

German National Association of Senior Citizens' Organisations
Statement on Education, Training, Life-Long Learning and
Capacity-Building

UN Open Ended Working Group on Ageing, New York, April 2019



The legal and political framework in Germany

The Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany does not explicitly formulate the right to education, yet it is implicitly derived from the fundamental rights, such as respect for human dignity and equal rights. Education for people in the post-professional phase is not regulated by law, but both publicly funded and market-driven offerings (pluralistic institutional structure, no market access regulation) offer unrestricted education for a fee or even free of charge.

However, there are still numerous barriers to an adequate and accessible education and training for older people:

Preliminary remark:

We learn for life. Lifelong learning is crucial for political education, social cohesion, the intergenerational dialogue and social security. Education serves as the basis for involved ageing, to one's own benefit and the benefit of society. Education for older persons also serves to secure participation and supports engagement.

While the primary obligations for younger people are those through school, work and exams, older people have a strong intrinsic **motivation** to learn. They learn in order to remain physically and mentally fit, to adapt to changes caused by ageing and to remain independent as long as possible (health competence).

The **learning fields** in old age differ to some extent from those of younger generations. Age-specific learning fields include, among others, intergenerational dialogue, coping with everyday life, new technologies, the meaning of life and spirituality, voluntary commitment, etc. This must be reflected in appropriate learning opportunities that take into account the different educational backgrounds of senior learners.

Many older persons wish to learn differently than through traditional methods. **Participation and resource orientation** play an important role in education for older people: Educational offerings can have thematic priorities, but the implementation should enable self-determined learning, make visible and include the learners' experience and skills acquired in the course of their lives. Teachers are regarded more as learning companions, giving impetus and providing a framework.

Self-determination in old age increasingly demands the confident use of digital technologies. **Digital participation** of senior citizens will be the challenge of the coming years. We therefore expressly embrace and support the **“Final Declaration” of the International Expert Conference on Human Rights of Older Persons ICHRoP, Vienna 2018.**

The following **concrete demands** must therefore be made for lifelong education and learning worldwide:

- There must be a right to education and learning for all people, regardless of their age.
- Municipalities should be obliged to set up dedicated welfare plans for the older population as for the youth that include education as an essential building block.
- Full-time and honorary employees of educational institutions such as adult education centres, family education centres, etc. should receive further training in geragogy.
- Senior learners should not be regarded as passive participants in ready-made offers, but as self-determined programme-makers. Education providers receiving public funding should include advisory boards with representatives from all social groups in their programming.
- Reputable, comprehensive and flexible curricula must be developed that convey knowledge about the opportunities and risks of the digital world. In addition, learning environments should be established at the local level allowing every citizen to try out digital devices and the Internet and receive geragogical and (security-related) technical support.
- In general, there is a need for new, easily accessible learning environments and new (e.g. outreach) offers and structures in the immediate living environment of older people. Supply deficits must be identified and compensated.
- Educational offers must take into account different levels of knowledge, connect to issues of everyday life, provide meaning for the older persons, and consider their cultural and individual diversity. For this reason, more non-formal or informal learning opportunities need to be created for people who do not wish to pursue further vocational training or qualifications, i.e. learning opportunities that go beyond the usual formal learning opportunities offered by adult education institutions and are detached from performance orientation, certification and vocational training objectives.
- Education for older adults or geragogy is an important factor in understanding and taking advantage of the opportunities offered by old age. Geragogy, at the interface of educational science and gerontology, should be better anchored institutionally and promoted as a scientific discipline. It researches educational processes in the second half of life, develops and tests educational concepts with older people and for old age, and embeds these in education, further education and training for the work with seniors.