

Learning in Later Life: European Approaches and Issues

Changing demography, especially ageing and migration into and within the EU, are making big new demands on national and EU policy. Adult education must adapt and contribute to meeting the new needs that arise – this was one of the statements in the EAEA study *Adult Education Trends and issues in Europe*.

The population profile of European countries is changing significantly¹. Birth-rates have fallen or are falling sharply, as women have fewer children, if any at all, with a first or only child born at a much older age². Life expectancy is rising or has already risen equally dramatically. A static or falling population, on average much older, expects to live long after retirement. The 'baby boom' generation after the 2nd World War adds further to the changing age balance. With a larger older population goes decreasing relative size of younger age groups. These changes have the keen attention of the European Commission³.

What actions are implied from a lifelong learning perspective, bearing in mind both economic but also social dimensions? Besides the economic dimension of Europe and its employment strategy there is the social dimension as well: civil society offers a rich diversity of bodies and organisations in which European inhabitants act as active citizens.

This new demography has far-reaching consequences as there are fewer employees to pay taxes and more retired people draw pensions and use health, nursing and related services more heavily⁴. A 'pensions crisis' and a health budget or 'care for the elderly crisis' loom in many places. Adult education suffers greater competition for public expenditure from health, welfare and other portfolios; meanwhile it becomes necessary to keep people active and employed longer for economic reasons, up to date and skilled to work.

Rising pensions and health and nursing costs put increasing demands on government budgets at the same time as increasing economic competition in global markets demands lower taxation levels to remain competitive in the global economy. This conflict affects education and training, hence current widespread policy debates about who should pay for increased levels. So long as the demand for skills and learning continue to rise discussion will continue to

¹ Keese, M. (2006) *Live Longer, Work Longer*, OECD, Paris

² Leney (2005), *Achieving to the Lisbon goal, the contribution of VET*. Final report to the European Commission. DG Education and Culture, Brussels

³ Communication from the European Commission 2005; Commission report *The social situation in Europe 2004*; Green Paper, *Confronting demographic change, anew solidarity between the generations*

⁴ "Whereas for every pensioner there are roughly 4 workers in 2000, there are only 2 workers in 2035" in: Mooij, R. de, Tang, P. (2004), *Four futures of Europe*, The Hague, The Netherlands, Central Plan Office

focus on how to curb VET costs through greater efficiency, and how to spread them between the state, individual learners and employers⁵.

EU policy and an ageing workforce

The Lisbon agreement set a target for increasing the participation rate for older workers (aged 50 to 64) in the labour market. It identifies lifelong learning as having a contribution to play, not least through improving older peoples' skills and adaptability. The European Union has agreed ambitious targets for increasing the active involvement of older workers in the labour market:

- 50% of the EU population in the 55-64 age group should be in employment by 2010⁶; and
- progressive increase of about five years in the effective average age at which people stop working by 2010⁷, resulting in an average retirement age of 64.

Following the Stockholm European Council agreement, the Commission proposed a partnership approach (European Commission, 2002b⁸), with public authorities developing policies to raise the participation of older workers in the labour force, working closely with social partners, regional and local authorities and education and training providers. How should individual countries go about carrying this out? The Commission has recommended a joint approach based on four main points:

- Focusing investment on enabling older people to update their skills
- Finding ways for employers to meet the needs of older workers
- Changing the view among employers that early retirement is a good way of downsizing
- Reviewing tax and benefit systems and encouraging people to work on rather than retire.

Despite European Union and national government commitment to participation in continuing training, this declines sharply with older workers. According to the Labour Force Survey (Eurostat, 2003⁹), 14% of 25-29 year olds participate in education and training, compared with 8% of 40-44 year olds and just over 4% of

⁵ Leney (2005), Achieving to the Lisbon goal, the contribution of VET. Final report to the European Commission. DG Education and Culture, Brussels

