



## D3.2 – National policy brief SLOVAKIA

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## National context for adult learning in Slovakia<sup>1</sup>.

As a result of digital transformations and green transitions, the Slovak labour market encounters various challenges in labour and professional skills shortages which situates adult learning as a top policy priority. Relative to other Member States, the Slovak economy is highly industrialized with a leading role in the manufacturing industry.

Due to increased automation and digitisation, Slovakia faces one of the highest risks of automation, skill obsolescence and job destruction compared to other developed economies (Nedelkoska and Quintini, 2018; Abdul-Hamid and Ambasz, 2023).

The dual transition affects the automotive industry, which is the leading industrial sector in Slovakia, traditionally anchored in the Slovak industrial structure (Kureková, 2012). Human capital management is seen as one of the key bottlenecks to further the growth and stability of the automotive sector in the future (Kureková, 2018). It is therefore highly relevant to study company-level training practices in the automotive sector and the role of social partners in shaping these.

Despite general consensus around the importance of adult learning, Slovakia is one of the countries which had consistently low rates of participation until 2020 (Figure 1). In 2021 the rate of participation increased to 4.8%, followed by a significant increase to 12.8% in 2022. This increase needs to be analysed more rigorously as it could be related to modification in the context information added to the survey question and the possible effect of employment trends, such as job turnover on the training incidence.

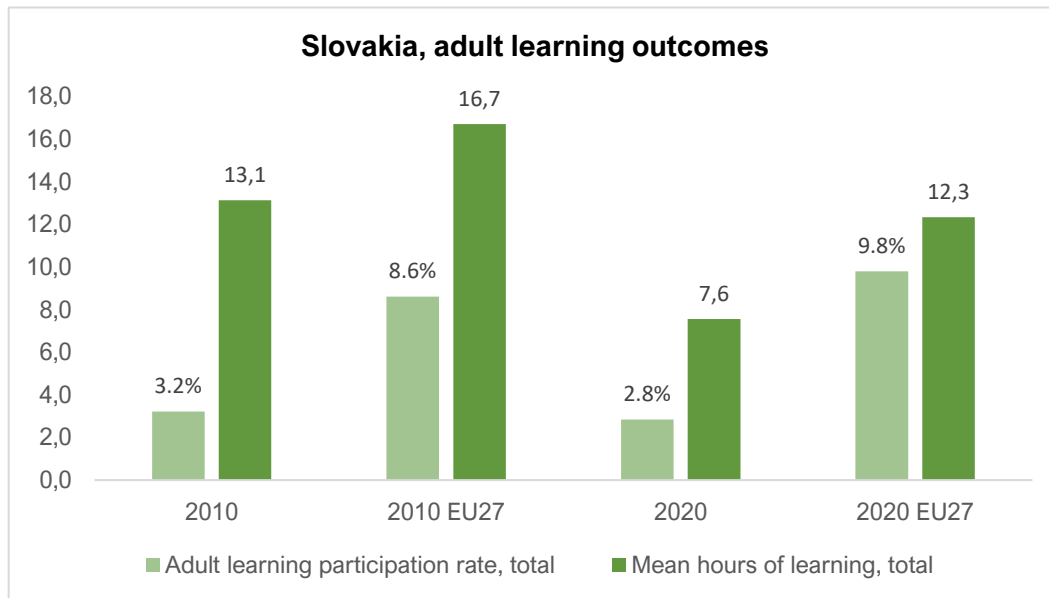
Moreover, inequality in participation is one of the key problems of the adult learning system in Slovakia. The participation rate of low-skilled or unemployed adults has been close to zero or not available due to low reliability in the data (Figure 2). Low-skilled adults do not participate in education or training, which could be to some extent connected with a limited offer of adequately structured learning programmes for low-skilled adults (Habodászová and Studená, 2019, Rigová et al. 2021; Studená and Gálová 2021).

