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Lifelong learning in ageing societies: Lessons from Europe

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Abstract

This paper sets out the main challenges for lifelong learning in ageing societies. The context is Europe, where there is an urgent need to increase the availability of vocational training in the workplace, particularly in relation to digitalization and new technologies, so as to enable older workers to remain active in the workforce. Access to information is increasingly available only by means of online services, and so training in digital skills is important to ensure that older adults can have access to their rights. Lifelong learning in health domains during retirement is also an important element in the prevention of the loss of autonomy. Acquiring skills in digital technologies can help older people to maintain an active and healthy lifestyle and lessen the risk of social isolation. When older adults permanently leave the labour market or are not engaged in paid labour, lifelong learning has a central role in promoting well-being and a good quality of life in old age. The chapter concludes that, although some practical and effective measures to include lifelong learning activities that address the needs of ageing societies have been put in place, there is growing need throughout Europe to focus on promoting lifelong learning in local and community settings and for all age groups.

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Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the ageing of the world's population will significantly transform societies. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), global average life expectancy increased by 5.5 years between 2000 and 2016, and global life expectancy at birth in 2016 was 74.2 years for women and 69.8 years for men (WHO, 2020). At the same time, the pace of this increase in longevity differs, with some countries still at the early stages and others more advanced. Regions that have experienced an acceleration in population ageing include East and South-East Asia (in particular Japan) and Latin America. Population ageing presents many challenges for societies, among which are how to ensure that older workers participate in the labour market, sustaining pension policies that provide adequate incomes in old age, and providing effective health and social care for illnesses or disabilities associated with old age. How these challenges are met depends largely on the organization of social security systems, health and social care services, and pension systems. There is increasing pressure in those countries where the state has a key role in public transfers (in particular Europe) to adapt and maintain social welfare models of services. In those countries where welfare states are absent or where public transfers are low, as in many Asian and African countries, the accumulation of assets and a reliance on family support systems is central to ensure a good quality of life in old age. However, widespread poverty in many of these countries poses a serious threat to the social inclusion of older citizens.

The challenges of population ageing have often been presented in a way that portrays old age as a problematic stage of the life course. For example, it is commonly assumed that older people are economically unproductive and that the proportion of the working age population will decline to a level that threatens the wealth and prosperity of nation states. Some commentators voice fears of a loss of intergenerational solidarity where younger generations are no longer prepared to support their elderly parents, or where older generations withhold their wealth to the detriment of younger generations. Old age is often associated with the decline or loss of physical and mental health, and older people can be exposed to ageist attitudes that exclude them from mainstream society.

Such negative representations of later life and old age undermine the significant contribution that older people can make to society. The skills, ideas and experiences of older people can be mobilized in many areas of social life, ranging from active participation in the labour market, volunteering, helping and caring for others, and activities related to the protection of the environment. Many individuals in later life and old age are already actively engaged in these activities, which, besides contributing to the overall well-being of society, help them to age well and remain healthy. Lifelong learning activities have a central role in helping older adults to realize their full potential and to age actively. In addition to keeping abreast of developments in many different arenas of society, research suggests that participating regularly in non-formal lifelong learning can be beneficial for the psychological well-being and life satisfaction of older adults (Yamashita, 2017; Narushima et al., 2018;). Moreover, in countries that experienced the baby boom of the second half of the twentieth century, current generations of older people have a growing interest in lifelong learning activities, whether they are motivated by intellectual curiosity, a desire to improve their quality of life, or for simple pleasure. To meet this demand, there has been an increase in lifelong learning institutes that provide educational opportunities for older adults, notably in Europe, North America and Australia (Phillipson and Ogg, 2013; Hansen et al., 2019). These institutes can be found in universities and colleges as well as specific

initiatives designed for older learners, such as the Universities of the Third Age (U3A) (Formosa, 2012). In addition, informal lifelong learning activities that occur outside structured educational programmes increasingly interest current generations of older people. These activities include opportunities for the intergenerational exchange of knowledge and skills, platforms and groups that enhance digital skills, and locally based community structures that facilitate learning.

This increase in the opportunities for lifelong learning in older sectors of the population is to be welcomed. At the same time, it is important to take into account the fact that many older people are either unaware of the existence of lifelong learning activities or are unable to access and participate in them. The reasons for the barriers to lifelong learning among older adults are not essentially different to those for younger age groups. Hillage and Aston (2001) have identified three categories of barriers: attitudinal barriers, including negative attitudes to learning, a lack of confidence or a lack of motivation; material and physical barriers, which include the costs of learning as well as time factors (such as family caring responsibilities); and structural barriers, which relate to a lack of appropriate education or training opportunities at the local level and the unavailability of work-related training. A key question for ageing societies is, therefore, how to harness the potential of older people to engage in lifelong learning activities.

This chapter focuses on several domains where lifelong learning will play a leading role in meeting the challenges of ageing societies. The focus is the European context, although many of the wider issues raised in relation to the future of lifelong activities in ageing populations have relevance for other regions.

Older workers

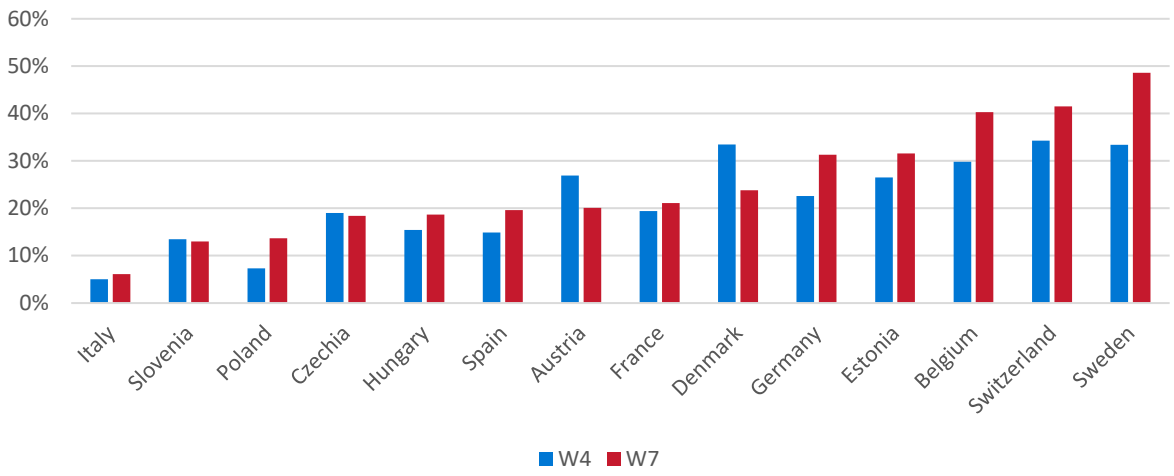
As societies age, most countries are putting into place policies that extend working life. The aim of these policies is mainly to sustain pension systems. Pushing back the legal age of retirement and increasing the length of time that contributions must be paid in order to be eligible for a full pension are common measures. Workers must, therefore, remain longer in the labour market. At the same time, the nature of employment is changing. The globalization of economies is accompanied by a decline in manufacturing and clerical jobs and increasing automation. Labour markets demand skilled workers who are able to adapt to changing work practices. New technologies that are introduced in the workplace can render certain jobs redundant, and employees are increasingly required to be flexible in moving between jobs. These trends of extending the working life in the context of rapid change in working practices present a specific challenge for older workers, and one in which lifelong learning can play a significant role. Lifelong learning initiatives that are fully incorporated into extended working-life policies can contribute to creating sustainable working environments in which the potential of older workers is fully mobilized.

Although the ability of lifelong learning to create the conditions where individuals are able to engage in meaningful employment that assures economic security is uncontested, wide sectors of the older working population currently remain excluded from any form of vocational training (Armstrong-Stassen and Cattaneo, 2010; Martin et al., 2014; Fleischmann et al., 2015; Lössbroek and Radl, 2019). Older workers are particularly disregarded when it comes to training for new technology (Krekula and Vickerstaff, 2020, p. 40). Data from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE[1])

[1] This paper uses data from SHARE Waves 4 and 7 (DOIs: 10.6103/SHARE.w4.710, 10.6103/SHARE.w7.710), see Börsch-Supan et al. (2013) for methodological details.
The SHARE data collection has been funded by the European Commission through FP5 (QLK6-CT-2001-00360), FP6 (SHARE-I3: RII-CT-2006-062193), COMPARE (CIT5-CT-2005-028857), SHARELIFE (CIT4-CT-2006-028812), FP7 (SHARE-PREP: GA N°211909), SHARE-LEAP (GA N°227822), SHARE M4 (GA N°261982) and Horizon 2020 (SHARE-DEV3: GA N°676536, SERISS: GA N°654221) and by DG Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion. Additional funding from the German Ministry of Education and Research, the Max Planck Society for the Advancement of Science, the US National Institute on Aging (U01_AG09740-13S2, P01_AG005842, P01_AG08291, P30_AG12815, R21_AG025169, Y1-AG-4553-01, IAG_BSR06-11, OGHA_04-064, HHSN271201300071C) and from various national funding sources is gratefully acknowledged (see www.share-project.org).

give an indication of the extent to which older workers are excluded from lifelong learning. **Figure 1** shows the proportion of individuals aged 50 years and above who were employed, self-employed or unemployed and who had attended an educational or training course in the preceding 12 months for a selected number of European countries. The data compare two waves of SHARE. Wave 4 data were collected in 2010 and 2011 and Wave 7 were collected in 2017. In all countries and at both points in time, less than half of older workers had attended an educational or training course in the preceding 12 months. Major differences are observed between countries, ranging from very low rates in Italy (less than 7%) to almost one half of workers in Sweden (at Wave 7).

Figure 1: Percentage of employed, self-employed or unemployed workers aged 50 years and above who attended an educational or training course in the preceding year.



Source: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe. Base: Individuals aged 50 years and above. Author's analysis.

The low rates of participation in an educational or training course for older workers observed in Italy is disconcerting in the context of a country which has experienced the rapid ageing of its population. The finding confirms the observation of Addabbo (2020) that Italy tends to be less involved in on-the-job training than other European countries and that there is a 'fragmentation of policies to support older workers at the local and regional levels with lifelong learning measures only being addressed at the national level' (Addabbo, 2020, p. 321). At the other end of the scale, Switzerland 'has a good record for on-the-job training for qualified workers, but a very poor record of offering lifelong learning opportunities to those with low levels of education' (Le Feuvre et al., 2020, p. 451). In Sweden, the relatively high rates of older workers who attended an educational or training course in the past year reflects a general policy to promote lifelong learning that has been in place since the 1990s, although adult education and learning has a lower priority as far as the older population is concerned. **Figure 1** also shows that, for most countries, rates of older adult education or training increased over the period 2010/11–2017. One exception however is Denmark, where, as Klein and Aggerstrøm Hansen (2016) note, '…maintaining the capacity of municipalities to improve the employability of job seekers and upgrade skills of job seekers can be a challenge, and monitoring of training programmes needs improving' (p. 14).

The general increase in rates of participation in educational or vocational training for older European workers that is observed in the SHARE data is encouraging and reflects both the desire for current generations of older workers to remain active as well as efforts by governments and employers to respond to the needs of older workers. There are examples of good practice by employers, whereby,

in participatory training sessions between employers and employees, ideas relating to working time flexibility by improving the efficiency of work processes, training sessions for managers regarding the life course transitions of older workers, and possible work–life imbalances are discussed in working groups (Addabbo et al., 2020). However, much work is still needed to ensure that lifelong learning can support older workers in adapting to the demand for new skills as well as managing transitions in an increasing flexible labour market. As stipulated in the third *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*, 'adults need support in acquiring new skills and managing the physical, mental and emotional demands of the labour market' (UIL, 2016, p. 12). Lifelong activities are central to this need; by enabling more older workers to make transitions to new sectors of the labour market, lifelong learning can make a significant contribution to the provision of sustainable economies. By investing in adult learning and education, countries can fulfil the goals of sustainable development through the provision of decent working conditions in later life. Practical measures can be put into place to achieve the integration of lifelong learning activities in the workplace and to counteract negative representations of ageing. In addition to ensuring individual training for older workers or individuals who wish or need to participate in the labour market, employers and other actors should promote participative intergenerational activities that are inclusive of all ages. Age-management policies, such as those that have been introduced in Finland (Tuominen and Takala, 2006), are one example of practical measures to promote lifelong learning in the workplace. These policies take into account the ages of the workforce at a team level that incorporates different needs, qualifications and skills.

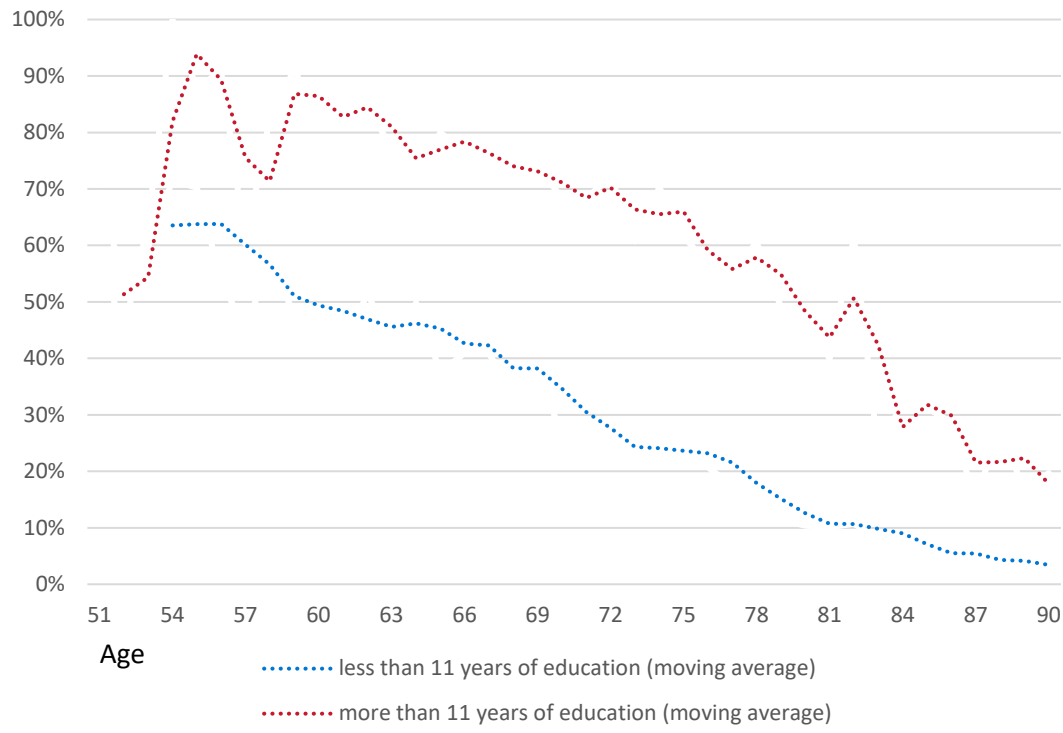
Digital skills in later life

The growing importance of the Internet and other digital services for lifelong learning is an area that provides specific challenges in later life and old age. Compared to younger generations, older people have in general been slow on the uptake in their use of information and communication technologies, and this lag may exclude them from important life domains, such as personal contacts, services and information (Wessels, 2013). Even today, older people have less access and use of digital media than younger people, and although the generational digital divide has decreased in terms of access, it is still large in terms of use (Rosales and Fernández-Ardèvol, 2019). Research suggests that the exclusion of older people from information and communication technologies is influenced less by generational factors that reflect differences between age groups than by differences among older adults, such as levels of education, income and attitudes towards the use of new technologies (Sourbati, 2009; Loos et al., 2012). Also, it is important to note that socially disadvantaged older people are often more likely to be excluded from access to and use of information and communication technologies. Research has also shown that attempts to achieve a knowledgeable older adult population regarding internet use must take into account their socioeconomic background and the difficulties that disadvantaged sectors of the older population have in getting access to computers and other digital devices (Hargittai et al., 2019). However, even where older people have access to computers, there are major differences in the level of online skills. It should also be noted that rates of internet use are consistently lower for older women compared to men, and this gender difference can be accentuated when older women become widowed and live alone (Matthews et al., 2019). In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, a study conducted in 2015 found that 41% of men aged 75 and over were recent internet users compared to 27% of women aged 75 and over, whereas there was no significant difference in the rates of internet use between men and women under the age of 65 (Office for National Statistics, 2015). This gender difference in older cohorts could be explained by more traditional gender roles over the life course (for example lower rates of women in the labour force and therefore with little access to digital technologies earlier in the life course).