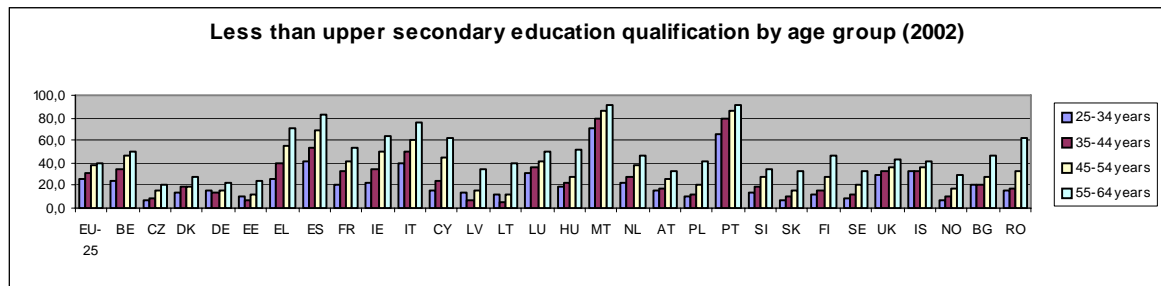
⁶ Presidency Conclusions, Stockholm European Council, 2001

⁷ Presidency conclusions, Barcelona European Council, 2002

⁸ European Commission, (2002b), Report requested by the Stockholm European Council "Increasing labour force participation and promoting active ageing", Brussels, Commission of the European Communities

⁹ Eurostat (2003) Labour Force Survey, results 2002, quoted in EC Report 3.3.2004

55-65 year olds. According to the same source, between 1999 and 2002 a significant 1% increase (4.7% to 5.7%) in the participation in training of 55-64 year olds took place in the EU15, during a period when the overall increase for employed people was 0.2%. This remains far below agreed European targets. The need for older people to update and adapt their skills is a serious challenge, particularly since they tend to have fewer formal qualifications than younger workers and take up training less.

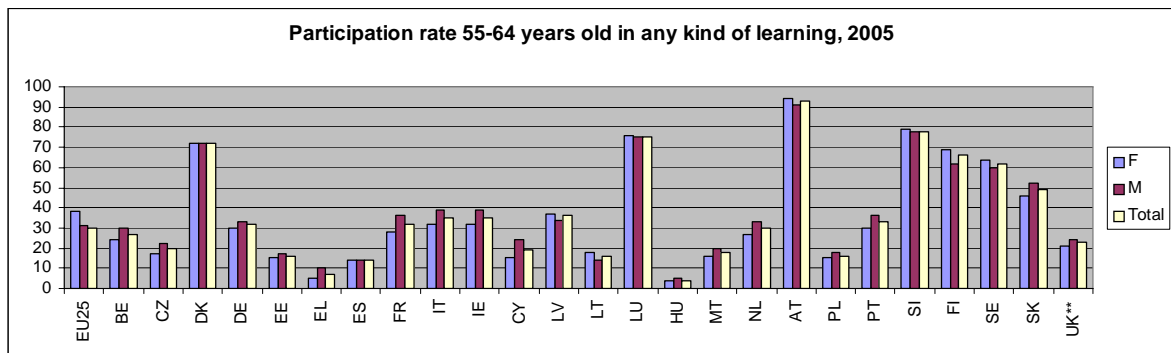


Source: Eurostat, Labour force survey.- in: Euridyce/Eurostat (2005), Key data on Education in Europe 2005

In many countries more than 20% of 55-64 year-olds lack an upper secondary qualification, in 17 countries more than 40%.

Participation rates decrease significantly with age (from 50% for 25-34 years old to 30% for the age group 55-64). If younger people are more involved in any kind of learning, it is certainly partly because they are still in the formal education system. The highest differences between these two groups are seen in Malta (64%), Cyprus (33%), France (29%), Estonia and Poland (25%) and Belgium (24%). On the contrary, Slovenia shows a little difference (8%) and Austria even an increase in participation over the age.

Participation of 55+ in any kind of learning activity (formal, non-formal or informal) is rather high in Austria, Slovenia, Luxemburg, Slovakia and the Scandinavian countries. Low participation rates are identified in Hungary, Greece, the Baltic states (with exception of Latvia), Spain and Poland.



(*) Informal training is not included in UK Source: Eurostat LFS, Ad Hoc module on Lifelong Learning 2003 Target population: 25-64 years old

Four strengths of senior citizens' education

An ethos of inclusiveness and integration underpins current policy thinking in the adult education sector, It is well illustrated by the trend towards inter-culturalism. The Grundtvig 4 network PEFETE (Pan-European Forum for the Education of The Elderly) distinguishes four main strengths of senior citizens' education¹⁰

1. *Self-directed and experiential learning*: senior citizens are often personally involved in their education; they have a lifetime of experience to offer others and generally feel strongly involved in the education process
2. *An immense volunteer reserve*: many activities in senior citizens' education are peer-to-peer activities; senior citizens work as volunteers in senior citizens' education
3. *Contributing to cultural heritage and human capital*: senior citizens can play an important role in relation to cultural heritage.
4. *Wide range of providers*: senior citizens' education is offered by a very wide range of providers; universities and other organisations of formal education, commercial institutes, self-help organisations, local groups of volunteers, etc.

