

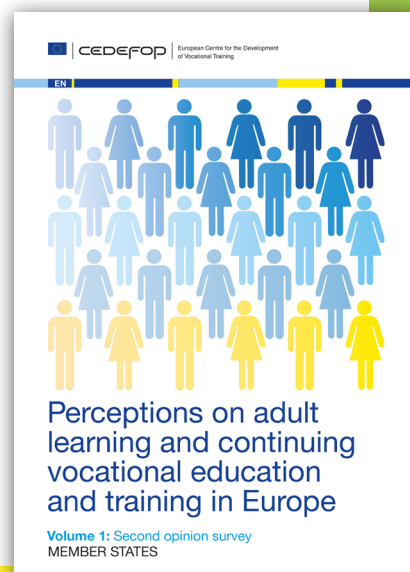


## *Executive* **SUMMARY**

# Perceptions on adult learning and continuing vocational education and training in Europe

## Volume 1: Second opinion survey MEMBER STATES

You can download  
the full report (in English) at:  
[www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/  
publications-and-resources/  
publications/3086](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3086)



**M**anaging the challenges of technical advance and the shift to a green economy requires the best human capital; not a small elite, but a thoroughly well-trained general workforce operating efficiently and effectively at all levels. A workforce whose skills are constantly developed and used.

Adult learning and continuing vocational education and training (CVET) are essential to developing such a workforce. They are central to lifelong learning; they enable adults to acquire the knowledge, skills and competences they need to manage changing jobs and lives. They also support employment, competitiveness and innovation (!).

(!) See Cedefop's work on adult education and CVET:  
[www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/adult-learning](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/adult-learning)

However, as Cedefop's first opinion survey <sup>(2)</sup> showed, people often see adult learning and CVET as less attractive learning options than general education. But while the first opinion survey gave insights into comparisons between general education and vocational education and training, we know little about the image people have of adult learning and CVET. We know little about the extent to which people think that adult learning and CVET are important for life and work; whether people believe that they bring tangible benefits or that there are opportunities for them to learn and so what stops them from taking those opportunities. To find out more, Cedefop launched this second opinion survey.

Image is important. Knowing more about people's perceptions can help Member States identify the strengths and weaknesses of their systems and can inform their strategies to improve adult learning and CVET and increase participation.

Monitoring and raising participation in adult learning and CVET have been on the European agenda for more than 20 years. However, various measures show that in many Member States levels of participation are not in the desired range. European averages also mask big differences between countries. And if Europe is to have the workforce it needs, more adults need to learn new and more skills.

## ABOUT THE SURVEY

To find out how people perceive adult learning and CVET, Cedefop's second opinion survey comprised 40 466 telephone interviews (landline and mobile) of adults, aged 25 and over who live in the European Union (EU), Iceland and Norway. The interviews were carried out between May and July 2019. The survey findings are presented in two volumes. This first volume examines perceptions in Member States <sup>(3)</sup>. The second considers perceptions and image among the demographic and socioeconomic groups (gender, age, economic status, occupation, education, migration background) across the whole EU.

The survey methodology defines adult learning

and CVET as 'any learning activities undertaken by adults (whether employed or not) with the intention of improving knowledge or skills'. Image is the perceived value of adult learning and CVET in producing desired outcomes for individuals (such as personal, skill and career development and personal financial situation), society and the economy (such as lower unemployment) and benefits for countries (such as social cohesion). The questionnaire asked about perceptions of the image of adult learning and CVET in relation to delivering these outcomes. Based on these replies the image of adult learning and CVET was constructed.

## A POSITIVE IMAGE

Respondents in all Member States have a positive image of adult learning and CVET. In all Member States respondents strongly believe that learning throughout life is important for their personal development and work. At least two-thirds of respondents in each country agree that adult learning and CVET should be an investment priority. This positive image is also likely to last. In every country, at least 70% of respondents say that adult learning and CVET will be more important, particularly for career progression, in 10 years' time.

The positive image of adult learning and CVET is also coherent and consistent, being closely linked to the benefits people expect to receive from them. Respondents who took part in learning in the past year were asked why. Across Member States, the two most common reasons given for participating in adult learning and CVET were personal development and to improve job skills.

People also perceive the benefits of adult learning and CVET to be real. Some 96% of respondents agree that adult learning and CVET are important for personal development. In a sign that systems are becoming more flexible, 78% of respondents also agree that there are many ways for adults to obtain a state-recognised degree.

There is also widespread agreement in Member States about the employment-related benefits of adult education and CVET. These benefits are regarded as important for: career progression; finding a new job; obtaining a better income; and reducing unemployment. Some 84% of respondents also agree that organised work-related training is important to develop skills for any job. In all Member States except Italy, respondents are more likely to describe adult learning and CVET

<sup>(2)</sup> Cedefop (2017). *Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 62. [www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/5562](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/5562)

<sup>(3)</sup> The term 'Member States' in this publication includes the 28 EU Member States at the time of the survey and Iceland and Norway.

as good rather than bad.

However, in all Member States people see employment-related and personal benefits of adult learning and CVET as greater than educational benefits. Adult learning and CVET are not regarded as important as school or university education, nor are they readily regarded as a route to obtain a traditional university or college degree.

