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## Demographic Development in North and South – Global Trends and Challenges for Education

### Zusammenfassung:

In diesem Artikel wird versucht die Notwendigkeit des lebenslangen Lernens aufzuzeigen, indem die heutige demographische Situation betrachtet wird. Es wird kurz die derzeitige weltweite Lage im Bezug auf Alterung, Gesundheit, Armut und Hunger, Urbanisierung und Migration dargestellt. Es wird gezeigt, dass lebenslanges Lernen eine allumfassende Methode ist, die Personen dazu befähigen kann, in einer sich schnell wandelnden Welt zu leben und zu arbeiten. Die Bedeutung der Alphabetisierung und Erwachsenenbildung – als Grundlage des lebenslangen Lernens – und der Bedarf der Entwicklung von Schlüsselkompetenzen werden betont. Es wird für eine dringend notwendige Anerkennung und Bestätigung der formellen und informellen Bildung plädiert.

**Schlüsselworte:** *Lebenslanges Lernen, Erwachsenenbildung, Schlüsselkompetenzen*

### Abstract:

After looking at today's demographic situation, this paper will attempt to demonstrate the need for lifelong learning. It will briefly review the current world situation in terms of ageing, health, poverty and hunger, urbanisation and migration. It will then show that lifelong learning, in particular when conceived as an overarching sector-wide approach, can enable individuals to meet the challenges in their private lives and in social and work environments in today's fast-changing world. The importance of literacy and adult learning and education – as the foundation and major component of lifelong learning – will be underlined.

**Keywords:** *lifelong learning, adult education, key competences*

### Introduction

Several, at times conflicting and at times complementary, trends characterise today's demographic situation. They include ageing populations, in particular in the North, and, as of now, disproportionately large parts of younger generations, predominantly in the South. To this is added the unresolved major health problematic in the South, along with continuing poverty and hunger, and rapidly exploding urbanisation and migration worldwide. These trends have a bearing on our edu-

cation systems and approaches; they increase the demand for learning of both individuals and societies, and diversify the types and styles of learning that would meet this demand. It is, hence, imperative that our overall understanding of education and our existing models of learning take the changing socio-economic and cultural environments into consideration and conceive learning as part of a lifelong and life-wide process. Rather than continue with isolated, age-specific or age-limited units, levels and forms of learning, we need to respond to the changing needs in a comprehensive and integrated way.

### Assessment of the demographic trends in the South and North

#### Ageing

Whereas the average life expectancy at birth was just 48 years in 1955, it was already 65 years in 1995. Today, some 20 % of Europeans are aged over 60 years, as compared with 10 % in Asia and Latin America and 5 % in Africa (cp. The Millennium Project). It is estimated that the number of people aged over 65 will rise from 390 million now to 800 million by 2025 – reaching 10 % of the total population. Moreover, it is expected that the life expectancy will reach 73 years by then (cp. WHO 1998). By 2025, increases of up to 300 % of older populations are expected in many developing countries, especially in Latin America and Asia (cp. WHO 1998). Overall, by the year 2025, it is expected that no country will have a life expectancy of less than 50 years. According to the OECD, the share of older to younger adults is expected to be especially high in Japan, the Republic of Korea and Italy, where it is predicted to reach almost three in the 65+ bracket for every four 15–64-year-olds (cp. OECD 2010). In total, today's 7 billion world population is expected to grow to 9.1 billion by 2050.

In light of this forecast, the overall question is how our societies will respond to the shifting needs caused by these dramatic developments in demography. Is the growing number of people in the world, and increasing life expectancy accompanied by appropriate provisions for ageing populations, taking into account personal as well as collective aspects?

With regard to education, Schuller and Watson underline in a recent report about the situation in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: "people are natural learners, but need different kinds of services at different points in their lives" (Schuller/Watson 2009). For the UK, they (Schul-

ler/Watson 2009) propose a four-stage age model as the basis for a coherent systematic approach to lifelong learning. Taking into consideration not only the increasing life expectancies, but also the prolonged range of an active and healthy life, they divide the life cycle into four stages: the periods of under 25, 25–50, 50–75 and 75+. Schuller and Watson foresee that the third age (50–75) is a central period that will assume growing importance and prominence in the life cycle, as more people already need and want to work longer – a trend that is expected to grow even more. At the same time, older adults who are used to learning at the workplace, will expect to continue learning and to have learning opportunities, as they enter retirement.