Using SHARE data once again, **Figure 2** shows the proportion of older Europeans who reported that they had used the internet for emailing, searching for information, purchasing or for any other purpose at least once during the preceding seven days. The data are presented according to the number of years of education, with two categories representing those individuals with less than 11 years of

education and those with 11 or more years of education. At all ages, rates decrease significantly with age, and individuals with 11 years or more of education are significantly more likely to have used the internet than individuals with less than 11 years of education. Given the importance of computer and internet use for lifelong learning, these figures illustrate the disadvantages that older Europeans face in terms of being equipped and familiar with what can be regarded as the basic tool for learning in the twenty-first century.

Figure 2: Percentage of older Europeans who used the internet at least once during the preceding seven days.



Source: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe. Base: Individuals aged 50 years and above. Author's analysis.

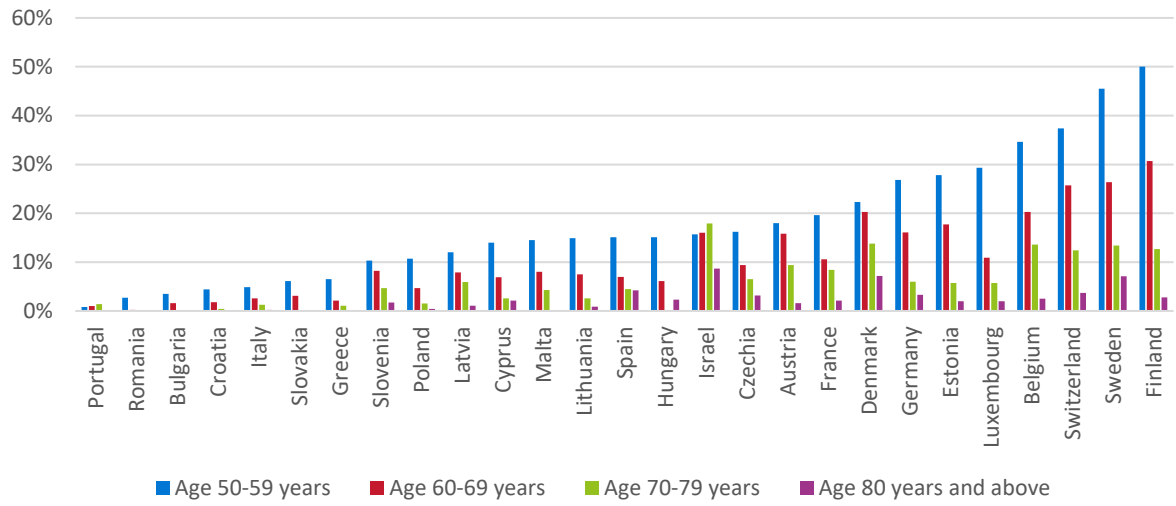
The high use of internet users among more educated sectors of the population also reflects the popularity and growing demand for digital courses within universities and other platforms that respond to the wishes of older citizens to be informed of current issues as well as to pursue learning for its own sake. There is evidence, for example, that many older learners are participating in MOOCs (massive open online courses), although there is a need for more research to determine which types of courses are in demand (Liyanagunawardena and Williams, 2016).

Lifelong learning and ageing

Beyond the potential for lifelong learning skills to support older workers in remaining active, the challenges associated with increasing life expectancy urgently require new forms of learning. In the twenty-first century, it is necessary to reverse the trend whereby lifelong learning significantly decreases with age to the point where it is practically absent at advanced ages. Using results from SHARE to the same question regarding participation in an educational or training course in the past year but now not restricting the field to older workers, **Figure 3** shows the sharp fall that is observed in all countries as individuals move into later life and old age. Country differences are flattened above the age of 80 years, with rates not attaining more than 9% in any of the 27 selected countries. Moreover, a general trend is observed of higher rates in northern and central European countries,

contrasting with lower rates in eastern and southern European countries.

Figure 3: Percentage of individuals who attended an educational or training course in the preceding year.



Source: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe. Base: Individuals aged 50 years and above. Author's analysis.

The country differences in **Figure 3** in part reflect the growing trend in northern and central European countries in lifelong activities both at the institutional (formal) level as well as the community level. These activities and courses are not related to seeking employment, but respond to the demand for learning that fulfils personal objectives such maintaining health and social connections, civic participation and 'knowledge for knowledge's sake'. At the same time, many institutes of lifelong learning (or their equivalent) reflect a long-standing university adult and continuing education tradition, promoting a wide range of courses to the general public. They do not necessarily reflect, as yet, the changing needs and aspirations among the new cohort of older people entering what has been termed the 'third age' following full-time employment. Another important area for informal education has been the development of 'intergenerational learning', with programmes linking older and younger generations emerging from a number of directions from the late 1970s onwards. Non-formal, self-help and voluntary activities will always be a major part of learning for older people. On the other hand, they may also reinforce existing inequalities in learning, given pressures on formal provision. The membership profile of U3A, for example, has been identified as 'overwhelmingly middle-class' (Phillipson and Ogg, 2013).

Lifelong learning activities in later life should increasingly be promoted in the context of policies to promote health and active ageing, such as the World Health Organization's 'active ageing' framework. This framework stresses the importance of both formal and informal learning to maintain and promote social participation and good health during later life. Moreover, research evidence points to a strong association between psychological well-being and non-formal lifelong learning (Narushima et al., 2018). In the United Kingdom, a study by Jenkins and Mostafa (2015) found that participation in non-formal education had a larger effect on the psychological well-being of older adults than formal education and training courses. These findings have particular relevance for countries where non-formal activities in later life are underdeveloped or where their potential to promote healthy ageing is overlooked in public policy.

Perhaps one of the most important challenges in this field is to enable societies to reverse the negative and stereotypical representation of ageing as a period of decline and disengagement from society. It is also necessary to disassociate lifelong learning from traditional forms of adult education. Too often, learning at advanced stages of the life course is associated with leisure and hobby activities that are

more likely to be taken up by higher social class groups. The content of learning in old age can be misinterpreted as quintessentially applying to older people and irrelevant for younger sectors of the population. In this scenario, there is the risk of 'educational segregation' between the generations, where formal education is seen as being the prerogative of younger adults and informal education associated much more with older adults.

Intergenerational lifelong learning activities can bridge this divide, and many opportunities exist to bring together the skills of different generations. The potential of lifelong learning through the promotion of intergenerational activities is a major area that can be reinforced. In Europe, the Lifelong Learning Platform brings together 42 European organizations that represent more than 50,000 educational institutions and associations covering all sectors of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Examples of good practice in intergenerational lifelong learning include the Crosstalk project, which aims to provide women, senior citizens, schoolchildren, young people and migrants with the skills and confidence to communicate effectively and tell their stories on their local radio. The project has produced a handbook which can guide local initiatives who are setting up similar projects (University of Education Freiburg, 2010). In a similar vein, the HEAR ME project (Highly Educated Retirees Mentoring Early School Leavers), comprising universities and organizations involved with adult education and community work, has produced a handbook on setting up mentoring projects between older citizens and younger people who are at risk of being marginalized or dropping out of school. (Rothuizen et al., 2011).

Concluding remarks

As lifelong learning activities gain in importance, older citizens will play a significant part in transferring knowledge to younger generations and in the transmission of values and beliefs. The sharing of experiences by older adults can play a major role in instilling the idea that a good life is a life of learning. Opportunities for generations to exchange knowledge and skills will be increased, strengthening older people's sense of belonging to a community and enabling them to remain physically and mentally active as they age. In assessing the European experience of promoting lifelong learning in the context of population ageing, it can be concluded that the picture is a mixed one. On the one hand, the arrival of the baby-boomer generations has increased the demand for both formal and informal learning activities, with many positive examples of the latter that are firmly rooted in local and community settings. On the other hand, there are major differences between European countries regarding the implementation of effective lifelong learning policies, notably for older workers. Although lifelong learning in the workplace is vital to meet the challenges of ageing populations, economic priorities for businesses and industry, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, threaten to undermine the priority of continued training and education for older workers. In the formal education setting, as Mayo (2017) has articulated, European universities and higher education institutions have not yet responded to the needs of adult learners and, by extension, older learners. The European formal education sector needs to engage with older adults who are at risk of social exclusion and connect with local communities. A reorientation of public policy on lifelong learning, with a shift of focus away from the economic priorities to the goal of promoting inclusive societies, is becoming a key challenge. Such a shift would be beneficial for ageing societies, and for individuals of all ages.

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Embracing a culture of lifelong learning

This paper was commissioned by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) within the broader framework of UNESCO's Futures of Education initiative to rethink education, knowledge production and learning from a future-oriented perspective. Within the context of this initiative, UIL invited a group of high-level experts to participate in a transdisciplinary consultation process on the futures of lifelong learning. The results of this consultation were captured in a report, entitled *Embracing a culture of lifelong learning*, which presents a compelling vision for lifelong learning and calls on the international community to recognize lifelong learning as a new human right.

To further explore the potential of lifelong learning for achieving a more equal, prosperous, healthy and peaceful future, the experts were invited to contribute a paper reflecting different disciplinary perspectives on lifelong learning. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and should not be attributed to UIL.

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Lifelong learning in ageing societies: Lessons from Europe

Jim Ogg

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the ageing of the world's population will significantly transform societies. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), global average life expectancy increased by 5.5 years between 2000 and 2016, and global life expectancy at birth in 2016 was 74.2 years for women and 69.8 years for men (WHO, 2020). At the same time, the pace of this increase in longevity differs, with some countries still at the early stages and others more advanced. Regions that have experienced an acceleration in population ageing include East and South-East Asia (in particular Japan) and Latin America. Population ageing presents many challenges for societies, among which are how to ensure that older workers participate in the labour market, sustaining pension policies that provide adequate incomes in old age, and providing effective health and social care for illnesses or disabilities associated with old age. How these challenges are met depends largely on the organization of social security systems, health and social care services, and pension systems. There is increasing pressure in those countries where the state has a key role in public transfers (in particular Europe) to adapt and maintain social welfare models of services. In those countries where welfare states are absent or where public transfers are low, as in many Asian and African countries, the accumulation of assets and a reliance on family support systems is central to ensure a good quality of life in old age. However, widespread poverty in many of these countries poses a serious threat to the social inclusion of older citizens.

The challenges of population ageing have often been presented in a way that portrays old age as a problematic stage of the life course. For example, it is commonly assumed that older people are economically unproductive and that the proportion of the working age population will decline to a level that threatens the wealth and prosperity of nation states. Some commentators voice fears of a loss of intergenerational solidarity where younger generations are no longer prepared to support their elderly parents, or where older generations withhold their wealth to the detriment of younger generations. Old age is often associated with the decline or loss of physical and mental health, and older people can be exposed to ageist attitudes that exclude them from mainstream society.

Such negative representations of later life and old age undermine the significant contribution that older people can make to society. The skills, ideas and experiences of older people can be mobilized in many areas of social life, ranging from active participation in the labour market, volunteering, helping and caring for others, and activities related to the protection of the environment. Many individuals in later life and old age are already actively engaged in these activities, which, besides contributing to the overall well-being of society, help them to age well and remain healthy. Lifelong learning activities have a central role in helping older adults to realize their full potential and to age actively. In addition to keeping abreast of developments in many different arenas of society, research suggests that participating regularly in non-formal lifelong learning can be beneficial for the psychological well-being and life satisfaction of older adults (Yamashita, 2017; Narushima et al., 2018;). Moreover, in countries that experienced the baby boom of the second half of the twentieth century, current generations of older people have a growing interest in lifelong learning activities, whether they are motivated by intellectual curiosity, a desire to improve their quality of life, or for simple pleasure. To meet this demand, there has been an increase in lifelong learning institutes that provide educational opportunities for older adults, notably in Europe, North America and Australia (Phillipson and Ogg, 2013; Hansen et al., 2019). These institutes can be found in universities and colleges as well as specific

initiatives designed for older learners, such as the Universities of the Third Age (U3A) (Formosa, 2012). In addition, informal lifelong learning activities that occur outside structured educational programmes increasingly interest current generations of older people. These activities include opportunities for the intergenerational exchange of knowledge and skills, platforms and groups that enhance digital skills, and locally based community structures that facilitate learning.

This increase in the opportunities for lifelong learning in older sectors of the population is to be welcomed. At the same time, it is important to take into account the fact that many older people are either unaware of the existence of lifelong learning activities or are unable to access and participate in them. The reasons for the barriers to lifelong learning among older adults are not essentially different to those for younger age groups. Hillage and Aston (2001) have identified three categories of barriers: attitudinal barriers, including negative attitudes to learning, a lack of confidence or a lack of motivation; material and physical barriers, which include the costs of learning as well as time factors (such as family caring responsibilities); and structural barriers, which relate to a lack of appropriate education or training opportunities at the local level and the unavailability of work-related training. A key question for ageing societies is, therefore, how to harness the potential of older people to engage in lifelong learning activities.

