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Key competences for people 50+

REPORT



The state of education in terms of key competences and the needs of the target group (people aged 50 and over) in Norway

Project result 1 - Methodology of training courses
"Key competences for people aged 50+" (part 1)

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Report

The state of education of key competences and the educational needs of adults, including people aged 50+ in Norway

Version: English

Prepared by: MiA

within the project 2021-1-PL01-KA220-ADU-000035200, „Key competences for people aged 50+”

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1.0 Introduction

The aging population of Europe, together with a labour market with an increasing need for skilled workers has introduced new challenges to the education systems and labour policies in the continent. The increasing digitalization has contributed to the change in the nature of work in many sectors. The skills needed for both performance in the workplace and life in general, are in constant flux. How these challenges are met by authorities and the stakeholders alike varies greatly in the region. The concept of life-long learning as a has taken root both in formal and informal education recent years. Are the learning opportunities the same for everyone? How do learners who are over fifty years old fare in this context?

The European Commission works with EU Member States to support and reinforce the development of key competences and basic skills for all, from an early age and throughout life. The *Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning* states that people need the right set of skills and competences to sustain current standards of living, support high rates of employment and foster social cohesion in the light of tomorrow's society and world of work. Supporting people across Europe in gaining the skills and competences needed for personal fulfilment, health, employability and social inclusion helps to strengthen Europe's resilience in a time of rapid and profound change.

Further in the Recommendation we can read that *“Member states should: support the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning and ensure opportunities for all to develop key competences by making full use of the “Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Reference Framework”* .

As a non-member state of European Union, Norway has not taken the Recommendation in full use in its own policies for basic skills or life-long learning. As an EEA member state, Norway does acknowledge the Recommendation, and recognizes it as a reference. The practical implications of the Recommendation as a reference are, however, limited. This paper will therefore examine the situation with key competencies/basic skills and the role of the older learners (over 50 years) in Norway by introducing and using the national



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definition of basic skills. This definition is used on all levels, from policymakers within VET-sector to VET educators in their daily work.

This paper will cast light on the definition of “basic skills”, which is a notably more limited

"Basic skills are important for enabling people to function well in their everyday lives and to secure their labour market participation. Education encourages democratic participation, cultural development and individuals' self-esteem and identity. We need more knowledge and skills; both for addressing the increasingly complicated challenges in society and in order to evolve as human beings and for personal fulfilment."

(EACA National policies platform,
Norway overview
https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/norway_en)

a concept than “key competences” in the EU states, both in how the skills are classified, understood and applied in the system and taken into account in the educators’ daily work. This paper will also reflect on how the labour force participation and retirement age affects accessing formal and informal learning for the older cohorts in Norway. Finally, it will provide the reader with useful links and sources for more information on the subject of basic skills and 50+ learners in the country.

2.0 Basic skills in Norway

Skills Norway (KompetanseNorge) is the national agency for life-long learning in Norway. Skills Norway aims to strengthen the participation in formal, non-formal and informal adult education in various ways, also by granting funds to organizations within VET and adult education. They set the curriculum for Norwegian as the second language examinations, as well as the life and society test one has to take if one wants to apply for the citizenship. In addition to this, Skills Norway has, among other things, developed a set of tools and guidelines for adult educators in basic skills. The agency has also created profession related profiles with concrete examples on the basic skills and their extent in the said profession. Since 1. July 2021 Skills Norway has become a part of the Norwegian directorate of higher education and skills, which again operates under the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, founded on the same day.

According to Skills Norway, the four basic skills are reading and writing (from here on referred to as literacy), mathematical (from here one referred to as numeracy), oral and digital skills. These are a prerequisite for being able to actively participate in education, society and working life.

How we perceive these skills is affected by the increasing digitalization, and they change in step with change in society. However, when compared with the European key competencies,



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the Norwegian basic skills do not portray a wider understanding of the competencies needed in the modern world. Even though one can argue that certain elements of the basic skills in Norwegian context are useful for instance for entrepreneurship and civic skills, like in the European framework, these are not highlighted as such.

2.1 Description of the skills and their levels

Skills Norway operates with a three-level system within each skill. Descriptions of the levels is based on learning objectives for each level, and give an approximate pointer to where one can place an adult learner based on the skills they possess now, and where to set the objectives for the said individual. Referring to the Skills Norway levels within the chosen skills is a common practice for VET educators in Norway.