What does that mean for education? First of all, to work longer means in consequence to carry on for a longer time with learning at work. Regardless of the level and kind of work, the need to constantly update one's knowledge and skills is a cross-cutting reality for all. Not only do we need to keep abreast of the rapid technical and technological developments around us, but we also need to master the possibilities and, hence, requirements of modern communication and management techniques.

What should also be taken into consideration is that nowadays workplaces are not "lifelong" any more. Individuals are more likely to change their jobs, partly because contracts are time-bound, but also because working means learning and accumulating skills. Hence, people also move on to different jobs out of their own motivation in order to continue their learning pathway; further learning is the consequence.

Against this background, it will increasingly be imperative for training and education opportunities to be enhanced, in particular for those previously considered to be "too old" for this investment: those over 50. In fact, following on from Schuller and Watson's argument, policy – including education and learning policies – should envision 75 as the standard upper age limit for economic activity, replacing the current limit of 60/65. From the learning perspective – and thus not taking the social resistance and cost factor on board – this would imply an expansion of training and education opportunities to cater for a growing segment of the population that is still part of the labour force, either in regular employment or, as is already the reality for many, in part-time or freelance functions.

As organised learning activities are increasingly part of working life, entering retirement will not put an end to further demand for learning, and post-retirement learning will be a growing sector.

At the same time, the growing life expectancy will have implications for the way in which school education is designed. When we expect initial schooling to prepare young people "for life", that means something very different if average life expectancy is 80 to 90 years than when it is only 50 to 60 years. Thus, in the long run, a systemic approach to lifelong learning will be necessary, where all elements of education are conceived in a lifelong learning perspective and where synergies and transition between non-formal and formal learning and education are ensured.

### Health

The substantial progress in health over recent decades has been impressive, but also deeply unequal. While promising new forms of medical treatment are being developed, and made

available to people primarily in the North, a stable provision of basic healthcare is far from being a reality for most in the South, as they can no longer afford the cost of medical treatment or are deprived from access to medication, e.g. to fight malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and other diseases.

Malaria is still the major killing disease in Africa; the consequences are appalling. According to the 2011 World Malaria Report of the World Health Organization (WHO), 655,000 people died of malaria in 2010. Out of the 216 million cases of malaria in 2010, 81 % were registered in the WHO African Region. A further estimated 3.3 billion people were at risk of malaria in 2010. Some 86 % of the victims were children under five years of age, and 91 % of malaria deaths occurred in the WHO African Region. On the other hand, malaria mortality rates have fallen by more than 25 % since 2000, with the largest percentage reductions seen in the European (99 %), American (55 %), Western Pacific (42 %) and African Regions (33 %) (cp. WHO 2011).

The other grave health concern is the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Around 1.8 million children under the age of 15 in sub-Saharan Africa live with HIV, while some 12 million children under the age of 18 have lost one or both parents to AIDS. In 56 countries for which recent household survey data are available, orphans who had lost both parents were 12 % less likely to be in school, and often become a head of household, assuming responsibilities at an early age. The impact of being orphans may be especially severe for girls, who in most countries are generally more likely than boys not to be in school (cp. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS 2008).

The examples of both malaria and HIV/AIDS, representing the two major health challenges in the South, illustrate the need for more awareness-raising and learning – and the price to be paid by individuals and societies for the lack of education that addresses these issues. While decreasing mortality rates for malaria represent some progress, they are still disconcertingly high for a disease that is preventable and treatable.

The two examples underscore the critical importance of education for health. In a lifelong learning perspective, this includes the incorporation of health issues into the formal education curriculum, in particular about the risks and preventive methods vis-à-vis malaria and HIV/AIDS in the South, to introduce children to the topic. Concomitantly, alternative and non-formal learning opportunities for out-of-school children and young people, as well as for adults, need to integrate or be built on these themes.

