



EN

LIFELONG LEARNING - A TOOL FOR ALL AGES



2007 — European Year of Equal Opportunities for All

AGE STATEMENT FOR THE 2007 EUROPEAN YEAR OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL



The European Older People's Platform
La Plate-forme européenne des Personnes âgées



The importance of lifelong learning for people of all ages

Lifelong learning is of key importance for individuals of all ages and holds an array of benefits for them and society. It promotes their full economic and societal participation, enables them to be better informed and more active citizens, contributes to their personal well being and fulfilment, supports their creativity and innovation, and increases their efficiency as workers or volunteers. Learning is intrinsic and we engage in learning throughout our whole lives.

The public and private benefits of lifelong learning include enhanced employability, reduced expenditure in unemployment benefits, welfare payments and early retirement pensions, higher tax revenue, increased social returns - for instance in terms of civic participation and community involvement - and better health with a subsequent reduction in healthcare costs.

The concept of lifelong learning stresses that learning and education are related to life as a whole - not just to work - and that learning throughout life is a continuum that should run from cradle to grave. This learning does not need to be linked to the attainment of formal qualifications.

However, the age of an individual has a clear impact on their propensity to take up or have access to opportunities for training and lifelong learning. Participation rates decline in relation to a person's age and level of initial education. This is an important challenge for policy makers. Training and educational efforts need to reach people of all ages.

Lifelong learning to achieve the Lisbon objectives

Promoting lifelong learning is part of the Lisbon Strategy which sets targets for economic growth, competitiveness and social inclusion. Although Member States recognise the importance of lifelong learning, the number of adult learners in Europe, in particular among people aged 45+, remains far below the target of 12.5% set by the Member States and huge regional disparities exist.

Lifelong learning is fundamental not only for the competitiveness and economic prosperity of the EU but also for social inclusion, employability, active citizenship and personal fulfilment. Individuals must be able to update and complement their knowledge, competences and skills throughout life.

However, the implementation of adult learning remains weak, especially for seniors. Adult learning for older people has not yet gained the recognition it deserves in terms of visibility, policy prioritisation or resources.

There is a need to increase lifelong learning opportunities for older workers, in particular for women, and a more positive approach needs to be promoted among employers and training providers to offering such learning opportunities for them. Public campaigning to raise awareness of relevant opportunities is also necessary.

The 2006 Spring Council Conclusions underlined the importance of lifelong learning strategies in the ongoing effort to make continued employment more attractive for people aged 50+ in the EU. Such aims cannot be achieved without a greater participation of older people in lifelong learning processes.

Promoting lifelong learning in the context of demographic change

Europe is facing unprecedented demographic change which will have a major impact on society and the economy, and subsequently on education and training provision and needs. These transformations point to the need to employ the full potential of adult learning with a view to extending the participation of older people in the workforce and allowing their better integration into all spheres of life.

In order to flourish, older people need the essential skills which underpin society such as language, literacy and numeracy. Familiarity in the use of information and communications technology is also of increasing importance. It is essential to ensure that older people's skills are appropriate to staying active and meeting the functional demands of life in our society.

In the knowledge-based society, the functional literacy of all generations is of vital importance. However this is an area of low priority in most Member States where the aspirations of - and the need for - older people to continue learning are not always fully understood. Moreover, functional illiteracy is generally greater among older people than in other age groups.

Older people's learning means that they can continue developing on a personal level, have greater individual autonomy and make a more active and productive contribution to society.



Tackling the barriers to lifelong learning

Older people's participation in lifelong learning remains limited. Barriers to this may be related to lack of time due to work or family commitments, difficulties in accessing information about learning opportunities or lack of accessible educational structures, individual attitudes to learning, inflexible entry requirements, and funding and transport obstacles. A greater understanding and moves towards resolving these issues are required from providers

An expansion of learning provision for older people is needed as is an increase in the participation of mature students in further education, as people are reaching retirement in better health and post-retirement life expectancy is high. Learning should be an integral part of everyone's life and accessible to all.

At a time when the average working age is rising across Europe, there needs to be a parallel increase in learning by older people. Low participation in learning among older workers is a particular problem. Addressing this adequately needs strong institutional commitment, coordination and partnership with all relevant stakeholders including civil society.