This chapter focuses on several domains where lifelong learning will play a leading role in meeting the challenges of ageing societies. The focus is the European context, although many of the wider issues raised in relation to the future of lifelong activities in ageing populations have relevance for other regions.

Older workers

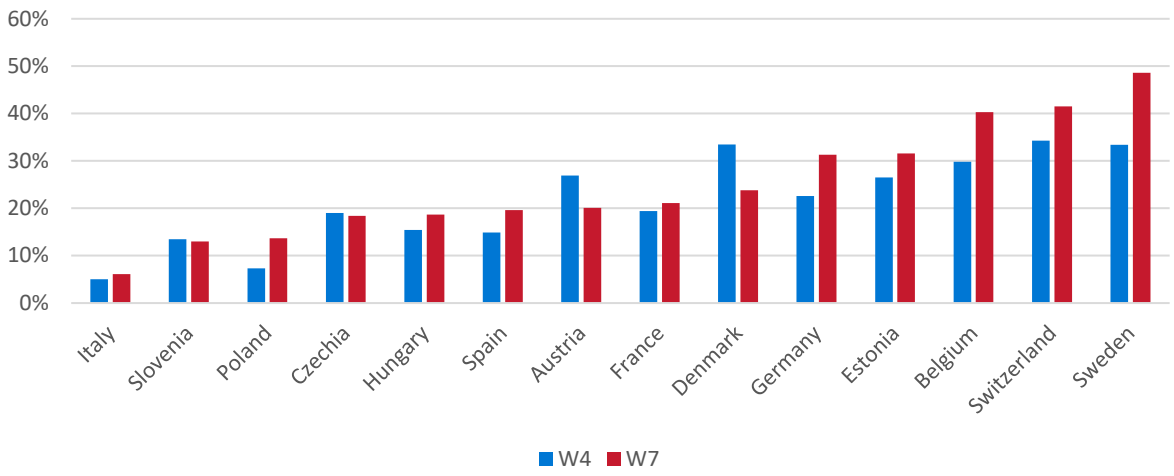
As societies age, most countries are putting into place policies that extend working life. The aim of these policies is mainly to sustain pension systems. Pushing back the legal age of retirement and increasing the length of time that contributions must be paid in order to be eligible for a full pension are common measures. Workers must, therefore, remain longer in the labour market. At the same time, the nature of employment is changing. The globalization of economies is accompanied by a decline in manufacturing and clerical jobs and increasing automation. Labour markets demand skilled workers who are able to adapt to changing work practices. New technologies that are introduced in the workplace can render certain jobs redundant, and employees are increasingly required to be flexible in moving between jobs. These trends of extending the working life in the context of rapid change in working practices present a specific challenge for older workers, and one in which lifelong learning can play a significant role. Lifelong learning initiatives that are fully incorporated into extended working-life policies can contribute to creating sustainable working environments in which the potential of older workers is fully mobilized.

Although the ability of lifelong learning to create the conditions where individuals are able to engage in meaningful employment that assures economic security is uncontested, wide sectors of the older working population currently remain excluded from any form of vocational training (Armstrong-Stassen and Cattaneo, 2010; Martin et al., 2014; Fleischmann et al., 2015; Lössbroek and Radl, 2019). Older workers are particularly disregarded when it comes to training for new technology (Krekula and Vickerstaff, 2020, p. 40). Data from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE[1])

[1] This paper uses data from SHARE Waves 4 and 7 (DOIs: 10.6103/SHARE.w4.710, 10.6103/SHARE.w7.710), see Börsch-Supan et al. (2013) for methodological details.
The SHARE data collection has been funded by the European Commission through FP5 (QLK6-CT-2001-00360), FP6 (SHARE-I3: RII-CT-2006-062193), COMPARE (CIT5-CT-2005-028857), SHARELIFE (CIT4-CT-2006-028812), FP7 (SHARE-PREP: GA N°211909), SHARE-LEAP (GA N°227822), SHARE M4 (GA N°261982) and Horizon 2020 (SHARE-DEV3: GA N°676536, SERISS: GA N°654221) and by DG Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion. Additional funding from the German Ministry of Education and Research, the Max Planck Society for the Advancement of Science, the US National Institute on Aging (U01_AG09740-13S2, P01_AG005842, P01_AG08291, P30_AG12815, R21_AG025169, Y1-AG-4553-01, IAG_BSR06-11, OGHA_04-064, HHSN271201300071C) and from various national funding sources is gratefully acknowledged (see www.share-project.org).

give an indication of the extent to which older workers are excluded from lifelong learning. **Figure 1** shows the proportion of individuals aged 50 years and above who were employed, self-employed or unemployed and who had attended an educational or training course in the preceding 12 months for a selected number of European countries. The data compare two waves of SHARE. Wave 4 data were collected in 2010 and 2011 and Wave 7 were collected in 2017. In all countries and at both points in time, less than half of older workers had attended an educational or training course in the preceding 12 months. Major differences are observed between countries, ranging from very low rates in Italy (less than 7%) to almost one half of workers in Sweden (at Wave 7).

Figure 1: Percentage of employed, self-employed or unemployed workers aged 50 years and above who attended an educational or training course in the preceding year.



Source: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe. Base: Individuals aged 50 years and above. Author's analysis.

The low rates of participation in an educational or training course for older workers observed in Italy is disconcerting in the context of a country which has experienced the rapid ageing of its population. The finding confirms the observation of Addabbo (2020) that Italy tends to be less involved in on-the-job training than other European countries and that there is a 'fragmentation of policies to support older workers at the local and regional levels with lifelong learning measures only being addressed at the national level' (Addabbo, 2020, p. 321). At the other end of the scale, Switzerland 'has a good record for on-the-job training for qualified workers, but a very poor record of offering lifelong learning opportunities to those with low levels of education' (Le Feuvre et al., 2020, p. 451). In Sweden, the relatively high rates of older workers who attended an educational or training course in the past year reflects a general policy to promote lifelong learning that has been in place since the 1990s, although adult education and learning has a lower priority as far as the older population is concerned. **Figure 1** also shows that, for most countries, rates of older adult education or training increased over the period 2010/11–2017. One exception however is Denmark, where, as Klein and Aggerstrøm Hansen (2016) note, '…maintaining the capacity of municipalities to improve the employability of job seekers and upgrade skills of job seekers can be a challenge, and monitoring of training programmes needs improving' (p. 14).

The general increase in rates of participation in educational or vocational training for older European workers that is observed in the SHARE data is encouraging and reflects both the desire for current generations of older workers to remain active as well as efforts by governments and employers to respond to the needs of older workers. There are examples of good practice by employers, whereby,

in participatory training sessions between employers and employees, ideas relating to working time flexibility by improving the efficiency of work processes, training sessions for managers regarding the life course transitions of older workers, and possible work–life imbalances are discussed in working groups (Addabbo et al., 2020). However, much work is still needed to ensure that lifelong learning can support older workers in adapting to the demand for new skills as well as managing transitions in an increasing flexible labour market. As stipulated in the third *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*, 'adults need support in acquiring new skills and managing the physical, mental and emotional demands of the labour market' (UIL, 2016, p. 12). Lifelong activities are central to this need; by enabling more older workers to make transitions to new sectors of the labour market, lifelong learning can make a significant contribution to the provision of sustainable economies. By investing in adult learning and education, countries can fulfil the goals of sustainable development through the provision of decent working conditions in later life. Practical measures can be put into place to achieve the integration of lifelong learning activities in the workplace and to counteract negative representations of ageing. In addition to ensuring individual training for older workers or individuals who wish or need to participate in the labour market, employers and other actors should promote participative intergenerational activities that are inclusive of all ages. Age-management policies, such as those that have been introduced in Finland (Tuominen and Takala, 2006), are one example of practical measures to promote lifelong learning in the workplace. These policies take into account the ages of the workforce at a team level that incorporates different needs, qualifications and skills.

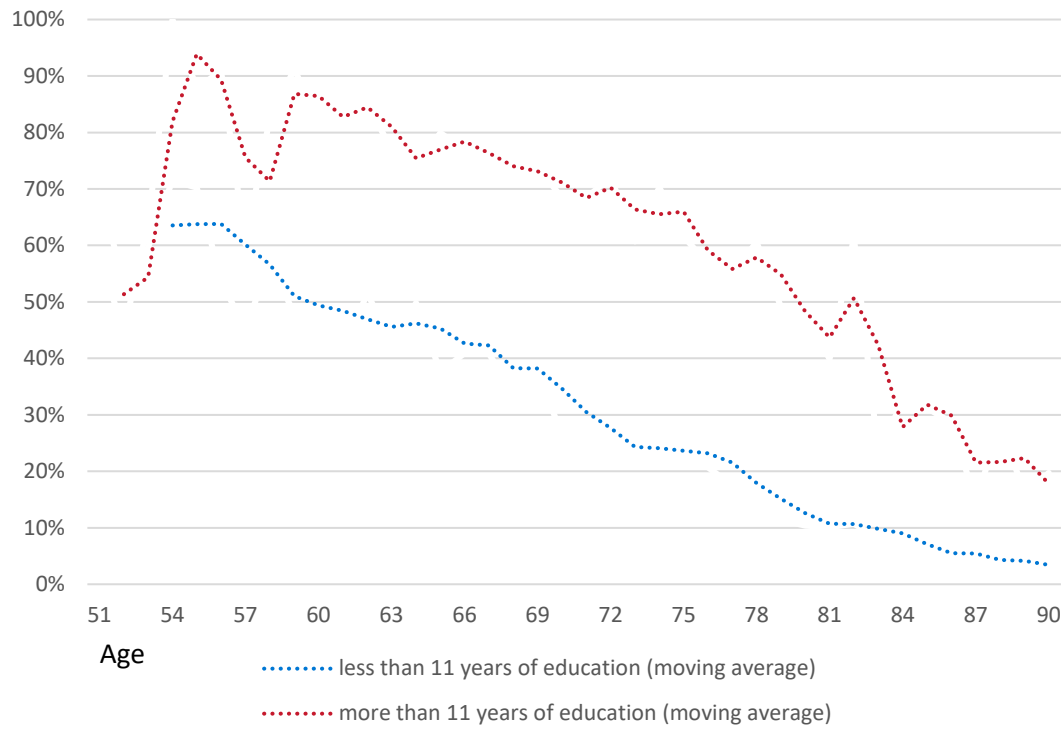
Digital skills in later life

The growing importance of the Internet and other digital services for lifelong learning is an area that provides specific challenges in later life and old age. Compared to younger generations, older people have in general been slow on the uptake in their use of information and communication technologies, and this lag may exclude them from important life domains, such as personal contacts, services and information (Wessels, 2013). Even today, older people have less access and use of digital media than younger people, and although the generational digital divide has decreased in terms of access, it is still large in terms of use (Rosales and Fernández-Ardèvol, 2019). Research suggests that the exclusion of older people from information and communication technologies is influenced less by generational factors that reflect differences between age groups than by differences among older adults, such as levels of education, income and attitudes towards the use of new technologies (Sourbati, 2009; Loos et al., 2012). Also, it is important to note that socially disadvantaged older people are often more likely to be excluded from access to and use of information and communication technologies. Research has also shown that attempts to achieve a knowledgeable older adult population regarding internet use must take into account their socioeconomic background and the difficulties that disadvantaged sectors of the older population have in getting access to computers and other digital devices (Hargittai et al., 2019). However, even where older people have access to computers, there are major differences in the level of online skills. It should also be noted that rates of internet use are consistently lower for older women compared to men, and this gender difference can be accentuated when older women become widowed and live alone (Matthews et al., 2019). In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, a study conducted in 2015 found that 41% of men aged 75 and over were recent internet users compared to 27% of women aged 75 and over, whereas there was no significant difference in the rates of internet use between men and women under the age of 65 (Office for National Statistics, 2015). This gender difference in older cohorts could be explained by more traditional gender roles over the life course (for example lower rates of women in the labour force and therefore with little access to digital technologies earlier in the life course).

Using SHARE data once again, **Figure 2** shows the proportion of older Europeans who reported that they had used the internet for emailing, searching for information, purchasing or for any other purpose at least once during the preceding seven days. The data are presented according to the number of years of education, with two categories representing those individuals with less than 11 years of

education and those with 11 or more years of education. At all ages, rates decrease significantly with age, and individuals with 11 years or more of education are significantly more likely to have used the internet than individuals with less than 11 years of education. Given the importance of computer and internet use for lifelong learning, these figures illustrate the disadvantages that older Europeans face in terms of being equipped and familiar with what can be regarded as the basic tool for learning in the twenty-first century.

Figure 2: Percentage of older Europeans who used the internet at least once during the preceding seven days.



Source: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe. Base: Individuals aged 50 years and above. Author's analysis.

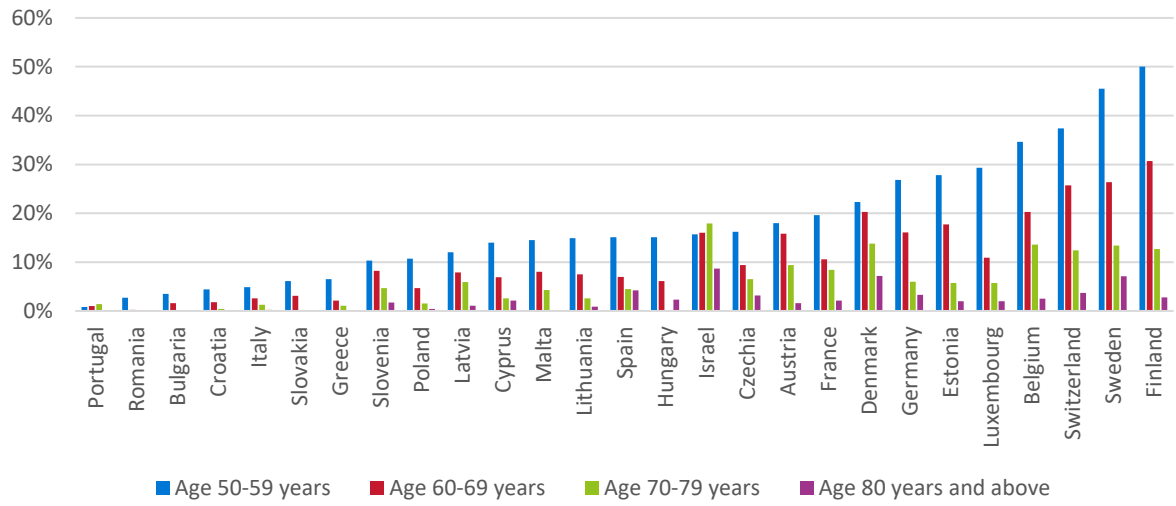
The high use of internet users among more educated sectors of the population also reflects the popularity and growing demand for digital courses within universities and other platforms that respond to the wishes of older citizens to be informed of current issues as well as to pursue learning for its own sake. There is evidence, for example, that many older learners are participating in MOOCs (massive open online courses), although there is a need for more research to determine which types of courses are in demand (Liyanagunawardena and Williams, 2016).