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<sup>1</sup> For more information see the full national report:  
Studená, I., Kováčová, L., and Kureková, L.M. (2023), I SKILL National Report –Slovakia. Working Paper I SKILL Project - Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue to Kick-in Inclusive Adult Learning – Deliverable 3.1  
[https://cdn.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/D-3.1-I-SKILL\\_National-Report\\_-Slovakia\\_final.pdf](https://cdn.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/D-3.1-I-SKILL_National-Report_-Slovakia_final.pdf)



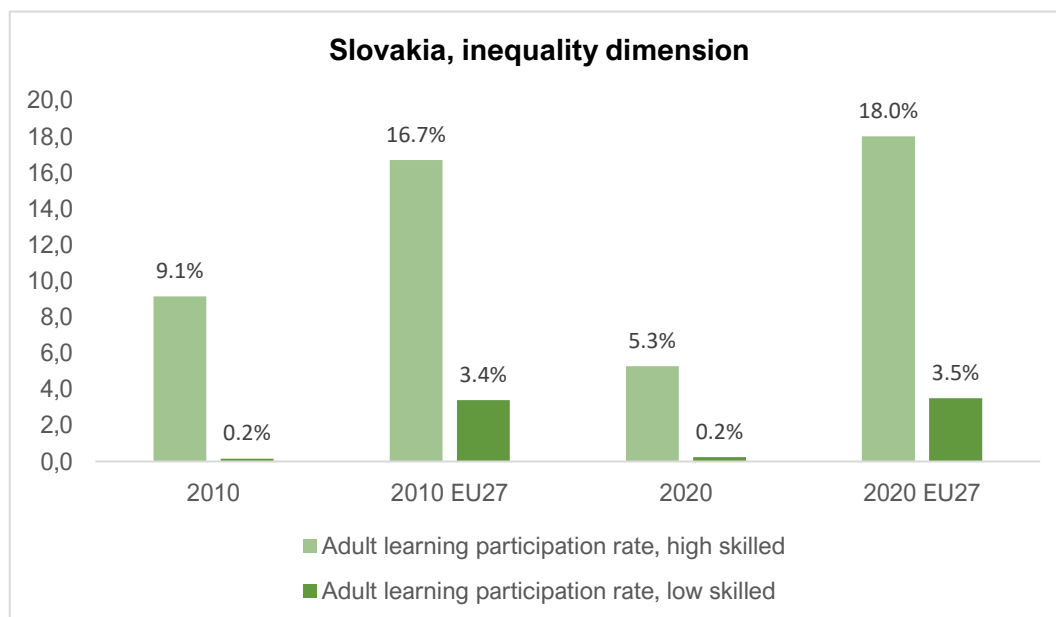
**Figure 1 Slovakia Adult learning outcomes participation rate %, and mean hours**



*Source:* Own calculations based on the Eurostat Labour Force Survey 2010 and 2020.