1. Literacy (reading and writing) levels 1-3.

Level 1 – learning objectives

Being able to read and write at level 1 means that one reads and writes short and familiar texts one encounters often. You may need support when reading and writing in new situations.

Level 2 – learning objectives

Being able to read and write at level 2 means that one reads and writes clear texts. One actively relates to written information and has strategies for further developing the skills. You can use reading and writing in new situations, for learning and to solve some challenges in everyday life

Level 3 – learning objectives

Being able to read and write at level 3 means that one masters formal requirements for a diversity of texts. One reads and writes in an independent, critical and flexible way and chooses strategies based on context and needs.

Skills Norway provides more detailed and concrete examples of reading and writing strategies that each level entails in order to ease the learners' placement through concrete examples. Some of these will not necessarily meet the older learner's expectations on what "literacy" means. Such examples are interpreting graphs and tables, filling in forms with unusual structures, evaluating the source for information etc.

2. Numeracy (mathematics) levels 1-3

Level 1 - learning objectives



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Being able to calculate at level 1 means that one understands simple mathematical information in everyday life, and uses simple arithmetic in familiar contexts with and without aids.

Level 2 – learning objectives

Being able to calculate as a basic skill at level 2 means that one actively relates to mathematical information, processes the information and uses arithmetics in different situations.

Level 3 – learning objectives

Numeracy as a basic skill at level 3 means that one understands and uses mathematical information. One should use one's knowledge to make narrow assessments, and be able to communicate and present mathematical information in different contexts.

And again, in addition to these general descriptions of the levels, Skills Norway provides a detailed description of practical skills for each level, some of which also utilize skills related to ICT, geometry and statistics. Some examples: simple use of calculator, doubling and halving numbers, simple use of spreadsheets, using a measuring tool, using digital tools to systemize information and calculate income, credit, loans and savings.

3. Digital skills levels 1-3

Level 1 – learning objectives

Level 1 digital skills imply that one relates to digital information when necessary, and uses simple digital tools. One knows simple digital etiquette rules. One needs training to use new tools or services.

Level 2 – learning objectives

One is actively involved in digital information and can use the information in new contexts and situations. Digital tools and services are known and used. One has an increased awareness in relation to online knowledge and digital judgment.

Level 3 – learning objectives

Level 3 implies that one is a reflective user of complicated digital tools and services. One uses digital services adapted to the situation actively, with purpose and active use is a natural part of everyday life in most situations. One settles quickly into new areas of use and is a conscious user.



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The Skills Norway's concrete examples for skill assessment/learning objectives for digital skills present different levels of proficiency in searching, classifying, and reproducing information, different levels of proficiency in online communication strategies, and finally, the increasing level of independence in taking new, previously unfamiliar technology in use.

However, it should be mentioned that due to digitalization in the society, a number of digital skills are already an integrated part of the literacy and mathematics, and therefore some digital skill descriptions according to their level are actually placed in these sections

4. **Oral skills** level 1-3

Level 1 – learning objectives

One communicates in a simple manner in familiar contexts. One perceives the main content of messages and instructions, and uses simple communication strategies.

Level 2 – learning objectives

One actively communicates on topics of interest in familiar context. One can take care of one's own interests and needs in everyday life and further develop one's own oral communication based on what is needed.

Level 3 – learning objectives

Oral skills at level 3 means that one communicates flexibly and effectively both in familiar and unfamiliar contexts. One can actively participate in exchange of opinions in public and private contexts, and take responsibility in communication.

Oral skills are defined in three areas: communication and learning strategies, listening and responding, and speech and communication, with practical examples for each area for assessment/self-assessment of ones skillset.

This section, along with the literacy, is often mistaken for being directed towards the population with migrant background. In reality, majority of the funding for classes improving basic skills is granted to learners with fully Norwegian background. Recognizing the norms and standards in different communication situations both at work and in private, understanding and dissemination of, for instance, spoken safety instructions, participating in meetings, taking notes and communicating effectively and politely with colleagues and customers may present challenges to many a mother tongue user.

