

TRAILS

Enabling Data Analytics for Actions
Tackling Skills Shortages & Mismatch



Policy brief #2: RE-ENGAGING ADULTS IN LEARNING THROUGH GUIDANCE AND MOTIVATION

Authors: Ioannis Pragidis (Professor) and Vasiliki Kotsirou (PhD candidate) at the Democritus University of Thrace

WHY IT MATTERS

Millions of adults in Europe remain outside education and training—not due to lack of opportunities, but because motivation to learn has faded. Achieving the EU target of 60% adult participation by 2030 requires reigniting willingness to learn alongside expanding provision. Lifelong learning depends on confidence, curiosity, and a sense of purpose, often weakened by negative schooling experiences or the perception that education is only for youth.

WHAT DATA SHOWS

TRAILS analysed Adult Education Survey (AES) data 2007–2022 (18–75 years, 27 EU and 6 non-EU countries, 930,000+ adults) to examine how prior learning experience, guidance, and structural barriers influence adults' willingness to learn.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Motivation grows with experience:** Adults who have previously engaged in learning are more likely to continue; first-time learners face the largest hurdle.
- **Guidance is essential:** Access to information and personalised advice significantly increases participation, especially for previously disengaged adults.
- **Persistent barriers:** Time constraints, cost, limited employer support, and life-stage challenges continue to hinder learning.
- **Perception matters:** Many adults feel learning is irrelevant, indicating a communication and trust gap.
- **Education fatigue:** Motivation declines the longer adults remain outside education, highlighting the need for ongoing engagement.

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POLICY IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strengthen guidance systems via personalised counselling, local centres, and digital platforms to reach adults who have lost contact with education.
- Facilitate first engagement with short, modular, flexible courses and recognition of prior learning to lower entry barriers.
- Address practical obstacles with paid training leave, flexible schedules, financial support, and employer-backed opportunities.
- Promote a learning culture through awareness campaigns, recognition of achievements, and showcasing adult learning success stories.
- Ensure inclusive formats for older adults or those with health constraints, fostering lifelong accessibility.

LOOKING AHEAD

TRAILS evidence shows that **both structural and psychological factors** affect adult learning. By investing in **motivation, guidance, and accessible opportunities**, European countries can make the 2030 adult learning participation target achievable, turning potential into active participation.

RESOURCES AND LINKS

- Full deliverables: D6.3 and TRAILS reports
- For more information, please visit the TRAILS website(<https://www.trails-project.eu/>) and social media channels.

