

## Significant country differences in adult learning

**More than a third of the EU population between 25-64 years participate in formal or non-formal education and training. There are significant country differences in participation rates according to results from the first Adult Education survey.**

Young people participate more and there are minor differences between males and females.

Among those participating, a large majority participate in non-formal education and training and over 80% of the non-formal activities are job-related. About 6% participate in formal education and training.

Formal education and training has a large share of total instruction hours whereas non-formal education and training is characterised by courses of shorter duration. The main reasons for participation are to do a better job and improve career prospects.

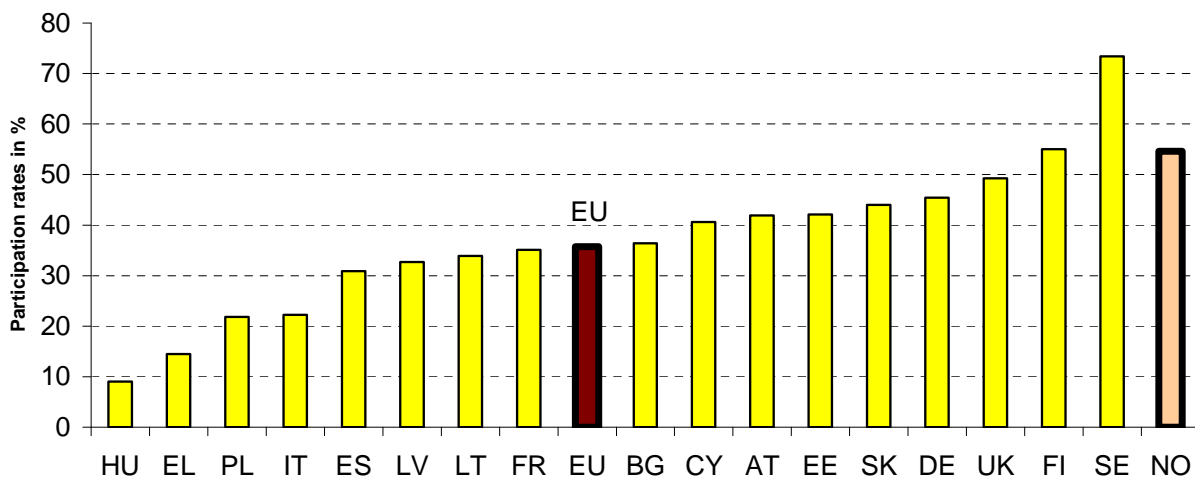
Most non-formal education and training activities are job-related.

Employers and non-formal educational institutions are the most significant providers of non-formal education and training. Together they provide half of total non-formal activities. About 60% of employed participants are sponsored fully or partly by the employers.

Nearly two thirds of the population do not participate in formal or non-formal education and training. More than 70% of people with low education as well as those in low-skilled blue collar professions do not participate in formal or non-formal education and training.

The two most important obstacles to participation in education and training are work schedules and family responsibilities. There are however major gender differences in obstacles to participation.

**Figure 1 : Participation in formal or non-formal education and training age 25-64 (%), 2007**



Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey

## The Adult Education Survey

Lifelong learning is considered as an important part of the EU Lisbon strategy according to which the European Union should become by 2010, the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economic area in the world, as well as a more cohesive and inclusive society. Acquiring and continuously updating and upgrading skills and competences is considered a prerequisite for the personal development of all citizens and for participation in all aspects of society.

In order to monitor life long learning, policy makers need internationally comparable data on adult participation and non participation in education and training in Europe. The Adult Education survey was developed in co-operation between European countries and Eurostat. The aim of the survey is to gather quality comparable data on adult participation in life long learning. The survey is part of a European statistical information system on education and lifelong learning.

The first Adult Education surveys conducted between 2005 and 2007 covered the main structures of life long learning such as participation in education and training, non participation, types of activities, reasons for participation, obstacles of participation and providers of education and training. The reference period for

participation in learning activities is 12 months prior to the survey. A total of 29 countries are part of the pilot survey.

This publication presents results for 17 EU countries plus Norway and covers participation in formal and non-formal education and training. The 17 EU countries have a combined population of 413million (83% of EU27 population, 2007).

Formal education is normally education provided in the formal diploma-based systems of education. Examples are primary and secondary level education and university / college diploma and degree courses.

Alongside the formal system is a range of educational and training activities which are not necessarily diploma-based. Non-formal education and training are normally short courses for all age groups taken within or outside the educational institutions. These courses can be taken for either job or personal reasons and examples are seminars and courses related to job, languages, computer and other IT studies, arts and culture. This also includes guided on the job training.

