

OECD Skills Studies

# OECD Skills Strategy Implementation Guidance for Korea

STRENGTHENING THE GOVERNANCE OF ADULT  
LEARNING

REPORT SUMMARY





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# Foreword

Adult learning matters for Korea's long-term prosperity and the well-being of its citizens.

Korea has been one of the fastest growing OECD economies in past decades, but economic growth has slowed down in recent years, and since 2020 has been adversely affected by COVID-19. Given the important relationship between skills and economic recovery and growth, developing and upgrading the skills of Korea's population is essential, and Korea has an opportunity to do this by strengthening the governance of its adult learning system. Due to the wide range of actors with an interest and role in adult learning, effective governance arrangements – including collaboration across ministries and levels of government, stakeholder engagement, and financing – are essential to the success of the adult learning system.

Korea has some promising initiatives in the governance of its adult learning system. The Social Policy Ministers Committee promotes horizontal co-ordination across nine ministries on a variety of social policies, including adult learning. Lifelong education promotion councils and regional skills councils co-ordinate adult learning policies across levels of government. Government and stakeholders work together in adult learning policies through the Lifelong Learning City and the Local-based Job Creation Support Programme. Financial incentives such as the National Tomorrow Learning Card and the Lifelong Education Voucher provide individuals with financial incentives to participate in adult learning.

However, some challenges remain. While several ministries partake in the provision of adult learning, a comprehensive and shared vision is missing. Subnational governments vary significantly in their capacity to implement adult learning policies. While government and stakeholders are increasingly involved in social dialogue around adult learning policies, they often lack sufficient capacity to render the engagement effective. Financial incentives need to be tailored and targeted more to support the participation of disadvantaged groups in adult learning.

Recent and planned policy reforms show great promise, but more needs to be done to ensure stronger adult learning governance that involves all relevant ministries, levels of governments and stakeholders, such as employers, unions, education and training providers, non-governmental organisations, and individual learners.

Citizens of all ages and backgrounds should be able to develop and use their skills effectively to take up the opportunities of a rapidly changing society and contribute to Korea's economic recovery and growth.

Based on an analysis of Korea's adult learning governance, as well as findings from widespread engagement with stakeholders in Korea, the OECD has developed a number of concrete recommendations for Korea.

The OECD stands to support Korea as it seeks to implement better skills policies for better lives.

# Executive summary

## OECD-Korea collaboration on the OECD Skills Strategy project

This OECD Skills Strategy project provides Korea with tailored opportunities and recommendations to strengthen the governance of its adult learning system. The project has benefited from the insights of a wide range of government and stakeholder representatives through two rounds of background questionnaires, written input on the four priority areas, an interactive focus group and bilateral meetings during two OECD missions to Korea, and two Korean expert visits to the OECD. This process provided invaluable input that shaped the findings and recommendations in the full report.

## Key findings and opportunities for improving the governance of Korea's adult learning system

In recent years, Korea has made significant progress in strengthening its skills and economic performance. The skills of 15 year olds in reading, mathematics and science, as well as the tertiary education attainment rate among young adults, are among the highest across the OECD. The economy has steadily grown, and only recently contracted due to the ramifications of COVID-19, although Korea has been less impacted economically than other OECD countries.

The public health crisis requires immediate policy attention, and large-scale policy responses are required to provide support to those affected, as well as to promote economic recovery. The skills acquired through adult learning can have a positive impact on the economic recovery, and a resilient and adaptable adult learning system can help to mitigate economic and social shocks in the future, as well as help Korea to prepare for the challenges posed by megatrends such as population ageing, technological change and globalisation.

There are some challenges in the current adult learning system. While several ministries are involved in the provision of adult learning, a comprehensive and shared vision is missing. Subnational governments vary significantly in their capacity to implement adult learning policies. Although government and stakeholders are increasingly involved in social dialogue around adult learning policies, they often lack sufficient capacity to render the engagement effective. Financial incentives need to be tailored and targeted more to support the participation of disadvantaged groups in adult learning.

In order to address many of these challenges, Korea has implemented a range of strategies and reforms, such as the Inclusive Nation Social Policy Promotion Plan (2019-2022). To support these efforts, the OECD and the Government of Korea have identified four priority areas to further improve Korea's adult learning governance. These priorities and the key findings are summarised below.

### ***Priority 1: Strengthening the horizontal governance of adult learning***

Having a strong adult learning system requires a co-ordinated effort across a range of government ministries, also referred to as horizontal governance. As adult learning encompasses the domains of diverse ministries, effective policy co-ordination across ministries increases the potential to improve adult learning outcomes. Ministries should work together with stakeholders to create a comprehensive long-term vision for adult learning. The Social Affairs Ministers' Committee, established in 2015 to lead horizontal co-ordination across nine ministries on a variety of social policies, should play a key role in co-ordinating adult learning policies across ministries. Horizontal co-ordination is particularly required to disseminate consistent information about adult learning opportunities.

Korea can strengthen horizontal governance in adult learning by:

- Developing a long-term vision for adult learning and supporting co-ordination across ministries.
- Improving the dissemination of adult learning information in co-ordination with ministries.

### ***Priority 2: Strengthening the vertical governance of adult learning***

Multiple levels of government are involved in the design and implementation of adult learning policies. Strong vertical governance arrangements are necessary to co-ordinate the respective roles and responsibilities across these levels for the effective and equitable implementation of adult learning policies across the country. Co-ordination bodies such as lifelong education promotion councils and regional skills councils play an important role in co-ordinating across levels of government, and their effectiveness should be raised. Given that the capacity for implementing adult learning policies varies significantly across subnational governments, those with lower capacity require additional support.

Korea can strengthen vertical governance in adult learning by:

- Improving co-operation in adult learning policies across levels of government.
- Supporting subnational governments to effectively implement adult learning policies.

### ***Priority 3: Strengthening stakeholder engagement in adult learning***

The effectiveness of adult learning policies depends on the responses and actions of a wide range of actors, including stakeholders. Engaging stakeholders allows for their expertise and knowledge to inform adult learning policies and raises their support for implemented policies. In order for engagement processes to be constructive, government officials and stakeholders need to be aware of why engagement matters, and have the capacity to engage effectively. Strengthening the role of stakeholders, particularly those who are disadvantaged, in the adult learning policy-making process requires diverse and inclusive engagement efforts, as well as effective stakeholder engagement bodies.

Korea can strengthen stakeholder engagement in adult learning by:

- Raising the awareness of, and capacity for, effective stakeholder engagement.
- Involving stakeholders effectively in the adult learning policy-making process.

