



Policy

brief

Lifelong learning

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Commitment 6 to promote lifelong learning and adapt the educational system in order to meet changing economic, social and demographic conditions.

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Challenging context

Populations in the UNECE region are ageing rapidly. To maintain economic growth and standard of living, people would need to work longer before they can retire. Regarding people who are currently in their working age, demographic change may require to include those into the labour market who were previously not fully integrated, such as early school leavers, women and migrants. In a knowledge society, this all requires a good standard of basic education as well as vocational training, tertiary education, information and communication technology (ICT) and language skills.

Suggested strategy

- Promotion of adult training programmes for people who have left initial education
- Programmes in basic education, such as literacy and numeracy and vocational training
- Programmes in further education, such as job related training, training in information and communication technology, and in languages
- Universities of the third age

Expected result

It is expected that adult training programmes lead to higher employability and personal well-being, which can foster economic productivity and development of the whole society. Older persons may benefit in particular as they stay mentally active and socially included through learning activities.

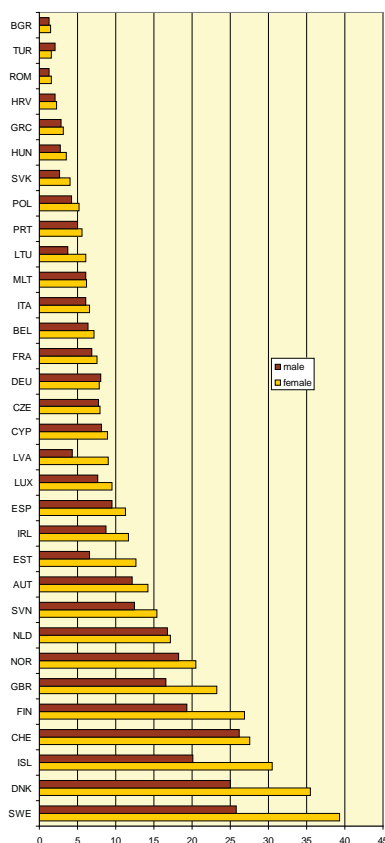
Introduction: lifelong learning in an ageing society

People who are trained and then integrated in the labour market must cope with a longer working age. At the same time, technological innovations are fundamentally changing current professions. Globalization is contributing to increased professional mobility. People may also have to learn new skills to earn extra income in retirement. For all these reasons, a new emphasis on lifelong learning and adult learning is needed. As was noted in the UNECE Regional Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA/RIS), “The increasing lifespan and rapid social change pose specific challenges for the educational system, which need to be addressed as part of the work towards this objective. Special emphasis should be put on building awareness among learners of all ages, of life choices and their short-term and long-term consequences in terms of lifestyles and career prospects.”

Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning, which includes regular school education, and adult learning can be seen as a strategy in the context of the life-course approach.

Figure 1: Percentage of 25-64 year-old men and women enrolled in adult learning programmes



According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), lifelong learning is “a policy strategy directed towards integrating older persons into the contemporary labour market, to give them the necessary education level to adapt to the educational system in order to meet the changing economic, social and demographic conditions”¹. Lifelong learning does not necessarily take place during the traditional education period at a young age, but can be undertaken later. As such it pertains to older persons working or in retirement as well as young and middle-aged people. Its societal impact is twofold: first, education and qualifications have a direct economic impact, by increasing the employability of people in all ages; second, lifelong learning promotes the integration, participation, and well-being of its recipients, which also has an economic impact.

Adult learning can be understood as all forms of learning undertaken by adults after having left initial education and training, no matter how far this process may have gone (e.g. including tertiary education)². The promotion of adult learning in the national context has many advantages. Older persons can acquire skills that enable them to upgrade their pensions by earning extra income. It can also contribute to the integration and participation of older persons who, for example, become adept at using the Internet in their daily affairs. Language training of working-age adults can help to ensure that immigration and intercultural communication and integration occurs in a way that is beneficial to both the immigrants and the host country.

Source: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE): UNECE Statistical Database. Gender Statistics. Health and Mortality. 2010. <http://w3.unece.org/pxweb/Dialog>. Enrolment is defined as ‘participation in regular education’ and/or ‘participation in other taught activities’ in the four weeks preceding the survey, while self-learning activities are not included. Refers to latest available year from 2006 to 2008

¹ International Labour Organization (2000). “Lifelong Learning in the Twenty-First Century: the Changing Roles of Educational Personnel”. Geneva: ILO

² Commission of the European Communities (2007). “Action Plan on Adult Learning. It is always a good time to learn”. Brussels: COM (2007) 558 final.