## Significant country differences in participation

**Table 1: Participation in formal or non-formal education and training by country, sex and age, 2007**

COUNTRY	SEX			AGE		
	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	25-34 years	35-54 years	55-64 years
EU avg	35.7	36.1	35.4	44.7	37.2	21.6
BG	36.4	37.9	35.0	44.7	39.7	20.3
DE	45.4	48.3	42.4	53.3	48.7	28.2
EE	42.1	36.9	46.7	52.5	42.6	27.5
EL	14.5	14.3	14.6	22.7	14.0	5.1
ES	30.9	30.8	31.0	39.7	30.8	17.0
FR	35.1	36.4	33.8	48.2	35.9	16.2
IT	22.2	22.2	22.2	30.5	23.0	11.8
CY	40.6	43.0	38.2	53.2	41.1	20.1
LV	32.7	25.9	39.0	39.0	34.3	21.8
LT	33.9	28.7	38.7	42.7	35.1	19.0
HU	9.0	8.3	9.6	15.8	9.0	2.5
AT	41.9	44.0	39.9	47.1	45.7	25.4
PL	21.8	21.3	22.4	34.1	20.7	6.8
SK	44.0	45.3	42.8	51.0	48.3	23.8
FI	55.0	48.9	61.3	66.0	58.6	37.8
SE	73.4	70.8	76.1	81.0	76.4	60.7
UK	49.3	47.2	51.3	58.8	50.3	37.0
NO	54.6	53.3	55.9	65.0	55.5	41.2

Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey

Total rates of participation vary between countries and the data shows the Nordic countries and the UK having high rates of participation. Low rates of participation are found in Hungary, Greece, Poland, and Italy.

The European average for the 17 countries represented indicates a slightly higher rate of male (36.1%) participation in education and training than for females (35.7%).

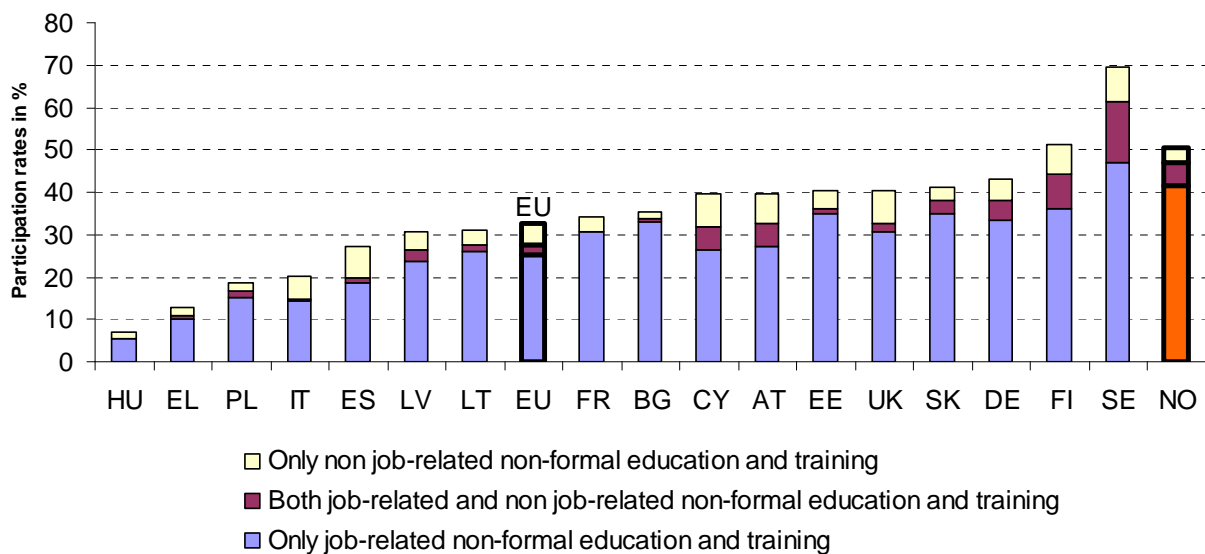
There are however varying gender differences in a number of countries. Countries with high participation rates like Sweden, Finland, Norway and UK have a higher proportion of females than males participating in education and training. Finland, Estonia and Latvia have over 10% more participation among females than males. There are minor gender differences in participation in countries with low participation rates like Hungary, Greece Poland and Italy. Germany, France, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Austria have higher participation rates for males than females.

There is generally a low participation rate in the age group 55-64 but there seems to be a higher proportion in this age group participating in education and training in countries with high rates of participation. Sweden differs considerably from the other countries with a participation rate for this age group of 60.7%, followed by Norway (41.2%), Finland (37.8%), United Kingdom (37.0%) and Germany (28.2%).

The biggest differences between the young age group 25-34 and the older age group 55-64 are found in Hungary (15.8%, 2.5%), Greece (22.7%, 5.1%) and Poland (34.1%, 6.8%). Participation in the labour market for the age group 55-64 is comparatively low in these three countries. Most activities especially in non-formal education and training are job-related. Since most older people in these countries are not active in the labour market they do not participate in education and training.

## Most participants in job-related non-formal education and training

**Figure 2: Participation in non-formal and job-related non-formal education and training (%), age 25-64, 2007**



Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey

Figure 2 shows participation in non-formal education and training by type of activity. The diagram shows those who took part in only job-related activities, both job-related /non job-related and others who took part in only non job-related activities.

