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Increasing workers' access to lifelong learning - Framework conditions for better training uptake by adults

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Key Findings

- The current crisis prompted by the global Covid-19 pandemic puts even more pressure on training systems. People on short-time / job retention schemes are equally looking for training, as are newly unemployed and under-employed workers. This comes against the backdrop that in most countries the lifelong learning challenge has not been resolved.
- Creating more learning opportunities for all adults, and especially disadvantaged groups, necessitates removing time and financial constraints.
- Quality of training is an imperative, regardless of the training duration, location and level (educational or on-the-job).

- Policies can encourage both the integration of adults into education systems and the provision of training at the workplace. This is precisely why the nexus between adult-learning in education systems and training at the workplace has to be seen together by policy-makers and social partners. This would facilitate more equity in and accessibility to life-long learning.
- Better access to learning and training can be achieved if three pillars of policy and regulatory actions are simultaneously pursued:
 1. The right to paid educational leave and fair financing schemes
 2. Diversifying training offers and funding concepts
 3. Expanding and strengthening the provision of career guidance.
- In order to take part in training, adults of working age must not only have the legal right to do so, but also the financial means and the time, which the working population is lacking.
- Entitlements to (paid) educational and training leaves and wage replacement schemes can be set in collective agreements. In many countries, it is collective bargaining agreements and other social dialogue mechanisms, not legislation, that set the right to paid educational leave and govern fair financing schemes.
- Policy approaches need to be more diversified, better co-ordinated, more mutually reinforcing, without being overly complex. They should be both broad in scope (universal) and flexible enough. This is needed both to meet the specific needs of certain groups of population and of adults individually over their life-time and evolving employment situations. In doing so, part-time, short-time and “modular training” models should be promoted as much as easier access to longer-term vocational and higher-education programmes for adults.
- Lack of information about the diversity of educational offers for adults and insufficient knowledge on training rights is a key obstacle. Adults’ right to counselling is also often limited to specific groups of workers and is not accessible to all. Broadening public career guidance services and making them easily accessible should be a priority. The lack of information results in skill gaps and ex post solutions rather than pro-active approaches. Equity and quality are more guaranteed through investment in locally based public guidance services and training centres.
- Social partnership cannot be successful if government support for it is insufficient. Where both social partners are involved in the governance of skills and training systems, outcomes tend to be better. In other words, policies work better when designed through social dialogue and are more targeted and reach workers better when collective bargaining and workers’ participation are deployed.

Why creating broader and diversified access to training and lifelong learning is key

Trade unions have been arguing and are continuing to argue for easier and better access to quality training. Demand for skill development and the need to train for new tasks are influenced by economic cycles, technological progress (digitalisation), the transition to low-carbon economies, evolving business models but also population-ageing. The current crisis prompted by the global Covid-19 pandemic puts even more pressure on training systems and accelerates some of these mega trends. People on short-time / job retention schemes are equally looking for training, as are newly unemployed and under-employed workers, or those affected by organisational change. This comes against the backdrop that in most countries the life-long learning challenge has not been resolved. With the current crisis, new policy solutions emerge, such as granting training rights under unemployment benefit schemes. The scope of this paper does not include the Covid-19 crisis. It presents pathways to learning outside of a crisis context. Put differently, mega trends and economic cycles are not the root cause for changing skill demands but add on existing labour market needs and dynamics.

Labour market transformations and changing skill needs necessitate lifelong up- and re-skilling. Adults require both individual incentives to train and framework conditions that allow them to do so. Providing varied access to different groups of workers and skills needs is imperative. Access to training enables professional growth and job satisfaction, likely enhances productivity, income and labour mobility. Figure 1 shows an existing discrepancy between the desire for further training and the opportunity to pursue it.

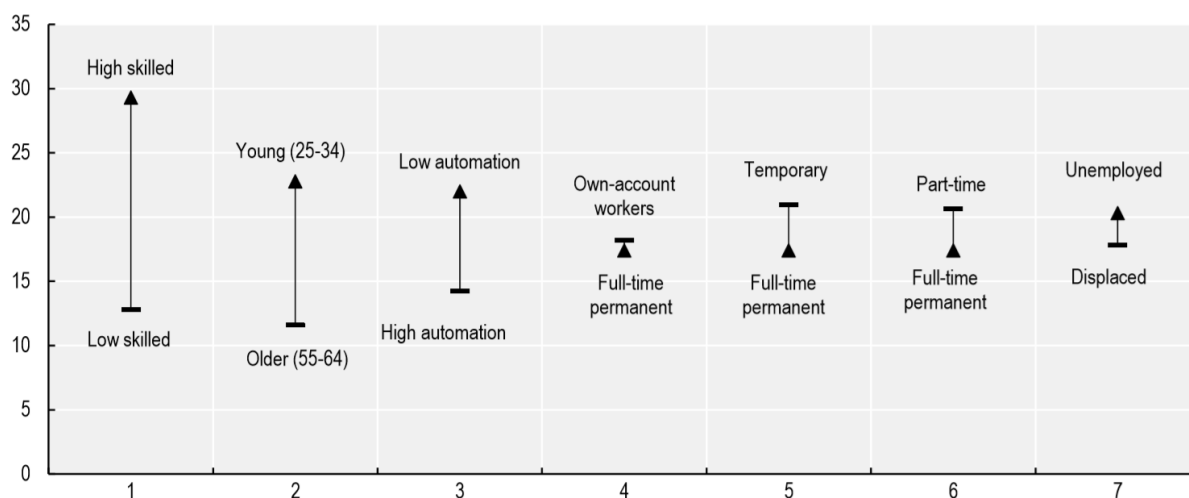


Figure 1: Willingness to train: Share of adults (age 16-65) in % by group who did not participate in training but would have liked to over the past 12 months (OECD average, data-source PIAAC 2012, 2015; OECD (2019). OECD Employment Outlook 2019: The Future of Work, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9ee00155-en>, p. 244)

Different groupsⁱ of workers along demographic, employment status and skill dimensions face varying degrees of challenges in updating their skills. The gap between those who wanted to take part in a further education programme during the last 12 months but

could not is greatest between high skilled and low skilled. There are also significant differences between older and younger people, those working in jobs with high and low risk of automation, those in non-standard and temporary jobs and those out of employment entirely (Figure 1). Participation in job-related training is below OECD-average for low skilled workers, older adults, those whose jobs are most at risk from automation, own-account workers, part-time workers and unemployed/displaced workers (OECDⁱⁱ). Generally speaking “*what is common to all OECD countries is that those who need training the most, train the least*” (OECDⁱⁱⁱ). Why people do not pursue learning opportunities although they would like to is shown in Figure 2.