2.2 Profiles - basic skills in different professions



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Skills Norway also provides profession specific standards for each basic skill. The professions in question are 19 in number, from nursery assistants and electricians to taxi drivers and plumbers. There are detailed descriptions of different work-related assignments that are sorted after their frequency, in profession X the person does Y “every day, regularly and every now and then”. These are useful in creating awareness of how the skills in question manifest themselves in the very context they are used. The profiles are primarily meant as tools for both employers

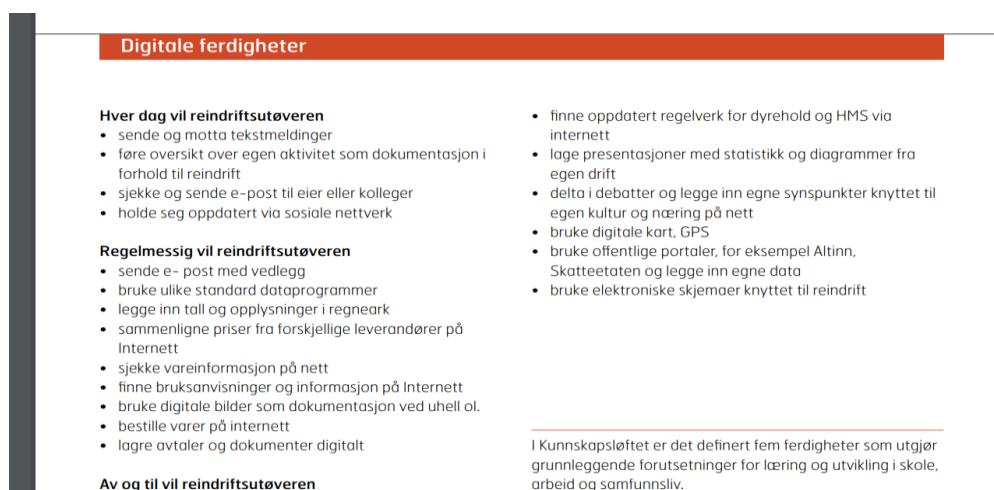


Figure 1 Digital skills for a reindeer herder, source: Kompetanse Norge

and educators for assessing the need for basic skill learning at the work place, and creating suitable curricula for the particular business. They were created in co-operation with organizations, companies, educators and representatives from the industries. They are available both as physical and digital brochures on their website.

For more information about the basic skills and their role in adult education in Norway, please visit www.kompetansenorge.no

3.0 Older learners in the Norwegian context

High level of work force participation

Fig. 1 Labour force participation rate, 55-74 years. All, 2021. (Percent)



Source: Statistics Norway 2022.

There is no explicit national strategy for learners over 50 in Norway, but the general policies concerning lifelong learning and learning at work are especially important for this group due to their high rate of work force participation. Norway is a country with an aging population, low unemployment rates and a costly welfare system to maintain. There is a strong societal push for keeping workers in gainful employment as long as possible, something which manifests itself in incentives, reforms and general view on the role of the older people in labour market and the society.



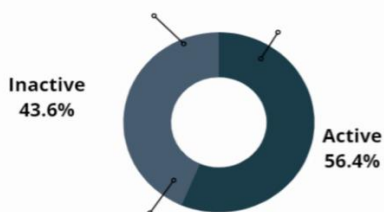
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Concrete examples of such incentives are 2011 pension reform that allowed for combining full work with full pension income, at the same time making it profitable to postpone both work exit and pension uptake. In 2015 the government raised the age limit for employment protection in the private sector from 70 to 72 years, an age in which employers may terminate the contract without further justification.

The general retirement age in Norway is 67, but there is a flexible system for personal retirement schemes, allowing for an earlier exit from the work force from the age of 62. Together with the fact that certain professions have a slightly lower retirement age, in reality only third of the 67-year old group is gainfully employed in Norway (Statistics Norway, 2022). However, internationally, among OECD countries Norway has one of the highest work participation rates for the population aged 55-64.

It should be also mentioned that 3 % of the working population as a whole is 67-74 years old. The work force participation in the group 55-74 year olds as a whole is high for both genders (figures 1, 2, 3).

Fig. 2 Labour force participation rate. Men. 55-74 years. 2021. (Percent)



Source: Statistics Norway 2022.

Fig. 2 Labour force participation rate. Women. 55-74 years. 2021. (Percent)



Source: Statistics Norway 2022.