Lifelong learning and ageing

Beyond the potential for lifelong learning skills to support older workers in remaining active, the challenges associated with increasing life expectancy urgently require new forms of learning. In the twenty-first century, it is necessary to reverse the trend whereby lifelong learning significantly decreases with age to the point where it is practically absent at advanced ages. Using results from SHARE to the same question regarding participation in an educational or training course in the past year but now not restricting the field to older workers, **Figure 3** shows the sharp fall that is observed in all countries as individuals move into later life and old age. Country differences are flattened above the age of 80 years, with rates not attaining more than 9% in any of the 27 selected countries. Moreover, a general trend is observed of higher rates in northern and central European countries,

contrasting with lower rates in eastern and southern European countries.

Figure 3: Percentage of individuals who attended an educational or training course in the preceding year.



Source: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe. Base: Individuals aged 50 years and above. Author's analysis.

The country differences in **Figure 3** in part reflect the growing trend in northern and central European countries in lifelong activities both at the institutional (formal) level as well as the community level. These activities and courses are not related to seeking employment, but respond to the demand for learning that fulfils personal objectives such maintaining health and social connections, civic participation and 'knowledge for knowledge's sake'. At the same time, many institutes of lifelong learning (or their equivalent) reflect a long-standing university adult and continuing education tradition, promoting a wide range of courses to the general public. They do not necessarily reflect, as yet, the changing needs and aspirations among the new cohort of older people entering what has been termed the 'third age' following full-time employment. Another important area for informal education has been the development of 'intergenerational learning', with programmes linking older and younger generations emerging from a number of directions from the late 1970s onwards. Non-formal, self-help and voluntary activities will always be a major part of learning for older people. On the other hand, they may also reinforce existing inequalities in learning, given pressures on formal provision. The membership profile of U3A, for example, has been identified as 'overwhelmingly middle-class' (Phillipson and Ogg, 2013).

Lifelong learning activities in later life should increasingly be promoted in the context of policies to promote health and active ageing, such as the World Health Organization's 'active ageing' framework. This framework stresses the importance of both formal and informal learning to maintain and promote social participation and good health during later life. Moreover, research evidence points to a strong association between psychological well-being and non-formal lifelong learning (Narushima et al., 2018). In the United Kingdom, a study by Jenkins and Mostafa (2015) found that participation in non-formal education had a larger effect on the psychological well-being of older adults than formal education and training courses. These findings have particular relevance for countries where non-formal activities in later life are underdeveloped or where their potential to promote healthy ageing is overlooked in public policy.

Perhaps one of the most important challenges in this field is to enable societies to reverse the negative and stereotypical representation of ageing as a period of decline and disengagement from society. It is also necessary to disassociate lifelong learning from traditional forms of adult education. Too often, learning at advanced stages of the life course is associated with leisure and hobby activities that are

more likely to be taken up by higher social class groups. The content of learning in old age can be misinterpreted as quintessentially applying to older people and irrelevant for younger sectors of the population. In this scenario, there is the risk of 'educational segregation' between the generations, where formal education is seen as being the prerogative of younger adults and informal education associated much more with older adults.

Intergenerational lifelong learning activities can bridge this divide, and many opportunities exist to bring together the skills of different generations. The potential of lifelong learning through the promotion of intergenerational activities is a major area that can be reinforced. In Europe, the Lifelong Learning Platform brings together 42 European organizations that represent more than 50,000 educational institutions and associations covering all sectors of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Examples of good practice in intergenerational lifelong learning include the Crosstalk project, which aims to provide women, senior citizens, schoolchildren, young people and migrants with the skills and confidence to communicate effectively and tell their stories on their local radio. The project has produced a handbook which can guide local initiatives who are setting up similar projects (University of Education Freiburg, 2010). In a similar vein, the HEAR ME project (Highly Educated Retirees Mentoring Early School Leavers), comprising universities and organizations involved with adult education and community work, has produced a handbook on setting up mentoring projects between older citizens and younger people who are at risk of being marginalized or dropping out of school. (Rothuizen et al., 2011).

Concluding remarks

As lifelong learning activities gain in importance, older citizens will play a significant part in transferring knowledge to younger generations and in the transmission of values and beliefs. The sharing of experiences by older adults can play a major role in instilling the idea that a good life is a life of learning. Opportunities for generations to exchange knowledge and skills will be increased, strengthening older people's sense of belonging to a community and enabling them to remain physically and mentally active as they age. In assessing the European experience of promoting lifelong learning in the context of population ageing, it can be concluded that the picture is a mixed one. On the one hand, the arrival of the baby-boomer generations has increased the demand for both formal and informal learning activities, with many positive examples of the latter that are firmly rooted in local and community settings. On the other hand, there are major differences between European countries regarding the implementation of effective lifelong learning policies, notably for older workers. Although lifelong learning in the workplace is vital to meet the challenges of ageing populations, economic priorities for businesses and industry, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, threaten to undermine the priority of continued training and education for older workers. In the formal education setting, as Mayo (2017) has articulated, European universities and higher education institutions have not yet responded to the needs of adult learners and, by extension, older learners. The European formal education sector needs to engage with older adults who are at risk of social exclusion and connect with local communities. A reorientation of public policy on lifelong learning, with a shift of focus away from the economic priorities to the goal of promoting inclusive societies, is becoming a key challenge. Such a shift would be beneficial for ageing societies, and for individuals of all ages.

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Embracing a culture of lifelong learning

This paper was commissioned by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) within the broader framework of UNESCO's Futures of Education initiative to rethink education, knowledge production and learning from a future-oriented perspective. Within the context of this initiative, UIL invited a group of high-level experts to participate in a transdisciplinary consultation process on the futures of lifelong learning. The results of this consultation were captured in a report, entitled *Embracing a culture of lifelong learning*, which presents a compelling vision for lifelong learning and calls on the international community to recognize lifelong learning as a new human right.

To further explore the potential of lifelong learning for achieving a more equal, prosperous, healthy and peaceful future, the experts were invited to contribute a paper reflecting different disciplinary perspectives on lifelong learning. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and should not be attributed to UIL.

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initiatives designed for older learners, such as the Universities of the Third Age (U3A) (Formosa, 2012). In addition, informal lifelong learning activities that occur outside structured educational programmes increasingly interest current generations of older people. These activities include opportunities for the intergenerational exchange of knowledge and skills, platforms and groups that enhance digital skills, and locally based community structures that facilitate learning.

This increase in the opportunities for lifelong learning in older sectors of the population is to be welcomed. At the same time, it is important to take into account the fact that many older people are either unaware of the existence of lifelong learning activities or are unable to access and participate in them. The reasons for the barriers to lifelong learning among older adults are not essentially different to those for younger age groups. Hillage and Aston (2001) have identified three categories of barriers: attitudinal barriers, including negative attitudes to learning, a lack of confidence or a lack of motivation; material and physical barriers, which include the costs of learning as well as time factors (such as family caring responsibilities); and structural barriers, which relate to a lack of appropriate education or training opportunities at the local level and the unavailability of work-related training. A key question for ageing societies is, therefore, how to harness the potential of older people to engage in lifelong learning activities.

This chapter focuses on several domains where lifelong learning will play a leading role in meeting the challenges of ageing societies. The focus is the European context, although many of the wider issues raised in relation to the future of lifelong activities in ageing populations have relevance for other regions.

Older workers

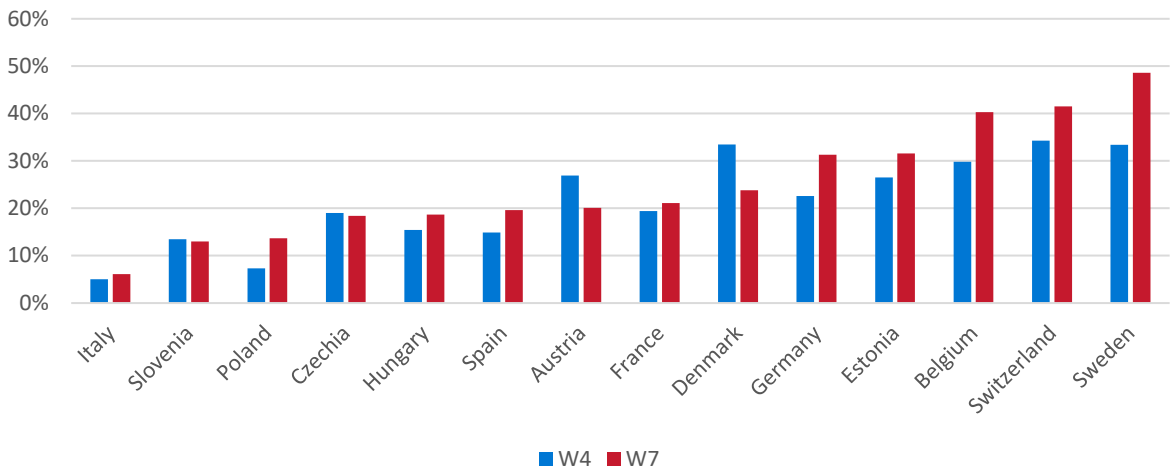
As societies age, most countries are putting into place policies that extend working life. The aim of these policies is mainly to sustain pension systems. Pushing back the legal age of retirement and increasing the length of time that contributions must be paid in order to be eligible for a full pension are common measures. Workers must, therefore, remain longer in the labour market. At the same time, the nature of employment is changing. The globalization of economies is accompanied by a decline in manufacturing and clerical jobs and increasing automation. Labour markets demand skilled workers who are able to adapt to changing work practices. New technologies that are introduced in the workplace can render certain jobs redundant, and employees are increasingly required to be flexible in moving between jobs. These trends of extending the working life in the context of rapid change in working practices present a specific challenge for older workers, and one in which lifelong learning can play a significant role. Lifelong learning initiatives that are fully incorporated into extended working-life policies can contribute to creating sustainable working environments in which the potential of older workers is fully mobilized.

Although the ability of lifelong learning to create the conditions where individuals are able to engage in meaningful employment that assures economic security is uncontested, wide sectors of the older working population currently remain excluded from any form of vocational training (Armstrong-Stassen and Cattaneo, 2010; Martin et al., 2014; Fleischmann et al., 2015; Lössbroek and Radl, 2019). Older workers are particularly disregarded when it comes to training for new technology (Krekula and Vickerstaff, 2020, p. 40). Data from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE[1])

[1] This paper uses data from SHARE Waves 4 and 7 (DOIs: 10.6103/SHARE.w4.710, 10.6103/SHARE.w7.710), see Börsch-Supan et al. (2013) for methodological details.
The SHARE data collection has been funded by the European Commission through FP5 (QLK6-CT-2001-00360), FP6 (SHARE-I3: RII-CT-2006-062193), COMPARE (CIT5-CT-2005-028857), SHARELIFE (CIT4-CT-2006-028812), FP7 (SHARE-PREP: GA N°211909), SHARE-LEAP (GA N°227822), SHARE M4 (GA N°261982) and Horizon 2020 (SHARE-DEV3: GA N°676536, SERISS: GA N°654221) and by DG Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion. Additional funding from the German Ministry of Education and Research, the Max Planck Society for the Advancement of Science, the US National Institute on Aging (U01_AG09740-13S2, P01_AG005842, P01_AG08291, P30_AG12815, R21_AG025169, Y1-AG-4553-01, IAG_BSR06-11, OGHA_04-064, HHSN271201300071C) and from various national funding sources is gratefully acknowledged (see www.share-project.org).

give an indication of the extent to which older workers are excluded from lifelong learning. **Figure 1** shows the proportion of individuals aged 50 years and above who were employed, self-employed or unemployed and who had attended an educational or training course in the preceding 12 months for a selected number of European countries. The data compare two waves of SHARE. Wave 4 data were collected in 2010 and 2011 and Wave 7 were collected in 2017. In all countries and at both points in time, less than half of older workers had attended an educational or training course in the preceding 12 months. Major differences are observed between countries, ranging from very low rates in Italy (less than 7%) to almost one half of workers in Sweden (at Wave 7).

Figure 1: Percentage of employed, self-employed or unemployed workers aged 50 years and above who attended an educational or training course in the preceding year.



Source: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe. Base: Individuals aged 50 years and above. Author's analysis.

The low rates of participation in an educational or training course for older workers observed in Italy is disconcerting in the context of a country which has experienced the rapid ageing of its population. The finding confirms the observation of Addabbo (2020) that Italy tends to be less involved in on-the-job training than other European countries and that there is a 'fragmentation of policies to support older workers at the local and regional levels with lifelong learning measures only being addressed at the national level' (Addabbo, 2020, p. 321). At the other end of the scale, Switzerland 'has a good record for on-the-job training for qualified workers, but a very poor record of offering lifelong learning opportunities to those with low levels of education' (Le Feuvre et al., 2020, p. 451). In Sweden, the relatively high rates of older workers who attended an educational or training course in the past year reflects a general policy to promote lifelong learning that has been in place since the 1990s, although adult education and learning has a lower priority as far as the older population is concerned. **Figure 1** also shows that, for most countries, rates of older adult education or training increased over the period 2010/11–2017. One exception however is Denmark, where, as Klein and Aggerstrøm Hansen (2016) note, '…maintaining the capacity of municipalities to improve the employability of job seekers and upgrade skills of job seekers can be a challenge, and monitoring of training programmes needs improving' (p. 14).

