

## Barriers to Engage Low-Skilled Adults in Educational Opportunities: A Global Perspective

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### INTRO

Strategies to engage middle-aged and older adult workers in AET often exclude low-skilled and sub-populations. The engagement of these sub-populations in AET is challenging as access, awareness, and program costs associated with AET opportunities often target highly skilled populations. The inequality in AET participation warrants specific programs and strategies to address challenges low-skilled adult workers face in pursuing AET. The purpose of this study is to identify AET opportunities for low-skilled middle-aged and older adults, as well as highlight major barriers to engage and retain these sub-populations in AET.

### METHODS

Data were collected from 36 key informants through semi-structured interviews and through document reviews. Key informants represented Australia, Canada, Italy, Norway, the Netherlands, the U.K., and the U.S. Descriptive methods were used to identify barriers in recruiting and retaining low-skilled middle-aged and older adults. We particularly focused on the barriers related to cost, language, access, and awareness.

### RESULTS

Results highlighted opportunities tailored to support adult workers in the pursuit of adult learning opportunities both domestically and internationally. Barriers including learning histories, lack of long-term person-centered support, as well as the role of multiple forms of learning, such as formal and informal learning, were identified.

### SUMMARY

- Participating in adult education and training (AET) is critical to have skills demanded by employers.
- Lack of training opportunities for older workers may place them at a disadvantage.
- Recruitment efforts tailored to support underserved minority middle-aged and older adult workers are needed.
- Administrators should operate from an equity and inclusion lens as individual experiences are not monolithic
- To retain adult learners, multiple learning forms are necessary, including formal, non-formal, and informal learning.

# Providing more support and opportunities for formal, non-formal, and informal learning can enhance continuing education and training participation of low-skilled older workers across nations.



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### THREE TYPES OF BARRIERS

Adult students face multiple barriers to participation, which have been categorized as Situational barriers, institutional barriers, and dispositional barriers.

Situational: The cost of education, lack of time, lack of child-care, unavailability of transportation, lack of support from family and friends

Example:

Regarding formal education for those aged 40-45: "Those people don't have the ability to change direction because if you want to do formal educational training in Australia, if you want to do university education, it's going to cost you. And it means withdrawing from the workforce." (Australia)

Institutional: Time required to complete an educational program, courses are not scheduled at a convenient time, lack of information about educational programs, difficult enrollment process, lack of computer/internet access, and strict attendance requirements

Example:

"Older adults' access to technology and skills is actually quite limited." (Australia)

Dispositional: Lack of confidence in ability, concern about being too old, tired of school, lack of enjoyment in studying

Examples:

"... Second chance learners, so those learners who were returning to study after having a checkered history of learning in school, basically, negative experiences of learning in school, where they felt they were anything from ... They had very negative perceptions of themselves as learners, that they were stupid, that they couldn't learn, they'd never been a good learner, they didn't have the skill or capabilities to learn. Which is terrible, to think that these people had held these, you know, internal dialogues about their capacity to learn for so long." (Australia)

"There are very few programs for people above the age of 45." (Italy)

### FORMAL, NON-FORMAL, & INFORMAL LEARNING

Formal Learning – results in a recognized diploma or credential

Non-formal Learning – takes place in the workplace or in an educational setting but does not typically lead to a formal credential

Informal Learning – takes place in everyday life and is not necessarily intentional but contributes to an individual's knowledge and skills

**All three forms of learning should be available to adults of all ages to ensure they have access to learning opportunities that are comfortable and relevant.**

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