Inclusive work culture and the Working Environment Act

Work life is strictly regulated and there are effective policies that encourage inclusion. This enables older workers to keep their jobs for longer. The Working Environment Act states that employers have a duty to facilitate the working conditions so that everybody, including older employees, are able to perform their work in a well-functioning manner. The Act takes the older workers in account by stating that after the age of 60 everyone is allowed an extra yearly vacation week. When it goes to work as a learning arena, the most important part is Chapter 4, Section 4.2 “Requirements regarding arrangement, participation and development”:

“The design of each employee's working situation shall pay regard to the following:

- a. arrangements shall be made to enable the employee's professional and personal development through his or her work,



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- b. the work shall be organised and arranged with regard for the individual employee's capacity for work, proficiency, age and other conditions,
- c. emphasis shall be placed on giving employees the opportunity for self-determination, influence and professional responsibility,
- d. employees shall as far as possible be given the opportunity for variation and for awareness of the relationships between individual assignments,
- e. adequate information and training shall be provided so that employees are able to perform the work when changes occur that affect his or her working situation.”

(Working Environmental Act, 2006, §4)

Due to the awareness among employers of their duty as a training provider, especially related to part e), and the possible repercussions if adequate training is not provided for discriminatory reasons, the participation rate in formal and informal training in Norway is high.

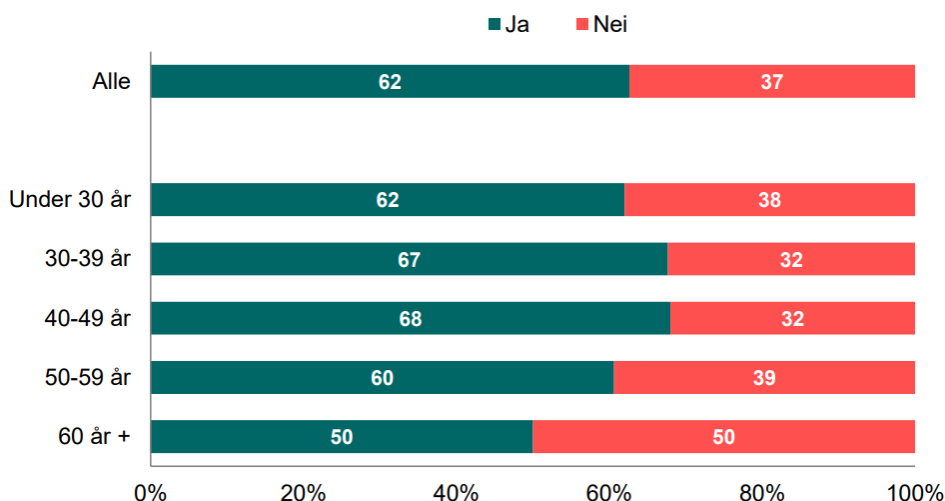
Older learners' participation to formal and informal training at work

Norwegian senior policy barometer (2019), maps perceptions and attitudes to senior policy issues in working life every other year. When asking about different aspects of age discrimination, 77% of the respondents, all of whom were in the active labour force, answered “seldom” or “never” to the statement “Older workers get to participate in courses and learning during the working hours less often than others”, meaning that they do not perceive this sort of discrimination taking place in their scope of experience.

When asked about participating in informal or formal learning at work during the last 12 months, the average among the respondents was 62 %. For the respondents over 60 years the result was clearly lower, at 50%.



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Tabell 1 Have you participated in formal or informal learning at work during the last 12 months Yes/No Source: Norsk seniorpolitisk Barometer 2019

Learning at work is both a necessity and a motivator in the Norwegian work life. According to OECD (Working better with age Norway, assessment and recommendations, 2014) evidence shows that older employees are very often most motivated to sign up for on-the-job training and education courses closely related to their work situation. One reason that older workers can have optimal training methods and intensity that are different from that of younger and mid-career workers is the shorter payback period.

Learning as an adult is very much a needs-based activity. We can imagine that a younger worker can appreciate a possibility to acquire formal qualifications, or engage in a study not directly connected with their current professional status in order to increase their employability in a later age, whereas for an older worker the actual payback for the investment of learning a new skill is mastering the new demands and changing aspects in the daily work. Therefore, for older workers, there is a greater focus is on informal on-the-job-training.