The general increase in rates of participation in educational or vocational training for older European workers that is observed in the SHARE data is encouraging and reflects both the desire for current generations of older workers to remain active as well as efforts by governments and employers to respond to the needs of older workers. There are examples of good practice by employers, whereby,

in participatory training sessions between employers and employees, ideas relating to working time flexibility by improving the efficiency of work processes, training sessions for managers regarding the life course transitions of older workers, and possible work–life imbalances are discussed in working groups (Addabbo et al., 2020). However, much work is still needed to ensure that lifelong learning can support older workers in adapting to the demand for new skills as well as managing transitions in an increasing flexible labour market. As stipulated in the third *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*, 'adults need support in acquiring new skills and managing the physical, mental and emotional demands of the labour market' (UIL, 2016, p. 12). Lifelong activities are central to this need; by enabling more older workers to make transitions to new sectors of the labour market, lifelong learning can make a significant contribution to the provision of sustainable economies. By investing in adult learning and education, countries can fulfil the goals of sustainable development through the provision of decent working conditions in later life. Practical measures can be put into place to achieve the integration of lifelong learning activities in the workplace and to counteract negative representations of ageing. In addition to ensuring individual training for older workers or individuals who wish or need to participate in the labour market, employers and other actors should promote participative intergenerational activities that are inclusive of all ages. Age-management policies, such as those that have been introduced in Finland (Tuominen and Takala, 2006), are one example of practical measures to promote lifelong learning in the workplace. These policies take into account the ages of the workforce at a team level that incorporates different needs, qualifications and skills.

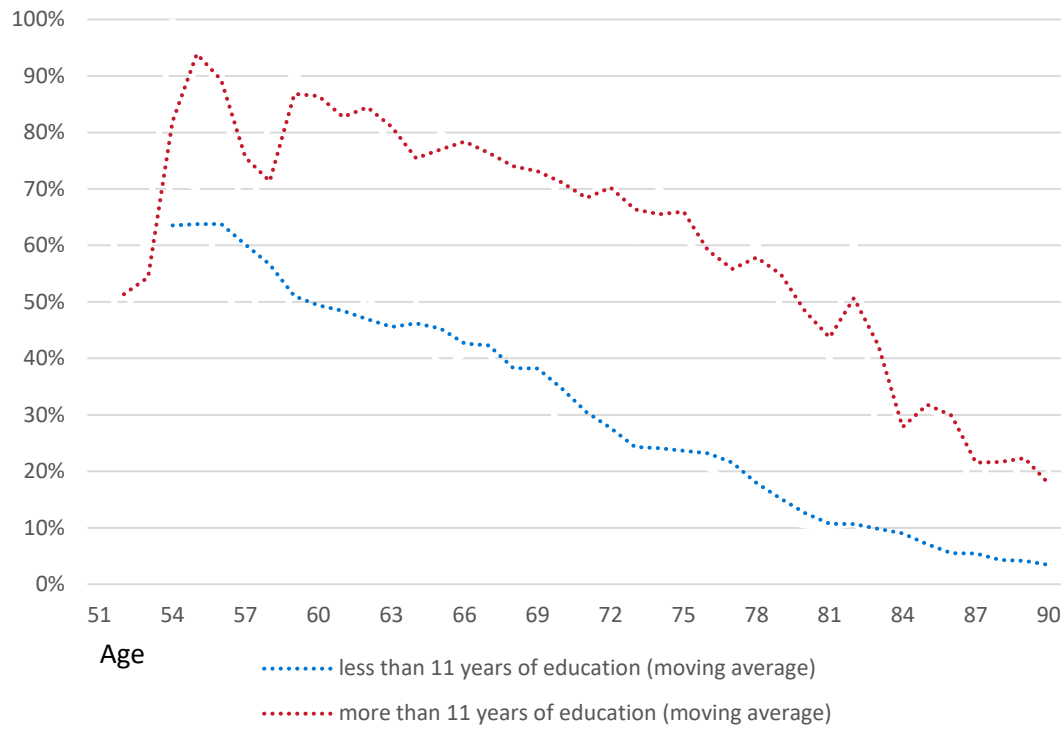
Digital skills in later life

The growing importance of the Internet and other digital services for lifelong learning is an area that provides specific challenges in later life and old age. Compared to younger generations, older people have in general been slow on the uptake in their use of information and communication technologies, and this lag may exclude them from important life domains, such as personal contacts, services and information (Wessels, 2013). Even today, older people have less access and use of digital media than younger people, and although the generational digital divide has decreased in terms of access, it is still large in terms of use (Rosales and Fernández-Ardèvol, 2019). Research suggests that the exclusion of older people from information and communication technologies is influenced less by generational factors that reflect differences between age groups than by differences among older adults, such as levels of education, income and attitudes towards the use of new technologies (Sourbati, 2009; Loos et al., 2012). Also, it is important to note that socially disadvantaged older people are often more likely to be excluded from access to and use of information and communication technologies. Research has also shown that attempts to achieve a knowledgeable older adult population regarding internet use must take into account their socioeconomic background and the difficulties that disadvantaged sectors of the older population have in getting access to computers and other digital devices (Hargittai et al., 2019). However, even where older people have access to computers, there are major differences in the level of online skills. It should also be noted that rates of internet use are consistently lower for older women compared to men, and this gender difference can be accentuated when older women become widowed and live alone (Matthews et al., 2019). In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, a study conducted in 2015 found that 41% of men aged 75 and over were recent internet users compared to 27% of women aged 75 and over, whereas there was no significant difference in the rates of internet use between men and women under the age of 65 (Office for National Statistics, 2015). This gender difference in older cohorts could be explained by more traditional gender roles over the life course (for example lower rates of women in the labour force and therefore with little access to digital technologies earlier in the life course).

Using SHARE data once again, **Figure 2** shows the proportion of older Europeans who reported that they had used the internet for emailing, searching for information, purchasing or for any other purpose at least once during the preceding seven days. The data are presented according to the number of years of education, with two categories representing those individuals with less than 11 years of

education and those with 11 or more years of education. At all ages, rates decrease significantly with age, and individuals with 11 years or more of education are significantly more likely to have used the internet than individuals with less than 11 years of education. Given the importance of computer and internet use for lifelong learning, these figures illustrate the disadvantages that older Europeans face in terms of being equipped and familiar with what can be regarded as the basic tool for learning in the twenty-first century.

Figure 2: Percentage of older Europeans who used the internet at least once during the preceding seven days.



Source: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe. Base: Individuals aged 50 years and above. Author's analysis.

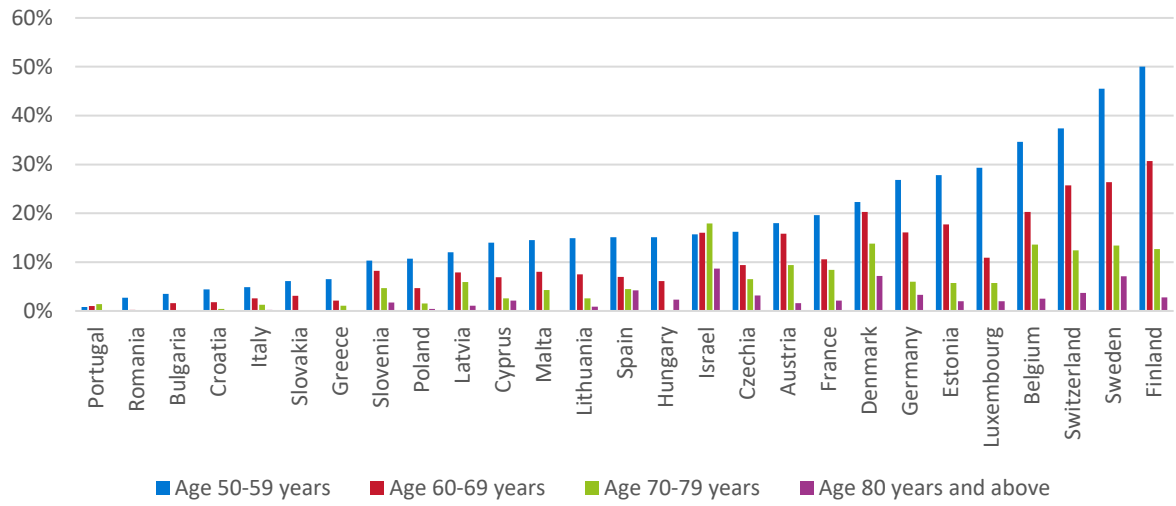
The high use of internet users among more educated sectors of the population also reflects the popularity and growing demand for digital courses within universities and other platforms that respond to the wishes of older citizens to be informed of current issues as well as to pursue learning for its own sake. There is evidence, for example, that many older learners are participating in MOOCs (massive open online courses), although there is a need for more research to determine which types of courses are in demand (Liyanagunawardena and Williams, 2016).

Lifelong learning and ageing

Beyond the potential for lifelong learning skills to support older workers in remaining active, the challenges associated with increasing life expectancy urgently require new forms of learning. In the twenty-first century, it is necessary to reverse the trend whereby lifelong learning significantly decreases with age to the point where it is practically absent at advanced ages. Using results from SHARE to the same question regarding participation in an educational or training course in the past year but now not restricting the field to older workers, **Figure 3** shows the sharp fall that is observed in all countries as individuals move into later life and old age. Country differences are flattened above the age of 80 years, with rates not attaining more than 9% in any of the 27 selected countries. Moreover, a general trend is observed of higher rates in northern and central European countries,

contrasting with lower rates in eastern and southern European countries.

Figure 3: Percentage of individuals who attended an educational or training course in the preceding year.



Source: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe. Base: Individuals aged 50 years and above. Author's analysis.

The country differences in **Figure 3** in part reflect the growing trend in northern and central European countries in lifelong activities both at the institutional (formal) level as well as the community level. These activities and courses are not related to seeking employment, but respond to the demand for learning that fulfils personal objectives such maintaining health and social connections, civic participation and 'knowledge for knowledge's sake'. At the same time, many institutes of lifelong learning (or their equivalent) reflect a long-standing university adult and continuing education tradition, promoting a wide range of courses to the general public. They do not necessarily reflect, as yet, the changing needs and aspirations among the new cohort of older people entering what has been termed the 'third age' following full-time employment. Another important area for informal education has been the development of 'intergenerational learning', with programmes linking older and younger generations emerging from a number of directions from the late 1970s onwards. Non-formal, self-help and voluntary activities will always be a major part of learning for older people. On the other hand, they may also reinforce existing inequalities in learning, given pressures on formal provision. The membership profile of U3A, for example, has been identified as 'overwhelmingly middle-class' (Phillipson and Ogg, 2013).

Lifelong learning activities in later life should increasingly be promoted in the context of policies to promote health and active ageing, such as the World Health Organization's 'active ageing' framework. This framework stresses the importance of both formal and informal learning to maintain and promote social participation and good health during later life. Moreover, research evidence points to a strong association between psychological well-being and non-formal lifelong learning (Narushima et al., 2018). In the United Kingdom, a study by Jenkins and Mostafa (2015) found that participation in non-formal education had a larger effect on the psychological well-being of older adults than formal education and training courses. These findings have particular relevance for countries where non-formal activities in later life are underdeveloped or where their potential to promote healthy ageing is overlooked in public policy.

Perhaps one of the most important challenges in this field is to enable societies to reverse the negative and stereotypical representation of ageing as a period of decline and disengagement from society. It is also necessary to disassociate lifelong learning from traditional forms of adult education. Too often, learning at advanced stages of the life course is associated with leisure and hobby activities that are

more likely to be taken up by higher social class groups. The content of learning in old age can be misinterpreted as quintessentially applying to older people and irrelevant for younger sectors of the population. In this scenario, there is the risk of 'educational segregation' between the generations, where formal education is seen as being the prerogative of younger adults and informal education associated much more with older adults.

Intergenerational lifelong learning activities can bridge this divide, and many opportunities exist to bring together the skills of different generations. The potential of lifelong learning through the promotion of intergenerational activities is a major area that can be reinforced. In Europe, the Lifelong Learning Platform brings together 42 European organizations that represent more than 50,000 educational institutions and associations covering all sectors of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Examples of good practice in intergenerational lifelong learning include the Crosstalk project, which aims to provide women, senior citizens, schoolchildren, young people and migrants with the skills and confidence to communicate effectively and tell their stories on their local radio. The project has produced a handbook which can guide local initiatives who are setting up similar projects (University of Education Freiburg, 2010). In a similar vein, the HEAR ME project (Highly Educated Retirees Mentoring Early School Leavers), comprising universities and organizations involved with adult education and community work, has produced a handbook on setting up mentoring projects between older citizens and younger people who are at risk of being marginalized or dropping out of school. (Rothuizen et al., 2011).

Concluding remarks

As lifelong learning activities gain in importance, older citizens will play a significant part in transferring knowledge to younger generations and in the transmission of values and beliefs. The sharing of experiences by older adults can play a major role in instilling the idea that a good life is a life of learning. Opportunities for generations to exchange knowledge and skills will be increased, strengthening older people's sense of belonging to a community and enabling them to remain physically and mentally active as they age. In assessing the European experience of promoting lifelong learning in the context of population ageing, it can be concluded that the picture is a mixed one. On the one hand, the arrival of the baby-boomer generations has increased the demand for both formal and informal learning activities, with many positive examples of the latter that are firmly rooted in local and community settings. On the other hand, there are major differences between European countries regarding the implementation of effective lifelong learning policies, notably for older workers. Although lifelong learning in the workplace is vital to meet the challenges of ageing populations, economic priorities for businesses and industry, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, threaten to undermine the priority of continued training and education for older workers. In the formal education setting, as Mayo (2017) has articulated, European universities and higher education institutions have not yet responded to the needs of adult learners and, by extension, older learners. The European formal education sector needs to engage with older adults who are at risk of social exclusion and connect with local communities. A reorientation of public policy on lifelong learning, with a shift of focus away from the economic priorities to the goal of promoting inclusive societies, is becoming a key challenge. Such a shift would be beneficial for ageing societies, and for individuals of all ages.

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Embracing a culture of lifelong learning

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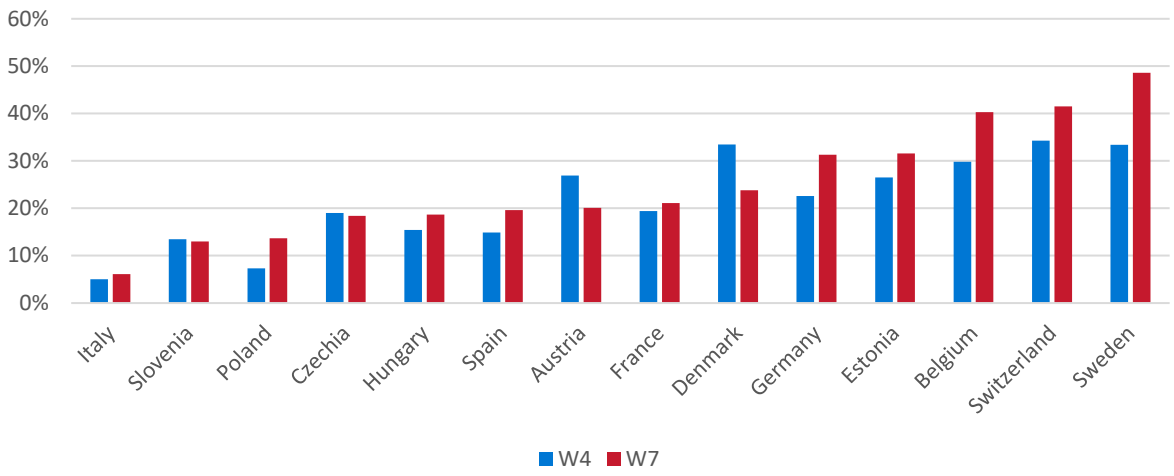


Source: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe. Base: Individuals aged 50 years and above. Author's analysis.

