

Opportunities of the Lifelong eLearning & eEducation

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INTRODUCTION

Global demographic growth and demographic shifts, combined with economic, social and environmental changes, offer opportunities for and pose serious challenges to sustainable development. The COVID-19 outbreak has given a sudden boost to the digitalization of our daily lives. The measures to constrain the spread of the virus have indeed intensified the use of digital technologies in all areas: work, care, banking and shopping, social interaction, teaching and learning, etc. We're connected with all sorts of enterprises as well as governmental agencies at any time all along the year from wherever we are. The use of technology is growing in importance in everyday life. This undoubtedly brings challenges for a generation born outside of the digitalised world, prior to the "Internet age".

Today a considerable number of people don't know how to use those tools and have no alternative, as previous processes are not available anymore. A way for older people to play an active role in society is Lifelong learning - investing in people's knowledge, skills and competences throughout their lives - forms part of the response to the challenges of ageing. It's true that no one has spent enough time to ensure that the general level of digital literacy of all age groups is high enough to allow citizens to get familiar with and to use those new tools. The shift to distance learning stimulated by the COVID-19 outbreak has provided some lessons for the use of digital technology in education and training. Infrastructure - from transport to schools, connectivity to housing or postal networks to healthcare - and the provision of services, such as education and training, health and long-term care, can enhance opportunities for development, if adapted to local needs. A lot of intergenerational learning happens informally in the community, in activities around libraries and museums, cultural, sports or other associations, religious institutions, etc. Varying needs and capacities of older people should be taken into account in the organisation of urban infrastructure and services. Many cities already take into account health, gender equality and other considerations in their urban mobility plans. Accessibility contributes to social inclusion. Adapted housing solutions and 'smart homes' with sensors and automated systems for electrical appliances, lighting and heating can improve the safety of older people living alone and increase product durability and reusability.

[The silver economy](#) enables the social and economic development of individual geographical areas with potential for new markets and economic activities. In this context, it is necessary to ensure access to sustainable long-term care systems for active and healthy ageing. The concept covers lifelong learning, intergenerational cooperation, research and innovation, and institutional change.

Adult learning, as understood [in the EU](#), covers the entire range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities - both general and vocational - undertaken by adults after leaving initial education. Adult learning brings considerable benefits for learners themselves, for employers and for the wider community. Furthermore, adult learning contributes to all policy areas (e.g. economy, innovation, environment, democratic values) covered by the European Commission as all depend to some degree on the skills of people.

GREEN PAPER ON AGEING, Fostering solidarity and responsibility between generations, European Commission, Brussels, [2021](#)

Education and training in a lifelong learning perspective

Lifelong learning - investing in people's knowledge, skills and competences throughout their lives - forms part of the response to the challenges of ageing. Continuous investment in learning has many positive effects: acquiring and updating skills helps people remain employable, succeed in job transitions and advance professionally, keeping them in work and adding to job satisfaction. In a fast-changing world, lifelong learning is a necessity, as careers and education opportunities change at a rapid pace.

It is also a way for older people to play an active role in society.

Lifelong learning is most effective when it starts early in life. The first years of life are critical for developing cognitive and social skills. Evidence shows that access to high-quality **early childhood** education and care has a lasting effect on achievement in school and beyond. Despite improvements in **school education and training**, too many young people still leave school early and have major problems with basic skills, such as reading, science and mathematics. The same is true for adults. It is alarming that one in five young people in Europe lacks basic digital skills. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are overrepresented among underachievers. Evidence also suggests a risk of a low-skills trap whereby people with more skills tend to engage more often in learning activities, while people with lower basic skills do not.

There is a large potential for developing the skills of older people, as well as to improve how they are validated and how career guidance is made available. **Adult education and training** helps to improve employability in a changing world of work as evolving skills needs in particular due to green and digital transitions bring potential for new jobs.

This is all at the core of the implementation of the European Skills Agenda recently adopted by the Commission¹. In addition, with the creation of a European Education Area² by 2025, we are working towards access to quality education for all, taking particular account of those more at risk of underachievement and social exclusion.