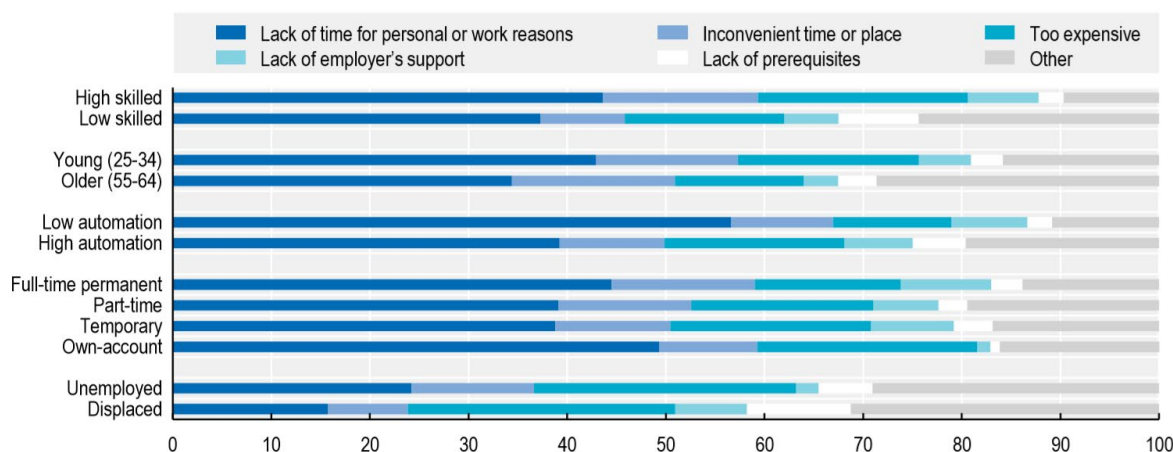


Figure 2: Reasons for not training among adults (aged 16-65) who did not train but would have liked to, OECD average, by group (source: PIAAC 2012/2015, 2019); OECD (2019). OECD Employment Outlook 2019: The Future of Work, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9ee00155-en>, p. 247)

Creating more learning opportunities for all adults, and especially disadvantaged groups, necessitates removing time and financial constraints. PIAAC data^{iv} reveals, that adults (aged 16-65) cite time constraints as the main reason, why they did not make use of further education programmes during the last 12 months although they wanted to. This lack of time turns out to be the main barrier to take up any type of courses for all groups in Figure 2, except for the unemployed. For people out of work and in low-paid jobs, financial hurdles and lack of information hinder their participation.

The **recognition of formal and non-formal learning** is an additional component. It builds an incentive for workers to pursue training. The recognition is connected to rewards such as career path progression (new tasks/ responsibilities, new title, etc.), wage adjustment and is a building block for further education and training. Some of these aspects are often set in social dialogue processes and in collective bargaining on wages and working time. Non-formal learning is harder to certify – evidence and best practices are lacking as to how to better reward workers.

The recognition of learning comes with rights and a legal basis. In France, a system for recognition and certification of skills^v (“Validation des Acquis de l’Experience”/“VAE”^{vi})

intends to improve the situation for low-qualified workers. Employers are obliged to inform their workers about the VAE in their regular employee interview (“Entretien Professionnel”). Anyone, no matter their age, citizenship, status and level of training, who has at least 1 year of experience directly related to a certain certification, can claim the VAE, which can be a diploma, a title or a certificate of professional qualification registered in the National Directory of Professional Certifications (RNCP).

Overall, to promote the recognition and enhancement of skills – especially for non-standard workers, migrants and refugees – acquired both inside and outside formal training, is crucial for employability. Moving towards better certification and skills appreciation models will necessitate streamlined processes while allowing for individual situation be fully reflected, including assessment and reporting tools for informal learning.

While the focus of this paper is on government policies, **social dialogue and collective bargaining matters equally for skills systems and training provisions**. As the TUAC Union and Skills II (2020)^{vii} shows, all three pillars discussed further in the paper are supported via social partner and trade union activities. Union advocacy and collective bargaining have created more access, broader training rights and pay. Trade unions support the low paid, less qualified, underrepresented or those who lack access to education systems – which mostly are adults in the most general sense, regardless of their skill levels. They bargain for enough learning opportunities and sometimes engage in direct provision with operating their own training institutes like the UK’s Unionlearn^{viii}.

It is no coincidence that the stakeholder involvement of social partners can be found in many successful policies.^{ix} *“Collective agreements and social dialogue processes can set or promote frameworks that enable rights to training, paid training leave/compensation and time for training. [...] With union support, take-up, retention and progression rates are higher at all educational levels. Unions encourage a culture of dynamic and continuous adult [learning] throughout a working life and are often times involved in continuous professional development.”* (TUAC 2020*: p. 15)

Entitlements to (paid) educational and training leaves and wage replacement schemes can be settled in collective agreements. In many countries, it is social dialogue instead of regulation that sets the right to paid educational leave and governs fair financing schemes. As such, trade union programmes or joint programmes with employers and/or governments provide (co-)financed courses and programmes. Collective agreements also ensure wage, as well as career path, adjustments (in title and task) for the workers upon acquiring new competencies and qualifications.

