



5th February 2019

Questions on Education, Training, Life-long Learning and Capacity-Building

AGE Platform Europe's input

This short answer is submitted in reply to the call of the Chair of the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWG). AGE Platform Europe (AGE) has ECOSOC status and is accredited to the OEWG since 2012.

As the largest European network of self-advocacy organisations of older people, our position aims to reflect the situation at EU level and to provide a comparative overview of the EU Member States on behalf of the 40 million older citizens represented by our members. Our contribution is based on written answers received from organisations of older people in several EU Member States, oral debate in the frame of our Council of Administration where representatives from 24 countries¹ and 6 European organisations/federations² sit, webinars organised with AGE members and desk research using sources referenced in this document.

Separate answers covering normative elements on long-term care and palliative care, normative elements on autonomy and independence, as well as on social protection and social security, are also submitted.

Further resources:

- [On active ageing, including volunteering and employment](#)

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¹ All EU countries with the exception of Croatia, Latvia, Luxembourg and Slovakia

² FIAPA, ESU, NOPO, EURAG, EDE, OWN Europe



National legal framework

Question 1: In your country/region, how is the right to education, training, life-long learning and capacity building in older age guaranteed in legal and policy frameworks?

- International and regional human rights law establishes a right to education.³
- On EU level, the European Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Pillar of Social Rights recognise a right to education⁴.
- However, these rights have seldomly operationalised with a life-course perspective.⁵
- The equal treatment framework directive⁶ addresses access to employment-related training for older persons, including vocational training and education. It establishes the principle of non-discrimination based on age, however vocational training policies are specifically excluded from the provision⁷.
- While the Erasmus+ programme provides a policy for mobility of learners in secondary and tertiary education, mobility is not funded for learners in adult education, excluding many older learners.
- Competence frameworks⁸ linked to education and training policies (including the recommendation on key competences for life-long learning) on EU level are focussing on skills relevant to the labour market only.

Availability, Accessibility and Adaptability.

Question 2: What are the key issues and challenges faced by older persons in your country/region with regard to the enjoyment of all levels of quality education, training, life-long learning, and capacity building services?

- Systematic challenges derive from ageism and age stereotypes about the benefits of learning of older persons, the lack of formal frameworks and funding for adult education and the reliance on the volunteer sector. There is an assumption of higher education to serve mainly young adults. Finally, lack of access for many groups of older persons is a challenge.
- On individual level, challenges are linked to internalised stereotypes, disability, geography or educational level.

³ Universal Declaration of Human Rights article 26, International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights Article 13, Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women article 10; UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Article 24.

⁴ [European Charter of Fundamental Rights of 26/10/2012](#), 2012/C 326/02 Article 14: 1. Everyone has the right to education and to have access to vocational and continuing training.

[Interinstitutional Proclamation on the European Pillar of Social Rights of 13/12/2017](#), 2017/C 428/09, Chapter I.1.: Education, training and life-long learning states 'Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market'.

⁵ The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in its General Comment number 6 on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of Older Persons briefly defines the right as the right of older persons to benefit from educational programmes and by making the know-how and experience of older persons available to younger generations.

The Council of Europe Recommendation 2014/2 on the promotion of Human Rights of Older People includes access to vocational initial and continuous training in the elements of the principle of non-discrimination in employment. Council of Europe Recommendation R(94)9 on elderly people recognises the importance of information and education for older persons themselves.

⁶ [Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation.](#)

⁷ Article 6(1)

⁸ Currently, there are two European Competence Frameworks: EntreComp for entrepreneurial skills and e-Comp for e-Competences.

- Employers tend not to encourage skills development of older workers because of assumptions of lower return on investment. In tertiary education, the financial means (scholarships) to pursue studies or PhD research can be unavailable to older persons.
- Policy frameworks are developed for formal education (primary till tertiary), but adult education is often non-formal and developed on local level – leading to different standards for access and quality of education in different areas. Adult education is not seen as a priority and thus there is underinvestment⁹ or lack of implementation of existing strategies.¹⁰
- Age barriers exist in national adult education programmes.¹¹
- Existing offers may not be made sufficiently visible.
- During the recent economic recession, access to adult education was restricted disproportionately, such as through the abolition of concessionary fees for older people.¹² Greece reports that there has been low investment in training and life-long learning for years, while Slovenia reports that while there is a life-long learning strategy, it is not properly implemented.
- The third sector, such as Third Age Universities, provides education specifically to older learners, but are dependent on volunteering and thus are of fluctuating quality.
- Ageism, negative stereotypes against older people that are interiorised, is a strong barrier to overcome, as many older adults feel that they are ‘too old to learn’.
- Disability, more common in older age, is a barrier for many older persons to access educational activities, which are often not designed in an accessible way.
- Educational level has an impact, with older people who have only basic education participating less in adult education.