The diagram shows that most people took part in only job-related non-formal education and training. There are significant country differences in the participation in non-formal education in the results of the Adult

Education Survey. The Nordic countries and Estonia together with the United Kingdom, Germany, Slovakia, Austria and Cyprus have high rates of participation.

Sweden has the highest rate with almost 70% of the population participating in non-formal education and training and as high as 60% participating in at least one job-related activity. This is followed by Finland and Norway with about 50% participation and with equally high rates in job-related activities (above 40%).

At the lower end of the scale we find Hungary, Greece and Poland with relatively low rates of participation in non-formal education and training. Hungary has a below 10% rate of participation in non-formal education and training, and Poland and Greece below 20%.

There is however a common trend in all countries. This is the fact that a large majority of participants in all the countries participate in job-related activities. The average for the seventeen EU countries available is 32.5% for all non-formal activities and 25 % for only job-related non-formal activities.

Sweden, with the highest participation rate in non-formal education and training, has a relatively high share of non job related activities as well. The United Kingdom with about 40% participation has almost 10% of adults participating in non job-related activities. Austria and Cyprus also have about a 10% participation rate in only non job-related activities. Italy and Spain have a relatively high share of participants in only non job-related activities among the countries with low rates of participation.

## Low educated and low skilled participate least in formal and non-formal education and training

**Table 2: Non-participation in education and training by labour status and occupation, age 25-64 (%), 2007**

Country	LABOUR STATUS				OCCUPATION			
	Total	Employed	Unemployed	Inactive	High skilled white collar	Low skilled white collar	High skilled blue collar	Low skilled blue collar
EU avg	64.3	56.9	75.7	82.7	39.3	55.3	70.8	70.5
BG	63.6	49.8	92.9	93.5	42.1	58.5	49.6	51.6
DE	54.6	47.0	70.7	73.8	31.2	51.2	61.7	66.3
EE	57.9	50.8	82.8	85.4	31.5	49.4	70.0	69.9
EL	85.5	82.2	86.8	94.6	72.6	78.9	92.6	92.3
ES	69.1	64.1	75.0	83.4	47.1	62.4	75.6	78.0
FR	64.9	57.7	71.4	87.6	43.6	60.9	73.0	71.0
IT	77.8	72.3	83.1	88.6	:	:	:	:
CY	59.5	52.0	68.9	84.3	32.9	49.8	72.4	77.6
LV	67.3	59.9	83.7	89.1	35.4	65.8	80.6	79.3
LT	66.1	56.6	83.3	92.0	30.8	59.4	77.1	81.2
HU	91.0	87.9	94.5	96.6	80.2	90.0	93.9	92.5
AT	58.1	51.7	58.6	76.2	35.6	47.0	68.7	78.5
PL	78.2	69.9	86.1	95.5	48.0	74.4	87.0	83.5
SK	56.0	46.0	84.3	89.0	35.7	54.8	58.4	50.5
FI	45.0	38.1	65.3	63.7	26.4	35.0	56.8	56.3
SE	26.6	20.7	41.4	48.2	8.9	22.5	36.0	42.4
UK	50.7	43.4	66.5	70.2	36.5	41.3	56.8	58.7
NO	45.4	39.7	54.2	70.1	31.2	42.1	54.5	61.3

Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey

A significant number of people between ages 25 - 64 did not participate in education or training in the last twelve months as shown in table 2. The EU average of persons not participating in education or training is 64.3%. Sweden, UK, Norway, Finland, Austria and Germany have non-participation rates below

60% while the rates are above 80% in Greece and Hungary.

The 'employed' category generally has lower rates but is high in countries like Greece and Hungary. The unemployed and inactive categories account for the largest proportion of non-participation in all the countries, though the rates of the 'inactive' are higher.

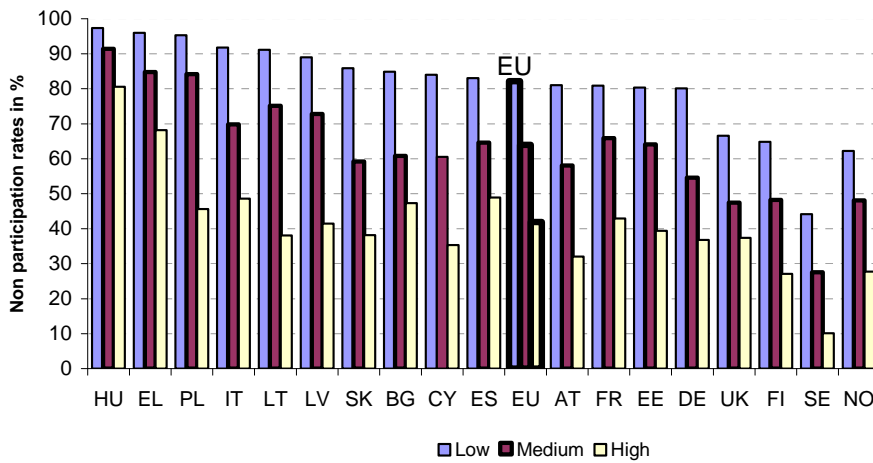
Differences in non-participation rates are also reflected in the types of occupation. Persons with highly skilled white collar jobs have the lowest rates in all countries. Hungary and Greece are the only exceptions with non-participation rates above 70% among this category. The EU average is almost 40%. A little more than half of