### ***Priority 4: Strengthening financing arrangements in adult learning***

A strong financing model in adult learning facilitates the effective co-ordination of funding sources and funding distribution. The total available funding for adult learning should meet the diverse adult learning needs of society, employers and individuals. At the same time, the distribution of funding needs to be equitable in order for it to be allocated proportionately, based on the ability of the beneficiaries to pay. Given that the national government has the largest amount of available funds it should play an important role in ensuring the equitable distribution of funds for adult learning policies. Disadvantaged subnational

governments will require additional financial support to implement adult learning policies. As the cost of participating in adult learning remains a significant barrier for disadvantaged groups, further improvements regarding financial incentives for individuals are necessary.

Korea can strengthen financing arrangements in adult learning by:

- Co-ordinating adult learning financing arrangements across levels of government.
- Improving financial incentives for individuals to participate in adult learning.

# 1 Key insights and recommendations for Korea

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This section provides an overall assessment and summarises the findings of the OECD Skills Strategy Governance Review of Adult Learning in Korea. The review covers four aspects of adult learning governance: 1) horizontal co-ordination among ministries; 2) vertical co-ordination across levels of government; 3) stakeholder engagement; and 4) financing arrangements. This section provides an overview these priority areas along with key insights and recommendations. It also describes the context of the skills system in Korea. The chapters in the full report examine each of the four priority areas in greater detail.

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## Introduction: The importance of adult learning in Korea

Korea has been one of the fastest growing OECD economies in past decades, but economic growth has slowed down in recent years and has been further affected by COVID-19. Korea's rapid transformation has relied on a well-educated population and a business environment that encourages innovation, world trade and integration in global value chains. The Korean economy recorded a 2.7% gross domestic product (GDP) increase in 2018 and renewed growth in 2019 (2%). Due to COVID-19, the economy contracted by 1.1% in 2020, which was the smallest decline across OECD countries. Assuming that there is no resurgence of the pandemic, the economy is projected to grow again by 2.8% in 2021 and 3.4% in 2022 (OECD, 2020<sup>[1]</sup>). Given that Korea's rapidly ageing society is reducing the contribution of labour utilisation to economic growth, labour productivity growth will be an even more important driver of economic growth in the future (OECD, 2016<sup>[2]</sup>; 2018<sup>[3]</sup>). The important relationship between skills and productivity mean that developing and upgrading the skills of Korea's population will be important for the country's long-term prosperity and the well-being of its citizens.

Due to the wide range of actors with an interest and role in adult learning, effective governance arrangements – including collaboration across ministries and levels of government, stakeholder engagement and aligned financing – are essential for the success of adult learning systems. Effective government arrangements involve relevant government ministries and agencies at multiple levels, education and training institutions, individuals, employers, labour unions, among others.

### ***Adult learning matters in the context of demographic change, digitalisation, globalisation and COVID-19***

A highly skilled workforce is critical for economic recovery and growth in Korea, and will help meet the challenges of a rapidly ageing society. Among OECD countries, population ageing will be the fastest in Korea, leading to a shrinking labour force. The OECD estimates that in 2050, for every ten individuals of working age in Korea there will be seven individuals not in the workforce. This is 20 percentage points above the corresponding OECD average (OECD, 2018<sup>[3]</sup>). The needs of a rapidly growing elderly population will lead to the expansion of healthcare and social services sectors. In Korea, workers are often forced out of firms around age 50 due to their relatively lower levels of skills and seniority based wages. A large share of older adults find themselves working in poor quality jobs with low and insecure earnings and little to no social protection. This contributes to the high poverty rates among adults aged 65 and over (46% compared to the OECD average of 13%) (OECD, 2018<sup>[4]</sup>). One key challenge for Korea will be to increase the life and job quality of older workers. It will be important to provide older adults with adequate opportunities to reskill and upskill through a strong adult learning system (OECD, 2019<sup>[5]</sup>) so that they can be better retained in the labour market and continue to contribute productively to the economy.

Technological change is affecting the nature of many jobs and the skills required. The OECD estimates that in Korea, about 10% of workers face a high risk of seeing their jobs automated, and another 33% will face significant changes in their job tasks due to automation (Nedelkoska and Quintini, 2018<sup>[6]</sup>). In addition, an estimated 20% of workers aged between 16 and 65 have moderate or significant training needs to prepare for the high risk of automation. At the same time, the digital transformation is creating new opportunities. Reaping the full benefits of digitalisation will ultimately depend on the ability of each country to develop a set of policies that help workers adapt to these changes and develop relevant skills to thrive in the digital world. The OECD Skills Outlook 2019: Thriving in a Digital World showed that most young people in Korea are equipped with digital skills, but that the share of older people (aged 55-65) lacking basic digital skills is relatively high (OECD, 2019<sup>[7]</sup>). Results from the Survey of Adult Skills (2012) show that below 5% of adults aged between 55 and 65 have good ability (proficiency at level 2 and 3) in problem solving in technology-rich environments, compared to nearly 65% of those aged 16 to 24 (OECD, 2016<sup>[2]</sup>).

The continuing expansion of international trade and global value chains also underscores the need for further adult learning. The general trend in OECD member countries, including Korea, is for low-skilled, routine tasks to be offshored, leading to the loss of jobs in developed countries and the corresponding gains in developing and emerging countries (OECD, 2019<sup>[5]</sup>). Over the last two decades, Korea has increased its participation in global value chains and specialised in technologically advanced industries (OECD, 2017<sup>[8]</sup>). Due to automation and globalisation, adults in Korea need to continuously upskill and reskill in order to move from low-skilled and routine task-based jobs to high-skilled and non-routine task based jobs.

COVID-19 is interacting with megatrends in complex ways. The increased use of digital solutions to overcome social distancing and quarantine requirements has accelerated digitalisation in learning and work in Korea. The need for production processes to be more resilient to supply shocks is incentivising Korean businesses to embrace automation and new technologies in their activities. As a consequence, new skills are required in the labour market and society, and individuals need to more frequently update and improve their set of skills. Skills are vital in enabling all individuals in Korea to adapt and eventually thrive in response to changing economic, social and environmental conditions in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

Skills are critical to reduce Korea's high level of inequality, which is being further exacerbated by COVID-19. Despite impressive economic growth in past decades, Korea has the third highest relative poverty rate and the seventh highest income inequality across the OECD (OECD, 2020<sup>[9]</sup>). COVID-19 has further increased inequalities, as disadvantaged groups have been particularly vulnerable to the economic and social ramifications of the pandemic. Non-regular workers<sup>1</sup> have been more likely to lose their jobs than regular workers and have less access to adult learning opportunities to support their transition to other jobs. Older workers, many of whom work in small businesses, have struggled to acquire the necessary digital skills to effectively use online platforms and other digital tools to telework. Women in general, and mothers in particular, have had relatively less time to acquire new skills for, and effectively participate in, remote working in light of their additional care responsibilities (OECD, 2020<sup>[9]</sup>). Adult learning is critical to ensure that all individuals form and maintain the required broad set of skills to adapt in a changing working environment and succeed in a dynamic society. A strong adult learning system will not only boost Korea's recovery today, but also build resilience and achieve long-lasting improvements for the future, without leaving any groups behind. For the definitions of "skills" and "adult learning", please see Box 1.1.