Old and very old people

As the total population ages the number of the very old increases faster. This is referred to as double-ageing. The number of 'oldest-old' is steadily increasing; more people are joining the 85+ age group than are joining the 65+-age group. A high proportion of oldest old are female.

The perception and position of senior citizens is changing. The idea that these are dependent and in need of special care is making way for a more positive image of senior citizens as active people. This is not always based on reality but education can

¹⁰ Mercken, C., (2004) Education in an ageing society – European trends in senior citizens' education – PEFETE, Klercq, J ,Odyssee, Baarn

help to increase senior citizens' ability to do things for themselves and remain active longer, contributing in the community.

Cultural change has hitherto been dominated by youth, but in coming decades demographic change may alter this. In the working world the new scarcity of talent may lead to the discovery of grey achievers. Longer retirement may encourage people to seek a new purpose in life, increasing their social commitment. An important task for the 21st century will be to find a role for the older generation to play, replacing the sense that they are no longer needed.

Intergenerational and intercultural issues

The issue of intergenerational fairness and conflict raises the question 'are the old living at the expense of the young or the young at the expense of the old?' In fact the really young and the really old live at the expense of the economically active working generation¹¹. But as far as intergenerational fairness is concerned, less important than how burdens and benefits are distributed at any moment in each individual's life is how they add up in total; in other words, whether age cohorts fare differently.

Important issues and differences in demography and in adult education responses in different parts of Europe include such issues as separate or integrated provision for the older and elderly, the use of intergenerational learning, and incentives to keep older adults in the workforce.

Intergenerational programmes build on the positive resources that different generations have to offer each other and are an effective way to address such key priorities as building active communities, promoting citizenship, regenerating neighbourhoods and addressing inequality.

Intercultural competence, often termed a key skill, was recently included in the list of European Key Competencies¹². It can be described as the competence that 'embraces knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes which make it possible to cope with cultural variety at cognitive, emotional and psychomotor levels'¹³. The complete set of key competences is important for future European citizens in their working and social life. Communication in foreign languages, digital competence, and learning to learn matter for older adults as well as migrants to be active citizens. 54-65 year olds have to maintain these competences, and for younger generations there will be serious problems of exclusion if they do not.

¹¹ Lein, K. and Tremme, J.: Das Prinzip Generationengerechtigkeit, a publication by the Alfred Herrhausen Society: Generationen im Konflikt, 2000

¹²European Commission, (2005) Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning, DG EAC Brussels

¹³ Fischer, V. (2005), in: Adult education Embracing Diversity II, Developing Strategies for Mainstreaming Intercultural learning Based on Needs and Experiences, IIZ-DVV International Perspectives in Adult Education 53/II, Bonn

For second and third generation immigrants combined intercultural and intergenerational learning will create chances to develop new identities - being a Dutch Turk for example - and a new career based on well-developed intercultural competence.

Active ageing

In the Communication *It is never too late to learn*¹⁴ the Commission describes the challenge for adult learning systems as two-fold:

- To ensure a longer working life, there is a need for up-skilling and increasing lifelong learning opportunities for older workers. It is widely acknowledged that in order to keep older workers employable, investment is needed throughout the life cycle and should be supported by government, professional bodies and sectors. Special attention should be given to those entering their mid career.
- An expansion of learning provision for retired people is needed (including for instance increasing participation of mature students in higher education), as people are reaching retirement in better physical and mental health, and post-retirement life expectancy is extending. Learning should be an integral part of this new phase in their lives. In its recent Communication on universities the Commission invited universities to “be more open to providing courses for students at a later stage of their life cycle”. Such provisions will have a vital role in keeping, retired people in touch with their social environment. In many countries education systems have not yet started to address the emerging needs of this group of citizens, who also have enormous potential in terms of what they can contribute to the learning of others. Moreover, the growing numbers of retired people in Europe should be regarded as a potential source of educators and trainers for adult learning.