Territorial aspects in access to education

The shift to **distance learning** stimulated by the COVID-19 outbreak has provided some lessons for the use of digital technology in education and training.

New approaches can blend classroom teaching with high-quality digital learning to improve access to education and training, both in urban and rural areas. The Digital Education Plan³ proposes a comprehensive approach to digital learning and education at EU level.

Employment and productivity – a territorial perspective (s10)

Digital connectivity can also help remote territories with access to quality education and quality job opportunities, as demonstrated during the COVID-19 crisis. The crisis has also highlighted the potential of telework for some professions as a way of avoiding commuting with all its consequences for air pollution and time use.

¹ COM(2020) 274 final, 1.7.2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1593587638149&uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0241>

² COM(2020) 625 final, 30.9.2020,

³ COM(2020) 624 final, 30.9.2020

Infrastructure - from transport to schools, connectivity to housing or postal networks to healthcare - and the provision of **services**, such as education and training, health and long-term care, can enhance opportunities for development, if adapted to local needs.

Staying active

Volunteering activities can promote intergenerational solidarity and cooperation, creating value and benefiting young and old alike in terms of knowledge, experience and self-esteem. At the same time, volunteering has an important economic value. Data show that about a fifth of 65-74 year-olds participate in formal volunteering while people aged 75+ also remain engaged when their health allows⁴.

Intergenerational learning, including mentoring or experience sharing, allows the young and old to exchange knowledge and competencies. A lot of intergenerational learning happens informally in the community, in activities around libraries and museums, cultural, sports or other associations, religious institutions, etc.

Mobility, connectivity and accessibility

On the other hand, they also present challenges for older people who lack basic digital skills or have limited internet access.

Varying needs and capacities of older people should be taken into account in the organisation of **urban infrastructure and services**. Many cities already take into account health, gender equality and other considerations in their urban mobility plans. Accessibility contributes to social inclusion. Adapted housing solutions and ‘smart homes’ with sensors and automated systems for electrical appliances, lighting and heating can improve the safety of older people living alone and increase product durability and reusability.

FUTURE ADULT LEARNING POLICIES - [European Council](#), Presidency of Slovenia, 2021

Key points of Slovenian Group:

Governance and partnership

- It is necessary to respond to future needs in the field of skills development, digitalization and sustainability.
- Digitalization of the education and learning process is becoming a priority topic in all European countries. It needs to be supported, organizationally, in terms of staff and financially.
- During the last pandemic, the vulnerability of some groups was particularly evident. Differences in the skills of the population have increased, and the vulnerable have become even more vulnerable. Providing appropriate approaches for their involvement in educational processes is one of the important tasks of management and partnership in turbulent times.
- Governance must respect the principle of balanced involvement of all target groups in Lifelong learning, with special emphasis on older adults regardless of their status.

⁴ For more information see Eurostat online table: ilc_scp19

- An important partnership with the higher education institutions is necessary and which is currently not involved. In this context, it is necessary to open an access to higher education, because it is crucial to acquire knowledge.
- A holistic approach is needed, based on networking and partnership between stakeholders in formal, non-formal and informal experimental education and learning, the public and civil sectors.

Inclusion, encouragement and motivation of low-low skilled adults and disadvantaged groups

Individuals with the right skills are better equipped to integrate into lifelong learning, adapt to the needs of jobs and to participate fully in society.

- Educationally disadvantaged are not only individual groups of the population, regardless of whether they are employed or not, but also residents of individual regions and smaller places where they have difficult access to educational opportunities. An approach needs to be considered to provide the conditions for their greater involvement. Some European funds go to people from less developed and rural areas - they need to be used.
- Design promotional campaigns for greater visibility and awareness of the impact of education on a higher quality of life.
- Raising awareness and motivating for greater involvement in all settings and levels. Emphasizing the importance of LLP at all stages of life.
- Intergenerational cooperation has proven to be an approach that encourages higher educational participation and contributes to better motivation.
- Involve the social partners from various aspects, including the involvement of employees in solving current and future challenges in the economy or at work.
- Strengthen research and development in the field.
- Overcoming age-related stereotypes.
- Encourage the creation of a campaign, either at national or European level, to help raise awareness among all sections of the population about the role and importance of lifelong learning.
- Provide or develop equitable access to education for all generations.
- Strengthen intergenerational cooperation and inclusion of the elderly and implement education closer to home.
- Insufficient emphasis on the importance of LLP in young people. Early awareness helps to perceive the role of education later in life.
- Awareness-raising must change the mind-set of the individuals and society. It is necessary to arouse curiosity and the desire to learn, or even passion.
- Volunteering also plays an important role, but only as a complement to other otherwise solid foundations in education.