### **Box 1.1. Definitions of "skills" and "adult learning"**

#### **Definition of "skills"**

The OECD Skills Strategy defines "skills" (or competences) as the bundle of knowledge, attributes and capacities that can be learnt and that enable individuals to successfully and consistently perform an activity or task in the labour market and society. Skills can be built upon and extended through learning. This definition includes the full range of cognitive, technical and socio-emotional skills. The concepts of "skill" and "competence" are often used interchangeably. The sum of all skills available to the economy at a given point in time forms the human capital of a country. The OECD Skills Strategy shifts the focus from traditional proxies of skills, such as years of formal education and training or qualifications/diplomas attained, to a much broader perspective that includes the skills people acquire, use and maintain – and also lose – over the course of a lifetime. People need skills to help them succeed in the labour market, contribute to better social outcomes, and build more cohesive and tolerant societies.

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### **Definition of “adult learning”**

Adult learning encompasses any education or training activity undertaken by adults for job-related or other purposes, and includes:

- Formal education or training: Education or training activity that leads to a formal qualification (at primary, secondary, post-secondary or tertiary level).
- Non-formal education or training: Education or training activity that does not necessarily lead to a formal qualification, such as on-the-job training, open or distance education, courses or private lessons, seminars or workshops.
- Informal learning: Learning that results from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. It is in most cases unintentional from the learner’s perspective.

Adult learners are defined as individuals aged 25+ who have left the initial “first chance” education system (either primary, secondary, post-secondary or tertiary level) but are engaged in learning. In the Korean context, the Ministry of Education (MoE) refers to adult learning as “lifelong learning”, while the Ministry of Employment and Labour (MoEL) refers to it as “vocational skills development”. Therefore, when referring to the specific adult learning programmes of the MoE and the MoEL, their respective terminologies are used.

Source: OECD (2012<sup>[10]</sup>), *Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives: A Strategic Approach to Skills Policies*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264177338-en>. OECD (2019<sup>[5]</sup>), *OECD Skills Strategy 2019: Skills to Shape a Better Future*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264313835-en>.

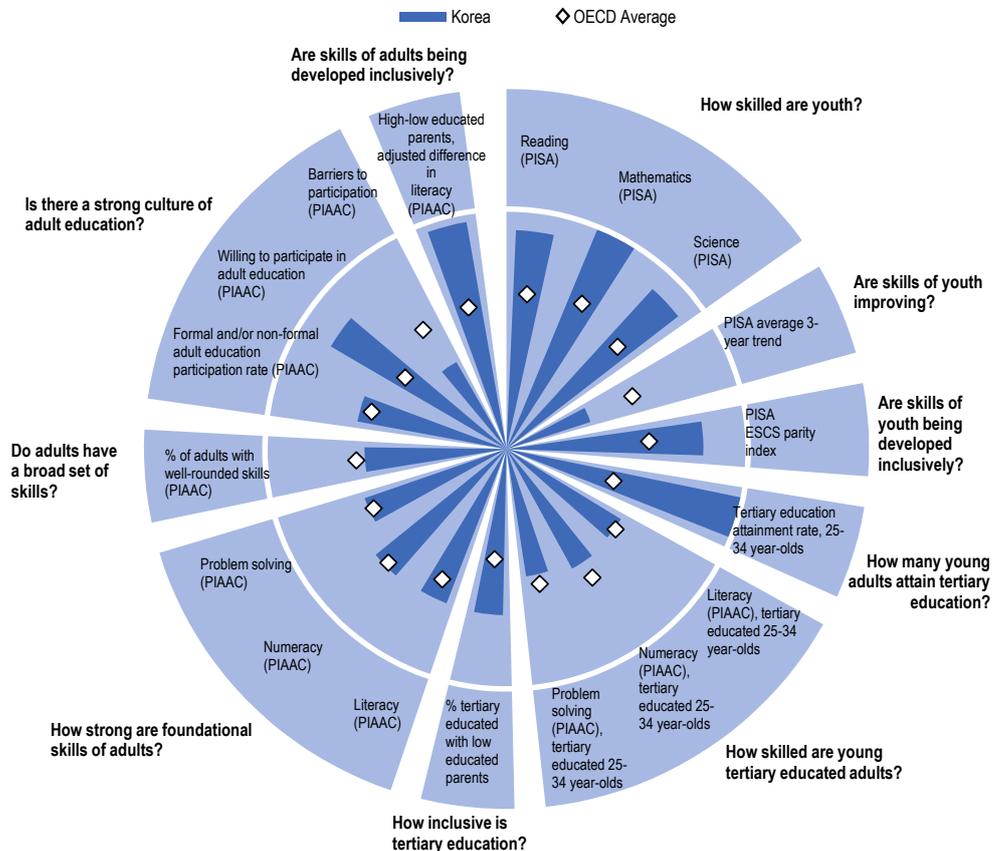
### **Developing relevant skills and using skills effectively**

The OECD Skills Strategy Dashboard provides an overview of the relative performance of countries across two dimensions of the OECD Skills Strategy: developing relevant skills and using skills effectively (as presented in Figure 1.1). For each dimension of the strategy there are a number of indicators, which are sometimes composite indicators made up of a number of other indicators, that provide a snapshot of each country’s performance (see Annex 1.A. in the full report for indicators and method). The two dimensions are important to keep in mind when considering Korea’s adult learning system.



**Figure 1.2. Key indicators for developing relevant skills**

Normalised score from 0 to 10, (0=minimum, 10=maximum) based on relative position in range of scores among countries, where a higher value reflects better performance.



Note: Relative position in country ranking (based on normalised scores), where higher value reflects better performance. The OECD average (when using PIAAC data) is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills. ESCS = economic, social and cultural status.

Source: Authors' calculations based on OECD (2019<sup>[12]</sup>), *PISA Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, <https://www.oecd.org/publications/pisa-2018-results-volume-i-5f07c754-en.htm> and OECD (2020<sup>[13]</sup>), *Survey of Adults Skills (PIAAC) (2012, 2015)*, <http://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/>.

