

Barriers to adult education participation within senior population in Latvia

Zane Vārpiņa¹

Extended Abstract

Ageing and greying of developed world takes unprecedented scale and brings about wide social and economic implications. In previous half-century the life expectancy at birth in EU has increased by ten years, and the populations have become older. It has been noted by researchers of the US Health and Retirement Study (2007), that “the ageing of the population and the retirement of the baby-boom generation are considered by many to be among the most transformative demographic changes ever experienced”. “This demographic shift may result in skill shortages, which pose a serious threat to each country’s welfare and prosperity” (Ruhose et al., 2020).

The concept “active ageing” was developed by World Health Organisation in late 1990ies. WHO defines active ageing as “the process of optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age” (WHO, 2002). “It allows people to realize their potential for physical, social, and mental well being throughout the life course and to participate in society according to their needs, desires and capacities, while providing them with adequate protection, security and care when they require assistance”, “The word “active” refers to continuing participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic affairs, not just the ability to be physically active or to participate in the labour force.” (WHO, 2002).

Active ageing is influenced and/or associated with a wide spectrum of determinants such as health, physical, behavioural, personal, economic and social determinants, crosscut by culture and gender (WHO, 2002). Education is a factor related to social environment, but is at the same time a factor associated with economic, health, behavioural situation. Hence education can be perceived as another cross-cutting determinant of active ageing. Lifelong learning is nominated as one of the key policy areas to support participation and hence active ageing.

As a current development, with the EC Green Paper on ageing (EC, 2021) launches a broad policy debate on the challenges and opportunities of Europe's ageing society. Education and training in a lifelong perspective is laid out as one of the three foundations that can help to “prevent, limit and postpone some of the challenges linked to ageing” (EC, 2021). At the same time the Commission invites consultation on the questions: What are the most significant obstacles to lifelong learning across the life-cycle? At what stage in life could addressing those obstacles make most difference? How should this be tackled specifically in rural and remote areas?

Adult education is found to be an efficient tool to combat implications of population ageing by maintaining people economically active and delay retirement from the labour market. However, participation in adult education and training is linked to a number of challenges and the uptake is not always smooth. We therefore ask, **what are the most significant obstacles to participating in adult education and training for older adults in Latvia?** This paper attempts to contribute to the discussion by concentrating on the adult education and training for pre-pension age group with the ultimate aim to understand opportunities for using this education in retaining seniors in employment.

¹ Stockholm School of Economics in Riga, Strēlnieku iela 4a, Rīga, LV-1010, Latvia;
zane.varpina@sseriga.edu

There is no standard definition in social science of an older adult. The notion is highly circumstantial if not philosophical, and depends on the society and question studied. Empirically often this group of people is referred to as adults close to retirement age and older. Depending on the study this is between 50 and 60 years of age and older. The focus of our study is adult population aged 55+, and for empirical analysis we study the age group 55-64, the older working age population, also called seniors in this study.

Obstacles or barriers to learning has been an important concept addressed in the adult education literature for more than 50 years. These obstacles are most often classified using concepts developed by Cross (1981) who classified factors creating barriers to adult education participation in three groups: situational, institutional and dispositional. Situational factors are such conditions that are related to the individual's personal circumstances and that hinder learning, such as direct and indirect costs connected to undertaking education, time restrictions and conflicting roles in work, family and society, and physical distance from a learning opportunity, health condition. Institutional factors are the barriers related to the institutions providing education, such as availability of information, admission procedures, timing scheduling of the education, flexibility to individual needs, study support and resources available for students use (library, IT, learning materials). The third group of factors are referred to as dispositional and are related to individual attitude towards learning and motivation to attend to it. These can be highly influenced by positive or negative prior learning experience. Potter and Alderman (1992) have added the fourth set of factors to the framework – so called Academic factors. These factors include skills possessed by the individual that empower or restrict learning – for example, literacy and numeracy skills, IT skills, a whole set of transversal skills. This group of factors includes also the learning mindset.

We build on the conceptual framework of Cross (1981) and Potter et al (1992) to empirically assess the barriers characteristic to education of older population in Latvia. We use three rounds of Eurostat Adult Education Survey microdata (2007, 2011 and 2016) for the analysis. We focus the attention to the population that reportedly wanted to participate in adult education activities, but did not do so.

Preliminary descriptive analysis suggests that 47.5% of adults in Latvia (in 2016) during the last 12 months have participated in formal education and/or non-formal education activities, up from 32.7% in 2011. It is evident that situational barriers are prevalent, followed by institutional barriers. For the people that did not participate but would have liked to do so, the main difficulty was the cost of training (56.5 %), conflicted with work schedule (37.6%) or family responsibilities (32.7%), as well as the there was no appropriate training (28.7%) or it was too far away (28.3%). The report distinguished the respondents by age groups, and for the older working age population, aged 55-64, high cost was by far the most important barrier to education participation, reported by respondents.

We aim to find a set of interactions between different factors that shape decisions to take part and resulting outcomes, whereas we also recognize that with the employed data we cannot confirm causality between the factors and the participation.

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