The low rates of participation in an educational or training course for older workers observed in Italy is disconcerting in the context of a country which has experienced the rapid ageing of its population. The finding confirms the observation of Addabbo (2020) that Italy tends to be less involved in on-the-job training than other European countries and that there is a 'fragmentation of policies to support older workers at the local and regional levels with lifelong learning measures only being addressed at the national level' (Addabbo, 2020, p. 321). At the other end of the scale, Switzerland 'has a good record for on-the-job training for qualified workers, but a very poor record of offering lifelong learning opportunities to those with low levels of education' (Le Feuvre et al., 2020, p. 451). In Sweden, the relatively high rates of older workers who attended an educational or training course in the past year reflects a general policy to promote lifelong learning that has been in place since the 1990s, although adult education and learning has a lower priority as far as the older population is concerned. **Figure 1** also shows that, for most countries, rates of older adult education or training increased over the period 2010/11–2017. One exception however is Denmark, where, as Klein and Aggerstrøm Hansen (2016) note, '…maintaining the capacity of municipalities to improve the employability of job seekers and upgrade skills of job seekers can be a challenge, and monitoring of training programmes needs improving' (p. 14).

The general increase in rates of participation in educational or vocational training for older European workers that is observed in the SHARE data is encouraging and reflects both the desire for current generations of older workers to remain active as well as efforts by governments and employers to respond to the needs of older workers. There are examples of good practice by employers, whereby,

in participatory training sessions between employers and employees, ideas relating to working time flexibility by improving the efficiency of work processes, training sessions for managers regarding the life course transitions of older workers, and possible work–life imbalances are discussed in working groups (Addabbo et al., 2020). However, much work is still needed to ensure that lifelong learning can support older workers in adapting to the demand for new skills as well as managing transitions in an increasing flexible labour market. As stipulated in the third *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*, 'adults need support in acquiring new skills and managing the physical, mental and emotional demands of the labour market' (UIL, 2016, p. 12). Lifelong activities are central to this need; by enabling more older workers to make transitions to new sectors of the labour market, lifelong learning can make a significant contribution to the provision of sustainable economies. By investing in adult learning and education, countries can fulfil the goals of sustainable development through the provision of decent working conditions in later life. Practical measures can be put into place to achieve the integration of lifelong learning activities in the workplace and to counteract negative representations of ageing. In addition to ensuring individual training for older workers or individuals who wish or need to participate in the labour market, employers and other actors should promote participative intergenerational activities that are inclusive of all ages. Age-management policies, such as those that have been introduced in Finland (Tuominen and Takala, 2006), are one example of practical measures to promote lifelong learning in the workplace. These policies take into account the ages of the workforce at a team level that incorporates different needs, qualifications and skills.

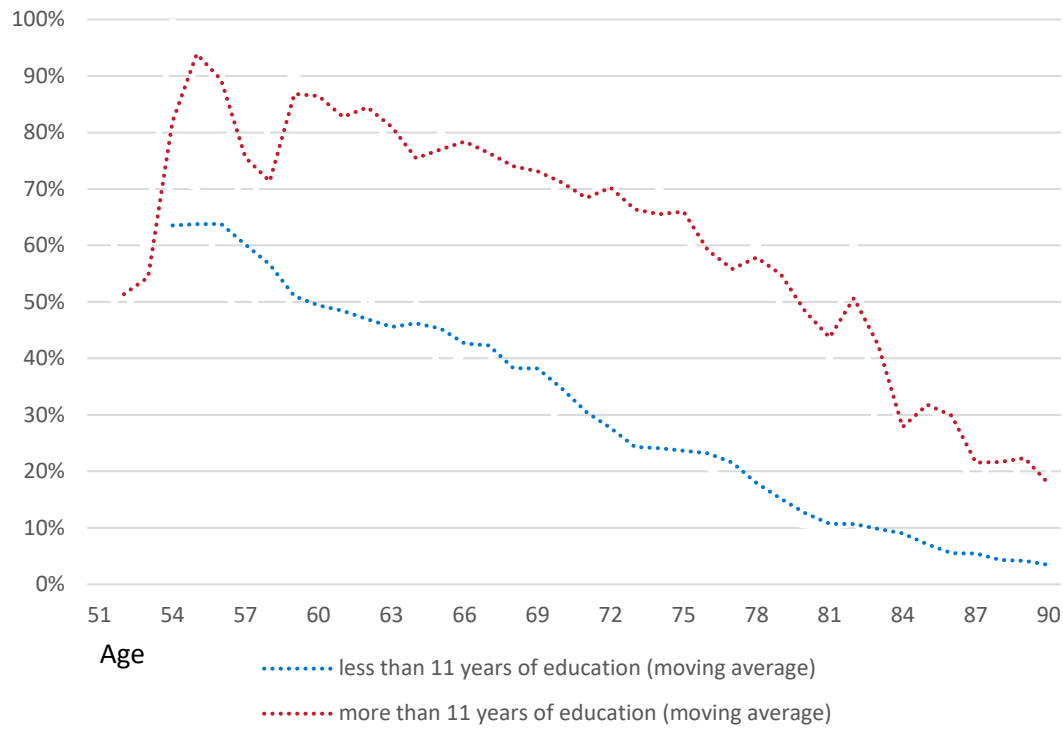
Digital skills in later life

The growing importance of the Internet and other digital services for lifelong learning is an area that provides specific challenges in later life and old age. Compared to younger generations, older people have in general been slow on the uptake in their use of information and communication technologies, and this lag may exclude them from important life domains, such as personal contacts, services and information (Wessels, 2013). Even today, older people have less access and use of digital media than younger people, and although the generational digital divide has decreased in terms of access, it is still large in terms of use (Rosales and Fernández-Ardèvol, 2019). Research suggests that the exclusion of older people from information and communication technologies is influenced less by generational factors that reflect differences between age groups than by differences among older adults, such as levels of education, income and attitudes towards the use of new technologies (Sourbati, 2009; Loos et al., 2012). Also, it is important to note that socially disadvantaged older people are often more likely to be excluded from access to and use of information and communication technologies. Research has also shown that attempts to achieve a knowledgeable older adult population regarding internet use must take into account their socioeconomic background and the difficulties that disadvantaged sectors of the older population have in getting access to computers and other digital devices (Hargittai et al., 2019). However, even where older people have access to computers, there are major differences in the level of online skills. It should also be noted that rates of internet use are consistently lower for older women compared to men, and this gender difference can be accentuated when older women become widowed and live alone (Matthews et al., 2019). In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, a study conducted in 2015 found that 41% of men aged 75 and over were recent internet users compared to 27% of women aged 75 and over, whereas there was no significant difference in the rates of internet use between men and women under the age of 65 (Office for National Statistics, 2015). This gender difference in older cohorts could be explained by more traditional gender roles over the life course (for example lower rates of women in the labour force and therefore with little access to digital technologies earlier in the life course).

Using SHARE data once again, **Figure 2** shows the proportion of older Europeans who reported that they had used the internet for emailing, searching for information, purchasing or for any other purpose at least once during the preceding seven days. The data are presented according to the number of years of education, with two categories representing those individuals with less than 11 years of

education and those with 11 or more years of education. At all ages, rates decrease significantly with age, and individuals with 11 years or more of education are significantly more likely to have used the internet than individuals with less than 11 years of education. Given the importance of computer and internet use for lifelong learning, these figures illustrate the disadvantages that older Europeans face in terms of being equipped and familiar with what can be regarded as the basic tool for learning in the twenty-first century.

Figure 2: Percentage of older Europeans who used the internet at least once during the preceding seven days.



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The high use of internet users among more educated sectors of the population also reflects the popularity and growing demand for digital courses within universities and other platforms that respond to the wishes of older citizens to be informed of current issues as well as to pursue learning for its own sake. There is evidence, for example, that many older learners are participating in MOOCs (massive open online courses), although there is a need for more research to determine which types of courses are in demand (Liyanagunawardena and Williams, 2016).

Lifelong learning and ageing

Beyond the potential for lifelong learning skills to support older workers in remaining active, the challenges associated with increasing life expectancy urgently require new forms of learning. In the twenty-first century, it is necessary to reverse the trend whereby lifelong learning significantly decreases with age to the point where it is practically absent at advanced ages. Using results from SHARE to the same question regarding participation in an educational or training course in the past year but now not restricting the field to older workers, **Figure 3** shows the sharp fall that is observed in all countries as individuals move into later life and old age. Country differences are flattened above the age of 80 years, with rates not attaining more than 9% in any of the 27 selected countries. Moreover, a general trend is observed of higher rates in northern and central European countries,

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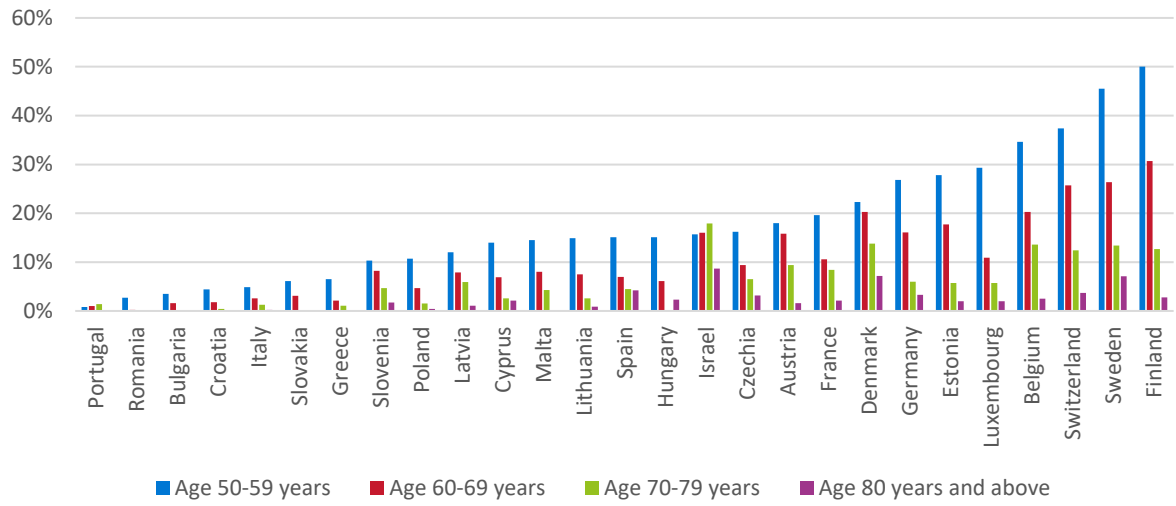
Figure 3: Percentage of individuals who attended an educational or training course in the preceding year.



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The country differences in **Figure 3** in part reflect the growing trend in northern and central European countries in lifelong activities both at the institutional (formal) level as well as the community level. These activities and courses are not related to seeking employment, but respond to the demand for learning that fulfils personal objectives such maintaining health and social connections, civic participation and 'knowledge for knowledge's sake'. At the same time, many institutes of lifelong learning (or their equivalent) reflect a long-standing university adult and continuing education tradition, promoting a wide range of courses to the general public. They do not necessarily reflect, as yet, the changing needs and aspirations among the new cohort of older people entering what has been termed the 'third age' following full-time employment. Another important area for informal education has been the development of 'intergenerational learning', with programmes linking older and younger generations emerging from a number of directions from the late 1970s onwards. Non-formal, self-help and voluntary activities will always be a major part of learning for older people. On the other hand, they may also reinforce existing inequalities in learning, given pressures on formal provision. The membership profile of U3A, for example, has been identified as 'overwhelmingly middle-class' (Phillipson and Ogg, 2013).

Lifelong learning activities in later life should increasingly be promoted in the context of policies to promote health and active ageing, such as the World Health Organization's 'active ageing' framework. This framework stresses the importance of both formal and informal learning to maintain and promote social participation and good health during later life. Moreover, research evidence points to a strong association between psychological well-being and non-formal lifelong learning (Narushima et al., 2018). In the United Kingdom, a study by Jenkins and Mostafa (2015) found that participation in non-formal education had a larger effect on the psychological well-being of older adults than formal education and training courses. These findings have particular relevance for countries where non-formal activities in later life are underdeveloped or where their potential to promote healthy ageing is overlooked in public policy.

Perhaps one of the most important challenges in this field is to enable societies to reverse the negative and stereotypical representation of ageing as a period of decline and disengagement from society. It is also necessary to disassociate lifelong learning from traditional forms of adult education. Too often, learning at advanced stages of the life course is associated with leisure and hobby activities that are

more likely to be taken up by higher social class groups. The content of learning in old age can be misinterpreted as quintessentially applying to older people and irrelevant for younger sectors of the population. In this scenario, there is the risk of 'educational segregation' between the generations, where formal education is seen as being the prerogative of younger adults and informal education associated much more with older adults.

Intergenerational lifelong learning activities can bridge this divide, and many opportunities exist to bring together the skills of different generations. The potential of lifelong learning through the promotion of intergenerational activities is a major area that can be reinforced. In Europe, the Lifelong Learning Platform brings together 42 European organizations that represent more than 50,000 educational institutions and associations covering all sectors of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Examples of good practice in intergenerational lifelong learning include the Crosstalk project, which aims to provide women, senior citizens, schoolchildren, young people and migrants with the skills and confidence to communicate effectively and tell their stories on their local radio. The project has produced a handbook which can guide local initiatives who are setting up similar projects (University of Education Freiburg, 2010). In a similar vein, the HEAR ME project (Highly Educated Retirees Mentoring Early School Leavers), comprising universities and organizations involved with adult education and community work, has produced a handbook on setting up mentoring projects between older citizens and younger people who are at risk of being marginalized or dropping out of school. (Rothuizen et al., 2011).