Older learners' participation in other forms of learning

In OECD's "Working better with age Norway – assessment and recommendations" (2014) it is pointed out that Norway, too, needs to boost the participation of the older age groups in work life. Also, a relatively large proportion of older population receives disability benefits and cannot access the training at work.

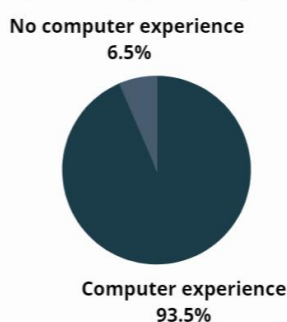
For the unemployed, the public social services NAV offers classes according to their employability assessment. These classes have a so-called push-factor both in relation to learning and employment. There is no accessible data on the age division among the participants in these groups. In addition to the public sector, the third sector has traditionally played an important role in education and learning in Norwegian society.



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As the European Commission's "Lifelong learning strategy" (2020) points out NGOs, voluntary and interest organizations offer a plethora of opportunities, and the cooperation between the third sector, public and private actors has a strong tradition in Norway. Also the Nordic school model "folk high school"/folkehøgskole, which is an educational center focusing on informal learning in the spirit of the Danish poet N.F.S.Grundtvig, is worth mentioning. Usually, the learners live at the school for a full year, and the studies are considered primarily for young adults, but there are folk high schools that cater to the older age groups with shorter learning units, better suited for their needs. Attending this kind of school gives an access to the state funded study loans and grants that usually are reserved for formal education.

Fig. 6 Percentage of adults with no/limited computer experience. 55–65 years. 2019. (Percent)



Source: PIAAC 2019.

The increasing opportunities in distance learning are also playing a role in evening out the access to learning, both geographically, disability- and age wise. The digital skills in the population as a whole are good (figure 6), but there are digital skill gaps between the majority and minority populations. According to Guthu and Holm (2010) the migrant population has generally weaker digital skills. Low level of digital competence is connected to age, educational level and employment. An older person with little education and a migrant background will therefore face a double hindrance, especially if they are expected to master the basic digital skills in order to access the training opportunities for other skills that are necessary for entering or re-entering the work force.

4.0 Summary

Not being a member of the European Union, Norway does not consider the European Key Competencies Framework as the basis for its approach to basic skills, neither in the administration and policy making, nor in the curricula created by the National Agency for Lifelong Learning Skills Norway or educators locally. The Norwegian basic skills are comprised of four categories – literacy, numeracy, digital skills and oral skills, and thus lack some of the dimensions of the European approach. The basic skills are defined for three levels of advancements each, and the national agency has created mapping tools for skills that are based on specific professions.

The level of participation in formal and informal learning among the older cohorts in the population is reasonably high due to high labour force participation rate in this age group in Norway. Work life policies highlight inclusivity, and there seems to be reasonably low level of discrimination when it goes to older employees' access to learning at the workplace. Up keeping the skills needed for participating in the labour market has a dual effect. Without them it is hard to enter the work force, but at the same time acquiring and maintaining the skills so that they answer to the actual needs of the employers, it is beneficial to already part of the work force. The older learners are bound to attend non-formal education that enables them to keep up with the changing work



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life, where as the younger learners may be investing in studies that will advance them careerwise.

There are alternative learning fora that increase opportunities for those over 50 years who are outside of the labour force. The social and employment services NAV offers classes in necessary skills that increase the employment, the third sector arranges a range of educational activities that benefit also older learners, and there are schools specialized in informal learning that cater also to older learners. The high level of digital skills in the population makes learning accessible to the learners, but at the same time the combination of low digital skills, high age and migrant background is a concrete hindrance in accessing learning opportunities in a way that affects a defined segment of the population.



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Useful links

Senter for seniorpolitikk www.seniorpolitikk.no , political interest organisation for seniors in Norway

KompetanseNorge/Basic Skills Norway www.kompetansenorge.no national agency working on improving basic skills in the adult population in the areas of literacy, numeracy, oral communication and ICT.

Voksenopplæringsforbundet/The Norwegian Association for Adult Learning, National NGO umbrella organization for adult learning in Norway <https://www.vofo.no/>

Lifelong learning strategy of Norway https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/norway/lifelong-learning-strategy_en#:~:text=Lifelong%20learning%20is%20an%20important,skills%20throughout%20their%20whole%20life.

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