In an ageing society, a vision of education in later life is needed. In many countries, education systems have not yet started to address the emerging educational needs of older people, including those who are retired. The growing number of retired people in Europe should also be regarded as a potential source of instructors and trainers for adult learning. Their knowledge and skills should be assessed and they should be offered courses in teaching skills.

Promoting ICT knowledge for older people

Unfamiliarity with the use of computers can aggravate the exclusion that older people may face. They are deprived of essential information and amenities which are increasingly available only in digital form.

We live in an increasingly knowledge-based society with an ageing population and a more intensely competitive global economy. It is therefore vitally important that older people continue to learn, keep up with and adapt to change so as not to be excluded from society. Member States must work to make ICT aspects of adult learning, including for older people, as easy and accessible as possible.

User-friendly technologies can assist older people in carrying out daily activities such as those involved in living independently, managing their assets, monitoring their health, creating and maintaining social networks, facilitating access to goods and services, participating in work or voluntary activities and better ensuring their safety.

It is important to ensure that the provision of goods, technological applications and services are user friendly, accessible, affordable and appropriate for all and to create incentives to encourage older people to use them. Older people's needs have to be mainstreamed into consumer goods and services.



Lifelong learning - a means of integrating older migrants

Investment through the provision of learning and training opportunities is needed for older migrants, in particular for older migrant women with a poor educational background. Such opportunities can contribute to their better integration into society and the labour market.

The availability of adult learning at an older age can help ensure that processes of integration can take place in a way that is beneficial to both migrants and the host country. Most new migrants have major needs in terms of language and cultural understanding, in particular those who are older who may be most vulnerable to social exclusion.

One challenge for adult learning is to support the integration of migrants into society and the economy and to make the most of their competences and educational experiences acquired prior to migration. This should include expanding adult learning opportunities in relation to linguistic, social and cultural integration, developing appropriate and effective teaching and promoting more inter-cultural learning, regardless of the age of the immigrant.



EU programmes

Structural Funds

The Structural Funds are the European Union's main instrument for supporting social and economic restructuring across the EU. Programmes cover a seven year period. The current programme runs from 2007-13. These funds are divided into three separate funds:

- > European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)
- > European Social Fund (ESF)
- > Cohesion Fund

Case example

St Stephen's Enterprise Centre is a state of the art family-learning centre which provides a friendly and welcoming environment in Port Glasgow (Scotland). It attracts people to lifelong learning through the medium of ICT and removes any notion of learning and education as a forbidding institution associated with failure.

European Social Fund

The European Social Fund, created in 1957, is the European Union's main financial instrument for investing in people. Its focus is on raising skills in employment, fighting against social exclusion and creating the infrastructure for adult education.

Case example

The project 'E-learning network for liberal adult education' involves the development of a network for distance and network-based education through adult education centres located in the West Finland Alliance area.

Grundtvig programme

The European Commission has integrated its various educational and training initiatives under the Lifelong Learning Programme, which includes the Grundtvig programme. This programme, which was launched in 2000, seeks to provide adults with pathways to improve their know-how and competences as they progress through life.

It focuses on all forms of non-vocational adult and continuing education and aims to provide new learning opportunities for all, especially for adults at risk of social exclusion and for older people. It brings together learners, teachers and adult education providers to learn from each other and develop new approaches through transactional partnerships, European projects and networks.

Case example

JOYFLL - Join Your Grandchildren in Learning a Foreign Language, a project involving partners from Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Spain, made the most of the close intergenerational relationship between grandparents and grandchildren with each motivating the other to learn languages through shared activities. It achieved notable success with the grandparents and did much to dispel the myth that languages can only be learnt when you are young.



Key EU documents

Communication on Delivering Lifelong Learning for Knowledge, Creativity and Innovation 2007

The Communication sets out the progress made in implementing the 'Education and Training 2010 work programme'. While achievements have been made, challenges remain and the work of the Bologna and Copenhagen Processes will need to be continued and reinforced well beyond 2010.