The relationship in the North between preventing lifestyle diseases and education is at the same time an area of renewed focus – there is a huge demand for learning about health, how to prevent disease, and keep healthy.

### Poverty and hunger

Huge parts of the world's population are still living in poverty (more than a billion people survive on less than US\$ 1 a day and nearly 3 billion on less than US\$ 2 a day) (cp. The Millennium Project). With major declines in gross domestic product in both developed and developing countries, it has been estimated that in 2009, between 47 and 84 million more people remained poor or fell into poverty than would have been the case if the financial and economic crisis had not hit (cp. United

Nations 2010). An additional 64 million were pushed into poverty by the economic meltdown by the end of 2010. These increases are coming on top of the 130–155 million people who became poor because of the food and energy crisis.

A new concern is the increasing number of poor people in middle-income countries.

An estimated 925 million people in the world suffer from hunger, i.e. 13.1 % or almost 1 in 7 people (cp. 2012 World Hunger and Poverty Facts and Statistics). Malnutrition affects around 175 million young children each year. It has been documented that in addition to the human costs, the inadequate infant and maternal healthcare can harm cognitive development and lock children into a future of educational difficulties. Hence, poverty and malnutrition are not only health emergencies, but also educational ones.

While income is neither the sole nor the best indicator of quality of life and sustainable human development, education is a key to alleviating poverty. Studies suggest that each additional year of schooling raises the average annual gross domestic product by 0.37 % (cp. UNDP 2005). There are indications that one extra year of schooling increases an individual's earnings by up to 10 %, and that 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty if all students in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills (cp. UNESCO 2010).

In addition to these macro-economic considerations, people affected by hunger and poverty, both in the South as well as increasingly in the North, are in need of learning opportunities to secure their livelihoods, and to acquire skills in order to master informal work contexts.

### Urbanisation and migration

Today there are 214 million international migrants worldwide, of whom 128 million live in developed countries, and out of these 58 % originate from developing countries (cp. United Nations 2010). The urban population is projected to jump from 3.4 billion in 2009 to almost 5 billion in 2030 and 6.3 billion in 2050 (cp. The Millennium Project). One-third of the urban population – over 1 billion people – live in places that lack durable housing, sufficient living space, access to clean water and sanitation and secure tenure (cp. WHO 2008). While rural development has produced considerable progress for many countries, the drive to seek better living conditions has led to growing migration between rich and poor areas, within and between countries. Household data from 42 countries show that rural children are twice as likely to be out of school as children living in urban areas. The data also show that the ruralurban gap is slightly wider for girls than for boys (cp. UNESCO 2010). It is estimated that over 85 % of people in OECD countries and nearly 70 % worldwide will be living in urban areas by 2050 (cp. OECD 2010).

At the same time, the growing agglomeration of urban environments is creating new social challenges. The rapid urbanisation in recent decades has implications for an increased offer of learning opportunities in order to help people cope with the new conditions.

### Lifelong learning

“The role of lifelong learning is critical in addressing global educational issues and challenges. Lifelong learning ‘from cradle to

grave’ is a philosophy, a conceptual framework and an organizing principle of all forms of education” (UNESCO 2010). This definition summarises the main features of lifelong learning. To make lifelong learning a reality implies a vertical axis, that is, the provision of learning opportunities in all settings or modalities (formal, non-formal and informal) for people of all ages (infants, children, adolescents and adults), as well as a horizontal life-wide axis, that is, the provision of learning opportunities in all areas of life (personal, work-related, health-related, functional, political and cultural). A systemic approach to lifelong learning would ensure that all elements of the education sector (from early childhood to elementary to secondary and tertiary education) are designed to enable people to pursue their learning paths throughout life. At the same time, a systemic approach would enable the transition between the different modalities of learning (formal, non-formal and informal) as well as with and between the learning provisions of other sectors (e.g. health, economy and science).

Through lifelong learning, people develop the capacity to deal with their environment and take control of their lives, in the multiple roles they have to fulfil in their lives. From the macro-economic perspective, lifelong learning is a continuous up-skilling and upgrading of human resources at all levels, for sustainable socioeconomic development, as well as for human development.