Enrolment in adult learning varies greatly across countries (Figure 1). In most countries with corresponding data, women's enrolment rate is higher than men's. The highest rates are in Denmark and Sweden where more than a third of 25-64 year-old women are in adult education. The corresponding figures in the other Nordic countries, Switzerland and UK range from 20 to 30 per cent. In several countries of Central and South-eastern Europe, enrolment rates are below ten per cent, while data from outside the European Union are scarce.

Basic education

Participation in today's knowledge society requires a certain level of education for both understanding and contributing to society. Basic education programmes are aimed at people who do not have such education, such as those who leave school early and migrants. Fundamental literacy and numeracy skills, school degrees, vocational training and apprenticeship are quite important in this context. In addition, women who were not able to receive education due to child-rearing may want to qualify themselves for employment at a later stage of life. Gender-sensitive education programmes that consider childcare needs may help create equal opportunities with respect to access to education programmes.

Aboriginal human resources development strategy in Canada

The goal of the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy (AHRDS) is to expand the employment and re-employment opportunities of Aboriginal people across Canada. Under the Strategy, Aboriginal organizations design and deliver the employment programmes and services best suited to meet the unique needs of their communities.

The programme includes many tools for job search preparation for first-time job seekers as well as for persons who wish to re-enter the job market after a period of absence. Additionally, access to job offerings is facilitated and special childcare opportunities are provided. The aim of the childcare component is to support parents who wish to re-enter the job market or attend training courses. Especially women may take advantage of this service, as they often attend retraining courses to better fit in with the demands of the labour market after many years of childbearing and child-rearing.

Source: Human Resource and Skills Development Canada (2009), "Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy (AHRDS)", Canada, http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/employment/aboriginal_employment/index.shtml, accessed 28 August 2009.

Fundamental literacy and numeracy

Low levels of initial education, periods of unemployment or rural isolation may lead to the marginalization of a large number of people from active participation in the labour market and the society at large. Many current employment problems of older workers are rooted in their low level of core skills such as literacy and numeracy. The level of initial education provides the basis for workers to acquire skills throughout their working life and thus be better skilled in old age. Hence providing basic literacy and numeracy to those in need is a key to tackling social exclusion. As adult learning has a vital role to play in this context, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has created a database on Effective Literacy Practice³ to monitor and share good practices in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

³ <http://www.unesco.org/uil/litbase>

Family literacy programmes in Turkey

Turkey has considerably increased the literacy rates of its population in the past few years. Nonetheless, as further measures are still necessary, the country initiated a family literacy programme combining early childhood education and adult education programmes. The programme is specially designed for those living in remote areas, with few education facilities.

A second initiative that has proven very successful involves mother-child education (MOCEP). Courses are taught to mothers and their children, with the result that the literacy skills of both improve and mothers are able to be their children's first teachers. Early child education is imperative, as it influences the future educational and psychosocial development of the child. MOCEP has achieved significant results. For example, children who attended courses are better prepared for school, and most importantly, their school retention or completion rates were much higher (87%) than children from families of non-participants (67%).

Another focus is women's education, as women represent two thirds of the illiterate population and are thus especially vulnerable. The Functional Adult Literacy and Women's Support Programme concentrates on developing women's literacy. Through education, women gain self-confidence and improve their relationships with husbands and other family members. Moreover, there is proof that educated women are more involved in family decision-making than uneducated women. Additionally, educated women may pass their knowledge on to their daughters, further developing valuable human capital.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2009). "Family Literacy Programmes" in *Effective Literacy Programme*.

Recognition of knowledge

After acquiring skills, it is important to ensure their recognition. The Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) makes the distinction between formally, informally and non-formally acquired knowledge.

- Formal learning refers to learning through a programme of instruction in an educational institution, adult training centre or the workplace, which is generally recognized in a qualification or certificate.
- Non-formal learning refers to learning through a programme, but is not usually evaluated and does not lead to certification.
- Informal learning refers to learning resulting from daily work-related, family or leisure activities.⁴

Whereas formal learning is usually acknowledged by a degree, it is also desirable that member States create mechanisms to compare and measure skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

⁴ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2006). "New OECD Activity on Recognition of non-Formal and Informal Learning. Guidelines for Country Participation". Paris: OECD.

The European qualifications framework: guidelines to better validate informal and non-formal education

To promote mobility in the European Union (EU) for work and study, the education ministers of EU Member States have acknowledged the importance of consistent guidelines for recognizing informal and non-formal education across the Member States and candidate countries.

