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2022 EU-LFS results on participation in education and training in the last 12 months

Sabine Gagel, Elodie Cayotte, Małgorzata Andres-Stadnik

European Commission

Eurostat - Statistical office of the European Union

ESTAT.F.3 Labour market and lifelong learning

Sabine.Gagel@ec.europa.eu, Elodie.Cayotte@ec.europa.eu, Malgorzata.Stadnik@ec.europa.eu

Abstract – In this paper, the 2022 European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) results on participation in education and training in the last 12 months are presented and compared with 2016 Adult Education Survey (AES) results and EU-LFS data on participation in education and training in the last 4 weeks. With the entry into force of IESS Regulation 2019/1700¹, EU-LFS does not only collect data on participation in formal and non-formal education and training in the last 4 weeks but also in the last 12 months. These data were collected by countries for the first time in 2022 in the LFS and then are to be collected every 2 years. Up to 2022, data on participation in education and training in the last 12 months were available only from the AES. First analyses of preliminary and full annual LFS 2022 data showed partly substantial differences between LFS and AES. Therefore, additional metadata is analysed that might explain the differences, such as national questions and proxies, and conclusions are presented from this additional information.

1. Background

One of the three European Union (EU) targets of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) Action Plan for 2030 is that “at least 60% of all adults should be participating in training every year by 2030”². The indicator is defined as the share of adults aged 25-64 who have participated in learning during the last 12 months (in percentage (%)). National targets around this European average complement it. The target of 60% in the EU for 2030 was established based on the levels of participation in formal and non-formal

¹ [EUR-Lex - 32019R1700 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

² https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan_en

education and training over the last twelve (12) months, called *Adult Learning (AL) 12 months* in this paper, in the Adult Education Survey (AES) 2016, 2011 and 2007 (excluding from the target guided on-the-job training from non-formal education³). However, as AES takes place only every six years and to meet policy needs, variables were introduced in Labour Force Survey (LFS) to collect biennial data (starting in 2022) on AL 12 months to monitor the progress towards the 2030 target with an appropriate frequency. This was set up in the context of framework Regulation (EU) 2019/1700 (“IESS”) and implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/2240 for the labour force domain. Before the new regulations, LFS already collected information on formal and non-formal education and training in the last 4 weeks but not in the last 12 months; the latter was only collected in AES up to 2022.

2. 2022 EU-LFS results

The main 2022 LFS data were provided to Eurostat by 31 March 2023 and main results were published on 27 April 2023. Hence, data for AL 12 months from LFS are now available. It appears that the LFS 2022 results (24.5% of participation in AL 12 months in the EU) are much lower than those of AES 2016 (37.4%). In the second half of 2022, first investigations were made on quarterly data for AL 12 months for countries that could already provide such data, and in that context differences between results were already noticed. Having now full annual data for all countries, Eurostat launched an in-depth analysis of the metadata (e.g. national questionnaires and compliance with methodological guidelines) and data, in order to assess if the differences with AES could be explained.

The next AES data (AES 2022), which will allow a more precise comparison will be available only at the end of 2023.

3. Outcomes of the analysis

3.1 Data – a comparison across sources

While according to the AES, 37.4% of people attended AL 12 months in the EU in 2016 (excl. guided on-the-job training (GOTJ)), it was only 24.5% according to LFS in 2022. This represents a difference of 12.9 percentage points (pp), i.e. the AL 12 months participation rate is 35% lower in LFS than in AES.

In LFS, AL 12 months is higher than AL 4 weeks in all countries, on EU average about double as high, with large differences across the countries, ranging between 3.4% and 71.0%.

Participation in adult learning at EU level (AL 12 months and 4 weeks) in the comparison of LFS and AES results is as follows:

- 2016 AES (12M, incl. GOTJ) 43.7%
- 2016 AES (12M, excl. GOTJ) 37.4%
- 2022 LFS (12M) 24.5%
- 2022 LFS (4W) 11.9%

³ Guided on-the-job training is a type of non-formal education already difficult to handle in the AES and was consequently excluded from the target and from the collection of non-formal education in the LFS variables.

AL 12 months in LFS ranges between 3.0% and 58.8%. In 2016 AES, the overall range was similar, from 5.8% to 61.9%.

LFS 2022 results are lower than AES 2016 results in 23 countries (in percentage points (pp)):

- Up to 6 pp lower: five countries
- 6 to 13 pp lower: nine countries
- More than 17 pp lower: nine countries

LFS results are equal or higher than AES 2016 in six countries.

As AL 12 months levels vary a lot across countries, the gaps between LFS 2022 and AES 2016 in percentage (%) range from -75% to +66%.

- More than 50% lower than AES: six countries
- 25% - 50% lower: seven countries
- 10% - 25% lower: eight countries
- Between 10% lower and 10% higher: five countries

LFS results are more than 30% higher than AES 2016 in three countries.

Above all the phenomenon is quite similar for nearly all countries and types of persons. Looking at the types of respondent, while the results are generally a bit closer in LFS and AES for people having attained a tertiary education, for women and for people aged 25-34, differences remain high.