To complement the perspective on the role of trade unions in skills eco-systems, this paper discusses underlying challenges in skills eco-systems and provides examples of measures and potential best practices (see “zoom-in boxes”). Social partnership cannot be successful if government support for it is insufficient. Where both social partners are involved in the governance of skills and training systems, outcomes tend to be better. In other words, the government policies discussed below work better when designed

through social dialogue and are more targeted and reach workers better when collective bargaining and workers' participation are deployed.

This paper is about policies that enable access to education and training for adults. It hence considers the broad spectrum of adult skills development. It follows the life-long learning perspective covering both continuing education and professional development programs/ on-the-job training. Since the paper is about policies enabling access to training, the focus is more on 'adult learning' as defined by the EC Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning (2011)^{xi}: *“Adult learning provides a means of up-skilling or reskilling those affected by unemployment, restructuring and career transitions, as well as makes an important contribution to social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development.” “The term adult learning covers the entire range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities — both general and vocational — undertaken by adults after leaving initial education and training.”* When considering different ways to learn or up-skill however, this paper also includes on-the-job training. Meaning that policies can encourage both the integration of adults into education systems and the provision of training at the workplace.

It is crucial to take more decisive steps to extend access to training and provide workers with paid leave, prevent skills depreciation and obsolescence, to facilitate just transitions within jobs, between jobs and across sectors and to improve professional development and earnings. This can be done through policy actions (including sound funding allocation) but also via social dialogue and collective bargaining.

The three pillars towards enhancing access and provision of training for adults

Better access to learning and training can be achieved if three pillars of policy and regulatory actions are simultaneously pursued:

- The right to paid educational leave and fair financing schemes
- Diversifying training offers and funding concepts
- Expanding and strengthening the provision of career guidance

This is very much in line with the ILO's call for well-resourced, learner-centred and rights-based life-long learning systems^{xii}. While this paper focuses only on the three pillars, there are equally important actions governments and stakeholders in skills ecosystems can take.

Pillar 1: The Right of paid education leave & fair financing schemes

For working people, it is the employer's responsibility to document, assess and recognise skills (formal or informal) and facilitate on-the-job training. For most of the employees, training and learning will take part at the workplace, but not only. Outside training can

only be taken up if there are no financial and time constraints. For both, on-the-job and outside training, conditions vary depending on firm size, the workers' contract (fixed term and non-standard employees are unlikely to receive on-the-job training) and individual characteristics (age, position, gender, etc.). Especially, workers and employers in SMEs have to be informed of opportunities at their disposal.

In order to take part in training, adults of working age must overcome financial hurdles. It is quite evident that learning takes resources including time, which the working population is lacking. The loss of earnings while participating in education and training programmes is a massive obstacle. In addition, workers face the direct costs of the programmes (fees). To increase the participation, policies must primarily address these time and financial constraints.

If adults are expected to update their competencies on an ongoing basis or even seek entirely new qualifications due to labour market and transitional needs, the following foundations are required to support them:

- a) the right to (paid) educational leave
- b) wage replacement schemes (and continuous social protection coverage)
- c) funding grants and subsidies (partly) covering direct costs (fees)

The need for such policies is confirmed by an OECD survey looking for reasons why adults do not take part in further training. Figure 3 shows that the shortage of time (work- and family-related) and the lack of financial resources hinder most from lifelong learning (LLL).

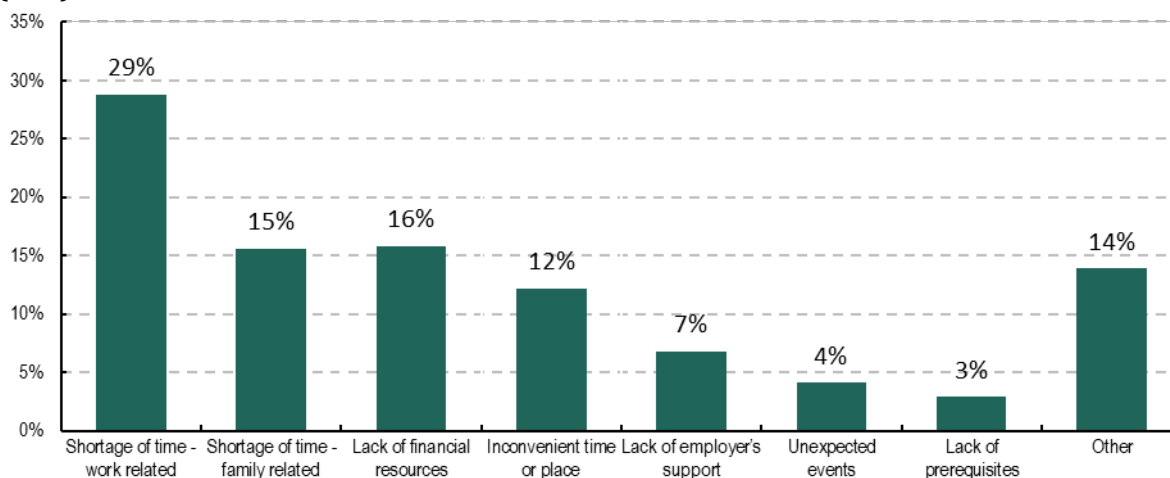


Figure 3: Barriers to participate in adult learning: most important reasons for non-participation (% of adults who wanted to participate but did not, based on average of OECD countries participating in PIAAC, PIAAC data 2012, 2015, 2018), OECD 2020^{xiii}

Policy measures that reduce the financial barriers to training for adults are rights to (paid) educational and training leaves, individual learning accounts (ILA) and, not to forget, active labour market policies for the unemployed.