Skills achieved through non-formal and informal learning often represent important characteristics and qualities of a person, but may not be included in a résumé or other records if uncertified. To improve the situation, the EU has approved guidelines including eight levels of knowledge, from basic skills to professional to innovative knowledge. According to these guidelines, each country may develop their own specifications. A translation and comparison of the level of knowledge from one to another country that facilitates labour mobility thus becomes possible.

Sources: European Parliament (2008). Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning, in: Official Journal of the European Union. Brussels, Strasbourg: C111/01.

Commission of the European Communities (2007). "The European qualifications framework: major benefits for citizens and employers throughout Europe", Rapid press release. Brussels: IP/07/1760.

European inventory (2005). "Validation of informal and non-formal learning". United Kingdom.

Vocational training and apprenticeship

"The discrepancy between the knowledge and skills that younger persons obtain in the educational system and the exigencies of the economy ought to be recognized and addressed, as this will affect positively all age groups. This will, inter alia, enable younger persons to enter more easily the labour market, relieving the problems created by the decline in the ratio between the economically active and non-active population, which adversely affect the social security system." (MIPAA/RIS, para. 47). Vocational training constitutes an important aspect of professional qualification, and it is desirable that member States promote education in a professional context.

Perspective vocational qualification – an initiative to promote the education of less-qualified young adults in Germany

In 2008, the German Ministry for Education and Research adopted the programme, Career Advancement through Education. In this framework, the programme Perspective Vocational Qualification (Perspektive Berufsabschluss) focuses on bringing teenagers and young adults into apprenticeships and promoting vocational training as well as retraining. The initiative's main goal is to promote better and broader basic education for everyone, by providing equal opportunities regardless of a person's social background. The German Government's aim is to increase the number of people who attain a school completion certificate, so as to enhance their prospects in the job market and/or of receiving an apprenticeship.

Perspective Vocational Qualification is divided into two initiatives. The first concerns improved networking, to exploit unused capacity in a supraregional context in terms of apprenticeship, training and retraining positions. The second focuses on training opportunities for less-qualified young adults. To augment their education, employers need to be encouraged to invest in training. It is recommended that training and retraining programmes be restructured in a modular way. Employers may send employees to very specific courses that imply quick results and less cost, but also efficient learning and certification for the employees that will enhance their future prospects in the job market.

Sources: German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (2009). "Aufstieg durch Bildung – Qualifizierungsinitiative für Deutschland". Berlin.

German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (2009). Perspektive Berufsabschluss.

Further education

As people live longer, it is expected that they will spend more years in paid labour than before. Job profiles and labour market requirements of employees' skills may change over the years, entailing further training. "Besides promoting employability of older workers through access to professional training and retraining, it is necessary to adjust education institutions to the needs of persons in retirement, including early retirement." (MIPAA/RIS, para. 49) "If knowledge, skills and learning abilities are not renewed, the capacity of individuals—and by extension, of communities or nations—to adapt to a new environment will be considerably reduced, if not cut off entirely. Lifelong learning is a survival issue. The importance for persons to continue learning throughout their active working life, and even beyond, will increasingly move to the top of individual, national and international agendas in the future.⁵

Job-related training

Further professional training is required to keep already obtained professional qualifications up to date, especially given the expected prolongation of working life. In addition, research⁶ has shown that people who have made the effort to take part in adult learning programmes are able to improve their incomes afterwards. Particularly in times of the economic crisis, job-related training becomes very important, as people need increase their competitiveness—and thus their employability—through job-related training. The age group 55+ may require further support through education and training to enhance their opportunities in the labour market.

Portugal: qualification – employment programme

In response to the global economic downturn, the Portuguese Government launched a special programme to help enterprises keep levels of employment up despite reduced activity in certain sectors. The programme works as follows. Companies, which are participating in this programme, are obliged not to dismiss employees. Simultaneously, the employees are provided with vocational training during periods when company does not have enough orders. In exchange, the Government reimburses a significant portion of salaries as well as part of the cost of vocational training. More than 10,000 employees are expected to benefit from the programme, which the Portuguese Government plans to run until December 2010.

Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, <http://www.gep.mtss.gov.pt>

Training in information and communications technology

Technological innovation creates a competitive advantage. Many professions nowadays depend on computer technology and technological awareness as key skills for professional success. In addition, technological awareness may also help to improve daily private life. Many services are easily accessible via the Internet. Training in related technology may promote participation of people in labour markets as well as enhance their possibilities to be active members of civil society. The EU has even argued that "new forms of illiteracy [have] appeared: adults who are not computer literate are deprived of essential information and facilities which are increasingly only available in digital form".⁷ In this context, adult learning has a key role in promoting social inclusion.