Participation in formal education looks to be more comparable than participation in non-formal education and training but overall plays a minor role for adults aged 25-64. The following participation rates are observed:

- 2016 AES 5.0%
- 2022 LFS (12M) 4.1%
- 2022 LFS (4W) 3.3%

Formal education participation rates range from 1.7% to 14.2% in 2016 AES, from 0.7% to 16.8% in 2022 LFS (12M) and 0.7% and 11.5% (4W). Accordingly, p.p. gaps between AES and LFS are quite small (between -1.8 and 5.7 pp) while in % they are higher (between -79% and 37%).

Non-formal education and training constitutes the major part of adult learning. The following participation rates are observed:

- 2016 AES (excl. GOTJ) 34.8%
- 2022 LFS (12M) 21.6%
- 2022 LFS (4W) 9.1%

There are big variations in the non-formal education and training participation rates, ranging from 4.3% to 59.7% in 2016 AES, from 1.5% to 52.0% in 2022 LFS (12M) and 0.5% and 29.6% (4W). Gaps in pp between AES and LFS range between -19.7pp and 30.7pp, and in % between -84% and 111%.

3.2 Metadata – possible explanations

3.2.1 National questionnaires

The analyses of the place and the respect of the recommended order of variables and questions in the questionnaire, show differences across countries although they do not explain the full extent of the gap found between LFS and AES for each country.

In particular:

- Adult learning covers participation in formal (FED) and non-formal education and training (NFE) whereby it is known from previous investigations that FED is easier to capture but plays a minor role for adults and that capturing NFE is more challenging (complex concept, memory issues, survey context). Therefore, under the IESS Regulation, new variables on participation in non-formal education (EDUCNFE) were implemented in LFS for collecting AL 4 weeks and 12 months, with the aim of capturing NFE in the most appropriate way in the LFS. However, while several countries changed their questions accordingly, most of them still use the pre-IESS approach with only some adaptations.
- Furthermore, following the conclusions of a 2008-2010 Task Force, Eurostat recommended to ask separate questions for NFE (courses, seminars & workshops, private lessons) also in LFS but most countries only use one. AES requires the collection of 3 variables (NFE COURSE, NFE WORKSHOP and NFE LESSON) for these 3 types of NFE and therefore it is ensured that 3 questions are asked, allowing a better screening and memory of NFE activities. Information on the different types of non-formal learning activities is mainly collected to help respondents to remember their non-formal learning activities. The different types are therefore not intended for dissemination of results as the categories are not considered to be comparable across countries.
- In the LFS, the recommended order of questions between AL 4 weeks (first) and AL 12 months (second) is respected in almost all countries, with some indication that non-respect of this order results in lower participation rates.
- Available time series for AL 4 weeks allow to compare 2022 data with the pre-Covid (2019) measurement in LFS. This reveals that countries that changed the questionnaire in the way recommended have a higher participation measured in 2022 (4 weeks). More generally, NFE participation rates appear to react strongly to the way the questions are asked.

3.2.2 Use of proxies

Answers by proxy allowed in both surveys but hardly used in 2016 AES, have a higher but still limited impact: the rate of AL 12 months is 27.4% for direct interviews and 18.8% for proxy interviews at EU level in LFS. However, the gap between AES and LFS direct interviews still remains 10.0 pp or 27%, a gain of around a fifth in the difference between the two sources including all interviews.

For its part, non-response does not appear to have any influence on the results.

3.2.3 Sampling and data collection mode of the survey

Sampling or data collection mode (face-to-face with interviewer – CAPI/PAPI, telephone with interviewer – CATI, internet without interviewer – CAWI) may also play a role in why the measurement of adult learning is different in AES and LFS and different in LFS across countries using different collection modes. The use of the most modern modes impacts positively the rate of AL 12 months in LFS, with 28.9% of AL 12 months participation for people answering by CAWI against 23.8% in CATI/CAPI/PAPI. This may result from the characteristics of people answering on internet, younger and skilled, therefore prone to participate in AL.

3.2.4 Purpose of the survey

A remaining point is the basic difference of LFS and AES in their main purpose. On the one hand, in AES questions on adult learning are at the core of the survey and respondents are fully thinking about this subject, answering detailed questions on it. On the other hand, in LFS the focus is on labour market and employment, and questions on participation in education and training are quite marginal. Therefore, the measurement in LFS of AL 12 months, a rather complex concept, can suffer memory recall problems on the part of the respondents, still more as usually asked at the end of the interview. A phenomenon is better measured in a dedicated survey than as just one of the subjects in a survey with another main purpose.

4. Conclusions

2022 LFS results for AL 12 months differ substantially from 2016 AES results but no clear and direct explanations appear in the investigations made by now. The bare difference of main subject and general characteristics of the survey used is certainly one of the main reasons of the gap between LFS and AES. From the factors investigated, two provide however partial explanations while others do not contribute to the explanation at all. Firstly, the important use of proxy interviews in LFS tends to decrease the reporting of AL 12 months but hardly explains more than a fifth of the difference. Secondly, while simplified questions compared to AES were agreed for LFS as a condition to be able to introduce this measurement in LFS, this probably affects results. Moreover, the implementation of these questions appears not to be optimal in all Member States. Further investigations together with the Working Group on Labour Market Statistics (LAMAS WG) in June 2023 and against 2022 AES results, at the end of 2023, are needed in order to allow a full evaluation of the LFS AL12 months data.