Schemes for educational leave, on the one hand, include the right to reduce working hours without losing employment and social security, and, on the other, allow for financial compensation for earnings (OECD^{xiv}). In Finland^{xv}, employees who have worked for the same employer for at least one year are entitled to take a training leave of a maximum of two years. They receive compensation for their loss of income in form of an expense allowance by the national employment fund (a tripartite structure^{xvi}). The Swedish right for educational and training leave is presented in the “Zoom-in box” below and Austria’s concept of “*Bildungskarenz*” is discussed in the next section. Rights to training leave are also set in collective agreements. For example, the German metal and electrical industries collective agreements allow for reducing worktime to pursue part-time training^{xvii}.

As for **individual learning accounts (ILA)**, “*most function as vouchers, allowances or (fully) funded training programmes and ‘real’ ILAs are quite rare*”^{xviii}. Systems are often based on the principle of cost-sharing between training participants and the government. Some require a personal financial contribution, while employers rarely contribute financially.

One of the more prominent examples is the French “*Compte Personnel de Formation*” (CPF)^{xix}, which can be used by any French worker (employed, self-employed and job seekers). It is funded by a levy from medium and large enterprises. For a full-time or part-time employee or an independent worker the account funds up to € 500 annually (limited to € 5,000) and up to € 800 per year of work (limited to € 8,000) for the low-skilled.

The take-up of ILAs is limited (see Figure 4). It might have to do with gaps in information, administrative burdens for workers or precisely with financial barriers and employers’ reluctance to provide time and support. Also, workers falling out of the traditional employee category and the self-employed are often not eligible. However, some schemes, as is the case in the UK, Singapore and Switzerland (Geneva), are universal. In some cases, eligibility criteria are based on income (in the case of the US ITA on low income under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Adult programme). According to the OECD, “*average support varies between a minimum of 0.3% of the average wage in Flanders*

to a maximum of about 21% of the average wage in the reformed French scheme for individuals with a low education level”^{xx}.

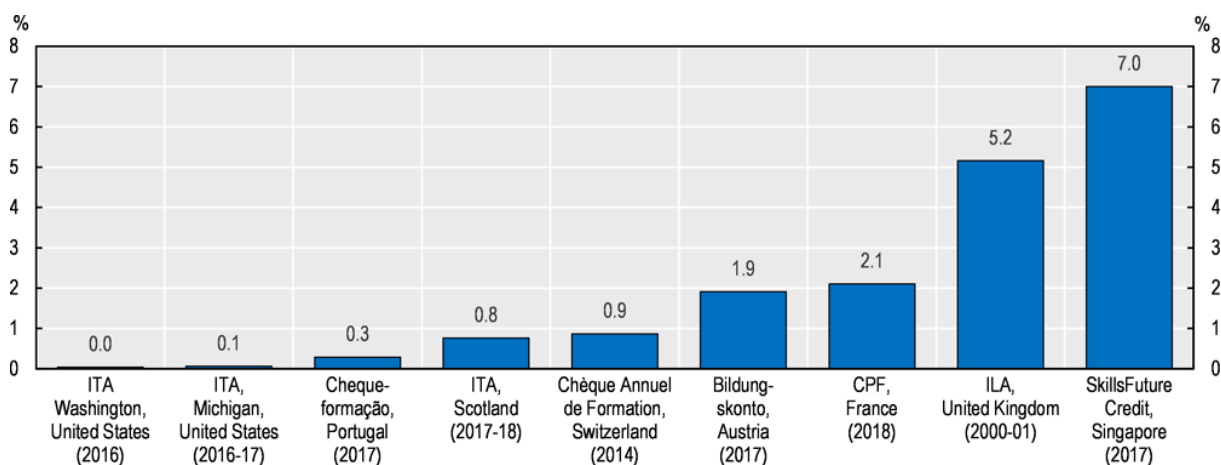


Figure 4: Participants in individual learning schemes as a share of the labour force (15-64)^{xxi}

ILAs seem to close gaps stemming from employer reluctance to train by targeting individual workers. The OECD^{xxii} observes that "among firms that do train, only about half do so for at least 50% of their workforce - which prompts the questions of whether firms' training reaches the most disadvantaged workers" and that "most employers who do not train admit that they prefer to recruit new staff rather than provide training for their existing workforce." Companies list high training costs and a lack of time for staff to participate as barriers to training. Since not all companies are committed to the further training of their employees, they should be considered responsible for a pay-as-you-go system as they benefit from a well-trained workforce from publicly funded systems. Some countries have funding schemes for companies when they train low-skilled workers. This might be due to the fact that companies otherwise have little interest in qualifying their employees for higher skilled jobs. There are different reasons for that including fear of no return on investment if workers then leave for another job. Companies also tend to rely on lower-skilled workers for certain tasks on lower wages without the intention to enhance their positions over time. Funds dedicated to companies further do not apply to the growing number of adults who are not traditionally employed, to the unemployed and for people on maternity/ paternity or parental leave. Hence, a funding mix is needed to reach workers in companies, and those outside of a regular employment relationship or on leave. All while not individualising the administration of training rights entirely.

Measures to support priority groups who participate less in further education and training include somewhat more generous policies. For example, as shown above, employees with very low qualifications benefit from higher allocations within the CPF (the French ILA). The Upper-Austrian "Bildungskonto"^{xxiii} (ILA) supports vulnerable groups through higher benefits (i.e. women returning from career breaks, low-income employees above 50 years of age, individuals with only compulsory education level and no vocational training, and immigrants studying the country's language). The French programme, "Emplois d'avenir"^{xxiv} (Jobs of the Future), encourages employers to upgrade

the skills of low-skilled workers by taking over 75% of wage costs (paid at minimum wage); provided that the employer appoints a tutor. The Singapore SkillsFuture Credit^{xxv} offers double the amount of the training grant for “older” participants (40+). Norway’s ‘Studies Funding Bank’ made changes this year with adjustments to the budget of its education support scheme that amongst other include an additional loan for people over 30 years or older for part-time education^{xxvi}. The change will make it easier to take short further education alongside work. The age limit for when the loan is to be repaid is raised from 65 to 70 years old. These measures intend to encourage more training for people over 45 years of age.