⁵ International Labour Organization (2000). "Lifelong Learning in the Twenty-First Century: the Changing Roles of Educational Personnel". Geneva: ILO

⁶ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2005). Education and Training Policy Promoting Adult Learning. Vol. 2005, no. 14. Paris: OECD.

⁷ Commission of the European Communities Eurostat (2006). "How Skilled are Europeans in Using Computers and the Internet?"; Statistics in Focus. Luxembourg: Issue 17/2006

ABC pc and maths aid – online programmes to improve basic skills in ICT and numeracy in Norway

Vox is an agency of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research that grants funds to educational non-governmental organizations. It has also created diverse online sources for improving the basic skills of the adult population. Their online platform includes programmes to improve skills in literacy, numeracy, ICT and oral communication, as well as word processing.

One of these programmes, ABC pc, is an interactive training programme in basic PC skills. Students learn the use of mouse and keyboard, and how to draft texts and how to use the Internet and e-mail. The programme is aimed at adults who want to improve their basic ICT skills.

A more advanced programme, Maths Aid (Mattehjelpen), is offered on the Vox website. Its objective is to improve adults' basic numeracy skills through exercises that also require the direct application of basic ICT skills. Besides the use of the computer, it helps parents understand the mathematics their children learn at school as well as how to use their mathematical skills in everyday tasks.

Sources: Vox - Institute for Adult Learning of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (2009). "ABCpc" in Digital Resources. Oslo.
Vox - Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (2009). "Maths Aid" in Digital Resources. Oslo.

Media competency of older persons in Germany

Making better and wider use of the experience and knowledge of older persons in Germany and spreading the awareness about their potentials are the main goals of the initiative "Erfahrung ist Zukunft", which has been launched by the German Government in 2006. The initiative is supported by several governmental departments such as the Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. As we are living in a society of longevity and on the background of demographic change, it is important to create more opportunities for older persons to share their competencies with younger generations. But it is also necessary to acquire new competences. On this account "Erfahrung ist Zukunft" enables older persons to use modern technologies and informs about available opportunities to do so.

This initiative includes various aspects such as lifelong learning, employability of older persons, business start-up opportunities, volunteering, and health promotion. In the area of lifelong learning, as one of the main elements within this initiative, the German Government focuses on the media competency of older persons and university courses for senior citizens. Media competency is in particular developed through various national and local projects. For example, several projects focus on delivering information about the use of the internet and opportunities that the internet offers for older persons, such as on-line shopping, on-line banking, and information about health issues. Other projects are concerned with "e-learning", where older persons learn how to handle the computer and the application of various software to enhance their knowledge in their field of interest. New IT-projects for the generation 50 plus will start in 2010 in order to diminish the "digital gap" in society between younger and older generations.

Source: German Federal Ministry of for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. 2008 <http://www.erfahrung-ist-zukunft.de/Webs/EiZ/DE/LebenslangLernen/MedienkompetenzImAlter/medienkompetenz.html>

Language training

Today's knowledge society is global. Flexibility and mobility help workers adapt to the demands of today's global knowledge society. Language skills are an important asset in this regard. Many migrants, even highly skilled people, have major needs in terms of language and cultural understanding.

Language training needs to be based on the appropriate pedagogical methods. For adults and older age people, language learning is highly influenced by learning methods acquired in school age. However, pedagogy has evolved over time from a static approach focused on learning grammar and translating literature to a more active approach focusing on communication skills.⁸ Teachers in adult learning need to consider and adapt to the previous knowledge and experience of their students. If not, one risks discouraging the learner with methods he or she disapproves of or feels uncomfortable with.

Language courses for adults in Bulgaria

To account for the language diversity in Europe, especially after EU enlargement in 2004, the European Commission has made it a priority that every adult should be able to communicate in at least one other European language besides his or her mother tongue. To support the process of EU integration, the Bulgarian Government facilitates access to language courses for adults. The focus is on adults, since the majority of them did not have the opportunity to learn a second or third language in school, as is customary nowadays. Thus to encourage mobility of workers and students and to strengthen their competitiveness, Bulgaria is taking diverse measures to increase formal language courses and to find ways to certify non-formal and informal language skills. Bulgarian universities have instituted part-time courses that enable working adults to obtain a Bachelor's degree in three years or a Master's in two years in one or more foreign languages. The New Bulgarian University in Sofia has established a Centre for Foreign Languages as part of its Centre for Continuing Education, where foreign languages are taught according to the Council of Europe's Framework of Reference (levels A1–C2).

