter group has a participation rate 18 percentage points higher than those who have not attained upper secondary education.

Differences in participation between men and women are generally small and are equal to or greater than five percentage points in only eight countries. In Canada, Finland, Sweden, the United States and Estonia, participation rates are higher for women; in the Czech Republic, Germany and the Netherlands they are higher for men (see Table A5.1a in *Education at a Glance 2010*).

### Definitions

Data presented here are 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 cater to persons of all ages.

### Going further

For additional material, notes and a full explanation of sourcing and methodologies, see *Education at a Glance 2010* (Indicator A5).

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 OECD

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

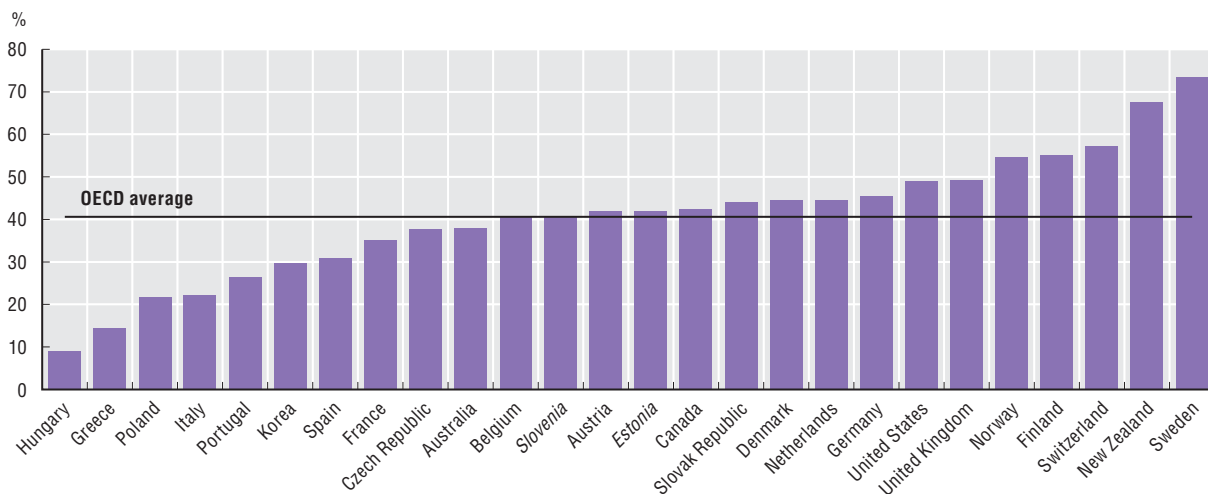
*Education and Training Policy – Qualifications Systems: Bridges to Lifelong Learning* (2009).

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

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

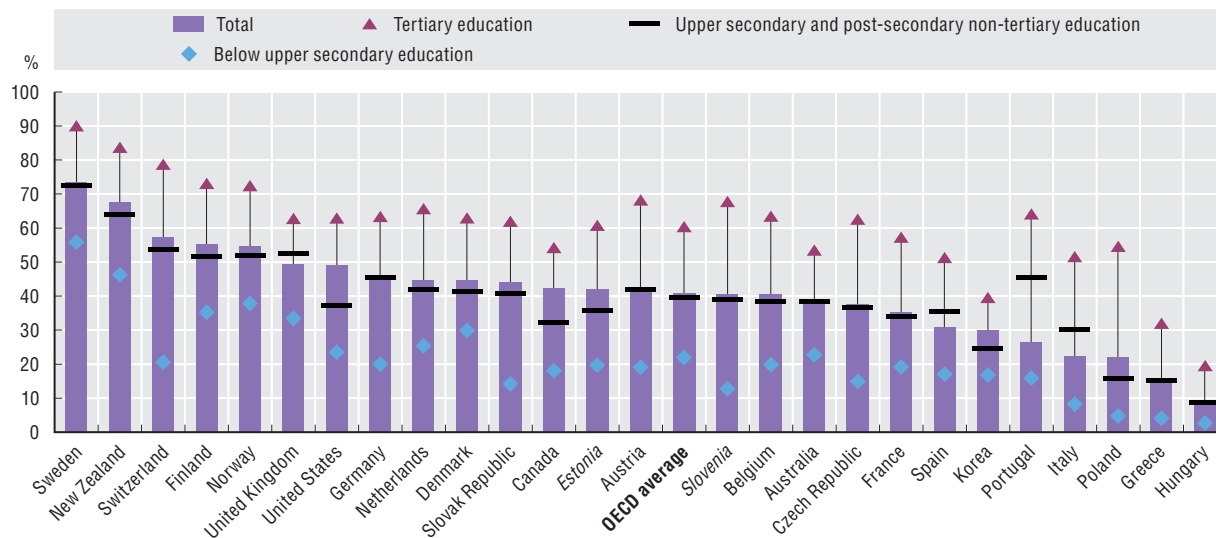
This figure shows the percentage of adults (25 to 64) who take part in formal or non-formal education. Across the OECD, the average participation rate is 41%.



Source: OECD (2010), *Education at a Glance 2010*, Table A5.1a, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932310168>.

Figure 1.17. **Participation in formal or non-formal education, by educational attainment, 2007**

This figure shows the percentage of adults by level of educational attainment who take part in formal or non-formal education. People with higher levels of attainment tend to participate more in further education.



Source: OECD (2010), *Education at a Glance 2010*, Table A5.1b, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932310168>.



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