

Foreword

Not only are skills, including basic literacy and numeracy, critical to the prosperity and well-being of individuals, they are also key drivers of economic growth and societal advancement. The OECD's new international Survey of Adult Skills aims to help countries secure better skills policies by measuring the basic skills of adults in 24 countries and demonstrating how these skills relate to economic and social outcomes.

This report, *Time for the U.S. to Reskill? What the Survey of Adult Skills Says* which sits alongside the main international report on the Survey, explores the main results from the United States in greater depth. It underlines how the U.S. compares with other countries and what this means for policy-making.

By international standards, despite a relatively high level of educational qualifications, the basic skills of adults in the United States are relatively weak. Unlike many other countries, there has been little sign of improvement in recent decades. The skills of young people are little different from those of their parents. 36 million adult Americans are living with the consequences of low literacy skills. In addition, the results at the top end of the ability range are not more impressive than those of other countries.

The good news is that there are very few countries in the world that are able to make better use of their citizens' skills than the United States. Skills contribute effectively to the strength of the economy. However, in the context of global upskilling and increasing competition for skills in global markets, it is important that the United States takes action. This should include strengthening initial schooling, supporting adult learning, and developing a set of coherent policies to address the needs of those with the weakest skills. The report puts forward a set of seven key recommendations designed to that end.

This will be the first of many studies designed to ensure that countries make the most out of their skills policies, by building on the findings from the Survey of Adult Skills both for policy development and for charting a way forward. The OECD is firmly committed to supporting countries in their bid to develop “*better skills policies for better lives.*”



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