respondents in low skilled white collar occupations did not participate in formal or non-formal education and training and about 70% in high skilled blue collar and low skilled blue collar did not participate in education and training. The last category includes plant and machine operators and elementary occupations. Elementary occupations include cleaners, labourers, garbage collectors, farm-hands.

This category exclusively has the highest non-participation rates with an EU average of 75% and highest country rates in Hungary and Greece (over

90%). Sweden is the only country where non-participation rates in elementary occupations is below 50%.

**Figure 3: Rate of persons not participating in formal or non-formal education and training by education attainment level (%), 2007**



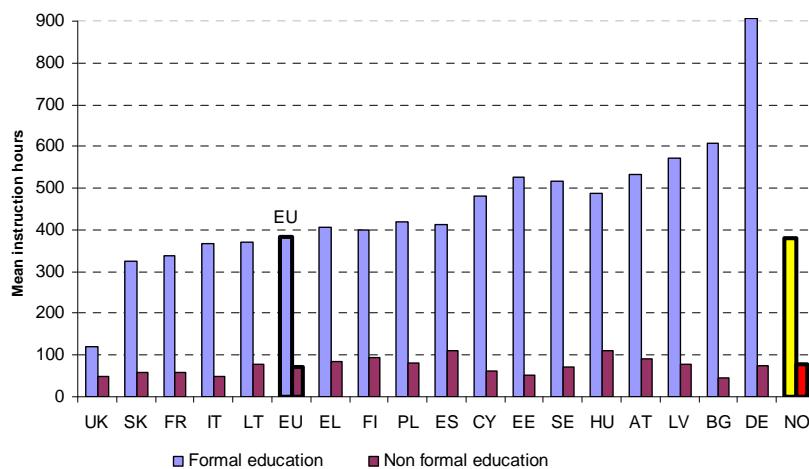
Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey

The highest level of education attained has an influence on the rate of participation or non participation in education and training as illustrated by figure 3. Persons with a high level of education have relatively low rates of non participation. Persons with a low level of education tend to have high non participation rates in all countries. The rates of non-participation among persons with high education are relatively high in Hungary and Greece

compared with the other countries. These same countries also have high rates of non-participation among persons with medium level of educational attainment. The weighted average for the 17 EU countries is above 40% for the highly educated and more than 80% for the low educated. Sweden, Finland and Norway have low rates of non-participation among persons with the high levels of education.

## Most instruction hours spent on formal education and training

**Figure 4: Mean instruction hours spent by participants in education and training, age 25-64, (2007)**



Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey

Duration of formal education and training activities is on average always longer than non-formal education and training. This is reflected in the high values of mean instruction hours presented in figure 4 for formal education. In all the countries, the mean instruction hours are much higher though participation rates are lower in formal education and training than in non-formal education and training.

The weighted average for the EU countries is 384 hours for formal education and training and 76 hours for non-formal education and training per participant. There are significant country differences in mean instruction hours spent by participants in formal and non-formal education and training. Germany stands out with the highest level of hours spent by participants (905 formal and 76 non-

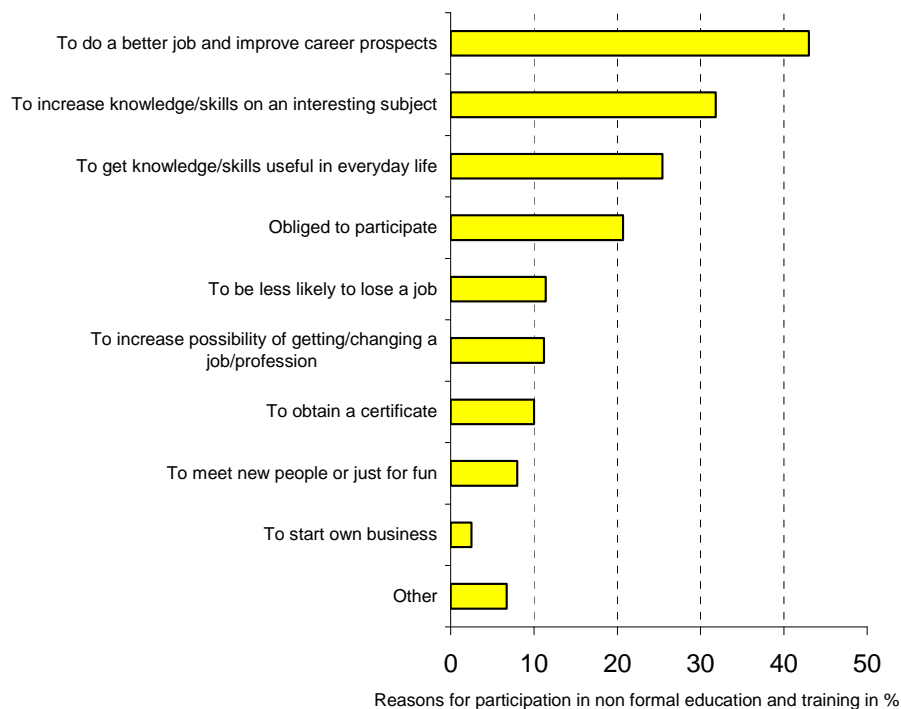
formal). This is followed by Bulgaria, Latvia and Austria albeit on a significant lower level.