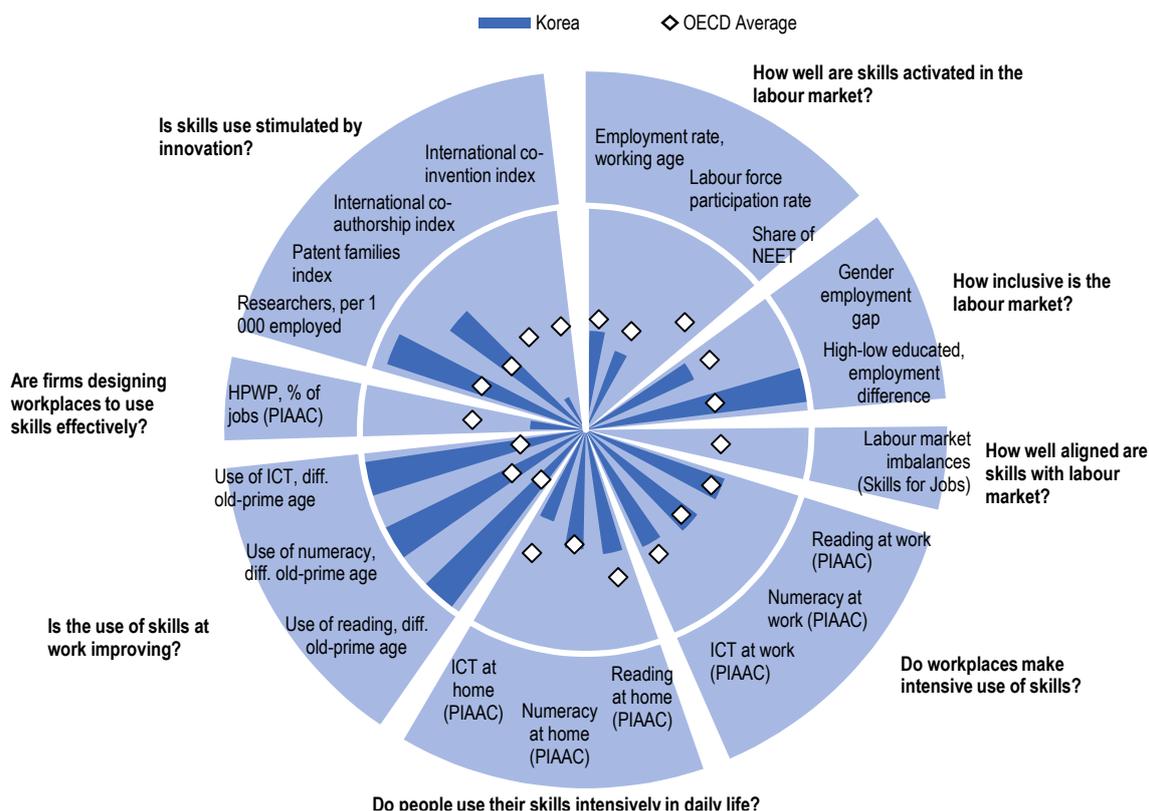
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Korea's performance in using the skills of its adult population effectively is relatively low. As Figure 1.3 demonstrates, Korea's employment and labour force participation rate is lower than the OECD average. Women are less likely to participate in the labour market due to the challenges of combining family and career responsibilities. Furthermore, there is a high share of tertiary educated adults who are not in employment, education or training (NEET), as many such graduates face challenges in entering the labour market. While Korea is a high performer in skills development, it is only an average performer in the extent to which it uses the skills of its adults. Although the use of reading and numeracy skills at work are slightly above average, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) skills at work is below average. In all these three skills domains, the use of skills at home is even weaker in relative terms. While the intensity with which skills are being used at work has increased for the younger generations compared to the older generations, there is still more that can be done. In PIAAC, relatively few workers report working in firms that have adopted high performance workplace practices (HPWP), which are practices associated with the more effective use of skills. Such practices include aspects of work organisation and job design (e.g. teamwork, autonomy, task discretion, mentoring and job rotation) and management practices

(e.g. incentive pay, training practices and flexibility in working hours). Skills use could also be further stimulated by innovation. Skills use performance in Korea highlights the need to ensure that the adult learning system is well aligned with the evolving skills demands of the labour market and society.

### Figure 1.3. Key indicators for using skills effectively

Normalised score from 0 to 10, (0=minimum, 10=maximum) based on relative position in range of scores among countries, where a higher value reflects better performance.



Note: Relative position in country ranking (based on normalised scores), where higher value reflects better performance. The OECD average (when using PIAAC data) is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills.

Source: Authors' calculations based on OECD (2020<sub>[13]</sub>), *Survey of Adults Skills (PIAAC) (2012, 2015)*, <http://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/>; and OECD (2020<sub>[14]</sub>), OECD statistics, <https://stats.oecd.org/>.

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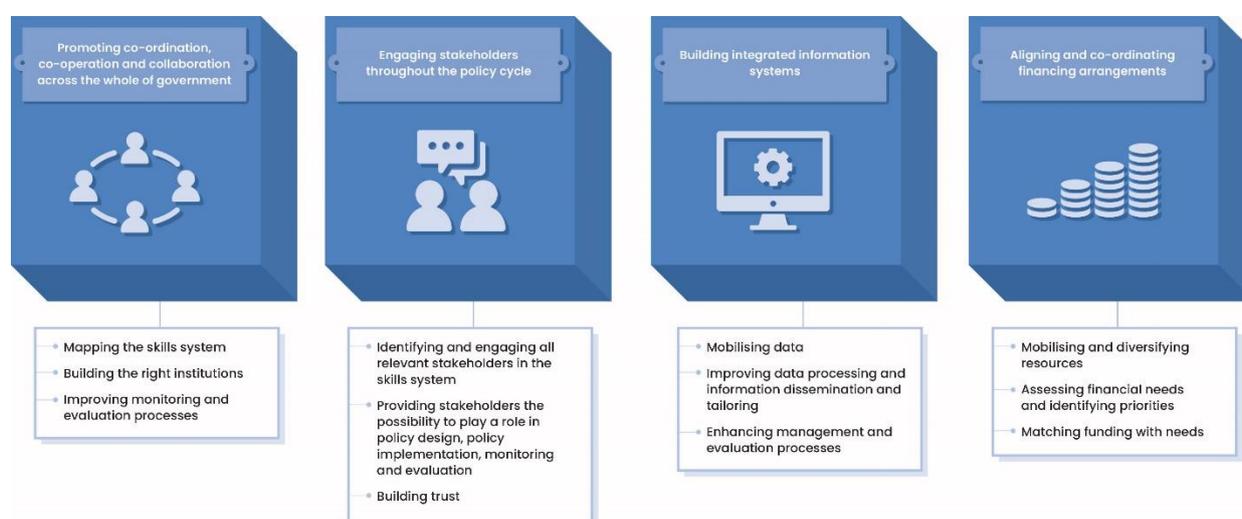
### The importance of the effective governance of adult learning

Effective governance arrangements are the foundation for improving Korea's performance in adult learning. The success of adult learning policies to improve the development of skills depends on the responses and actions of a wide range of actors, including government, students, teachers, workers, employers and trade unions (OECD, 2019<sub>[5]</sub>). Investing in skills is popular across different electoral and political constituencies as the benefits for economic development and social inclusion are broadly recognised. However, adult learning policy is more complex than many other policy areas as it is located at the intersection of education, labour market, industrial and other policy domains (Busemeyer et al., 2018<sub>[15]</sub>). Adult learning policies therefore implicate a more diverse range of government ministries, levels of governments and stakeholders. Governance should occupy a central position in adult learning policy to facilitate a concrete vision and longer-term strategy, and avoid the pitfalls of reactive policy making and uncoordinated investments in adult skills (OECD, 2020<sub>[16]</sub>).

