



LIFELONG LEARNING

Knowledge, skills, and qualifications are essential if shrinking and ageing societies want to keep their level of prosperity. Consequently, lifelong learning has become a much embraced concept among European policy makers. However, actual participation in such activities could still be improved in many countries. Recent research takes a closer look at possible reasons and strategies. Find some insights here and more on our website: www.population-europe.eu.

© Fotolia.com / fotofuerst

Stay eager for knowledge

Five questions to Demographer Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak

What is your definition of “lifelong learning” and why is it important in the context of demographic change?

For me it is a process in which we acquire knowledge, skills, and other competences during our lives in different ways and forms. That means learning through training, but also through informal ways like learning from books, from the internet, from our friends, from experience at work. Population ageing means that the number of people at working age is shrinking. So in the context of a decreasing labour force everyone looks for ways in which we can improve the overall level of human capital, through investing in the skills and abilities of people in the workforce.

In the European average, currently only 10% of adults participate in lifelong learning. What are the reasons for this?

There is huge diversity between countries, but there are a lot of countries in which really very few people tend to learn when they are adults. One explanation is a very traditional way of perceiving life courses, so there is a period in which we learn, during childhood, and then there is a period in which we work and form our families. Second is the labour market. In those countries where people stay in the same job for many years they don't feel the need to update their skills or competences because they feel that what they know and what they are able to do is absolutely sufficient for their workplaces.

What is the secret of countries with high percentages of participants?

Flexible labour markets and very well developed educational systems. Those performing best are Scandinavian countries, and their educational systems are also known as being very good. And they see the need to

develop the ability to learn throughout the entire life as a part of a school curriculum. This is very important because not everybody is born with the idea “I should learn throughout all my life”.

What are the most common reasons for not participating?

People don't find the time and employers don't see the need to start training their employees because they see it as a sort of competitive activity to working. And this is something that is a very short-sighted idea. Because if workers have more competences they can be more productive, so it is a good investment.

Can you give an example of a successful policy measure to increase lifelong learning?

The UK example: They have their qualifications framework developed years ago. Based on their example, the EU issued recommendations in 2008 to develop the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and better mobility. They are a means of communication between the labour market and educational systems. The language the framework uses is focused on learning outcomes and in this way is very close to the language used by employers. And that way, employees who form a huge part of the entire adult learning community, participate in lifelong learning.



Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak

is researcher at the Warsaw School of Economics (Institute of Statistics and Demography) and the Institute for Educational Research. She is co-author of the upcoming Population Europe Policy Brief on Active Ageing.

© private



[Read more](#)

32.8 % of all Danish citizens between 25 and 64 are participating in lifelong learning activities, according to Eurostat. This makes Denmark the EU-27 leader in the field, followed by Sweden (24,5%) and Finland (23%). The lowest lifelong learning participation is to be found in Bulgaria and Rumania (1.2 and 1.3%). Whilst the Europe 2020 strategy sets a target of at least 15%-participation, the actual EU 27 average has not exceeded 10% since 2005. The main reasons Europeans give for not participating in adult learning are a lack of time due to family responsibilities (36,6%), conflict with work schedules (35%), and costs (28,3%). A new wave of the Adult Education Survey (AES), to be carried out from October 2012 onwards, might provide further insights how to improve lifelong learning in Europe.



[Read more](#)

Grey Matter

Increasing forgetfulness, slower comprehension, weaker analytical abilities – losing cognitive functions is one of the biggest worries associated with ageing. Not just for individuals, but also for societies that have to cope with an ageing workforce. The good news is: Cognitive capacities are not necessarily a question of chronological age, says a recent publication by Vegard Skirbekk, Elke Loichinger and Daniela Weber. They compared cognitive ability worldwide using the most common measure for short term memory: the capacity to immediately recall a certain number of given words. Their results show that seniors in the US and northern and continental European countries have the highest immediate recall ability, whereas their peers in China, India, Mexico and southern Europe perform worse. Given this, the ageing population of Europe could well be cognitively equipped to handle new job requirements and generally participate in lifelong-learning activities. The researchers suggest taking cognitive abilities into account when comparing the burden of ageing across countries. Instead of the conventionally used “old age dependency ratio” (OADR), which assumes that people are dependent on others when they reach the age of 65, they recommend a “cognition adjusted dependency ratio” (CADR). This would imply that, although continental European countries have a larger population share above the age of 65 than China, their lower CADR would suggest that these countries are effectively “younger” as they have a lower share of seniors with poor cognitive performance.



[Read more](#)

Modeling the future

Education can play an important role in slowing down population increase in developing countries because educated women are more likely to emphasise the quality of life for their children and they can control their family planning better due to their knowledge of and access to contraception. Wolfgang Lutz and Samir KC calculated four different future scenarios which differ in their assumptions about school enrolment rates. The first scenario is called the “Fast Track” (FT): It means that countries

expand their school systems as strongly and rapidly as possible, a path shown for instance by South Korea and Singapore. The second scenario is the “Global Education Trend” (GET) and is not quite as ambitious. The assumption is that the countries will increase the pace of school expansion in the same way that other somewhat more advanced developing countries have done in the past. With the scenario called the “Constant Enrolment Rate” (CER), the researchers assume that the proportions of school enrolment will stay constant: Because there are more children, they need more schools, but relatively the rate will be the same. In the most pessimistic scenario, called “Constant Enrolment Numbers” (CEN), the absolute number of students and schools will remain the same, so relative to the increased number of children enrolment will decline.

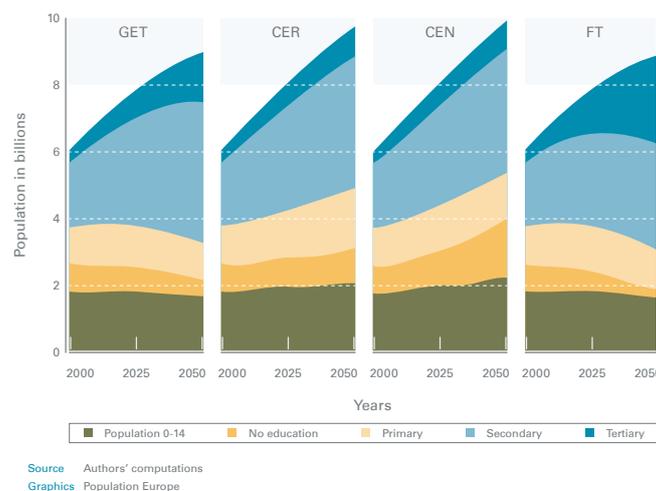


Figure 1. Four scenarios for world population growth depending on school enrolment rates

In a 40-year period, the Fast Track scenario forecasts one billion people fewer than the pessimistic CEN scenario. One billion – that is the entire population of Africa today or three times that of the U.S.



[Read more](#)

Publication

Education and Fertility: Dynamic interrelations between women’s educational level, educational field and fertility in Sweden, written by Karin Tesching, analyses three key dimensions of the topic: What impact does the education have on fertility, how are female educational careers influenced by having children and what other, currently unrecognized, factors might be important in this context. One surprising result of Tesching’s research is that a significant number of Swedish women re-entered education after becoming a mother. Having found it difficult to reconcile children and work in their original occupations, these women looked for training in fields that offered more stable and family friendly employment prospects.



[Read more](#)