Financial support to meet new skills needs is increasingly introduced. For example, Estonia grants a “Degree Study Allowance”^{xxvii} to employed and unemployed adults with insufficient or outdated skills or who are at risk of losing their job. The allowance enhances vocational, vocational higher education or a Bachelor's degree at a state-commissioned facility. These study programmes qualify workers for the professions with projected growth and in which the demand for labour exceeds supply. The regional grant “Digi-Winner” in Vienna (Austria) supports employees, who opt to acquire digital competences. Every employee can receive up to €5,000 in funding for vocational education and training that prepares for the digital world of work and improves employability. The funding is available for a wide range of courses including with an IT focus on application programs, programming languages, use of social media, web design, data protection, etc. Allocated according to the amount of income, 80%, 60% or 40% of the course costs are covered. The funding is provided by the public local “workers advancement funds” (“Wiener ArbeitnehmerInnen Förderungsfonds”/“waff”) and the Viennese Chamber of Labour (“Arbeiterkammer Wien”).

Zooming in: The Swedish Study Leave Act of 1974

Under the Swedish Study Leave Act of 1974 (“Studieledighet”)^{xxviii} employees in the public or private sector who wish to undergo training are entitled to the necessary leave from their job for the entire duration of the training. Workers can also take a work leave for part-time studies. The right to this leave is granted to workers who have been employed by the same employer for the past six months or a total of at least twelve months during the last two years. Employees wishing to take part in education that is largely related to trade union or business issues can pursue the training ahead of the prescribed minimum period of employment.

It is required that the employer grants the leave but can postpone it to a later date than the employee has requested (of up to six months). Reasons for this can be the continuation of business operations or that several employees applied at the same time. If bound by a collective agreement, an employer has to submit a notification of rejection to the employee but also to the local union. The union has the right to request consultation with the employer about the rejection or suspension of the request. If the employee has not been allowed to start his/her leave within two years of the request

being made, he/she is entitled to appeal to the court for examination of the issue of leave of absence.

The employee can freely decide which education or training they want to pursue. The chosen programmes do not have to do anything with current professional tasks, but the education should have a curriculum (i.e. no self-study).

When returning to work after the educational leave, workers are assured to return to the same or equivalent position, duties and conditions of employment.

There is no funding scheme directly attached to the educational leave, but many citizens aged 20+ are entitled to "CSN"^{xxix} (student funding), which provides a monthly sum of approximately € 1.000 from the government. Around € 300 of this is a non-repayable study grant and the complementary € 700 come from a student loan that has to be paid back. The subscription is limited in time and decreases with its duration and the person's age. Moreover, union members who take an educational leave can take advantage of the union's student aid^{xxx} that helps covering study fees or course costs (up to ~€1.300).

Zooming in: The Italian right to training leave and Inter-professional Fund for Continuous Training

In Italy, the law n.53 / 2003 provides for leave for training (abstract art.5: "*employees of public or private employers, who have at least five years of service at the same company or administration, may request a suspension of the employment relationship for training leave for a period not exceeding eleven months, continuous or split, over the entire working life; "training leave" means that aimed at completing compulsory schooling, obtaining a second degree qualification, a university degree or degree, participation in training activities other than those undertaken or financed by the employer*") and leave for continuing training (abstract art. 6: "*workers, employed and non-employed, have the right to continue training courses throughout their life, to increase knowledge and professional skills*").

Under this framework, the training offer must allow for courses that benefit the individual worker. They are then certified and recognised as training credits at national and European level. An individual can choose to pursue training, so can an employer under firm-level or territorial training plans agreed between the social partners. These plans set the number of hours of the training leave, the criteria for identifying eligible workers and remuneration connected with participation in training courses. Unfortunately, due to the economic and financial crisis of 2008, this training leave was no longer financed and the resources were directed towards other objectives.

According to the Law n. 388/2000, the training falling within the company or territorial plans can be financed through the Inter-professional Fund for Continuous Training. All companies are required to contribute a fixed share of payroll costs (0.30% of gross wages social charges). In turn, upon prior agreement between the employees representatives

and the employers, contributing employers receive grants to pursue their training plans. The funds as such are inter-sectorial and governed by the social partners. Their reach is quite impressive as they cover around 1 million workers annually.^{xxxii} However, the OECD finds that “individual training plans are the least frequently used type of TF-supported training, involving only 8.9% of firms and 1.6% of participants” in 2018 and that vulnerable workers are less covered. Most Funds are territorial, followed by sectoral.^{xxxiii} With the Covid-19 pandemic, a new fund has been introduced. The New Skills Fund can be used by all private sector employers who have entered into specific agreements signed at company or territorial level by comparatively more representative employers and workers associations at national level, or by the RSU (unitary trade union representatives); these agreements allow for the downsizing of working hours as the organisational and production needs of the company change and instead part of the working time can be used at developing the skills paths of workers. The role that is given to the social partners in the regulation of the Fund is important: it will be collective agreements that identify the training needs for new or better skills, in line with the introduction of innovations in the company or to respond to changing needs production.

Pilar 2: Diversifying training offers and funding concepts

The circumstances for adults to take up further training in a professional and private context are diverse. In order to increase adult learning, this must also be reflected in diversified, yet well-coordinated and mutually enforcing, policy approaches. There is not one miracle one-fits-all approach that would cover for all situations. At the same time, more incremental approaches should not result in overwhelming complexity. Policies should be both broad (universal) and flexible to be applicable to many target groups and training offers to meet the various needs of adults in different life and employment situations. The imperative regardless of the training duration, location and level (educational or on-the-job) should be its quality.