The OECD Skills Strategy 2019 identifies four building blocks for strengthening the governance of skills systems (Figure 1.4) (OECD, 2019<sup>[5]</sup>):

- Promoting collaboration, co-ordination and co-operation across the whole of government, horizontally across ministries, and vertically across national and subnational governments.
- Engaging stakeholders meaningfully throughout the policy cycle, allowing them to play a role in policy design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation, while also building trust.
- Building integrated information systems to mobilise data and improve data processing with the goal of enhancing management and evaluation processes.
- Aligning and co-ordinating financing arrangements by matching funding with needs and diversifying sources of financing.

**Figure 1.4. Building blocks for the strong governance of skills systems**



Source: OECD (2019<sup>[5]</sup>), *OECD Skills Strategy 2019: Skills to Shape a Better Future*, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264313835-en>.

Adult learning policies are shared responsibilities between government and stakeholders. Higher levels of co-ordination, co-operation and collaboration have the potential to improve adult learning. The co-ordination of different policy areas is facilitated when there is a shared commitment and a clear vision that adult learning is a national priority. In the Inclusive Nation Social Policy Promotion Plan (2019-2022), Korea has established some medium-term policy goals, such as raising participation in adult learning (from 35.8% to 42.8%), adult vocational education and training (VET) (from 24.7% to 26%) and work-based learning in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (from 7.9% to 14%) (Table 1.1). Other plans, such as the fourth Lifelong Learning Promotion Basic Plan, the third Vocational Skills Development Basic Plan for Innovation and Inclusive Growth, the Five-year Roadmap for Job Policy, and the State Management Five-year Plan have set specific goals for increasing the provision of adult learning programmes (e.g. adult learning centres, adult learning programmes for disabled citizens) and the number of beneficiaries in specific adult learning programmes (e.g. Lifelong Education Voucher users, literacy education participants).

Governments need to identify and engage with relevant stakeholders and encourage co-ordination between national and subnational authorities. Co-ordination efforts should be supported by the right institutions and through the appropriate formal engagement bodies, such as councils and committees. Formal engagement bodies allow stakeholders to participate in the policy-making process through providing feedback and suggestions. Such engagement processes ensure that policies benefit from the expertise and knowledge of stakeholders, have higher legitimacy, and are more likely to be implemented effectively. In Korea, several formal engagement bodies play an important role in adult learning (Table 1.2).

**Table 1.1. Long-term adult learning policy goals in Korea**

Name	Year	Description
Inclusive Nation Social Policy Promotion Plan	2019	Promotes enhanced and equitable access to lifelong learning and adult VET opportunities, particularly for disadvantaged groups (i.e. SME employees, non-regular and self-employed workers).
The fourth Lifelong Learning Promotion Basic Plan (2018-2022)	2018	Increases the online and industry-specific adult learning ecosystem. Expands the network of university lifelong learning centres. Raises the number of beneficiaries of Lifelong Education Vouchers (up to 45 000) and literacy education (up to 640 000), as well as increases the number of adult learning programmes for disabled citizens to 60 by the year 2022.
The third Vocational Skills Development Basic Plan for Innovation and Inclusive Growth	2017	Establishes an online VET platform, including the learning management system using big data, Internet of Things and artificial intelligence (AI) via Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), flipped learning and blended learning. Strengthens the prior learning accreditation system for eventual alignment to credit accumulation towards a degree.
Five-year Roadmap for Job Policy	2017	Increases the number of <i>Meister</i> (VET) and polytechnic schools to strengthen sectoral-academic ties. Assesses the implementation of the lifelong vocational training account, long-term paid training leave, and guidance and counselling systems (this pilot started in 2018 and was made compulsory by 2019).
State Management Five-year Plan	2017	Provides nanodegree programmes and online learning programmes (e.g. K-MOOC) to promote adult learning.

Source: Korea (2019<sup>[17]</sup>), OECD Skills Strategy for Korea Questionnaire.

**Table 1.2. Councils and committees related to adult learning**

Government level	Councils and committees	Purpose	Examined in chapter
National	Social Affairs Ministers Committee	Evaluate and review social issues and policies. Plans related to adult learning are presented, discussed and reviewed.	Ch2. Horizontal Governance
National	Job Council	Deliberate and co-ordinate policies related to job creation and improving job quality.	Ch2. Horizontal Governance
National	Economic, Social and Labour Council	A social dialogue body where labour, management, government and public interest groups consult on labour, industrial, economic and social policies.	Ch4. Stakeholder Engagement
National	Lifelong Educational Promotion Committee	Main agency that reviews matters related to the promotion of lifelong education policies.	Ch2. Horizontal Governance
Regional/ local	Industrial skills councils (ISC)	Provide industry-led human resource development programmes, establishing and disseminating standards for industrial vocational abilities.	Ch3. Vertical Governance Ch4. Stakeholder Engagement
Regional/ local	Sectoral human resource development councils	Distinct from ISC, operates in the area of human resource development by industry under the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy.	Ch4. Stakeholder Engagement
Regional/ local	Lifelong education promotion councils	Evaluate implementation plans for lifelong education policies and co-ordinate with lifelong education promotion institutions.	Ch3. Vertical Governance
Regional/ local	Regional employment policy councils	Address employment-related issues and seek solutions.	Ch3. Vertical Governance
Regional/ local	Local labour and management committees	A consultative body that identifies, discusses, and deliberates issues related to local employment, human resource development and labour-management co-operation for regional economic development.	Ch3. Vertical Governance Ch4. Stakeholder Engagement
Regional/ local	Regional skills councils	Cultivate manpower needed for local SMEs by conducting a survey of labour market needs and providing training for recruitment.	Ch3. Vertical Governance Ch4. Stakeholder Engagement

Source: Korea (2019<sup>[17]</sup>), OECD Skills Strategy for Korea Questionnaire.

## Priority areas and recommendations

The full report provides policy recommendations in four priority areas for the governance of adult learning in Korea. These priorities were selected based on close consultation with Korean experts and available literature. Expert opinions were collected through two rounds of background questionnaires, written input on selected topics, two missions of the OECD team to Korea, and two Korean expert visits to the OECD.