The United Kingdom (121 formal, 48 non-formal) is the only country with instruction hours below 200. It is also one of the countries with the highest participation rates in both formal and non-formal education and training. The United Kingdom has comparatively more short courses in institutions providing formal education. This explains the contrasts between participation and intensity and the difference for example between Germany and UK in figure 4.

For non-formal education, Spain (112) and Hungary (111) have the highest instruction hours per participant. Bulgaria has the lowest value with 45 hours.

## 'To do a better job' and 'improve career prospects' are the most important reasons for participation in non-formal education and training.

**Figure 5: Reasons for participation in non-formal education and training, age 25-64 (% average, 2007)**



Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey – France is not included in the EU average

There are several reasons for participation in non-formal education and training and this is illustrated in figure 5. In the survey, this is a multi-choice question and values therefore do not add up to a 100%. By far the most important reasons are 'to do a better job' and 'improve career prospects'. This is the main reason in almost all the countries and the weighted average in the 17 countries available is 43%.

The second most important reason for participation in non-formal education and training is 'to increase my

knowledge/skills on a subject that interest me'. A quarter of the respondents selected 'acquiring knowledge or skills for everyday life' as a reason for participating in education and training.

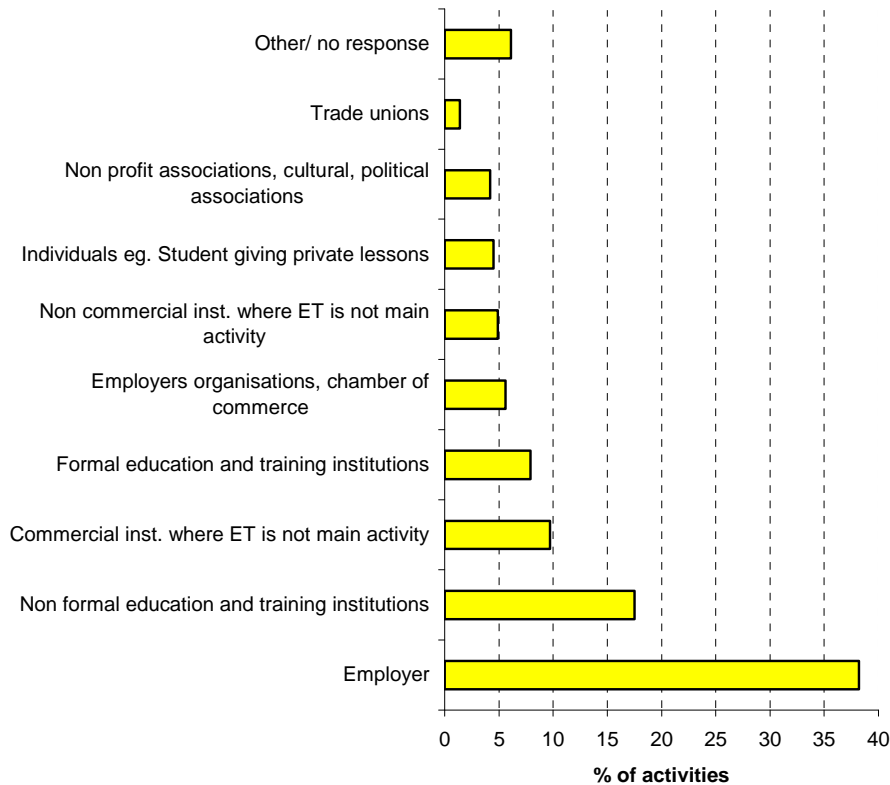
About 20% of the respondents were obliged to attend, 10% participated to obtain certificates and 8% participated to meet new people or just for fun. Starting one's own business is not a popular reason for participation as less than 3% gave this reason for participation.