Question 3: What steps have been taken to ensure that education, training, life-long learning, and capacity building services are available and accessible to all older persons, adapted to their needs, suited to their preferences and motivations, and of high quality?

- Financial costs of education exclude many older persons. Where there are no publicly funded offers for adult education, learning or recreational activities, education is only accessible to those who are able to find programmes, register to activities and finance them themselves.¹³
- There is age discrimination in accessing loans or scholarships to engage in tertiary education or research.¹⁴
- Geographical and mobility barriers challenge accessibility: offers of adult education are often concentrated in urban areas, while many older people live in rural areas, thereby being excluded from accessing these offers.
- There are few measures to ensure quality of education directed towards older people. Evaluation of adult education often depends on the willingness of providers or funding institutions to collect data and evaluate courses.
- The performance of tertiary institutions and vocational education are evaluated, but often without assessing the outcome by age.

⁹ Reported from Greece

¹⁰ Reported from Slovenia

¹¹ As an example, the Slovenian National Programme for Adult Education 2013-2020 only covers persons under 65 years.

¹² For example in the UK and in Ireland

¹³ Institutions such as the Open University (UK) accept learners of all age groups, but charge high fees to deliver formal degrees.

¹⁴ In Sweden, older persons over 50 have no access to the same type of student loans for tertiary education as younger people; in the UK, a case of a scholarship refused on the basis of age has been reported.

Question 4: In your country/region, are there studies and/or data available on the access of older persons to the right to education, training, life-long learning and capacity building in older age?

- Participation in life-long learning is lowest for the age group of older persons across the EU. While it is 45% on average for 25-64-year-olds, it is 33% for 55-64 year-olds.¹⁵ No data are available beyond 65 years.
- The OECD, in the PIAAC¹⁶ survey, looks at the outcomes of adult education, but does not cover all EU member states and the last survey dates from 2013 only.

Equality and non-discrimination

Question 5: In your country, is age one of the prohibited grounds for discrimination in relation to education in older age?

- Except for the equal treatment framework directive, there is no non-discrimination framework that takes account of age in access to education and learning in the EU. The ‘horizontal equal treatment directive’¹⁷, proposed in 2008 is still not adopted and would have covered non-discrimination in the field of access to services, including education. However, member states make only very little progress, and the access to education has been one of the main elements on the ground of which discussions have stalled. The current compromise text¹⁸ establishes that access to education should be non-discriminatory *only* where access is regulated by EU law; education systems are a competence of member states.¹⁹ Member states are to retain the possibility to set age limits in the area of education.²⁰
- While the equal treatment framework directive is meant to combat age discrimination in the access to training by employers, the figures and challenges outlined above highlight that it is ineffective in this regard.

Accountability

Question 6: What mechanisms are necessary, or already in place, for older persons to lodge complaints and seek redress for denial of their right to education, training, lifelong learning and capacity building?

- Given the lack of legal or programmatic establishment of adult education and education towards older people, there are no unified complaints mechanisms in place in member States.
- Where accountability systems are in place, access can be restricted with barriers such as the necessity to submit complaints online or to have the necessary skills to know find the relevant mechanism.
- Effective means to protect the right to complaint and redress would be ombudspersons and references to complaints mechanisms as part of curricula or activities.

¹⁵ Eurostat, Participation rate in education and training by age - participation in formal or non-formal activities in the past 12 months, 2016 data for the EU28.

¹⁶ Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), <https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/aboutpiaac.htm>

¹⁷ [Proposal for a Council Directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation](#), COM(2008)0426 final.

¹⁸ General Secretariat of the Council, [Note to Delegations on the Proposal for a Council Directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation](#) of 22/11/2018, 12956/18.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, recital 17a

²⁰ *Ibid.*, recital 17g and article 3(2)d