The priority areas identified by Korea in reviewing the governance of adult learning are:

1. Strengthening the horizontal governance of adult learning (Chapter 2 in full report).
2. Strengthening the vertical governance of adult learning (Chapter 3 in full report).
3. Strengthening stakeholder engagement in adult learning (Chapter 4 in full report).
4. Strengthening financing arrangements in adult learning (Chapter 5 in full report).

The governance building block on integrated information systems (see Figure 1.4 above) is embedded across the other four identified priority areas.

### ***Strengthening the horizontal governance of adult learning***

Having a strong adult learning system requires a co-ordinated effort across a range of government ministries. Horizontal governance refers to co-ordination between the ministries of the national government on adult learning policies. As adult learning encompasses the domains of diverse ministries, effective policy co-ordination across ministries increases the potential to improve skills outcomes (OECD, 2019<sup>[5]</sup>).

#### *Opportunity 1: Developing a long-term vision for adult learning and supporting co-ordination across ministries*

Creating a comprehensive long-term vision for adult learning is essential for clarifying roles and responsibilities, setting targets, and identifying adult learning policies for government and stakeholders to implement. A comprehensive long-term adult learning vision is currently lacking in Korea, and government officials report the frequent change of policy priorities set by the government as the second most important obstacle to their work. Although the Lifelong Education Act requires the consultation of all relevant ministries in the design of the Lifelong Learning Promotion Basic Plan, it does not require the engagement of stakeholders. Making stakeholder engagement mandatory in the process of developing an adult learning vision, and getting more stakeholders engaged by raising their awareness about the importance of adult learning, would foster an inclusive vision development process that is owned and supported by all relevant actors. The vision development process would also benefit from being guided by an evidence-based approach, so that proposed adult learning policies in the vision are more likely to succeed when implemented. An evidence-based approach could be fostered by having an adult learning research institute co-ordinate adult learning relevant research efforts and actively inform the vision development process.

As adult learning policies fall under the domains of many ministries, strong horizontal co-ordination is key to effective policy implementation. The Social Affairs Ministers' Committee (SAMC), which is headed by the minister of education and includes senior representatives across eight other ministries, should play a greater role in co-ordinating adult learning policies. However, due to the broad mandate of the SAMC, its effectiveness in co-ordinating adult learning policies has been limited. Therefore, the SAMC's co-ordinating role in adult learning policies should be supported by a working level co-ordination group to promote ongoing discussions among relevant ministries. Such a working level co-ordination group, composed of representatives of relevant ministries, could regularly discuss in-depth adult learning policies, facilitate the preliminary co-ordination of adult learning policies across ministries, and provide recommendations on adult learning policies for the SAMC to consider. The SAMC should be further supported with adult learning policy experts who could exchange adult learning policy information across relevant ministries, gather

relevant adult learning policy research findings, prepare substantive input on adult learning for the SAMC to consider, and follow-up on any decisions. The two existing and relevant national adult learning co-ordination bodies – the National Lifelong Education Promotion Committee and the Employment Policy Deliberative Council – should also support and inform the work of the SAMC.

*Opportunity 2: Improving the dissemination of adult learning information in co-ordination with ministries*

The dissemination and management of adult learning information needs to improve. The various online portals established by the MoE and the MoEL provide a wide range of information on adult learning opportunities and keep track of individual adult learning participation records. Both ministries are currently making efforts to consolidate adult learning information from various information sources under their auspices in an online portal (National Lifelong Learning Site [MoE] and Goyong21 [MoEL]). However, there is not enough co-ordination between the MoE and the MoEL across their respective online portals, which leads to inconsistent information and makes the access and usage of the portals more complex for end users. The information provided on the various online portals should be consistent and complementary. Introducing a single account to access the different portals would simplify accessibility and facilitate usage by making it easier for users to update adult learning participation information across portals. It would also create a unified track record of adult learning participation and make it possible to analyse more comprehensively adult learning participation to inform the design of adult learning policies. The provision of adult learning information should be complemented with customised counselling and guidance services, particularly for disadvantaged groups. The information provided by these services (e.g. Work-net, Career-net) also needs to be consistent, rely on the latest labour market data, and be tailored to individual profiles and needs (Korea, 2019<sup>[18]</sup>).

*Recommendations for strengthening the horizontal governance of adult learning*

Policy directions	Recommendations
<b>Opportunity 1: Developing a long-term vision for adult learning and supporting co-ordination across ministries</b>	
Creating a comprehensive and long-term vision for adult learning	1.1. Develop a comprehensive long-term vision for adult learning that is based on social consensus and reinforced by awareness-raising activities. 1.2. Establish or designate a research institute to co-ordinate research efforts on adult learning and inform the development of the national adult learning vision.
Supporting horizontal co-ordination of adult learning policies	1.3. Support the Social Affairs Ministers' Committee with a working level co-ordination group responsible for co-ordinating adult learning policies among relevant ministries. 1.4. Support the co-ordination role of the Social Affairs Ministers' Committee with adult learning policy experts.
<b>Opportunity 2: Improving the dissemination of adult learning information in co-ordination with ministries</b>	
Improving the dissemination of adult learning information	1.5. Introduce a single account for users to access the online adult learning information portals, and track their adult learning participation history across online portals. 1.6. Co-ordinate counselling and guidance services to provide comprehensive and consistent information on adult learning opportunities, with particular attention paid to disadvantaged groups.

**Strengthening the vertical governance of adult learning**

Multiple levels of government have roles and responsibilities in the design and implementation of adult learning policies. Strong vertical governance arrangements are necessary to co-ordinate respective roles and responsibilities across levels of government so that adult learning policies can be implemented effectively across levels of government and equitably across the country.

*Opportunity 1: Improving co-operation in adult learning policies across levels of government*

There are number of obstacles in Korea that reduce the quality of co-operation on adult learning policies across levels of government. Such obstacles include a lack of clarity about respective roles and responsibilities, conflicting interests, and insufficient dialogue about the design and implementation of adult

learning policies. Co-ordination bodies such as Lifelong Education Promotion Councils and Regional Skills Councils consist of representatives from various government levels and are one of the main mechanisms to support co-operation across levels of government. The effectiveness of these bodies should be raised by introducing a legal mandate that strengthens their vertical co-ordination roles in facilitating knowledge transfer, identifying priorities, informing budget allocations, and fostering consensus and ownership for national adult learning reforms, such as the Lifelong Learning Promotion Basic Plan. Moreover, the effectiveness of the co-ordination bodies should be improved through establishing sectoral working groups on adult learning policies, which can prepare for and follow up on official meetings. If the attendance requirement in the bodies could become more flexible by allowing lower ranking government officials to replace senior government representatives when necessary, it would be possible for the body to convene more frequently and would provide more time for representatives to discuss in-depth adult learning policies and arrive at a consensus about what actions to take. Co-ordination bodies should also be equipped with sufficient human and financial resources, i.e. a permanent secretariat and an annual budget, in order to operate effectively.