There were however a few national exceptions in reasons for participation. More than 20% in Finland, Sweden, Austria and Latvia participated because they wanted to meet people or just for fun. Over 30% in Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary and Greece participated to

obtain certificates. More than half in Slovakia and Hungary were obliged to attend. Almost 6% of respondents in Greece and over 7% in Hungary participated to acquire skills to start their own business

## Employers are the leading providers of non-formal education and training activities

**Figure 6: Providers of non-formal education and training activities, age 25-64 (%), average, 2007**



Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey – France is not included in EU average

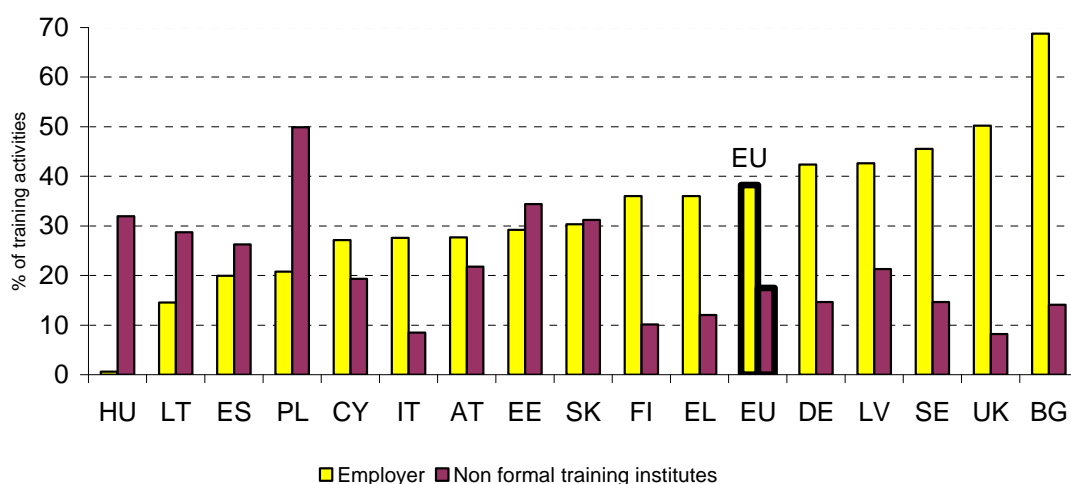
Providers of non-formal education and training activities are presented in figure 6. Results from the Adult Education Survey clearly indicate that employers are the leading providers of non-formal education and training activities with almost a 40% share. Non-formal education and training institutes follow next with just above 17 % of the non-formal activities.

Non-formal education and training institutions normally refer to institutions that offer systematic and intentional learning opportunities but are not necessarily diploma-based. Examples of such institutions are adult education

institutes, vocational training institutes, community learning centres, employment services and educational institutions like the folk high schools in Scandinavia, Germany, Austria and Switzerland but also private companies (language schools).

Other providers include commercial and non commercial institutions where education and training is not the main activity as well as employers' organizations and chambers of commerce. Non profit organisations, cultural and political associations and trade unions provide less than 5% each of total activities.

**Figure 7. Employers and non-formal education and training institutes (%), 2007**



Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey

EU average is the weighted average of the 16 EU countries available - Data from France is excluded. No data available for Norway

Figure 7 shows employers and non-formal education and training institutes. Employers are the most important providers of non-formal education and training activities in many countries and the weighted EU average is almost 40%.

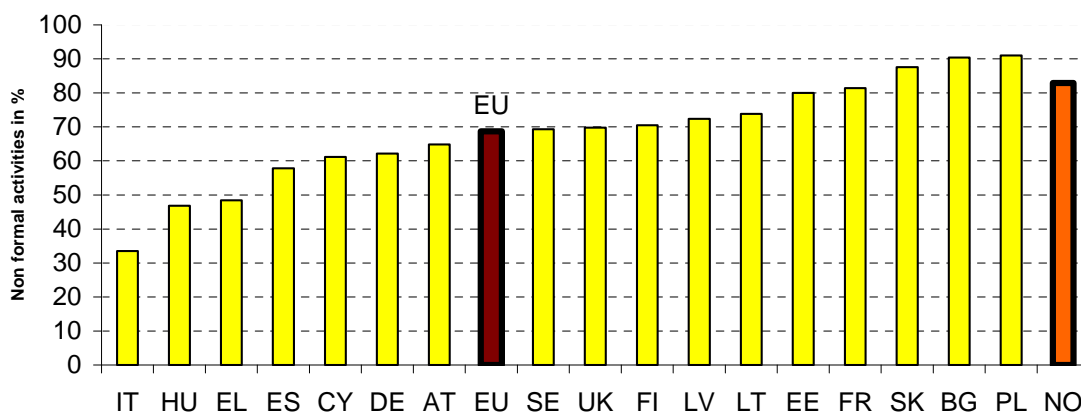
Non-formal education and training institutes are important providers in Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, Spain, Estonia and Slovakia. In all these countries, they provide relatively more non-formal education and training activities than employers.

Employer-provided activities account for almost 70% of all non-formal activities in Bulgaria while non-formal institutes provide about 15% of activities. Employers are also the leading providers in the United Kingdom with 50%. Employers provide between 40-50% of non-formal education and training activities in Germany, Latvia, the United Kingdom and Sweden.

