

## Chapter 1. The context: Why is adult learning important in Italy?

*In Italy, as in other OECD countries, demographic change, globalisation, and technological progress are having a profound impact on skills needs. Italy has an old and rapidly ageing population, and over half of workers may see their job tasks change significantly as a result of automation. In addition, a large share of adults has relatively low skills. Within this context, the availability of adult learning options of high quality is crucial to support workers through these ongoing, deep, and rapid changes. However, while the share of adults participating in job-related learning in Italy has increased substantially over the past years compared to other OECD countries, participation remains low, especially for those who need training the most. This chapter analyses the key drivers of skills pressures, placing Italy into the international context.*

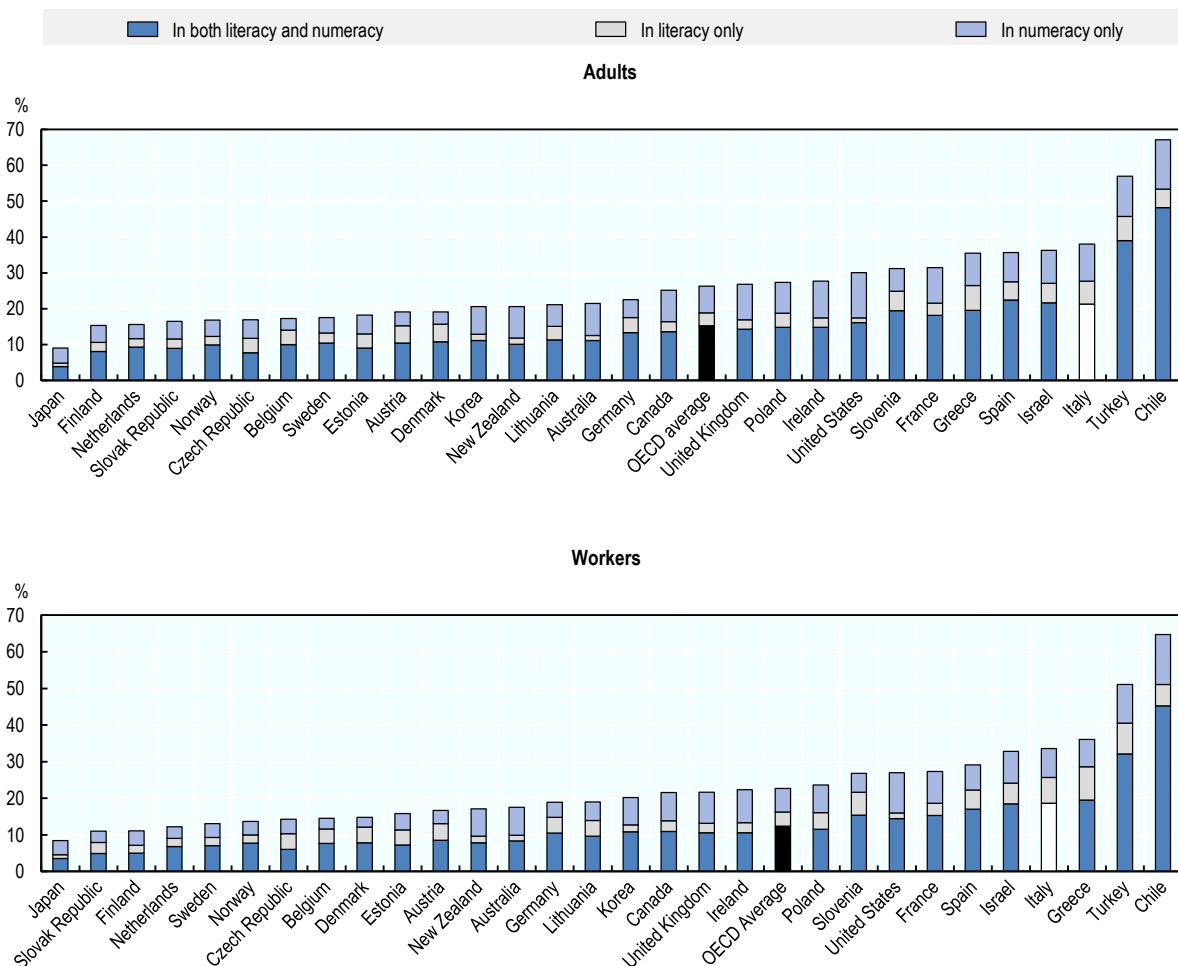
---

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

## 1.1. Adults' skills

In Italy, a large share of adults has low skills. Around 38% of Italian adults have low levels of literacy and/or numeracy proficiency, a share larger than in all but two other OECD countries (Chile and Turkey) with available data, and well above the average of 26.3% (see Figure 1.1). The situation does not improve much at workplaces. Indeed, 33.6% of workers in Italy have low literacy and/or numeracy proficiency, a share that is higher than most OECD countries with the only exception of Chile, Greece and Turkey, and well above the OECD average of 22.7% (see Figure 1.1). These adults may struggle to find a place in the labour market, and when at work they may find it hard to access productive job opportunities.