*Opportunity 2: Supporting subnational governments to effectively implement adult learning policies*

There are large socio-economic gaps across regions in Korea, as well as significant adult learning participation and outcome gaps. In order to reduce these regional gaps, all subnational governments need to have sufficient and well-equipped government officials to implement adult learning policies effectively. However, there are significant regional gaps in the number of available government officials per inhabitant, the skill level of government officials, and the share of government officials recognised for their excellent performance. Existing staff mobility schemes should be expanded and adapted to make hard-to-find skills available, particularly for subnational governments with low capacity. Such schemes would provide professional development opportunities for government officials, promote peer-learning and disseminate best practices. Although a variety of general training options for government officials exist, more training options that address the specific and practical challenges of implementing adult learning policies should be provided. Co-operation among subnational governments in implementing adult learning policies should also be increased by raising awareness of the benefits of co-operation and providing greater financial incentives.

*Recommendations for strengthening the vertical governance of adult learning*

Policy directions	Recommendations
<b>Opportunity 1: Improving co-operation in adult learning policies across levels of government</b>	
Strengthening co-operation between national and subnational governments	2.1 Provide a clear legal framework that guides the roles of bodies responsible for co-ordinating adult learning policies across levels of government. 2.2 Improve the effectiveness of co-ordination bodies through making the attendance requirements of members more flexible and by establishing working groups. 2.3 Equip co-ordination bodies with sufficient human and financial resources to fulfil their functions effectively.
<b>Opportunity 2: Supporting subnational governments to effectively implement adult learning policies</b>	
Increasing the capacity of subnational government officials to implementing adult learning policies	2.4 Improve subnational government staff mobility schemes to ensure the continuity of adult learning policies and provide additional support for subnational governments with low capacity. 2.5 Provide training to subnational officials to raise their capacity for implementing adult learning policies. 2.6 Increase co-operation in adult learning policies among subnational governments by raising awareness of the benefits of co-operation and providing greater financial incentives.

**Strengthening stakeholder engagement in adult learning**

Effective stakeholder engagement is essential to support Korea's performance in adult learning. The effectiveness of adult learning policies depends on the responses and actions of a wide range of actors, including a wide range of stakeholders. Engaging stakeholders allows for their expertise and knowledge

to inform policies and raises their support for implemented policies (OECD, 2019<sup>[5]</sup>). Stakeholders should be given the opportunity to play a role throughout the entire policy cycle.

*Opportunity 1: Raising the awareness of, and capacity for, effective stakeholder engagement*

The awareness and capacity of government to engage stakeholders in adult learning policy making needs to be raised in Korea. A particular challenge for government officials is identifying the relevant stakeholders to engage, as stakeholders in Korea are not as well organised as in other OECD countries. For example, trade union and employer organisation density levels are among the lowest across the OECD. Government officials should conduct a mapping exercise to identify which stakeholders to engage, for what reason they should be engaged, and how they should be engaged. Existing training on stakeholder engagement from the National Institute for Lifelong Education and the Seoul Metropolitan City Government should be expanded and further developed to ensure that it raises the awareness and capacity of government officials to engage disadvantaged stakeholders (e.g. women, older adults, adults with lower levels of education and non-regular workers). Training should also raise the capacity of government officials to develop consistent and transparent indicators that they can use in evaluating stakeholder proposals, so that all proposals, regardless of who is submitting them, can be assessed in the same merit-based manner.

The awareness and capacity of stakeholders to engage with government in adult learning policy making also needs to be raised. Stakeholders often do not sufficiently engage with the government on adult learning due to a low awareness about the importance of adult learning in the long term relative to other topics such as wages and working conditions in the short term. Stakeholder organisations such as unions and employer associations are fragmented and have low coverage across the country, which makes it difficult for these stakeholders to communicate messages to government in one clear voice and reduces their bargaining power. Stakeholders should be provided with training to raise their awareness about the importance of engaging with government on adult learning policies and the processes through which they can engage. The government should consider supporting stakeholder groups, particularly those lacking financial resources and without a formal stakeholder organisation, to organise and represent themselves more effectively. The capacity of stakeholder organisations to participate in evidence-based dialogue with the government should be raised through internal research units in stakeholder organisations.

*Opportunity 2: Involving stakeholders effectively in the adult learning policy-making process*

Although stakeholders are able to provide input throughout the policy-making process, the extent and quality of engagement should be raised. In a survey of stakeholders, only 23% responded that they had experience of expressing their opinions on the government's policy issues or projects. Among those who expressed their opinions, 74% did so using online platforms. Given that disadvantaged stakeholders are less likely to use online platforms, online engagement efforts should be complemented with offline engagement efforts adapted to the specific needs and profiles of disadvantaged stakeholders to encourage their active participation. Existing stakeholder engagement initiatives, such as civic participatory service design teams, should be made available across the whole country. Besides providing input, partnerships between government and stakeholders in implementing adult learning programmes (e.g. Suwon Lifelong Learning City, Gwangju Job Creation Programme) should be expanded. When evaluating the effectiveness of such partnerships, sufficient time over several years should be allocated to give time for different initiatives to show results in adult learning programmes. When funding such partnerships, the government should also encourage stakeholders to work together through prioritising funding requests and proposals that involve more than one stakeholder. A public-private partnership unit specifically for adult learning policies should support the management of government and stakeholder partnership projects and facilitate the dissemination of best practices.

Formal stakeholder engagement bodies for adult learning should be reviewed to make them more effective. A variety of stakeholder engagement bodies for adult learning currently exist, for example local labour and management committees and sectoral human resources development councils. Given that a common challenge across most of these engagement bodies is the uneven representation of stakeholders, their membership should be revised to ensure the equal representation of stakeholders such as unions and employers. Due to the large number of engagement bodies, there are significant overlaps in terms of mandates and responsibilities across bodies. This duplicates engagement efforts and makes the process of engagement more inefficient, with bodies competing with one another. When engagement bodies cover similar issues on adult learning policies, better co-ordination between them should be supported and required by their respective line ministries. The effectiveness of bodies should be raised through forming working groups specifically on adult learning policies. The bodies should be regularly monitored and evaluated to inform decisions about consolidating or abolishing bodies that are unnecessarily overlapping, ineffective or no longer necessary.