In Hungary a large share of the activities are provided by non-formal education and training institutes and the share of employer-provided activities is very low compared with the other countries. In Slovakia, Austria, Cyprus, Spain and Estonia, the two providers are almost equally important in the provision of non-formal education and training activities.

## Most participants are sponsored by employers

**Figure 8: Distribution of activities totally or partly sponsored by employers (%), 2007**



Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey



The employer is the most common sponsor of non-formal education activities. The diagram shows the distribution of activities totally or partially sponsored by the employer. The data is based on activities by respondents employed at the time of the survey. The rates range from 90% in Bulgaria and Poland to around 30% in Italy. Most of the countries are well above 50%, the European average is almost 70%.

Over 60% of activities in countries with high rates of participation in non-formal education like Sweden, Norway, Finland and United Kingdom are either fully or partially sponsored by the employer.

Figure 2 showed that the majority of the non-formal education and training activities are job-related and this may account for the high level of sponsorship from employers as well.

Italy, Hungary and Greece have sponsorship rates below 50%. These countries have comparatively low participation rates in job-related activities (below 20%) as illustrated in figure 2. Hungary and Greece are also among the countries with the lowest participation rates as presented in figure 1.

## Work schedule is the most important obstacle for men and family responsibilities for women.

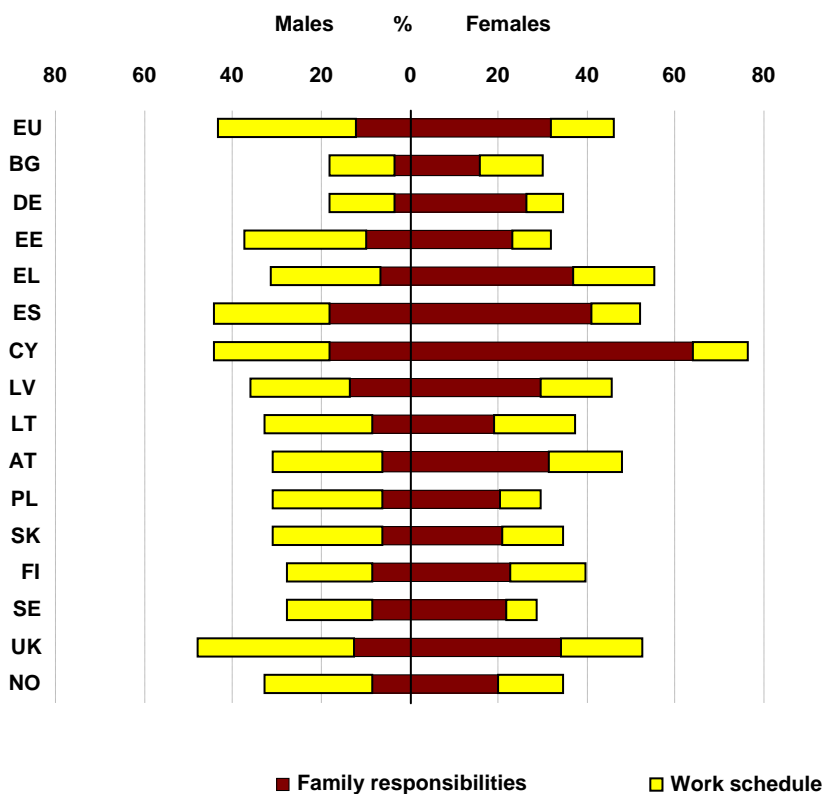
'The most important obstacle' is the main reason why people did not participate in education or training. Almost 50% of the respondents did not participate and did not want to participate. About 12% did not participate but wanted to participate. The information on obstacles in this section is based on those who wanted to but did not participate in formal or non-formal education and training.

The two most frequent reasons for not participating are work schedule (22.4%) and family responsibilities (22.3%). Cost of participation (15.7%) is the third major

reason for non-participation. The three reasons form more than 60% of the responses.

Reasons not frequently cited by respondents include not confident of going back to school, and did not have the prerequisites. Approximately 7% of respondents stated lack of employer support as a reason for non participation and a similar proportion selected 'no facilities at reachable distance'. The weighted European averages for 14 countries is however less than 5% in each of these other reasons.

**Figure 9: Most important obstacles to participation in education and training: work schedule and family responsibilities by sex and age 25-64 (%), 2007**



Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey

Data from France, Italy and Hungary are not included

Figure 9 shows respondents who selected work schedule and family responsibilities as the main obstacles for not participating in education and training. The figure shows clear differences between males and females in the two obstacles presented.

The EU average for 'work schedule' is 30.9% for males and 14.6% for females. The United Kingdom has relatively most respondents with work schedule as the most important obstacle.

In all countries females are in the majority among those who selected family responsibilities as the reason for not

participating in education and training. The average for the 14 countries represented shows that 31.7% of females were prevented from attending due to family responsibilities while only 12.3% of males selected this reason as an obstacle of participation in education and training.