**Figure 1.1. The proportion of low performers in literacy and/or numeracy**



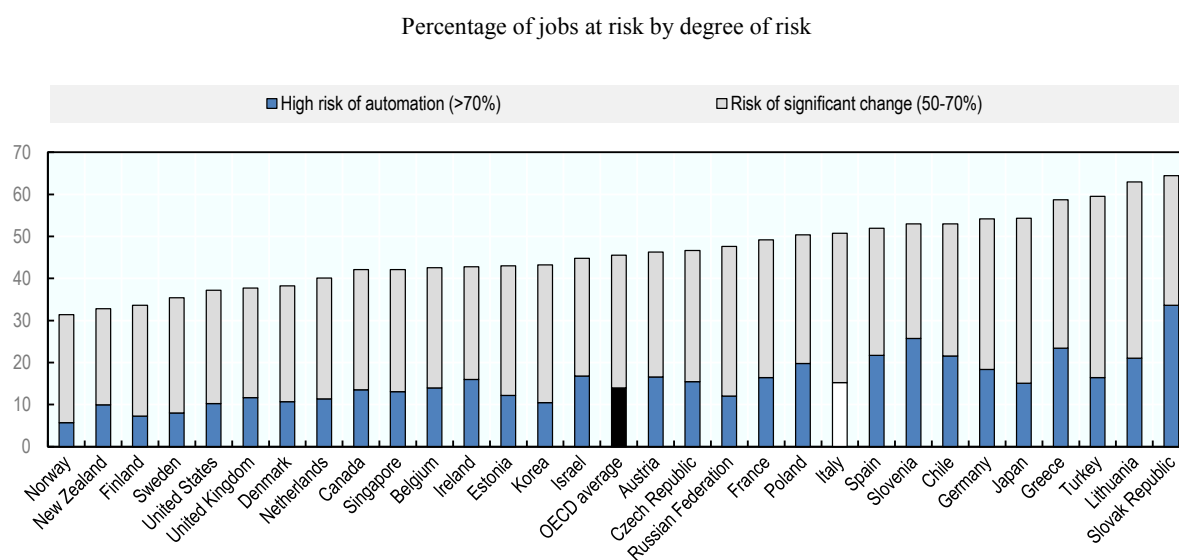
*Note:* Low-performers are defined as those who score at or below Level 1 in either literacy or numeracy according to the Survey of Adult Skills. Chile, Greece, Israel, New Zealand, Slovenia and Turkey: Year of reference 2015. All other countries: Year of reference 2012. Data for Belgium refer only to Flanders and data for the United Kingdom refer to England and Northern Ireland jointly.

*Source:* OECD calculations based on the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) (2012 and 2015).

## 1.2. Risk of automation

New technologies are changing jobs and skill needs, in Italy like elsewhere in the OECD. While on the one hand these new technologies have the potential to free up workers' time to do more productive and less routine jobs, on the other hand they will likely change many existing jobs and the skills required to perform them. Indeed, recent OECD research (Nedelkoska and Quintini, 2018<sup>[1]</sup>) suggests that in Italy 15.2% of jobs have a high risk of automation, and a further 35.5% of jobs may experience significant changes to how they are performed. This risk is higher than the average of OECD countries with available data (14% and 31.6% for the two indicators, respectively) (see Figure 1.2). This puts considerable pressures on the Italian adult learning system, as many individuals will need to re-skill to cope with the change.

