

Inequalities in access to job-related learning among workers in Italy: evidence from Adult Education Survey (AES)

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Abstract Equitable access to adult learning for all is a goal for European education, training and employment policies. In particular, all workers should be able to acquire, update and develop their skills over their lifetime. How is it possible to improve access to learning for older workers? This report provides a statistical picture of older workers participation in job-related training in Italy, investigating its variability and relevant inequalities. The analysis is carried out using Italian AES, provided by Eurostat. It analyses adults' learning activities and distinguishes formal, non-formal and informal learning. Using logistic regression model it is possible to estimate the learning-age gap between those aged under and over 50 years more accurately. Overall the data confirm the existence of strong inequalities in access to job-related learning among workers.

Key words: Age management; Adult education; Lifelong learning; Logistic regression model.

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1 Introduction

Demographic ageing is an irreversible process. The direct effect of population ageing is the increasing share of elderly people, who are in retirement age, compared to the decreasing share of young people.

Furthermore, the European Commission 2012 Ageing Report suggests that population ageing has been also affecting the age structure of population working age. This is extremely important in the overall context of labour force in the EU (particularly in Italy). On the labour market, the proportion of jobs that require medium and high-level qualifications is expected to increase. However, there is still an extremely high number of those of working age in Europe who have either low or no qualifications.

The nature of jobs is changing, necessitating changes in the skills that are required of workers and adapting lifelong learning systems to the needs of an ageing workforce. The recent crisis has also highlighted the importance of education and training at all stages of life, in particular for older adults to avoid unemployment, vindicating the messages that “it is never too late to learn” and learning must be for all. This requires older people to maintain and update the skills they have, particularly in relation to new technologies. Continuous learning and development of an ageing workforce are important for employers’ survival in competitive markets, as well as for maintaining older people’s employability.

Equitable access to adult learning for all is a goal for European education, training and employment policies. In particular, all workers should be able to acquire, update and develop their skills over their lifetime. However, despite the increasing need for learning later in life, participation and access to learning decrease with age. How is it possible to improve access to learning for older workers? This report provides a statistical picture of older workers participation in job-related training in Italy, investigating its variability and relevant inequalities due to key factors such as the influence of individual characteristics, jobs and workplaces.

2 Data and methods

In order to achieve this goal, the analysis is carried out using microdata from the second and latest wave of Italian Adult Education Survey (AES-2011), provided by Eurostat. The survey analyses the learning activities of adults and distinguishes between formal, non-formal and informal learning, which takes place inside or outside the workplace. It investigates adult participation in training in depth and includes a sample of 11.500 individuals, 6.000 of which are workers (if weighted they become 22 million, exactly the workers' amount in Italy).

Regular participation in learning activities does not include taking part in formal training only, but also learning in non-formal and informal learning settings.

In particular, informal learning plays a greater role for older employees than formal learning because it facilitates the transfer of knowledge and know-how between generations, allows practical skills to be gained quickly and ensures the inclusion, particularly for older workers, within the circles of relationships.

Descriptive analysis shows a strong inequalities between under and over 50 workers for all broad categories.

Using multivariate analysis (logistic regression models with Stata software) it is possible to estimate the learning-age gap between those aged under and over 50 years more accurately. The model has been developed for employed adults only and includes, first of all, adults' socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender and citizenship), secondly, job and size enterprise.

3 Conclusions

One principal finding of such an analysis is that people under 50 have a probability of 1.22 and higher of participating in training when compared to those aged 50 and more (table 2). Secondly, women are less likely to take part in training than men.

Overall the data confirm the existence of strong inequalities in access to job-related learning among workers: foreign individuals, in micro and small enterprises and in occupations with lower skills participate in job-related learning to a much lower extent.

This requires policy attention, to increase the focus on job-related training as part of active labour market policies, to prevent skills' obsolescence. In addition, it is important develop a "learning culture". It is a key factor for increasing the productivity of older workers increasing e.g. the capacity to deal with technological change ("it is never too late to learn").

However, it will be crucial to increase the level of continuous vocational training for all workers in future.

This is (or should be) the real challenge.

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