Some ‘vulnerable’ groups benefit from more targeted support including the low skilled, migrants and people with migrant backgrounds, women working part-time or after maternity leave, and workers above the age of 55+. This however has an adverse side-effect: although those with the higher level of skills and qualifications participate more in on-the-job training, the same is not true of adult learning in the education system, because programmes are not targeted to them. This is precisely why the nexus between adult learning in education systems and training at the workplace has to be seen together by policy makers and social partners. This would establish more equity in regards to the accessibility to lifelong learning.

For training to be accessible to as many adults as possible, **training offers and funding policies** should be flexible in terms of the:

- duration of support for continuing education (long-term – short-term)
- extent of training (full time – part time)

- type of training (according to e.g. the level ranging from basic skills to post-graduate education, to the professional field)
- organisation of the training (full attendance classes - blended learning - distance-learning)
- terms of contract
- income and employment status (employees, own-account workers, one-person company, people out of work).

Providing more **part-time-training and extra-occupational training** can be one of the possible solutions for the lower-skilled and lower-wage workers, for adults with family (care) responsibilities and those working part-time. These groups' lack of time for training on its own and also the "*financial means to pay for childcare or take time off work aggravates the situation for the low skilled who tend to work low-wage jobs*"^{xxxiii}. Austria's *Bildungsteilzeitgeld* (part-time educational leave)^{xxxiv} is an example of facilitating training access for disadvantage groups (see zoom-in box below). In Denmark, as part of a tripartite agreement from 2017 on adult and continuing training, 25 mill. DKK are set aside each year (2018-2021) for the so-called track-changing scheme (*sporskifteordning*)^{xxxv}, which gives worn-out workers or workers who are at risk of being worn-out the opportunity to change track. A track-changing course can consist of employment directed guidance, vocational training or work place experience in another company. There are no requirements for education of the employee and no age requirements.

Better **access to and quality control over short-term courses** might also provide an avenue for some^{xxxvi}. Shorter course duration might also allow meeting labour market needs more effectively in some instances. It is important that such courses need to be accessible across skill levels. In Denmark, as part of the tripartite agreement from 2017 on adult and continuing training, a Re-conversion fund was established^{xxxvii}. The Re-conversion fund gives skilled and unskilled workers the opportunity to boost their qualifications by getting a short-cycle or first-cycle higher education degree. The fund covers course fees in relation to supplementary and further education (max 10.000 DKK per person annually), where workers in their spare time or in their working hours (with an agreement from the employer) can participate in relevant formal programmes. The Danish union, FH, proposed a large-scale qualification plan for employees^{xxxviii} in response to rising unemployment numbers in the current crisis. As part of its 5-point proposal, they argue for the suspension of the waiting period before applying for courses, 50 million DKK to be allocated to short-term courses, and for an increase in unemployment benefits for those wanting to pursue longer-term training to 110%. The proposals cost an estimated approx. 400 million kr. Further to that, FH proposes nine actions that strengthen skills-upgrading^{xxxix} of the many who are either unemployed or at risk of becoming unemployed as a result of the crisis. This includes support for job rotation and the expansion of several existing schemes. A broad coalition of the parties in parliament have agreed to some of the proposed measures by FH^{xl}.

When it comes to training design, a **modular structure** can encourage potential participants. Modular training allows to segment a programme into different parts. This allows to learn according to time preferences. Such programme design may help to overcome time constraints and take the fear of failure. According to the Rational-Choice Theory of Boudon, a continuing education decision is the subjective accounting of costs and benefits. A modular programme, divided into manageable certified sections can reduce the insecurity and thus the accounted cost for the worker. Modular training programmes can be found at different levels of education and varying lengths.

Ireland offers part-time higher education broken down into certified annual sections at the Technological University Dublin^{xli}. In Belgium/Flanders, the '*Centra voor Volwassenonderwijs*'^{xlii} (Centre for Adult Education) certifies the learner for each course individually. When completing an entire programme, the learner receives a formal certificate recognised by the Flemish government. Low-skilled adults in Mexico can acquire basic qualification through different modules via „the Model for Life and Work Programme” (MEVyT)^{xliii}. The MEVyT is a distance learning programme that allows to catch up on primary or secondary education in modules, free of charge. This however is not to say that there are arguments for and against modular programmes. For instance, in terms of quality controls and completion rates, more research should be done. Integrated programmes if given access to a multitude of learner profiles with a fair financing structure and time off, would solve some of the underlying problems as well.

Eligibility to financing schemes is often tied to only certain employment types (full-time employees, self-employed or the unemployed). For example, part-time or temporary workers often cannot fully benefit from training programmes provided by the public employment service (PES), which are often reserved to “full time job seekers” (OECD^{xliv}). Commonly, own-account workers and those in non-standard, flexible forms of work (OECD^{xlv}) can hardly participate in up- or re-skilling due to mis-classification of their employment status and financial constraints. To support them, in Austria, the Union of one-person companies “vidaflex”^{xlvi} provides a tailored training package.

Zooming in: Part-time paid education leave in Austria

In Austria, “*Weiterbildungsgeld*” or often called “*Bildungskarenz*”^{xlvii} is a financial scheme allowing an educational leave of up to 12 months in the course of 4 years and after having contributed for a minimum of 6 months to unemployment insurance. Administered by the Public Employment Service (PES), it grants monetary compensation and continued social security insurance coverage. The amount equals the standard unemployment benefit and if someone pursues part-time training, they obtain 0.83 Euro per hour. This means 498 Euro per month for someone taking up 50% of their working time (40h) for training (0.83 Euro x 20 hours x 30 days). The employer must agree to the application.

Data on the uptake shows that workers with lower educational attainment and part-time workers (often women) were less prone to use the scheme. The original minimum duration was too long and full-time training was not financially doable for lower income groups^{xlviii}. This led to the introduction of the “*Bildungsteilzeitgeld*” (paid part-time

educational leave) in 2013, which allows to combine working part-time (25-50% of their weekly working hours) and pursuing education and training of four months up to two years. Social partners are involved in the governance and administration at all levels. The population of recipients has changed over the years. Especially, workers aged 20 to 44 take advantage of the scheme. The ratio of women to men has reversed to 57% women and 43% men (2009: 35%; 65%). Women tend to take the training leave longer than men (262 vs. 214 days on average). The share of people with foreign citizenship is at 11% (2009: 5%). In 2016, the annual funding amounted to €165m for the full-time leave and €20m (including social security contributions) for the part-time leave covering 20.000 participants.