*Note:* Variables refer to the population of employed adults, aged 25-64

**Figure 2 Slovakia Inequality dimension, participation rates of high and low skilled [%]**

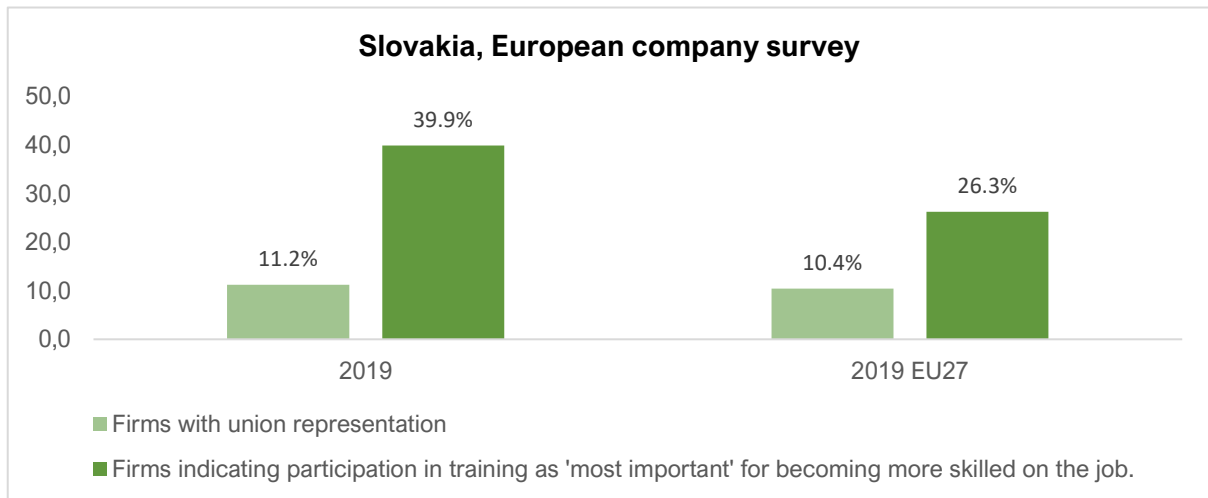


*Source:* Own calculations based on the Eurostat Labour Force Survey 2010 and 2020.

*Note:* Variables for low-skilled refer to the population of employed adults, aged 25-64, ISCED levels 0-2; variables for high-skilled refer to the whole population, aged 25-64, ISCED levels 5-6.



**Figure 3 Union density & company perception on the importance of training**



Source: Own calculations based on the European Company Survey 2019 dataset.

Adult learning governance in Slovakia is characterised by fragmentation across multiple actors and institutions. A wide range of national and regional actors assume competences which have direct or secondary relevance for the policy measures for adult learning. Cross-sectoral coordination has been identified in several studies as one of the key areas where improvements could be particularly beneficial for progress in the delivery of measures supporting participation and effectiveness of adult education (OECD, 2020).

Employers have acted as an influential voice in debates about the education system and skill development. Due to the skill and labour shortages repeatedly faced by firms in Slovakia, most interventions led by employer associations have focused on formal education, its quality, and its (poor) structure (i.e., resulting in the introduction of dual VET).

At the secondary level, formal vocational education and training play an important role in the Slovak skills development framework from the perspective of work-based learning; but its role in adult learning remains minimal. Slovakia belongs to the countries with a traditionally strong school-based VET system, which is predominantly youth-centred (Fazekas and Kureková, 2016).

Slovakia is one of the countries with participation in formal education is undertaken mostly by learners up to the age of 25 years (Habodászová and Studená, 2019). In 2016, the average age of adult learners was the lowest in the EU and Slovak adults spent fewer hours in formal education than adults in other EU countries (Ibid.).

Public funding for, and the practice of adult learning programmes, is provided mainly in the framework of active labour market policies which include training programmes intended as a route for upskilling. These have typically been provided only for registered job seekers, and only recently has the target group been extended to employees. These publicly funded learning programmes in Slovakia do not specifically address the needs of low-skilled workers.

Large employers, and the employer associations representing them, are very influential in shaping the content of debates about adult learning in Slovakia but appear to fail to see the issue in its full complexity, including its potential to alleviate the exclusion of low-skilled adults from the labour market.



In an eco-system with fairly weak social partnerships and declining membership, both fragmentation and coordination describe existing social partnerships in Slovakia. Union density followed a declining trend and remained low compared to other EU countries (Fig. 3). The engagement of social partners is not sufficiently supported; as a result, adult learning is rarely a part of collective bargaining, and trade unions do not tend to engage in shaping training programmes for workers.