Concluding remarks

As lifelong learning activities gain in importance, older citizens will play a significant part in transferring knowledge to younger generations and in the transmission of values and beliefs. The sharing of experiences by older adults can play a major role in instilling the idea that a good life is a life of learning. Opportunities for generations to exchange knowledge and skills will be increased, strengthening older people's sense of belonging to a community and enabling them to remain physically and mentally active as they age. In assessing the European experience of promoting lifelong learning in the context of population ageing, it can be concluded that the picture is a mixed one. On the one hand, the arrival of the baby-boomer generations has increased the demand for both formal and informal learning activities, with many positive examples of the latter that are firmly rooted in local and community settings. On the other hand, there are major differences between European countries regarding the implementation of effective lifelong learning policies, notably for older workers. Although lifelong learning in the workplace is vital to meet the challenges of ageing populations, economic priorities for businesses and industry, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, threaten to undermine the priority of continued training and education for older workers. In the formal education setting, as Mayo (2017) has articulated, European universities and higher education institutions have not yet responded to the needs of adult learners and, by extension, older learners. The European formal education sector needs to engage with older adults who are at risk of social exclusion and connect with local communities. A reorientation of public policy on lifelong learning, with a shift of focus away from the economic priorities to the goal of promoting inclusive societies, is becoming a key challenge. Such a shift would be beneficial for ageing societies, and for individuals of all ages.

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Embracing a culture of lifelong learning

This paper was commissioned by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) within the broader framework of UNESCO's Futures of Education initiative to rethink education, knowledge production and learning from a future-oriented perspective. Within the context of this initiative, UIL invited a group of high-level experts to participate in a transdisciplinary consultation process on the futures of lifelong learning. The results of this consultation were captured in a report, entitled *Embracing a culture of lifelong learning*, which presents a compelling vision for lifelong learning and calls on the international community to recognize lifelong learning as a new human right.

To further explore the potential of lifelong learning for achieving a more equal, prosperous, healthy and peaceful future, the experts were invited to contribute a paper reflecting different disciplinary perspectives on lifelong learning. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and should not be attributed to UIL.

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in participatory training sessions between employers and employees, ideas relating to working time flexibility by improving the efficiency of work processes, training sessions for managers regarding the life course transitions of older workers, and possible work–life imbalances are discussed in working groups (Addabbo et al., 2020). However, much work is still needed to ensure that lifelong learning can support older workers in adapting to the demand for new skills as well as managing transitions in an increasing flexible labour market. As stipulated in the third *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*, 'adults need support in acquiring new skills and managing the physical, mental and emotional demands of the labour market' (UIL, 2016, p. 12). Lifelong activities are central to this need; by enabling more older workers to make transitions to new sectors of the labour market, lifelong learning can make a significant contribution to the provision of sustainable economies. By investing in adult learning and education, countries can fulfil the goals of sustainable development through the provision of decent working conditions in later life. Practical measures can be put into place to achieve the integration of lifelong learning activities in the workplace and to counteract negative representations of ageing. In addition to ensuring individual training for older workers or individuals who wish or need to participate in the labour market, employers and other actors should promote participative intergenerational activities that are inclusive of all ages. Age-management policies, such as those that have been introduced in Finland (Tuominen and Takala, 2006), are one example of practical measures to promote lifelong learning in the workplace. These policies take into account the ages of the workforce at a team level that incorporates different needs, qualifications and skills.

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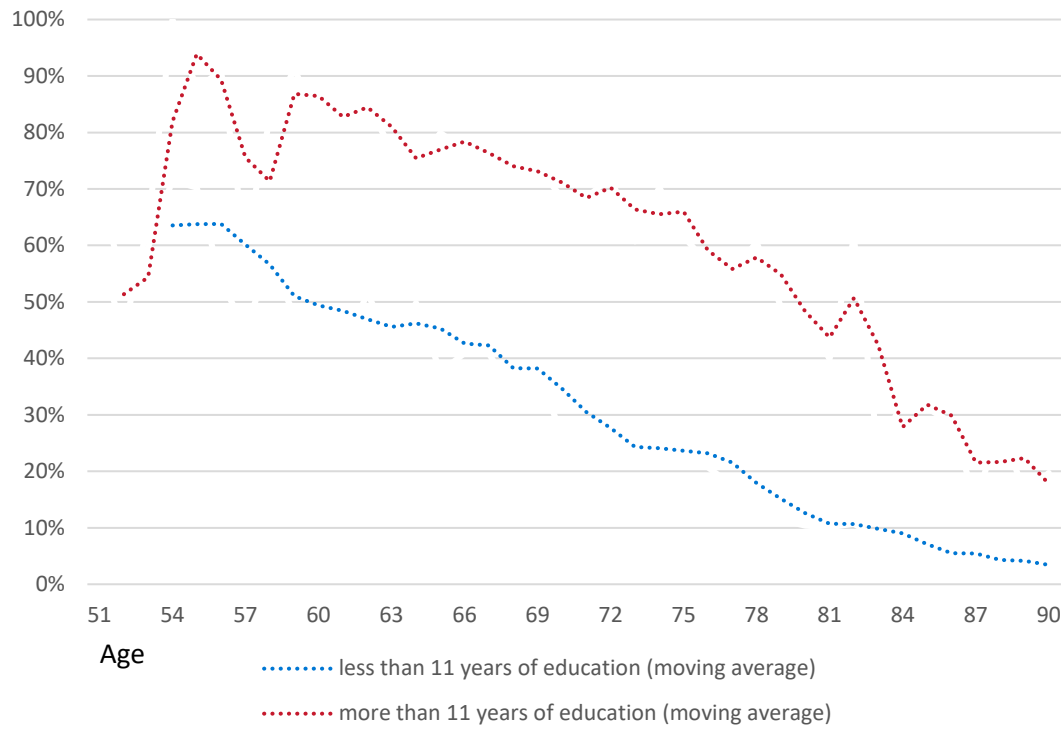

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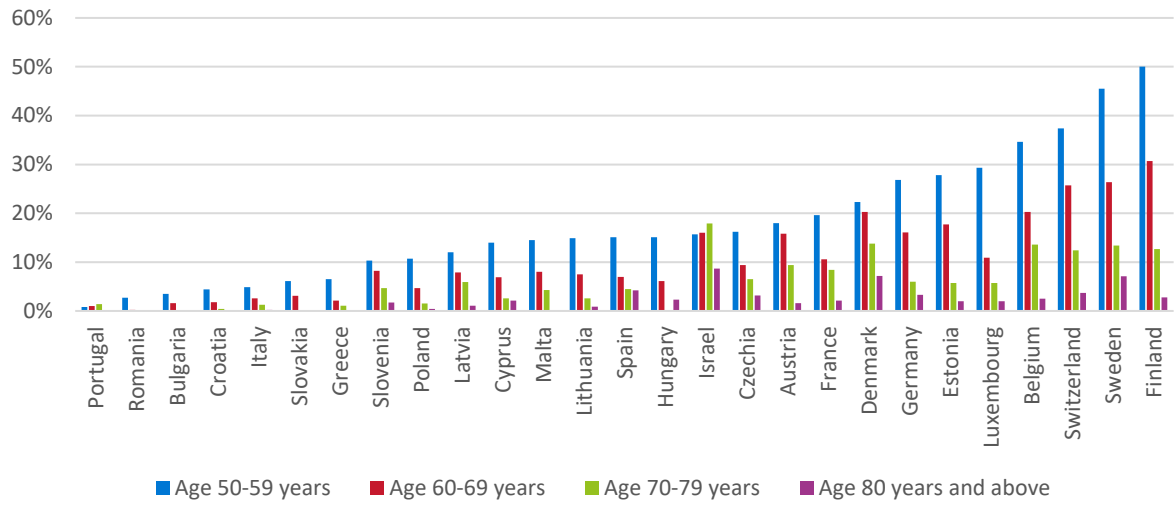

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Lifelong learning activities in later life should increasingly be promoted in the context of policies to promote health and active ageing, such as the World Health Organization's 'active ageing' framework. This framework stresses the importance of both formal and informal learning to maintain and promote social participation and good health during later life. Moreover, research evidence points to a strong association between psychological well-being and non-formal lifelong learning (Narushima et al., 2018). In the United Kingdom, a study by Jenkins and Mostafa (2015) found that participation in non-formal education had a larger effect on the psychological well-being of older adults than formal education and training courses. These findings have particular relevance for countries where non-formal activities in later life are underdeveloped or where their potential to promote healthy ageing is overlooked in public policy.

Perhaps one of the most important challenges in this field is to enable societies to reverse the negative and stereotypical representation of ageing as a period of decline and disengagement from society. It is also necessary to disassociate lifelong learning from traditional forms of adult education. Too often, learning at advanced stages of the life course is associated with leisure and hobby activities that are

more likely to be taken up by higher social class groups. The content of learning in old age can be misinterpreted as quintessentially applying to older people and irrelevant for younger sectors of the population. In this scenario, there is the risk of 'educational segregation' between the generations, where formal education is seen as being the prerogative of younger adults and informal education associated much more with older adults.

Intergenerational lifelong learning activities can bridge this divide, and many opportunities exist to bring together the skills of different generations. The potential of lifelong learning through the promotion of intergenerational activities is a major area that can be reinforced. In Europe, the Lifelong Learning Platform brings together 42 European organizations that represent more than 50,000 educational institutions and associations covering all sectors of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Examples of good practice in intergenerational lifelong learning include the Crosstalk project, which aims to provide women, senior citizens, schoolchildren, young people and migrants with the skills and confidence to communicate effectively and tell their stories on their local radio. The project has produced a handbook which can guide local initiatives who are setting up similar projects (University of Education Freiburg, 2010). In a similar vein, the HEAR ME project (Highly Educated Retirees Mentoring Early School Leavers), comprising universities and organizations involved with adult education and community work, has produced a handbook on setting up mentoring projects between older citizens and younger people who are at risk of being marginalized or dropping out of school. (Rothuizen et al., 2011).

Concluding remarks

As lifelong learning activities gain in importance, older citizens will play a significant part in transferring knowledge to younger generations and in the transmission of values and beliefs. The sharing of experiences by older adults can play a major role in instilling the idea that a good life is a life of learning. Opportunities for generations to exchange knowledge and skills will be increased, strengthening older people's sense of belonging to a community and enabling them to remain physically and mentally active as they age. In assessing the European experience of promoting lifelong learning in the context of population ageing, it can be concluded that the picture is a mixed one. On the one hand, the arrival of the baby-boomer generations has increased the demand for both formal and informal learning activities, with many positive examples of the latter that are firmly rooted in local and community settings. On the other hand, there are major differences between European countries regarding the implementation of effective lifelong learning policies, notably for older workers. Although lifelong learning in the workplace is vital to meet the challenges of ageing populations, economic priorities for businesses and industry, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, threaten to undermine the priority of continued training and education for older workers. In the formal education setting, as Mayo (2017) has articulated, European universities and higher education institutions have not yet responded to the needs of adult learners and, by extension, older learners. The European formal education sector needs to engage with older adults who are at risk of social exclusion and connect with local communities. A reorientation of public policy on lifelong learning, with a shift of focus away from the economic priorities to the goal of promoting inclusive societies, is becoming a key challenge. Such a shift would be beneficial for ageing societies, and for individuals of all ages.

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Embracing a culture of lifelong learning

This paper was commissioned by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) within the broader framework of UNESCO's Futures of Education initiative to rethink education, knowledge production and learning from a future-oriented perspective. Within the context of this initiative, UIL invited a group of high-level experts to participate in a transdisciplinary consultation process on the futures of lifelong learning. The results of this consultation were captured in a report, entitled *Embracing a culture of lifelong learning*, which presents a compelling vision for lifelong learning and calls on the international community to recognize lifelong learning as a new human right.

To further explore the potential of lifelong learning for achieving a more equal, prosperous, healthy and peaceful future, the experts were invited to contribute a paper reflecting different disciplinary perspectives on lifelong learning. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and should not be attributed to UIL.

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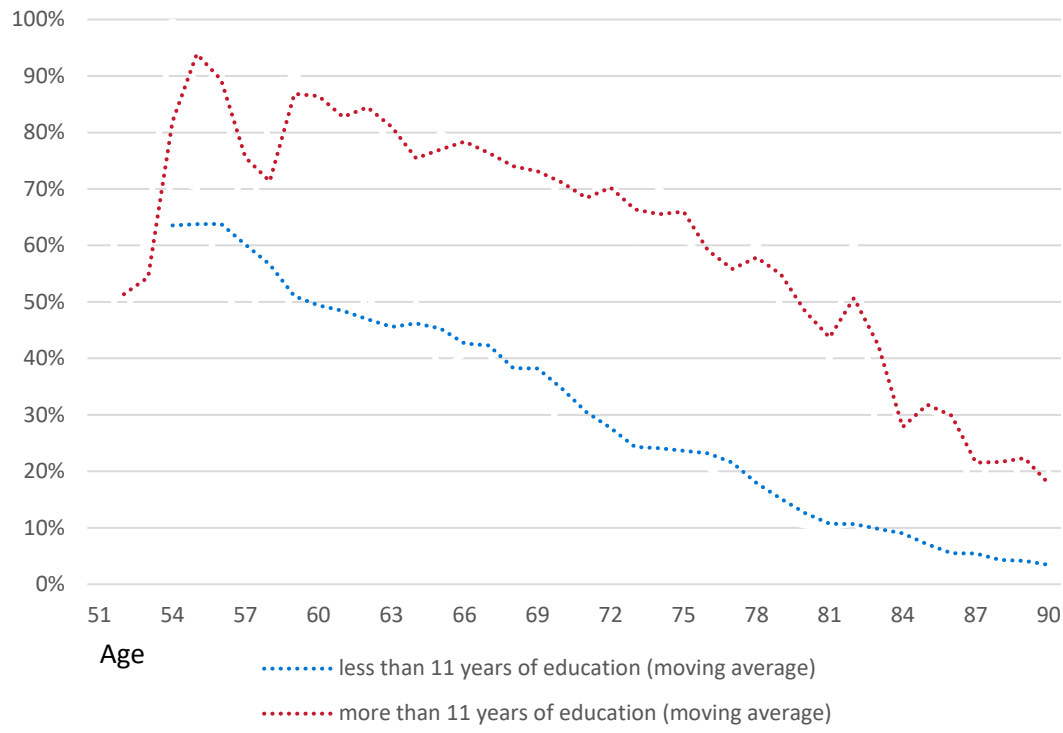
education and those with 11 or more years of education. At all ages, rates decrease significantly with age, and individuals with 11 years or more of education are significantly more likely to have used the internet than individuals with less than 11 years of education. Given the importance of computer and internet use for lifelong learning, these figures illustrate the disadvantages that older Europeans face in terms of being equipped and familiar with what can be regarded as the basic tool for learning in the twenty-first century.

Figure 2: Percentage of older Europeans who used the internet at least once during the preceding seven days.