### *Recommendations for strengthening stakeholder engagement in adult learning*

Policy directions	Recommendations
<b>Opportunity 1: Raising the awareness of, and capacity for, effective stakeholder engagement</b>	
Raising awareness and capacity of government to engage stakeholders	3.1 Identify through a mapping exercise the relevant stakeholders in adult learning policy and how they should be engaged. 3.2 Expand training for government officials on how to engage in particular disadvantaged stakeholders in adult learning policies, as well as how to assess stakeholder proposals.
Raising awareness and capacity of stakeholders to engage with government	3.3 Provide stakeholders with training to raise their awareness about the importance and benefits of engaging with government on adult learning policies, and on the processes through which they can engage. 3.4 Strengthen stakeholders' capacity to represent themselves effectively in engagement processes. 3.5 Raise the capacity of internal research units in stakeholder organisations to participate in an evidence-based dialogue with government.
<b>Opportunity 2: Involving stakeholders effectively in the adult learning policy-making process</b>	
Expanding opportunities for stakeholders to participate in the adult learning policy-making process	3.6 Use diverse and inclusive engagement formats to solicit input and feedback from stakeholders, in particular those who are disadvantaged, on the development of adult learning policies. 3.7 Create a dedicated public-private partnership unit to support the management of government and stakeholder partnership projects in the area of adult learning.
Improving the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement bodies	3.8 Improve the composition and co-ordination of, and support for, stakeholder engagement bodies. 3.9 Monitor and evaluate existing engagement bodies to raise their effectiveness in engaging stakeholders in adult learning policy.

### **Strengthening financing arrangements in adult learning**

A strong financing model in adult learning facilitates the effective co-ordination of funding sources and funding distribution. The total available funding for adult learning needs to be adequate to meet the diverse adult learning needs of society, employers and individuals. At the same time, the distribution of funding needs to be equitable to distribute the funds proportionately based on the ability of the beneficiaries to pay (OECD, 2019<sup>[19]</sup>). Those who can afford to pay more should receive less external funding, while those who are less well-resourced should be more financially supported. Given that the national government has the largest amount of available funds it should play an important role in ensuring the equitable distribution of funds for adult learning.

#### *Opportunity 1: Co-ordinating adult learning financing arrangements across levels of government*

Subnational governments vary significantly in their available financial resources for adult learning policies due to varying revenue generating capacities and different transfer amounts received from the national government. The national government needs to play a greater role in particularly supporting subnational governments with fewer resources. Specific programmes by the MoE and MoEL, such as the Lifelong

Learning City Programme and the Local-customised Job Creation Support Programme, support subnational governments to implement adult learning policies. However, since these programmes disproportionately reward subnational governments that already demonstrate high performance (e.g. adult learning participation rates), they may reinforce the gaps between strong and weak performers. In order to provide greater support to governments with fewer resources, additional characteristics regarding the capacity of subnational governments to meet adult learning needs should be taken into account in the funding allocation process. Adult learning funding for subnational governments with fewer resources should be further raised by allowing more flexibility in reallocating funding from general education to adult learning to meet rising demands due to population ageing. The reallocation of funds from general education to adult learning policies could be supported by increasing collaboration between subnational governments, which are mostly responsible for adult learning, and subnational offices of education, which are mostly responsible for general education.

*Opportunity 2: Improving financial incentives for individuals to participate in adult learning*

The cost of participating in adult learning is a significant barrier for individuals, particularly disadvantaged groups such as adults with lower levels of education, lower levels of income and non-regular workers. Financial incentives such as loans, scholarships and study/training leave, and individual learning schemes (ILS) have been created to help individuals overcome the financial barriers to participating in adult learning. ILS such as the MoE's Lifelong Education Voucher and the MoEL's National Tomorrow Learning Card are considered suitable policy levers to reach the largest number of beneficiaries. ILS do not require repayment (in contrast to loans), demonstration of already high skills (in contrast to scholarships) and employer-support (in contrast to training leave subsidies). However, the existing schemes should be further improved by targeting them more to benefit disadvantaged groups. Complementary financial measures that cover the indirect costs of participation should also be available, especially for when disadvantaged individuals pursue long-term formal education programmes. Comprehensive counselling services on adult learning opportunities and relevant supportive financial incentives should be provided at flexible times and in a variety of formats tailored to the profile and needs of disadvantaged groups. In order to simplify overall access to ILS and reduce administrative burden, the management systems of the MoE and the MoEL schemes could be connected through a single user access account.

*Recommendations for strengthening financing arrangements for adult learning*

Policy directions	Recommendations
<b>Opportunity 1: Co-ordinating adult learning financing arrangements across levels of government</b>	
Co-ordinating adult learning financing arrangements across levels of government	4.1 Provide additional financial support to subnational governments that have fewer resources to reduce the performance and resource gaps in implementing subnational adult learning programmes. 4.2 Increase collaboration between subnational education offices and subnational governments to support the reallocation of funds from general education to adult learning to meet rising demand in this area.
<b>Opportunity 2: Improving financial incentives for individuals to participate in adult learning</b>	
Improving financial incentives for individuals to participate in adult learning	4.3 Tailor individual learning schemes to meet the specific needs of disadvantaged groups. 4.4 Simplify access to individual learning schemes in Korea through creating a single user access account.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In Korea, non-regular workers are made up of three at times overlapping groups: 1) non-permanent workers, including those working on a temporary or fixed-term basis; 2) part-time workers, including those with 35 or fewer regular working hours per week; and 3) non-typical workers, including daily workers, contractors (either engaged for a specific task or paid on commission), temporary work agency workers, domestic workers and other such categories of workers with only week ties to the employer (OECD, 2018<sub>(4)</sub>).

<sup>2</sup> Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, which produces the Survey of Adult Skills.



OECD Skills Studies

# OECD Skills Strategy Implementation Guidance for Korea

## STRENGTHENING THE GOVERNANCE OF ADULT LEARNING REPORT SUMMARY

A well-coordinated adult learning system is essential to support the achievement of Korea's long-term goals. The transformational effects of demographic change, digitalisation, globalisation, and most recently COVID-19 on life at work and outside of it amplify the importance of getting adults' skills right.

OECD research shows that individuals, employers and society benefit from adults having higher levels of skills. Korea is a global leader in student performance and tertiary attainment. Yet today, many adults in Korea have skill levels below the OECD average. A significant share of adults face barriers to participate in adult learning. Against the backdrop of a growing awareness about the importance of skills, Korea's government and stakeholders have a unique opportunity to improve how they share responsibility and work together in the adult learning system.

This report outlines how Korea can increase participation in adult learning by strengthening horizontal co-ordination across ministries, vertical co-ordination across levels of government, engagement of stakeholders and financing arrangements. The report provides examples of national and international good practices as well as a series of concrete recommendations to help Korea improve the governance of adult learning and in turn enhance economic growth and social cohesion.