The motivation of the participants is professional progression and new career opportunities. The measure has also become a means to facilitate job transitions: half of the participants do not return to their previous job. The educational leave was taken up more often during economic crises.^{xlix}

Zooming in: Norway's Competence Programme

Norway has established a Competence Programme¹ that is supposed create new and flexible offers that will help close the skills gaps of working people. Through the programme, the government will start testing measures that can increase the demand for skills development. The competence programme has 97 million NOK at its disposal in 2020 to carry out three programme areas in 2020:

1. Grants for flexible further education offers - the goal of the grant is for universities, colleges and vocational colleges to develop more flexible educational offers, so that companies and individuals have better access to flexible and work-relevant further education.
2. Tripartite industry programme for competence development - the goal is increased participation in competence development in various sector – but especially those with many unskilled workers and those with high demand for further education.
3. Testing of intensive schemes for lifelong learning - the aim is to produce insights about the effects of such schemes on learners and their competencies.

Pilar 3: Expanding and strengthening the provision of career guidance

Career guidance (similar to “career counselling”) refers to activities intended to support individuals to make and implement informed educational, training and occupational choices (OECD^{li}). Career guidance services not only help students entering the world of

work, they also support workers throughout their life. Career guidance services help to anticipate training needs and provide support with searching, choosing and financing training.

Career guidance services usually include the provision of:

- Assessment and self-assessment tools to map out individual potential (education, experience, interests);
- Information on labour market changes in a specific professional field;
- Identification of possible career paths and training programmes (with varied durations), funding and social security
- Individual coaching and advice;
- Support with applications to training and funding as well as support during recruitment processes.

Expert knowledge and assistance are helpful since most workers cannot constantly keep an eye on labour market changes or are mostly not encouraged to do so by their employers. Ideally, counselling should be at the forefront of providing adequate pathways to up- and re-skill adult populations. In the best case, employability problems are preventable via such guidance and at-work CPD (Continual Professional Development). In reality, lack of information about the diversity of educational offers for adults and insufficient knowledge on training rights lead to many not receiving the training they need and are entitled to. Adults' right to counselling is also often limited to specific groups of workers and is not accessible to all.

There is urgent need to broaden public career guidance services and make them easily accessible. The lack of information about training and career change opportunities results in skill gaps and ex-post solutions rather than proactive approaches.

To redress this, more accessible career advice and guidance services are paramount to reach a maximum number of workers. These can be public services – also locally managed by municipalities, or programmes managed by one or both social partners (for example at the sector level). Equity and quality are rather guaranteed through investment in locally based public guidance services and training centres. They can be social partner or trade union-administered career guidance and counselling at the sector level or directly at the company level as well.

For public services, it is important to strive for efficiency with adequately trained and sufficient personnel, with a good knowledge of the local labour market and a good network, so as to be always updated in time on job opportunities; an anticipatory system capable of intercepting "weak demand".

The European GOAL Project^{lii} finds that *“there is no one-size-fits-it-all approach to providing advice and guidance, and the type of guidance provided must be tailored to the individual needs and context of the adult.”*^{liii} The project mainly targeted early school leavers (ESL) in 6 member countries from 2015 to 2018. The main key findings of its programme evaluation show that 1.) the different levels of readiness of participants

determine the outcomes; 2.) clients should not be overwhelmed by too much information and too many challenges in one session; 3.) single-session counselling models were less beneficial than multi-session models and 4.) financial aid for training is key to low-skilled, their motivation and readiness cannot overcome the absence of provision of free or subsidised training programmes.

Trade unions often support their members with the provision of career guidance services. For example, in the Netherlands, union training funds^{liv} help to train and develop workers' skills. One fund in the motor vehicle industry pays for career coaches to assist employees in planning their career and job-to-job transitions. In Belgium^{lv}, trade unions offer career counselling for workers and jobseekers, and specifically focus on the elderly unemployed.

As to raising participation in training among adults, the OECD Employment Outlook of 2019^{lvi} highlights the following good practices:

- Australia's "Career Transition Assistance" (CTA)^{lvii}: Career guidance for job seekers above the age of 45+ that develops a specific plan on improving skills and getting back into a job lasting for 8 weeks.
- Korea's "Job Hope Centre": Re-employment service that includes counselling and guidance for adults above 40+ who need (re)training before starting their job search; e.g. ICT skills.

Zooming in: Career guidance in the Netherlands

The "Ontwikkeladvies"^{lviii} ("Development Advice") programme is providing career guidance for working people above 45+ years. They can apply for a subsidy of €600 per person. The temporary subsidy scheme from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment aims to encourage participants to take charge of their careers. It draws future perspective of the current work, the competences and future career opportunities of the participant. This policy approach wants participants to actively think about how they can reach their retirement age while working and how to prevent illness or unemployment. The coaching results in a personal development plan, in which the participant describes what action he/she will take to increase his/her employability until retirement.

Zooming in: Denmark's Outreach Pool and Educational Ambassadors

To motivate more people to participate in adult and continuing training, an outreach pool was established based on social partner agreements. Its annual funding volume for the period of 2018-2021 is at 25 million DKK. The purpose is to strengthen basic skills through more opportunities for people to attend courses in reading, writing, math, IT and English as well as adult vocational education and training. Social partners can apply for funding with projects addressing lack of general competencies and promoting qualified labour by providing information, guidance and advice to workers.^{lix}

The purpose of education ambassadors is to advise the unemployed about the education opportunities and the adult apprenticeship scheme and to help them find training agreements^{lx}. The intention is to support those most in need and specifically people with no, or obsolete, vocational training. The rules and regulations regarding educational schemes in Denmark are complex. It can be difficult to find the scheme that is the best and most suitable match. To enhance the appropriate use of educational and training schemes, job centres and unemployment insurance funds can apply for funding to employ educational ambassadors, who can help with guidance and know-how in navigating the complex system. They support both the public services in building up this capacity, and workers directly.