Quality of adult learning

- Ensure minimum quality standard, develop and provide national systems or models of internal and external quality assessment from the aspects of programs, processes, implementing organizations and educators, etc.
- Develop quality systems also in the progresses of educating the elderly.
- Strengthen monitoring of IT processes and evaluations.
- It is necessary to provide an evaluation to measure the results and effects of the educational and the effects of the process.
- We propose the introduction of a quality standard in the field of IT, or at least the creation of a working group at EU level to deal with this issue.

- In present times of COVID-19, private ICT companies are taking the initiative – providing teaching materials and courses – quality can become an issue. On the other hand, education has become more accessible – money and time are less of a barrier than before.
- On-line training should have the same status as in-person training which is also a question of inclusion.

Formal, non-formal and informal learning in adult education

It is necessary to comprehensively address the issue of IT and to integrate all areas accordingly; formal, non-formal and informal learning. Research has shown that individuals with higher formal education are more likely to participate in non-formal education and training and informal learning. On the other hand, non-formal education represents the majority of the work of acquiring adult knowledge and skills. Casual learning is a fundamental component of any developed, inclusive and humanistic ally based knowledge-based society.

European targets and indicators

- It is necessary to develop statistics: Eurostat, surveys, monitoring of marginal and other group of adults, data on investments in education at the level of employers, individuals, local communities, etc.
- Develop measures to bring the country's results closer to the EU goals and indicators, such as: about individual learning accounts with an emphasis on the specifics of the country, micro-qualifications, free access to education, etc. About increased investment in infrastructure, provide access to broadband connections.
- Presentations of good practice from different European countries are always useful.
- The problem is that the indicators are summarized according to the Labour Force Survey. Instead of expanding research in all areas, the existing one is even being abolished. Why is inclusion only measured up to the age of 64?
- The problem is that only the involvement is measured, not the outcomes and effects, the satisfaction of the participants. Therefore, once again an appeal to strengthen and develop research.

Funding and sustainability systems

- Businesses and individuals need to be specially trained in how they can use European resources. The information on resources / calls available is always very useful. Advice in this area is essential.
- The budget relies too much on EU funds. When these expire, it is difficult to obtain funds in the state budget.
- EU funds are supposed to be a supplement to national funds, but in our country the opposite is true.
- Due to the consequences of Covid-19, much more money is available (Recovery and Resilience Fund), but the long-term nature of this financial support is questionable.
- Equal access to financial support is questionable. The issue of accessibility has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Older people, in particular, now need digital skills – mechanisms are needed to support this on all sides (link to the Green Paper on Aging).
- We need decent system for AL, not excellent, but adequate financed by needs of adults for sustainable development.
- Adult learning need financing sustainability for good life; adult learning is a right for all.

II. THE USE OF eTECHNOLOGIES IN eEDUCATION AND eLEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION - Ministerial Communiqué (EHEA, Rome, 2020)

Addressing the challenges, developments and trends in virtual education is important for all generations, also for us, senior's (not only during the COVID-19 pandemic). The use of eTechnologies in eEducation and eLearning is critical for our quality of life and independence in future digital era. Today, we face with serious challenges. We are confronted with a continuing economic and social crisis, dramatic levels of unemployment, increasing marginalization of young and old people, huge demographic changes, new migration patterns, and conflicts within and between countries, as extremism and radicalization. On other hand, greater mobility and cooperation between people, digital access to the knowledge, rapid development of research and technology, which impacts on societies and economies, plays increasingly important role in our life.