Lifelong learning is an umbrella concept also covering literacy, as well as adult learning and education, enabling individuals not only to live and participate in society as a whole, but also to adapt flexibly to and actively shape the rapidly changing world we live in.

Without access to good-quality lifelong learning, many will remain on the margins of their societies, and their potential will be underdeveloped. The sketch of the demographic changes at global level has already alluded to the role that learning and education play in addressing the related challenges, and in helping people to be equipped to meet the related demands.

While it is commonly accepted that formal education (at all levels) fulfils its role in providing the knowledge and capacities to children and young people so that they are equipped for their personal life and work biographies amidst the changing demographic situation, the role and potential of the non-formal sector remain largely neglected. But in light of the major demographic trend – ageing – which is already manifest in the North and will be more prominent in the South in the future, and given the numbers of out-of-school young people and illiterate adults, which is currently a major problem in the South but increasingly also visible in the North, the non-formal education sector needs more attention: literacy, which is the foundation for lifelong learning; and adult learning, which is its largest and most critical component.

### Literacy: The foundation for lifelong learning

One core principle of lifelong learning is to make learning opportunities accessible for all. While illiteracy is no longer considered as ignorance, the absence literacy skills is a major obstacle to make use of available learning opportunities. This is particularly so in our modern societies, where communication, exchange, work and also learning are interlinked and dependent on people being able to master – actively and passively – the scripts and codes of our environments.

Literacy is an indispensable basis that makes it possible for individuals to engage in learning opportunities at all stages of the learning continuum. Moreover, it is a fundamental right that enables an individual to perform effectively in sustainable personal, community and societal development. Literacy allows men and women to understand the interconnections between personal, local and global realities. It is a key element required for participating in society, work and learning in an increasingly complex, changing and demanding society.

Thus, literacy is very much related to social inclusion. In view of the demographic changes, the provision of literacy learning will gain more importance, to cater for diversifying segments of populations and for their multiplying demand for learning.

The lack of literacy skills is a concern for both developing and developed countries. Literacy is, of course, a core subject for early childhood education and elementary schools, and would, ideally, not be a concern for people beyond school age. However, huge numbers of out-of-school children and young people – as well as adults who have either left school without sufficient mastery of literacy or who have never had a chance to attend primary school, are affected by low levels of literacy skills – or the complete lack of it. These young people and adults need to be included, otherwise they will be excluded from further education and training.

Of the 793 million adults worldwide reported as not being able to read and write, two-thirds (64 %) were women. The global adult literacy rate was 84 % in 2009 (cp. UNESCO 2011). An analysis of adult literacy in 21 countries in sub-Saharan Africa using household survey data found that 22 to 24-year-olds with five years of education had a 40 % probability of being illiterate (cp. UNESCO-BREDA 2007). People with seven years of education had a 20 % chance of being illiterate. These figures point not just to an enormous waste of human potential and restricted opportunity, but also to a failure of investment in education to deliver results.

More than half of all illiterate adults live in just four countries: Bangladesh, China, India and Pakistan. In Guatemala, 60 % of adults living in extreme poverty are illiterate, compared with 17 % of richer adults (cp. UNESCO 2010). A further 176 million illiterate adults were recorded in sub-Saharan Africa (cp. UNESCO 2010).

Following the contemporary definitions expanding the concept of literacy to include wider cognitive skills, and extending it across the whole population, people are more or less literate depending on how well they understand and use printed information to solve everyday problems at home and at work. Using this wider definition, the International Adult Literacy Survey conducted by the OECD and Statistics Canada found that developed countries contain a considerable number of people who have poor literacy skills. For example in the United Kingdom, 1.7 million people (5 % of those aged 16 to 65) perform below the level expected of seven-year-olds on the national curriculum test, and 5.1 million perform below the level expected of 11-year-olds. In the Netherlands, 1.5 million adults (including 1 million native Dutch speakers) are classified as not equipped to process basic information. In France, 9 % of the working adult population (18 to 65) is estimated as illiterate. As a contribution to the United Nations Literacy Decade, the

German Federal Ministry of Education and Research presented recent data showing that about 7.5 million adults perform at a level that does not enable them to participate effectively in society. This number nearly doubles previous estimates and equals nearly 14 % of the workforce (cp. Grotlüschen/Rieckmann 2011).