Source: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe. Base: Individuals aged 50 years and above. Author's analysis.

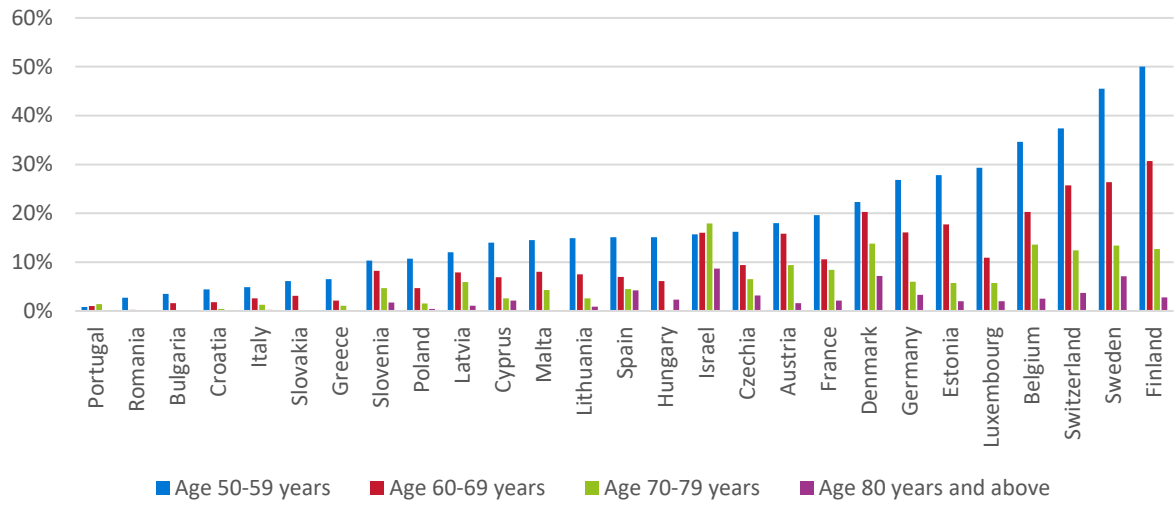
The high use of internet users among more educated sectors of the population also reflects the popularity and growing demand for digital courses within universities and other platforms that respond to the wishes of older citizens to be informed of current issues as well as to pursue learning for its own sake. There is evidence, for example, that many older learners are participating in MOOCs (massive open online courses), although there is a need for more research to determine which types of courses are in demand (Liyanagunawardena and Williams, 2016).

Lifelong learning and ageing

Beyond the potential for lifelong learning skills to support older workers in remaining active, the challenges associated with increasing life expectancy urgently require new forms of learning. In the twenty-first century, it is necessary to reverse the trend whereby lifelong learning significantly decreases with age to the point where it is practically absent at advanced ages. Using results from SHARE to the same question regarding participation in an educational or training course in the past year but now not restricting the field to older workers, **Figure 3** shows the sharp fall that is observed in all countries as individuals move into later life and old age. Country differences are flattened above the age of 80 years, with rates not attaining more than 9% in any of the 27 selected countries. Moreover, a general trend is observed of higher rates in northern and central European countries,

contrasting with lower rates in eastern and southern European countries.

Figure 3: Percentage of individuals who attended an educational or training course in the preceding year.



Source: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe. Base: Individuals aged 50 years and above. Author's analysis.

The country differences in **Figure 3** in part reflect the growing trend in northern and central European countries in lifelong activities both at the institutional (formal) level as well as the community level. These activities and courses are not related to seeking employment, but respond to the demand for learning that fulfils personal objectives such maintaining health and social connections, civic participation and 'knowledge for knowledge's sake'. At the same time, many institutes of lifelong learning (or their equivalent) reflect a long-standing university adult and continuing education tradition, promoting a wide range of courses to the general public. They do not necessarily reflect, as yet, the changing needs and aspirations among the new cohort of older people entering what has been termed the 'third age' following full-time employment. Another important area for informal education has been the development of 'intergenerational learning', with programmes linking older and younger generations emerging from a number of directions from the late 1970s onwards. Non-formal, self-help and voluntary activities will always be a major part of learning for older people. On the other hand, they may also reinforce existing inequalities in learning, given pressures on formal provision. The membership profile of U3A, for example, has been identified as 'overwhelmingly middle-class' (Phillipson and Ogg, 2013).

Lifelong learning activities in later life should increasingly be promoted in the context of policies to promote health and active ageing, such as the World Health Organization's 'active ageing' framework. This framework stresses the importance of both formal and informal learning to maintain and promote social participation and good health during later life. Moreover, research evidence points to a strong association between psychological well-being and non-formal lifelong learning (Narushima et al., 2018). In the United Kingdom, a study by Jenkins and Mostafa (2015) found that participation in non-formal education had a larger effect on the psychological well-being of older adults than formal education and training courses. These findings have particular relevance for countries where non-formal activities in later life are underdeveloped or where their potential to promote healthy ageing is overlooked in public policy.

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Intergenerational lifelong learning activities can bridge this divide, and many opportunities exist to bring together the skills of different generations. The potential of lifelong learning through the promotion of intergenerational activities is a major area that can be reinforced. In Europe, the Lifelong Learning Platform brings together 42 European organizations that represent more than 50,000 educational institutions and associations covering all sectors of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Examples of good practice in intergenerational lifelong learning include the Crosstalk project, which aims to provide women, senior citizens, schoolchildren, young people and migrants with the skills and confidence to communicate effectively and tell their stories on their local radio. The project has produced a handbook which can guide local initiatives who are setting up similar projects (University of Education Freiburg, 2010). In a similar vein, the HEAR ME project (Highly Educated Retirees Mentoring Early School Leavers), comprising universities and organizations involved with adult education and community work, has produced a handbook on setting up mentoring projects between older citizens and younger people who are at risk of being marginalized or dropping out of school. (Rothuizen et al., 2011).

Concluding remarks

As lifelong learning activities gain in importance, older citizens will play a significant part in transferring knowledge to younger generations and in the transmission of values and beliefs. The sharing of experiences by older adults can play a major role in instilling the idea that a good life is a life of learning. Opportunities for generations to exchange knowledge and skills will be increased, strengthening older people's sense of belonging to a community and enabling them to remain physically and mentally active as they age. In assessing the European experience of promoting lifelong learning in the context of population ageing, it can be concluded that the picture is a mixed one. On the one hand, the arrival of the baby-boomer generations has increased the demand for both formal and informal learning activities, with many positive examples of the latter that are firmly rooted in local and community settings. On the other hand, there are major differences between European countries regarding the implementation of effective lifelong learning policies, notably for older workers. Although lifelong learning in the workplace is vital to meet the challenges of ageing populations, economic priorities for businesses and industry, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, threaten to undermine the priority of continued training and education for older workers. In the formal education setting, as Mayo (2017) has articulated, European universities and higher education institutions have not yet responded to the needs of adult learners and, by extension, older learners. The European formal education sector needs to engage with older adults who are at risk of social exclusion and connect with local communities. A reorientation of public policy on lifelong learning, with a shift of focus away from the economic priorities to the goal of promoting inclusive societies, is becoming a key challenge. Such a shift would be beneficial for ageing societies, and for individuals of all ages.

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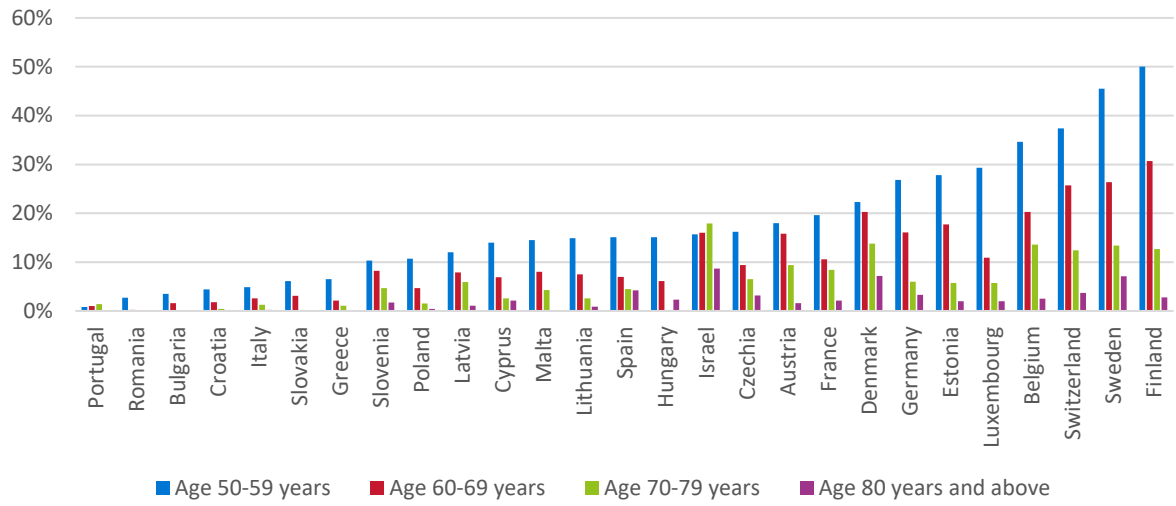
contrasting with lower rates in eastern and southern European countries.

Figure 3: Percentage of individuals who attended an educational or training course in the preceding year.



Source: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe. Base: Individuals aged 50 years and above. Author's analysis.

The country differences in **Figure 3** in part reflect the growing trend in northern and central European countries in lifelong activities both at the institutional (formal) level as well as the community level. These activities and courses are not related to seeking employment, but respond to the demand for learning that fulfils personal objectives such maintaining health and social connections, civic participation and 'knowledge for knowledge's sake'. At the same time, many institutes of lifelong learning (or their equivalent) reflect a long-standing university adult and continuing education tradition, promoting a wide range of courses to the general public. They do not necessarily reflect, as yet, the changing needs and aspirations among the new cohort of older people entering what has been termed the 'third age' following full-time employment. Another important area for informal education has been the development of 'intergenerational learning', with programmes linking older and younger generations emerging from a number of directions from the late 1970s onwards. Non-formal, self-help and voluntary activities will always be a major part of learning for older people. On the other hand, they may also reinforce existing inequalities in learning, given pressures on formal provision. The membership profile of U3A, for example, has been identified as 'overwhelmingly middle-class' (Phillipson and Ogg, 2013).

Lifelong learning activities in later life should increasingly be promoted in the context of policies to promote health and active ageing, such as the World Health Organization's 'active ageing' framework. This framework stresses the importance of both formal and informal learning to maintain and promote social participation and good health during later life. Moreover, research evidence points to a strong association between psychological well-being and non-formal lifelong learning (Narushima et al., 2018). In the United Kingdom, a study by Jenkins and Mostafa (2015) found that participation in non-formal education had a larger effect on the psychological well-being of older adults than formal education and training courses. These findings have particular relevance for countries where non-formal activities in later life are underdeveloped or where their potential to promote healthy ageing is overlooked in public policy.

Perhaps one of the most important challenges in this field is to enable societies to reverse the negative and stereotypical representation of ageing as a period of decline and disengagement from society. It is also necessary to disassociate lifelong learning from traditional forms of adult education. Too often, learning at advanced stages of the life course is associated with leisure and hobby activities that are

more likely to be taken up by higher social class groups. The content of learning in old age can be misinterpreted as quintessentially applying to older people and irrelevant for younger sectors of the population. In this scenario, there is the risk of 'educational segregation' between the generations, where formal education is seen as being the prerogative of younger adults and informal education associated much more with older adults.

Intergenerational lifelong learning activities can bridge this divide, and many opportunities exist to bring together the skills of different generations. The potential of lifelong learning through the promotion of intergenerational activities is a major area that can be reinforced. In Europe, the Lifelong Learning Platform brings together 42 European organizations that represent more than 50,000 educational institutions and associations covering all sectors of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Examples of good practice in intergenerational lifelong learning include the Crosstalk project, which aims to provide women, senior citizens, schoolchildren, young people and migrants with the skills and confidence to communicate effectively and tell their stories on their local radio. The project has produced a handbook which can guide local initiatives who are setting up similar projects (University of Education Freiburg, 2010). In a similar vein, the HEAR ME project (Highly Educated Retirees Mentoring Early School Leavers), comprising universities and organizations involved with adult education and community work, has produced a handbook on setting up mentoring projects between older citizens and younger people who are at risk of being marginalized or dropping out of school. (Rothuizen et al., 2011).

Concluding remarks

As lifelong learning activities gain in importance, older citizens will play a significant part in transferring knowledge to younger generations and in the transmission of values and beliefs. The sharing of experiences by older adults can play a major role in instilling the idea that a good life is a life of learning. Opportunities for generations to exchange knowledge and skills will be increased, strengthening older people's sense of belonging to a community and enabling them to remain physically and mentally active as they age. In assessing the European experience of promoting lifelong learning in the context of population ageing, it can be concluded that the picture is a mixed one. On the one hand, the arrival of the baby-boomer generations has increased the demand for both formal and informal learning activities, with many positive examples of the latter that are firmly rooted in local and community settings. On the other hand, there are major differences between European countries regarding the implementation of effective lifelong learning policies, notably for older workers. Although lifelong learning in the workplace is vital to meet the challenges of ageing populations, economic priorities for businesses and industry, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, threaten to undermine the priority of continued training and education for older workers. In the formal education setting, as Mayo (2017) has articulated, European universities and higher education institutions have not yet responded to the needs of adult learners and, by extension, older learners. The European formal education sector needs to engage with older adults who are at risk of social exclusion and connect with local communities. A reorientation of public policy on lifelong learning, with a shift of focus away from the economic priorities to the goal of promoting inclusive societies, is becoming a key challenge. Such a shift would be beneficial for ageing societies, and for individuals of all ages.

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Embracing a culture of lifelong learning

This paper was commissioned by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) within the broader framework of UNESCO's Futures of Education initiative to rethink education, knowledge production and learning from a future-oriented perspective. Within the context of this initiative, UIL invited a group of high-level experts to participate in a transdisciplinary consultation process on the futures of lifelong learning. The results of this consultation were captured in a report, entitled *Embracing a culture of lifelong learning*, which presents a compelling vision for lifelong learning and calls on the international community to recognize lifelong learning as a new human right.

To further explore the potential of lifelong learning for achieving a more equal, prosperous, healthy and peaceful future, the experts were invited to contribute a paper reflecting different disciplinary perspectives on lifelong learning. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and should not be attributed to UIL.

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To further explore the potential of lifelong learning for achieving a more equal, prosperous, healthy and peaceful future, the experts were invited to contribute a paper reflecting different disciplinary perspectives on lifelong learning. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and should not be attributed to UIL.

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