Main take-aways

In order to achieve more participation in up- and re-skilling, it is helpful to consider the main take-aways from the evidence and examples of good practices gathered in this paper. Three pillars form the basic framework that enables adults to take part in further training. Adult learning participation would increase if the three pillars are carried out simultaneously:

- The right to paid educational leave and fair financing schemes
- Diversifying training offers and funding concepts
- Expanding and strengthening the provision of career guidance.

If workers are expected to update their competencies on an ongoing basis or seek entirely new qualifications due to labour market and transitional needs, the following foundations are required to support them:

- a) the right to (paid) educational leave
- b) wage replacement schemes (and continuous social protection coverage)
- c) funding grants and subsidies (partly) covering direct costs (fees).

This has to be paired with a better recognition of formal and informal learning – in particular by employers, and a full engagement of both social partners in the governance, design and provision of adult learning and career guidance. In countries where social partners are responsible to set the parameters for training uptake or to govern training systems directly, they should be supported in that. Indeed, a striking number of countries with good practice policies involve social partners in policy-making and implementation. The prominence of effective social dialogue seems to translate into higher rates of participation and better alignment with labour market needs.

In addition, there are countless related topics to consider, such as the quality of training, the alignment of training with personal and labour market needs, infrastructure for (digital) learning, means of personalised learning, the potential of eLearning (distance-learning) and requirements of initial education to prepare for life-long learning skills.

Certainly, adults need the right framework conditions that enable them to take up further training: *“Unless urgent action is taken, the low skilled workers in jobs at risk of automation, older adults and displaced workers [...] are likely to be left behind.”* (OECD^{lxi}) The Covid-19 induced employment crisis displayed gaps in rights to access and afford training. It also shows the need for flexible systems and a broad collaboration of all stakeholders to prevent longer unemployment spells and a Corona generation.

The right to paid educational leave and fair financing schemes

Adult learning needs adequate and sustainable public funding *“with contributions by the government individuals, and firms”* (OECD^{lxii}). Investments in further learning can be understood as strategies of a productive welfare state since *“social investment policies such as education and training boost economic competitiveness”*^{lxiii}.

Learning takes time. Wherever it is not applied, educational leave should be a worker’s right. In order to be able to afford a partial or full-time reduction in working hours, workers need compensation for the loss of earnings to bear their costs of living. Public funding or employers covering all or parts of the course costs facilitates participation. Self-contributions to training (also via individual learning accounts or repayable loans) deter especially lower-income workers.

Support measures and rights should be kept as simple as possible so that they can be easily communicated and taken up. Rights to training leave and the allocation of financial incentives should ideally be set in collective agreements at the sector or cross-sector level.

Grants should be aimed at individuals and collectively agreed schemes and not at individual employers, because not all companies invest in the further training of their employees and if they do, they tend to be selective. It could be considered that the companies that are not or hardly involved in the further training of their employees should make financial contributions into a pay-as-you-go system for adult learning.

Diversifying training offers and funding concepts

Policy frameworks should take into account the different situations of adults to fit their lives and employment situations. They should be both broad (universal) and flexible to be applicable to many target groups by creating diverse entry points and training offers. Diversity of courses would allow meeting the different needs of adult learners along educational levels and in line with professional development requirements (full-time, part-time, short or long duration, distance-learning, evening and weekend courses etc.).

Part-time solutions increase the participation of workers with care responsibilities and of low-income workers. Comprehensive training and further education could also be designed in a modular way so that courses can be certified individually allowing for

interruptions and readmissions. The division into manageable modules lowers the entry hurdles to training and allows for a more granular recognition of learning.

Policies should especially address those in non-standard forms of work to enable them to train. Tailored solutions are also needed for refugees and migrants, people with care responsibilities and on care-induced leave, and older workers. Minorities – in terms of ethnic background, income and skill level – deserve special attention.

The training offers should be available to all skill levels. Especially with programmes for Early School Leavers (ESL) – while taking into account fears and attitudes towards classic school-learning settings. For some groups of learners, it is necessary to train learning skills first and possibly overcome hurdles in the application of digital tools.

Expanding and strengthening the provision of career guidance

All adults should have support from career guidance in order to prosper professionally and profit from the value of further training. Public employment services need to expand to all workers with attractive offers. Workers would benefit from mapping out individual paths for professional development and from obtaining information on funding and their rights. Much counselling is already carried out by social partner bodies and workers' representatives. Such complementary services next to public career guidance offerings deserve greater support – not at least due to the proximity of social partners to the demand of training (OECD^{lxiv}).

Support structures providing career guidance need more funding to carry out better and more counselling and to boost their labour market intelligence. It is largely unclear what training contents are useful in the labour market in the longer run and what type of offers should therefore be promoted. More knowledge is needed as to whether it makes sense to promote specific training such as IT courses or transitions into distinct occupational fields. Also, little is done to identify and recognise non-formal qualifications that adults acquire. Public career-guidance services need to be supported and given the mandate (where it is lacking) to develop the tools necessary to provide support to different types of workers, certify their formal and informal learning better and provide more digital (remote) tools to map out options for training, employment and career changes.

Overall, gaining skills must pay off for workers in terms of job opportunities. It needs to translate in remuneration, more professional responsibilities and over quality of employment.

ⁱ Note: As to OECD “low (high) skilled refers to adults who score at level 1 or below (levels 4 or 5) on the PIAAC literacy scale. High (low) automation refers to adults at high (low) risk of automation. Own account workers are the self-employed without employees. Temporary refers to workers on fixed term or

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