Low female participation in the labour market may be behind this pattern in a number of countries and reflects participation in education and training since most activities are job-related

## ESSENTIAL INFORMATION - METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

The Adult Education Survey (AES) is part of the EU Statistics on education and lifelong learning. The surveys have been carried out by 29 countries in the EU, EFTA and candidate countries between 2005 and 2008. The EU AES is a pilot exercise which for the first time proposed a common framework including a standard questionnaire, tools and quality reporting. The reference year is set to 2007.

### SOURCE

Data from 18 of the 29 countries have been published. The rest of the countries are expected to be published by the end of 2009. The analysis and tables in this publication are based on data from the following countries: BG - Bulgaria, DE - Germany, EE - Estonia, EL - Greece, ES - Spain, FR - France (Data for France do not include the overseas departments (DOM).), IT - Italy, CY - Cyprus, LV - Latvia, LT - Lithuania, HU - Hungary, AT - Austria, PL - Poland, SK - Slovakia, FI - Finland, SE - Sweden, UK - United Kingdom and NO - Norway. Data from France are provisional.

### STATISTICAL UNITS

Individuals and learning activities

### POPULATION COVERAGE

The reference population is individual persons living in private households aged between 25 to 64 years.

### TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Data collection methods were designed in collaboration with the participating countries and Eurostat through the work of the AES Task Force and other Working groups including collaboration with external contractors. An AES manual and a standard questionnaire were recommended for use in the survey as well as common techniques of conducting interviews.

### PERIODICITY AND REFERENCE PERIOD

The Adult Education surveys are planned to be conducted every 5 years (see 'Regulation (EC) No 452/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 concerning the production and development of statistics on education and lifelong learning' domain 2. [Council Regulation \(EC\) No 452/2008](#)

The reference period is 12 months for reporting on learning activities. Detailed methodological notes are available on CIRCA.

[http://circa.europa.eu/Public/irc/dsis/edtcslibrary?l=/public/measuring\\_lifelong/education\\_survey&vm=detail&sb=Title](http://circa.europa.eu/Public/irc/dsis/edtcslibrary?l=/public/measuring_lifelong/education_survey&vm=detail&sb=Title)

### DEFINITIONS

**Formal education** is defined as education provided in the system of schools, colleges, universities and other formal educational institutions that normally constitutes a continuous "ladder" of full-time education for children and young people. In the AES only age-group 25-64 in formal education are included.

**Non-formal Education** is defined as any organised and sustained educational activities that do not correspond exactly to the above definition of formal education. Non-formal education may therefore take place both within and outside educational institutions and cater to persons of all ages. Depending on

country contexts, it may cover educational programmes to impart adult literacy, basic education for out of school children, life-skills, work-skills, and general culture.

### Highest level of education successfully completed (educational attainment)

- **Low** corresponds to pre-primary, primary and lower secondary (ISCED levels 0, 1, 2)
- **medium** corresponds to upper secondary and post secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED levels 3 and 4)
- **high** corresponds to tertiary education (ISCED levels 5 and 6)

### Occupation

- **high skilled white collar** (codes 1+2+3) that includes, legislators, senior officials and managers, professionals and technicians and associate professionals;
- **low skilled white collar** (4+5) that includes clerks and service workers and shop and market sales workers,
- **high skilled blue collar** (6+7) where includes skilled agricultural and fishery workers and craft and related trades workers,
- **low skilled blue collar** (8+9) where is included plant and machine operators and assemblers and elementary occupations.

### SPECIFIC NOTES

- All European averages are weighted averages of the 17 EU countries available except for figures 5, 6, 7 and 9.
- Non-participation refers to persons not participating in formal or non-formal education and training
- Data on occupation is based only on respondents with status 'employed'
- Information on obstacles of participation is based on respondents who wanted to participate but did not participate in education and training
- Participation in job-related activities refers to respondents who participated in at least one job-related activity
- Reason for participation is a multiple-choice question but in FR this was a single-choice question asking for the main reason. The data is therefore not comparable in level with the other countries and are not shown in this Statistics in Focus.
- Participation rates in the Adult Education Surveys are in general higher than in the quarterly EU Labour Force Survey because of differences in reference periods and coverage of activities (more information is available on CIRCA).
- Individual weights were used for calculation of activity weights for FR, IT and UK because the surveys documented detailed information on only one non-formal education and training activity. Other country surveys documented detailed information on 3 activities.

### SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

: Not available

More information on methodology can be found on CIRCA:

[http://circa.europa.eu/Public/irc/dsis/edtcs/library?l=/public/measuring\\_lifelong\\_education\\_survey&vm=detail&sb=Title](http://circa.europa.eu/Public/irc/dsis/edtcs/library?l=/public/measuring_lifelong_education_survey&vm=detail&sb=Title)

## Further information

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Select your theme on the left side of the homepage and then 'Data' from the menu.

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### Education and training

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