**Figure 1.2. Jobs at risk of automation or significant change**



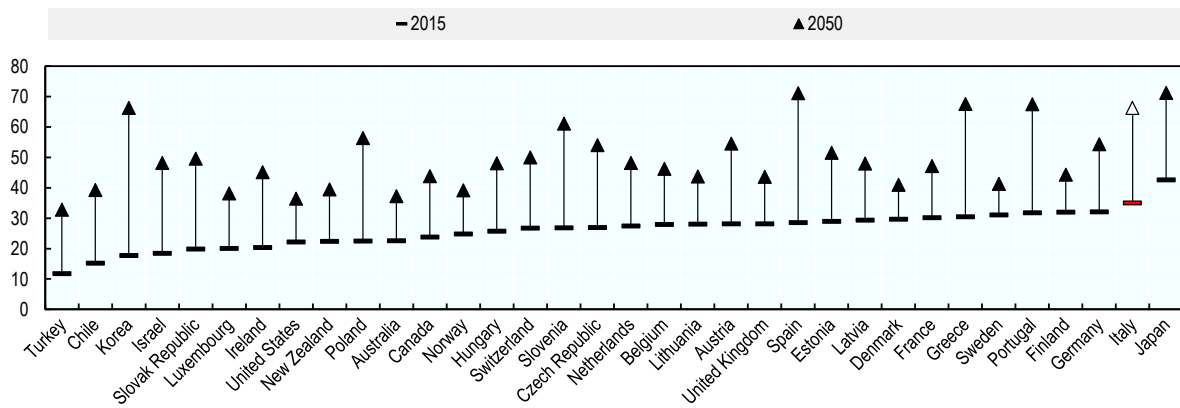
Source: Nedelkoska and Quintini (2018<sup>[1]</sup>).

## 1.3. Population ageing

Italy also has an old and ageing population, which puts further pressures on its adult learning system. According to UN population statistics, Italy has only 2.6 times as many working-age adults than over-65-year-olds today – making Italy the second most “aged” country in the OECD, after Japan – and this number will shrink to 1.5 by 2050 (see Figure 1.3). These demographic trends can impact training needs in a number of important ways. They may increase the need for individuals to update their skills over the life-course in a context of longer working lives. The retirement of large cohorts can lead to significant shortages of labour, a gap that can be filled through up- and re-skilling of the existing workforce. Finally, population ageing can result in further shifts in the demand for goods and services, e.g. increased demand for health and care services, which may require substantial up-skilling of the existing workforce (OECD, 2019<sup>[2]</sup>).

**Figure 1.3. Population ageing**

Population aged 65+ as % of population aged 15-64

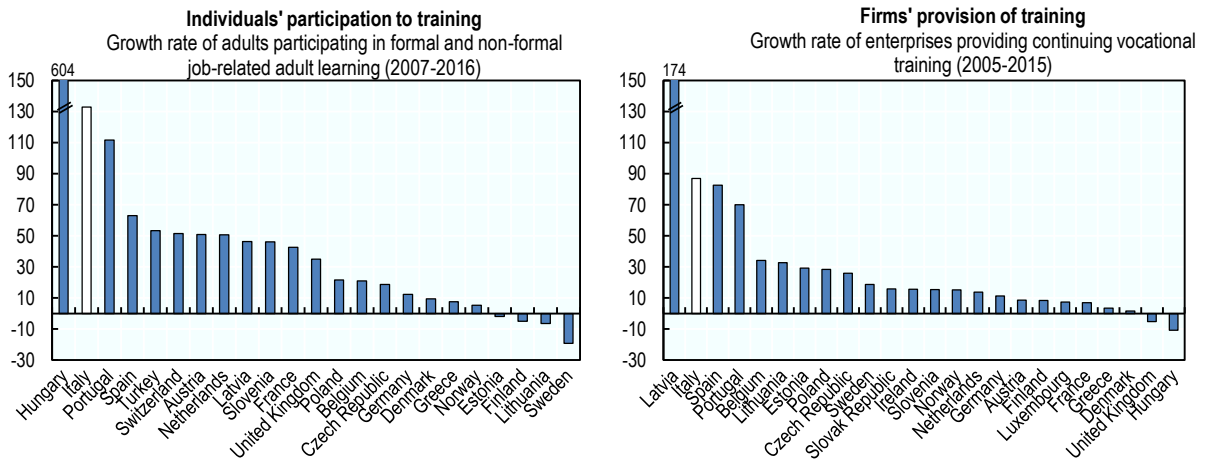


Source: UN population statistics.

### 1.4. Participation to adult learning

In this context, the availability of adult learning options of high quality is crucial to support workers through these ongoing, deep, and rapid changes. Adults’ participation to and firms’ provision of training opportunities has improved considerably in Italy over the past decade, although from a low initial base. Indeed, elaborations of the Adult Education Survey show that the share of adults participating in job-related learning in Italy has increased by 133% between 2007 and 2016, the second highest increase in OECD European countries after Hungary. Similarly, elaborations of the Continuing Vocational Training Survey show that the share of firms providing training to their workers has increased by 87% in Italy between 2005 and 2015, the second highest increase after Latvia (see Figure 1.4).