### **Main takeaways from the National Report**

- From the economic perspective, adult learning is currently perceived as a key driver for boosting adults' skills, which is particularly important for Slovakia, and can generate a range of personal, economic, and social benefits. However, this has not yet been reflected in the patterns of participation based on available statistical sources, nor in the policy toolkit and resources needed to support adult learning development.
- Company-level social dialogue issues are shaped by the preferences and needs of unionised workers as relating to wages and working conditions. Trade unions remain less involved in collective bargaining over adult learning at the workplace in Slovakia, but they realise this is a key topic they should integrate into their priorities.
- Inequity is one of the key weaknesses of the Slovak adult learning system. Low-skilled adults do not participate in education or training, which is very likely a result of the limited offer of adequately structured programmes for low-skilled adults.
- Due to dynamically changing labour market skill needs, companies understand the increasing role of reskilling and upskilling. They often rely on their own solutions and develop non-formal in-house training courses with individualised approaches and open career paths to any motivated employee. Companies communicate that the motivation of workers to continuously learn is generally weak.
- Companies understand and emphasise the need to foster not only hard skills but also to communicate the increasing importance of supporting soft skills such as teamwork, communication skills, problem-solving skills, as well as the ability to adapt to new situations and to engage in complex work projects.
- Management is aware of increasing pressure on the resilience and mental well-being of their employees. Strong competitive pressures, however, limit the extent of support of employers to all workers in soft skills or well-being. Company representatives also see a space for improvement in the implementation of adult learning programmes in better cooperation between the formal educational institutions and the business sector.
- Overall, we find that labour and skills shortages support more equal opportunities at the workplace for reskilling and upskilling, regardless of the qualification background of the job seekers or employees.
- To date, Slovakia has not introduced a universal scheme or measure to support participation in adult learning. The training programmes developed in the framework of active labour market policies have targeted individuals to allow reskilling or upskilling, but in practice, the reskilling or upskilling dimensions or vulnerability of adults to the effect of automation have not been addressed by these programmes.



- Social partners emphasize the need to foster cooperation between the education system and the business sector to foster adult learning.

### Dealing with skills shortages, companies support equality in upskilling.

Due to dynamically changing labour market skill needs, companies understand the increasing role of reskilling and upskilling. They often rely on their own solutions and develop non-formal in-house training courses with individualised approaches and open career paths to any motivated employee.

Our case study company developed a non-formal upskilling programme with particular emphasis on an individualised approach. The programme was designed for a specific position for those already employed at a lower position, or job applicants. Company plans to extend the programme to other, higher-skilled job positions. This approach creates an open learning environment with more equal opportunities for upskilling:

*“It depends on the personality of the employee. Those employees who want to make a progress, would be given the opportunity. They may apply [for a position] because we internally offer various job positions. People are different ...”*

(Head of the Production Unit)

Companies and trade union representatives agree that worker motivation is key in adult learning. They also agree that the motivation of workers to continuously learn is generally weak in Slovakia. Management seeks to put in place organisational practices supporting workers to engage in self-learning and to build their individual intrinsic motivation to learn.

Management emphasises the need not only to adapt to new technologies and needs stemming from the green transition in terms of vocational skills, but also to invest in the development of social skills. These include social skills required in project-based work such as teamwork, flexibility, and adaptation to new tasks. Critical thinking is gaining further importance for performance and the future world of labour technical skills.

#### **Recommendations from the National report**

- The role of social dialogue in supporting the participation of adults in learning and in promoting equity of participation is limited. Social partners would welcome support to foster their expert and personal capacities so that they could really be engaged in shaping adult learning programmes.
- The Adult learning system in Slovakia needs to enhance general support for the development of soft skills for adults, including social skills and critical thinking both for formal and non-formal education and training programmes.
- It is important to decrease the administrative burden of publicly funded schemes faced by employers so that progress can be made in terms of their outreach at the employee level and in dealing with the skills challenges in Slovakia more broadly.
- In view of increasing labour shortages and polarisation, attention to low-skilled adults needs to be intensified, as they represent an untapped labour source. To this end, support for low-skilled



adults could be enhanced and supported through public funding so that low-skilled adults with dispositional barriers to participation in learning could:

- more equally benefit from current publicly funded schemes providing access to training courses.
- take advantage of current opportunities in terms of workplace learning and the upskilling and reskilling routes.
- Inclusive training opportunities for low-skilled adults are underdeveloped in Slovakia. Outreach to low-skilled adults is best achieved when linked with the delivery of support services, such as social work and employment services.
- To develop adult learning and lifelong learning culture in Slovakia, learning opportunities need to be individualised, accessible, and flexible for any adult.

Enhancement of adult learning provision frameworks to offer more equal opportunities for all adults regardless of their skills or education level could lead to significant improvements in the local and regional labour supply.



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