Higher Education Institutions should making their systems more inclusive is an essential aim of [EHEA](#), because our populations become more and more diversified not only because of immigration but also because of demographic changes. EHEA undertake to widen, participation in higher education and support institutions that provide relevant learning activities in appropriate contexts for different types of learners, including lifelong learning.

[Ministerial Communiqué](#) (Rome, 2020), support European higher education institutions in using digital technologies for learning, teaching and assessment, as well as for academic communication and research, and to investing in the **development of digital skills and competences for all**. They also commit to the development of open science and education to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and **openly licensed materials** that can be easily shared among higher education stakeholders, who can adapt and repurpose them for their needs.

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATION (EUA), WEBINAR IN 2021

The [2021 European Learning & Teaching Forum](#) on “Embedding and facilitating sustainability” took place online on 18-19 February 2021 and was explore how learning and teaching ensure access to the knowledge and skills needed to achieve the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SGDs) and to accomplish the transformations that our societies and economies require.

STRATEGY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MARIBOR 2021-2030 ([UM](#))

The University will be responding to the needs of its environment with the knowledge necessary for the progress and sustainable development of society during study and through a newly established lifelong learning system, which will be developed in the new period.

Establishment of a lifelong learning system that is open, flexible, tailored to individual learning objectives, to needs and interests of individual learners, and provision of shorter educational formats to facilitate the transition to the labour market and sustainable development of society.

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITIES FOR eLEARNING AND eEDUCATION? (Online survey, 2020)

The Group Members have been asked to suggest five answers to the question, what are the most important opportunities for eLearning and eEducation? We received 29 responses from 10 countries. Participants presented different views [eLearning & eEducation responses July 2020](#) and highlighted several aspects of concrete examples of the impact of eLearning and eEducation on social relations between teachers and students and to the environment. Interestingly, despite the geographical diversity of participants, there are no differences in perceptions of utility and basic approaches to eLearning and eEducation [eLearning & eEducation responses analysis July 2020](#). They shared their visions, thoughts and examples of good practice, which they developed and experiences at their institutions and in their environment. The majority opinion is that distance learning can successfully replace teaching at institutions in cases like, for instance Covid-19 pandemic. That it is affordable and in most cases independent of location. Participants presented different views and highlighted several aspects of concrete examples of the impact of eLearning and eEducation on social relations between teachers and students and to the environment. Based on better understanding the opportunities for eLearning and eEducation, the Group Members may contribute to exploiting these opportunities in the environments in which they operate <http://eregion.eu/university-elearning-education-group/>.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

- The importance of the transfer of knowledge and skills from the older to the younger generation and vice versa – the intergenerational approach should be emphasized. For these purposes, it may be necessary to adapt legislation e.g. simultaneous presence of older and younger people at the workplace with the aim of passion and knowledge and experience.
- Strengthen the knowledge that personal growth is strengthened by linking formal, non-formal and informal education and learning.
- Strengthen the importance of education for the acquisition of general competencies taking into account the green transformation of society, which shows the need to develop competencies in this area.
- Make better use of the opportunities offered by modern technology to acquire new knowledge, while also providing some security in accessing and working remotely. It is necessary to protect yourself from false information.
- Strengthen the role of employers in identifying and promoting the potential of employees for personal growth, employability, the needs of the employees, the professions of the future.
- Provide material conditions for education (ICT equipment) for older adults and providers.
- The fourth pillar of education according to Delors et. al (Learning, Hidden Treasure, 1996) is personal growth; it is often overly associated with leisure interest. It makes sense to expand the view, e.g. personal growth for entrepreneurship.

People, regardless of age and digital literacy, can't be ignored when designing and introducing new digital initiatives and tools. Senior's persons are often neither reached nor targeted [by digital education initiatives](#). How on earth are those people, many of them being over 70 years old, going to manage their lives (bank accounts, medical care, paying taxes, etc.) without having access or knowing how to use digital tools and services? Shall we remind that “Everyone is entitled to realization of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality” (art. 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights)? If we want human rights to be respected, the coming digital world must be designed with and for all citizens. In the context of the pandemic that showed digital inclusion is more important than ever to fight loneliness and isolation and to fully participate in society.

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