The positive image of adult learning and CVET extends to perceptions of availability and access. Overall, information in Member States about adult learning and CVET opportunities is good; most agree that their country has many opportunities and people are aware of them. The internet is the best source of advice about adult learning and CVET in all countries except Romania, where professional or sector associations come first. The survey indicates that the internet is used as a first contact point and to filter information and that different information sources are combined in different ways across Member States.

Positive views of adult learning and CVET also appear deeply held and widely shared. They are reinforced by family and friends, who are major supporters of decisions to participate. In almost every country, respondents identify family and friends as the principal source of support to participate in adult learning and CVET.

In 22 countries, the reason respondents give most frequently for not taking part in organised training is that they feel they do not need it. Exceptions are Bulgaria, Ireland, Greece, Spain and Malta, where the main reason for not participating is problems with time, and in France and Romania where it is feeling too old. There is widespread support for measures proposed to encourage participation in adult learning and CVET: better information; improving quality; financial incentives; flexible learning arrangements; adapting learning to individual needs; help with caring responsibilities; and certification and recognition of learning.

Unsurprisingly, there are differences in emphasis between countries. Overall, respondents are particularly positive about the benefits of adult learning and CVET in Greece, Cyprus, Malta, Romania but less so in Estonia, Croatia and Italy. Views on different aspects of adult learning and CVET also vary. In Malta and Romania, respondents are positive about quality, availability of opportunities and access. Respondents in Sweden are positive about availability and quality; Ireland is also positive about quality.

Those in Spain, France and Italy are, relatively, negative about access to and availability of adult learning and CVET. In Greece, too, positive views about learning in general are offset by criticisms of access and availability. In Italy, Latvia and Lithuania respondents are critical about quality. Iceland is least positive about access to work-related training.

Exceptions to family and friends being the principal source of support to participate in adult learning and CVET are: the Netherlands, Norway and the UK, where an employer is regarded as most likely to offer support; France, where it is professional or sector associations; and Luxembourg, where government is the most frequent response.

However, it is important to note that the main differences between 'positive' and 'less positive' occur because fewer people 'totally agree' rather than 'simply agree'. Although seemingly slight, these differences are important. It is unsurprising that, generally, people see adult learning and CVET as 'good things'. The survey, however, brings out relative differences and relative strengths and weaknesses for Member States to consider. It is also important to note that the survey findings are about perceptions; the image may not reflect the reality, in which case misconceptions need to be corrected.

## IMAGE AND INCENTIVE

A concern is that participation in adult learning and VET remains persistently below expected levels because people hold adult training and CVET in low esteem. However, irrespective of any need to strengthen measures to encourage participation, the survey clearly shows that concerns about not enough people taking part in adult learning and CVET are not because people have a negative image about them.

The survey clearly shows that people value adult learning and CVET and that they regard them as important, associating them with real practical benefits.

According to the survey, the main reason people do not participate in adult learning and CVET is because they 'see no need'. This is despite nearly nine out of 10 respondents, who were in work when surveyed, saying that their job requires them to keep their skills constantly up to date, 28% of respondents in work saying that they lack some technical skills and 23% saying they lack some general skills to carry out their job at the required level.

However, the survey strongly indicates that ‘seeing no need’ for adult learning and CVET is not because people have a negative image about them. Adult learning and CVET may not quite have the same status as tertiary education, but they are highly valued, at least in general terms. They are increasingly seen as a necessity. However, this ‘necessity’ is seen in general, abstract terms. It can be expressed as people recognising a general need for adult learning and CVET, but they are not necessarily a need for ‘me’, at least not at this moment.

Consequently, the issue of attractiveness of and participation in adult learning and CVET would appear to be not lack of esteem, but of incentive.

The various benefits of adult learning and CVET are interrelated. Learning motivated for personal development can improve career prospects and vice versa. However, incentive to participate depends on the likelihood of the desired benefits being realised. The benefits of participating in adult learning and CVET for personal development are defined by the individual and outcomes are in their control. However, although people see adult learning and CVET as helping career progression, job search and better incomes, realising these benefits is generally not in the hands of participants or governments, but of employers. Government measures can encourage people to participate in adult learning and CVET. Such measures are needed but they do not guarantee a job, promotion or a pay rise.

Governments have more control of certification and recognition of adult learning and CVET. Certification and recognition can be an incentive for learning for personal development and for employment; skills that are certified and visible have more currency on the labour market.

The survey shows high levels of support in all Member States for each measure to encourage people to participate in adult learning and CVET. These high levels of support indicate that there is scope for Member States to introduce, widen access to, or raise awareness of them. However, in addition to these measures, in European policy terms, there is a strong argument that government measures to encourage participation need also to be linked, not with abstract notions of some general good or deferred reward, but with tangible benefits such as a job or a qualification, or both.

Further, the attractiveness of adult learning and CVET is not only about people’s willingness to participate, but also employers’ willingness to invest. Employers across Europe say they have difficulties finding the skills they need. However, the impact of technological change on job tasks is creating a tension in adult learning and VET over the balance between the core skills, which employers say they want, and the job-specific skills that employers expect CVET, in particular, to provide. More opportunities for work-based learning for adults may not only increase participation, but also help resolve that tension.