Action Plan on Lifelong Learning 2007

The Action Plan aims to help remove the barriers that prevent adults from engaging in learning activities and to improve the quality and efficiency of the adult learning sector. It complements this with a call to ensure adequate levels of investment in - and better monitoring of - this sector.

Communication on Adult Learning 2006

In this Communication, Member States are encouraged to ensure the quality of their adult learning systems and overall skills levels. Better adult learning can play a key role in vocational training and in the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups on the labour market such as older people and migrants, who are both growing in numbers.



AGE Recommendations

AGE considers:

- > Barriers to older people's access to lifelong learning such as upper age limits need to be reviewed to combat age discrimination;
- > Adult learning has an important role to play in meeting the challenges facing Europe but its potential is not yet being achieved;
- > It is important to ensure that the wider aspects and benefits of later life learning are evidenced, resources and encouraged;
- > There is a need to counter stereotypes and negative perceptions of older people's needs and capacities to learn;
- > Lifelong learning strategies need to be properly integrated into a wide approach to age management;
- > Practical measures to raise the effectiveness of lifelong learning need to be implemented;
- > Motivating older people to participate in learning opportunities needs to be fostered;
- > Research in this field needs to be supported and instructors and trainers need to be provided with specific knowledge about education in later life.

AGE calls on the social partners to:

- > Promote a culture which values the skills and knowledge that older workers offer and to pay particular attention to the gender dimension;
- > Facilitate strong partnerships at European, national, regional and local levels to ensure effective implementation on the ground of reforms in lifelong learning;
- > Raise awareness of the need for workers to develop their competences throughout and beyond their working lives.

AGE calls on the Commission to:

- > Reinforce specific programmes within the European Social Fund to achieve the goal of lifelong learning;
- > Give priority to creating strong links between the implementation and development of the Lisbon Integrated Guidelines and the Education and Training 2010 work programme;
- > Strengthen the effectiveness, impact and political ownership of the open method of coordination in education and training;
- > Facilitate and support peer learning and exchange of experience between policy makers and stakeholders;
- > Continue to monitor the development and implementation of lifelong learning strategies and make a periodic assessment of progress;
- > Encourage research and studies on older people's lifelong learning needs and improve the quality and comparability of data.

AGE calls on Member States to:

- > Ensure equity of access, participation, treatment and outcomes in lifelong learning opportunities;
- > Invest in older people through education and training that matches both the needs of the learner and society;
- > Address implementation of lifelong learning strategies and mobilise national institutions and stakeholders at all levels including civil society;
- > Move from peer learning to peer review and ensure that the results of such activities reach policy makers and ministers;
- > Make the most of Community funds and programmes, in particular the Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013 and the European Social Fund;
- > Improve the culture of learning, modernise training systems and support distance learning for older people.

Useful links

European Social Fund

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf/index_en.htm

Lifelong Learning Programme

http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/newprog/index_en.html

Grundtvig Programme

http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/grundtvig/index_en.html

National Reports 2007 on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/nationalreport_en.html

Communication on Delivering Lifelong Learning for Knowledge, Creativity and Innovation 2007

<http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0703:FIN:EN:PDF>

Action Plan on Lifelong Learning 2007

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/adult/com558_en.pdf

Communication on Adult Learning 2006

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2006/com2006_0614en01.pdf

Vocational Education and Training (Copenhagen Process)

http://ec.europa.eu/education/copenhagen/index_en.html

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/>

Eurydice - the information network on education in Europe

<http://www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice>

ETF - European Training Foundation

<http://www.etf.europa.eu/>

CRELL – Centre for Research on Lifelong Learning

<http://farmweb.jrc.cec.eu.int/Crell/>

LIFELONG LEARNING - A TOOL FOR ALL AGES

More information on AGE

More information on AGE - the European Older People's Platform and on its objectives and lobbying activities can be found on the AGE website at: www.age-platform.org. Information on lifelong learning issues can be found on the "Employment" section.

AGE - the European Older People's Platform

Rue Froissart, 111

1040 Brussels

Belgium

Tel. + 32 2 280 1470

Fax + 32 2 280 15 22

Email: info@age-platform.org

For Diversity



Against Discrimination

This publication is supported by the European PROGRESS Community Action Programme. For more information see:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/progress/index_en.htm

The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.