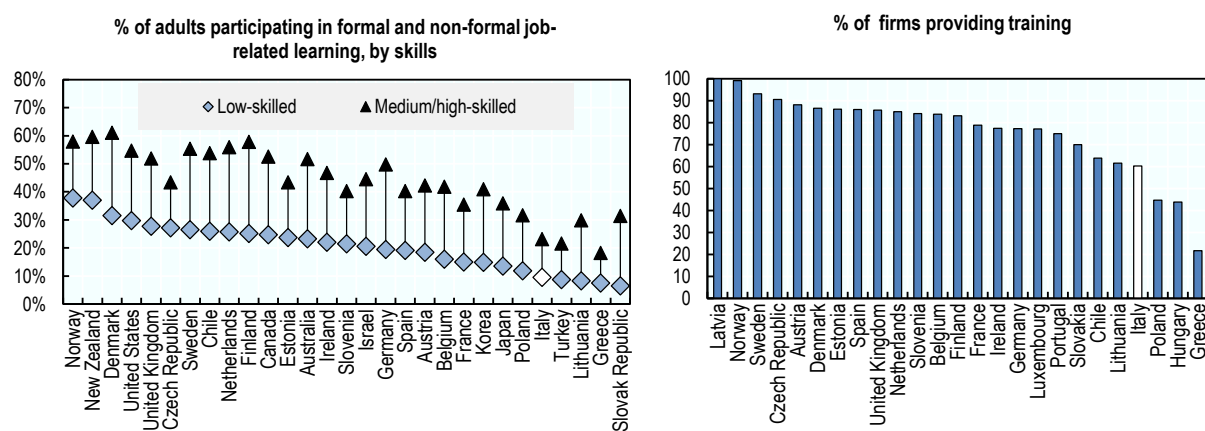
**Figure 1.4. Trends in adults’ participation and firms’ provision of training, Italy and OECD countries**



Source: AES and CVTS; data for Australia refer to WRTAL; data for New Zealand refers to the Business Operations Survey.

Despite this progress, however, Italy continues to lag behind by international standards. Too many adults – including the low-skilled – still do not participate in adult learning opportunities and a high share of firms continue not to provide any training to their workers. Indeed, PIAAC data shows how in Italy only 20.1% of the adult population participate in job-related training, half the OECD average (40.4%). Although the low-skilled are arguably those who are in most need of training, only 9.5% of them train in Italy, less than half the OECD average (around 20%). Within this context, Italian firms could play a greater role in upskilling its workforce. The CVT Survey shows that in Italy, only 60.2% of firms (with at least 10 employees) provide continuous vocational training to their workers, lower than the OECD European average of 76.1%, a rate which places Italy at the bottom of the OECD ranking ahead only of Poland, Hungary and Greece (see Figure 1.5).

**Figure 1.5. Adults’ participation and firms’ provision of training, Italy and OECD countries**



*Note:* for data on firms’ provision of training, data for Chile refers to 2014, and 2016 for all other countries; the low-skilled refer to adults with low numeracy and literacy skills.

*Source:* data on adults’ participation to training: PIAAC survey; data on firms’ provision of training: CVTS; ENCLA for Chile; Basic Survey of Human Resource Development for Japan; Business Operations Survey for New Zealand.

Overall, while Italy has made major progress in the past decade to up-skill its population and workers, it is crucial that further efforts are put in place to improve access to good quality adult learning opportunities. Training Funds represent one very important tool through which Italy could face the pressures brought about by the mega-trends, and equip adults and workers with the skills needed to thrive in the labour market and society.

## References

- Nedelkoska, L. and G. Quintini (2018), “Automation, skills use and training”, *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*, No. 202, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/2e2f4eea-en>. [1]
- OECD (2019), *Getting Skills Right: Future-Ready Adult Learning Systems*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/25206125>. [2]



**From:**

## **Adult Learning in Italy** **What Role for Training Funds ?**

**Access the complete publication at:**

<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264311978-en>

### **Please cite this chapter as:**

OECD (2019), "The context: Why is adult learning important in Italy?", in *Adult Learning in Italy: What Role for Training Funds ?*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/b87339b2-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to [rights@oecd.org](mailto:rights@oecd.org). Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at [info@copyright.com](mailto:info@copyright.com) or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at [contact@cfcopies.com](mailto:contact@cfcopies.com).