Sources: Betcheva, Rossica. "Needs and Motivation of Adults at Bulgarian Universities to study Foreign Languages". The Alpine European Manual of Good Practice. Sofia.

New Bulgarian University (2009). Centre for Continuing Education (CEE). Sofia.

Universities of the third age

"Adult and late-life education should be recognized as a productive investment, which not only results in positive returns in terms of economic growth, but also improves the quality of life and overall social development of older persons. In this regard, the role played by educational institutions for older persons, such as by universities of the third age, needs to be further recognized and supported." (MIPAA/RIS, para. 47). Universities of the third age (U3As) were initially invented in 1973 in France, and the concept has since spread to many European countries. The idea is to offer higher education to people no longer in full-time employment. U3As may be attended by anyone, with no requirement of school certificates or previous academic education. They are an excellent opportunity for older persons both to exchange experience and information and to participate more in society.

⁸ Berndt, Annette (2001). "Der Blick zurück: Überlegungen zu Lern- und Lehrerfahrungen älterer Menschen" in Praxis des Neusprachlichen Unterrichts 2/2001 (48) pp. 115-123. Germany.

The teaching and learning objectives of U3As differ distinctly from those in earlier stages of life. People no longer learn for professional purposes but rather for personal ones. Learning is seen as a way to improve the quality of life in terms of social participation as well as to prepare for changing lifestyles in old age.⁹ The teacher's role is also differs, among other ways as the teachers are typically younger than their students. Teachers also need to take account of the fact that U3A students are less interested in certification than in learning about interesting things they can immediately apply in their lives.

Universities of the third age in Ukraine

While in France U3As have a special curriculum for foreign languages, literature and other cultural areas of study, in Ukraine they more generally provide a place for older persons to meet and communicate. The Ukrainian U3A project is closely connected with the implementation of MIPAA/RIS and is supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Ukrainian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. As of 2009, four U3As had been implemented with the following main targets:

- All-around development of older people
- Older persons' adaptation to modern living conditions
- (Re)integration of the older population in the active life of society
- Organization of communications
- Education in principles of healthy lifestyles in older age

The interest in the U3As is high and the project is by now continued by NGOs.

Sources: International Association of Universities of the Third Age (2009). France. Université tous Ages de Lyon (2009). Présentation. France. United Nations Population Fund Ukraine (2009). "Supporting the Implementation of the MIPAA in Ukraine". Ukraine: UNFPA.

Conclusions and recommendations

Lifelong and adult learning are important strategies for enhancing economic development, the employability of citizens, and social integration and participation. This entails three elements: basic training, retraining and education for pensioners. The following three lines of recommendations can be proposed.

First, receiving training and seeking further education may constitute a challenge for many adults. It is therefore necessary to highlight the advantages of further education by raising awareness of the fact that adult training can lead to higher incomes, brighter career prospects and enhanced social participation.

⁹ Kolland, Franz (2007). "Bildungschancen für ältere Menschen" Institute for Sociology University of Vienna. Vienna.

Second, methods for teaching adults differ from methods for teaching children and teenagers. “Onsite learning methods by trainers should be developed, where appropriate, to teach older persons the skills to handle technological tools for daily life, to use the new communication technologies, and to train their cognitive, physical and sensory skills.” (MIPAA/RIS, para. 50). It is thus important to adapt learning methods to the needs of older persons.

Third, it may be necessary to develop and promote gender-sensitive education programmes, since women may have different educational needs than men. Member States may wish to consider how resources could be distributed in a way that considers the needs and preferences of men and women to the same extent. In this context, gender budgeting is a proven method for creating equality in the distribution of funds.

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Checklist : lifelong learning		
Main areas	Areas of implementation	Key elements
Basic education	Literacy and numeracy	Initial education
		Adult learning
	Recognition of education	Recognition of formal education
		Recognition of non-formal education
		Recognition of informal education
	Vocational training	Integration of those who leave school early
		Integration after parental leave and other work interruptions
Further education	Job-related	Integration into labour market
		Promotion
	Language	Supporting professional mobility
		Integration and participation of migrants
	ICT skills	Professional development
		Societal integration and participation
		Societal integration and participation
Education for pensioners	Universities of the third age	Well-being of older persons
		Sharing the expertise of older persons