Hence, adult literacy is an important issue of immense scope, with implications for both the South and the North. The growing dimension of the lack of or low levels of literacy in combination with increasingly sophisticated technologies in every area of life make it indispensable to devote more attention to literacy – so that the foundations are laid for a lifelong learning culture that is able to respond to the complex demographic changes.

### Adult learning and education

As indicated above, the largest and most critical component of lifelong learning is learning in adulthood. As seen in the previous section, this includes literacy learning in adulthood. However, adult learning and education are much broader than that:

“Adult education denotes the entire body of on-going learning processes, formal or otherwise, whereby people regarded as adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, and improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction to meet their own needs and those of their society” (UNESCO 1997).

Unfortunately, much remains to be done to bring this part of learning and education into the centre of policy and action, as a transversal agenda that cross-cuts policy domains and resource allocations.

According to the national reports submitted to the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning in preparation for the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) (cp. UNESCO 2010) and for the first Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) (cp. UNESCO 2009), most countries do not have specific adult education laws or policies that are integrated within overall education policies or even a lifelong learning policy framework. In addition, understandings of adult learning and education are often limited to literacy or vocational training, employability and the world of work.

CONFINTEA VI, under the motto “Living and Learning for a Viable Future: The Power of Adult Learning”, was held in 2009 in Brazil. It was one of the most important platforms for policy dialogue and advocacy on adult learning and non-formal education at global level during the last ten years. The Belém Framework for Action (cp. UNESCO 2010) – the outcome document of CONFINTEA VI – constitutes a prime tool in reminding policy-makers of the urgency of the task, and in pushing for the implementation of the commitments made. It is the most recent global policy document guiding action to develop adult literacy and adult education within a lifelong learning perspective, and to harness their power and potential for a viable future for all.

A key concern is the scope and coverage of adult education programmes, and, accordingly, the participation and inclusion of large segments of the population in adult learning. The Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE), (cp. UNESCO 2009) produced in preparation for

CONFINTEA VI, shows that even though programmatic variety is evident in many countries, the issue of who benefits from existing provision needs to be addressed. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the reach of adult learning and education programmes, including government ones, continues to be very limited compared with demand. Rural and indigenous populations, Afro-descendants, migrants, people with special learning needs and prison inmates typically have restricted access to programmes, thereby maintaining or even deepening inequalities rather than reducing them.

These examples can be found in most parts of the world. The only way to achieve a sustainable answer to the learning demands and needs is to build a comprehensive system of lifelong learning with a strong component of recognition and validation of all kinds of learning, as well as to create a flexible mechanism of bridges and pathways.

### Conclusion

Today's world calls for a new thinking about education and learning. By giving a brief presentation of the state of the art of the demographic changes, this paper has attempted to highlight the key role of lifelong learning as one of the solutions to the challenges we are facing.

Whether we are talking about upgrading knowledge and skills, learning new ones or simply been given a second chance, lifelong learning stands to become increasingly essential in our fast-changing, ageing and diversifying societies and labour markets. Lifelong learning is beneficial to all: young and old, poor and rich, women and men, whatever their nationality, their culture or language.

As highlighted in this paper, lifelong learning is not only a philosophy and conceptual framework, but also an organising principle of all education. Hence, an important goal on the way forward is the construction of systems of lifelong learning. A lifelong learning system recognises and validates all kinds of learning and training outcomes, regardless of where and how these have been obtained. It promotes a lifelong and life-wide continuum and permeability between formal, non-formal and informal learning.

The multiple challenges and turbulences created by the demographic developments require a new, creative and innovative thinking for adequate solutions to meet them. A multitude of approaches in all areas is necessary, and will be so even more as the demographic trends intensify. One key approach to meet the related challenges is lifelong learning. Through its potential to up-skill and upgrade human resources at all levels and throughout life, in order to meet the demands for human and socio-economic development and for facing the demographic challenges, lifelong learning is a key investment for the future.

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