The Commissions Action Plan for Adult Learning¹⁵ still mentions as one of the challenges for the future: *to increase participation in lifelong learning and particularly to address the fact that participation decreases after the age of 34. At a time when the average working age is rising across Europe, there needs to be a parallel increase in adult learning by older workers.* The Action Plan itself however aims primarily to help strengthen the adult learning sector in order to be able to use its full capacity. There are no specific measures or proposals to raise the participation of older learners. With a reference to the demographic changes the most concrete statement is *to increase the possibilities for adults to go one step up and achieve at least one level higher qualification.*

The echo of the EU Lifelong Learning Programme

¹⁴ European Commission, Brussels, 23.10.2006 COM(2006) 614 final

¹⁵ European Commission, It is always a good time to learn, Brussels, 27.9.2007 COM(2007) 558 final

The raising attention to learning in later life has been translated in priority ranking for this topic in the EU Lifelong Learning Programme, the most explicit in the Grundtvig part.

Since 2000 you can see regularly projects focused on learning in later life:

- **TROBADA** - Citizenship for all: from participation, basic education and voluntary work, Barcelona 2000
- **"Mobilità in Europa e cittadinanza attiva per gli anziani"**, Roma (IT) 2001
- **Environments for Learning**, Wallingford (UK) 2002. The project aims at developing and supporting the recognition of qualifications achieved while volunteering on environmental or local community projects.
- **STILL ACTIVE! PERFORMING VOLUNTARY SERVICE AFTER 55 YEARS OLD A (SURVIVAL) TRAINING SCHEME**, Roma (IT) 2003. Development of a toolkit.
- **CORA** (Community Orientated Recognised Activities) Stockport (UK) 2004. The overall aim of this project is to promote and enhance the recognition of volunteering as a valuable resource in the provision of services across the Community and to help improve the quality of service provided by volunteers
- **VOLUNTEER TRAINING : A PATHWAY TO LIFE-LONG LEARNING**, London (UK) 2004. This The project is analyzing what makes people train to be volunteers rather than participate in other types of learning and what skills and benefits are volunteers able to pass on as mentors in the community?
- **SENTRAINICT- TRAININGS FROM SENIORS FOR SENIORS**, Erlangen (DE) 2005. This project intends to improve the quality of seniors' ICT training given by seniors and to
 - introduce a notion of quality management and certification in this sector.
- **SEN-NET- SENIORS IN NETWORK**, Prague (CZ) 2005. This project delivers support for education of seniors in ICT skills and creation of network of educators
- **LACE** - Lifelong learning and Active Citizenship in Europe's ageing Society, Utrecht (NL), 2005. This project aims at increasing the active engagement of Europe's ageing population
- **ELLA** - Ehrenamtliche für lebenslanges Lernen im Alter - Voluntary workers for lifelong learning in old age, Munster (DE) 2005. ELLA has involved the very old and persons suffering from dementia in educational work. The project redefines the idea of education on the basis of the encounter between old persons and voluntary workers as educational mediators
- **SEVIR** - Senior volunteers in interest representations, training programme for participatory competences, Waldmünchen (DE) 2006. This project has developed a training programme to enhance the political and communicative skills of senior volunteers engaged in interest representation
- **Alpha to Omega** - New pathways towards volunteering and life long learning for senior European citizens, Stuttgart (DE) 2006. The project intends to introduce senior citizens in Europe to forms of life long learning through methods of social participation, volunteer services and intergenerational dialogue.
- **Senior European Volunteers Exchange Network**, Roma (IT) 2007. This thematic network is the result of several pilot projects that experimented transnational exchanges of senior European Volunteers. This network provides a platform for all its participating partners to exchange information, expertise and good practices.

- **Empowering seniors to take part in community life** - qualification offers for members of seniors self-help groups and voluntary initiatives, Stiehr (AT)2007. The project aims at developing, testing and implementing learning materials and methods for members of seniors self-help groups and voluntary initiatives which enable them to work on ways and methods on how to activate and empower seniors concerned by isolation, e.g. by personal mentoring. The targets of the project are directed at various actors and stakeholders, ranging from seniors at risk or affected by isolation and members of senior self-help groups and voluntary initiatives to adult education bodies, advisors and government officials. Seniors will be empowered to actively take part in community life and help others in doing so.
- The **VALUE** (Volunteering & Lifelong Learning in Universities in Europe) Network: a mix of 20 organisations representing Universities (Unis), Volunteering Organisations (VOs) & networks/associations (from both sectors) from 13 European countries, London (UK)2008

PEFETE as example

PEFETE – Pan- European Forum of Education for The Elderly, Maastricht (NL)2003, Network project between adult education centers, older people organizations and research institutions in 20 European countries exploring the field of learning in later life.

PEFETE has provided the partners with **good practices**, ideas, information, trends, new initiatives, contact persons and developments about elderly education in Europe. PEFETE also offered the opportunity for exchange of experiences and expertise. It's good also to know the reality in other countries. sometimes we need to look far to realize what we have at home).

PEFETE was a chance for several countries **to start** and **to develop** the framework of education for elderly. As the result of participation in the PEFETE project a national report on senior citizens education was written and disseminated, several articles were published and couple of the events concerning senior education were organized. In this way the various organizations for senior citizens can be mobilized to take actions towards senior citizens education (policy development). The work and activities developed within the PEFETE project have provided useful background for the further promotion and enhancement of senior citizens' educational opportunities in countries of many partners, thanks also to the papers and books derived from this work. The network has provided a stimulating and thrilling opportunity to know people from all over Europe interested in the today more and more crucial issue of senior citizens education, challenging old-fashioned pictures and promoting sometimes even apparently provoking ideas for the further enhancement of this sector, which deserves increasing attention and resources to provide its contribution to the future of Europe.

More specific the exchange of **policy developments** and different approaches for implementation and financial support are very interesting. This means a change from "top - down" to "bottom - up" approach. Instead of waiting for the development of political and financial tools by the policy makers, we should move towards the realisation of initiatives and actions which will in consequence

put pressure on the relevant parties responsible for policy making on national and local level.

The PEFETE-network and the outcomes have produced arguments to get LLL on the different national agendas. This means that the network has helped. building and supporting national networks Further on it has stimulated awareness-raising among local and national administrators for the human capital of the elderly.

Participation in PEFETE project makes it easier for lobbying for **finances** from donors for development and support of senior citizens education.

The PEFETE project is bringing the **European dimension** to the national approaches and activities on the field of education of elderly. Providing the opportunity to work in an European dimension is one of the best ways to improve and to make institutions, media and society in general more sensitive to the importance of lifelong learning for elderly. PEFETE makes it easier to link up with other (European) networks

Grundtvig senior volunteering projects

"GIVE" (Grundtvig Initiative on Volunteering in Europe for Seniors) is a new initiative which will be implemented from 2009 on. It consists of a scheme of grants to support Senior Volunteering Projects between local organisations located in two countries participating in the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP). The Lifelong Learning programme aims to offer various kinds of educational opportunities to people of all ages, in order to facilitate formal, non-formal or informal learning. Volunteering is increasingly recognised as a very valuable informal learning experience, for people of all ages. In particular, it has been recognised as a way of offering new learning opportunities to senior citizens in Europe, promoting the process of active ageing and emphasising the contribution of seniors to our societies. Indeed, senior citizens are a rich source of wisdom and experience from which society should derive far greater benefit than has usually been the case in the past. This Action therefore offers a new form of mobility to European senior citizens and will allow them to learn, to share knowledge and experience - and to "give" - in a European country other than their own.

The term "volunteering" refers to all forms of voluntary activity, whether formal or informal. It is undertaken of a person's own free-will, choice and motivation, and is without concern for financial gain. It benefits the individual volunteer, communities and society as a whole. It is also a vehicle for individuals and associations to address human, social or environmental needs and concerns, and is often carried out in support of a non-profit organisation or community-based initiative. Thus voluntary activities add value to society, but do not replace professional, paid employees.

This new form of mobility is also a new form of cooperation within Grundtvig, fostering collaboration between the organisations which will send and host volunteers. It should allow new types of organisations to join the Grundtvig programme, enrich their work, through the exchange of good practice, and create sustainable European collaboration between them.

The new Action pursues the following interlinked objectives:

1. To enable senior citizens to volunteer in another European country for any kind of non-profit activity, as a form of informal (and mutual) learning activity (learning / sharing knowledge).
2. To create lasting cooperation between the host and sending organisations around a specific topic or target group, and thanks to the exchange of volunteers.
3. To enable the local communities involved in the exchange of volunteers to draw on the potential of senior citizens as a source of knowledge, competence and experience.

Summary

This paper gives an overview of EU studies on trends and issues focused on rapid demographic changes, key policy and the reflection of this policy in the Lifelong Learning Programme.

My presentation will comment these development from another perspective: what will be the value for the older learner?

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