

AGENDA 2030 FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE FUTURE OF ADULT LEARNING IN EUROPE

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Abstract

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development proclaimed in September 2015, on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the United Nations, established a set of 17 universal and transformative Goals and targets for our planet and the people who inhabit it, in pursuit of prosperity and peace. Putting this plan into action with a view to its full implementation by 2030 implies a huge collective effort, a collaborative partnership of all countries and entities. Everyone recognises the need to ensure respect for the human rights of all and sustainable development in its three dimensions - economic, social and environmental. If in the environmental dimension, we are faced with the issues of climate change and the limitation of natural resources; at the economic level, the dissemination of information and communication technologies, scientific and technological innovation, automation and artificial intelligence systems are gaining importance; the social challenges cause even more concern today due to Brexit, migration flows, as well as the current movement of refugees and displaced persons fleeing the theatre of war, destruction and death. In the present study we were interested in highlighting Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The method consisted of a theoretical and descriptive approach based on the principles of the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and relevant international human rights instruments, namely the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA). In addition, a quantitative analysis of significant data recently released by Eurostat was carried out. The results show that the working-age population is expected to fall by 5% by 2030, from around 66% to just over 60% of the total population. And that, although there is a trend in the European Union to increase the retirement age, it is thought that such a measure will not be sufficient to solve the problems arising from demographic change. Furthermore, this decrease of active citizens contributing to social security could be compensated through the education of adult immigrants, in those areas where there are greater labour shortages, adjusting their training skills to the market and offering specialisation and language learning opportunities. In this continuous learning may lie the key to solving the problems arising from changes in demography, the fall in the working population and the sustainability of social security. In this sense, a reflection was made on the evolving dimensions of the right to education. In particular, we were interested in the role that adult education can play in the future of Europe. The results obtained show that education in this age group provides European citizens with the necessary and appropriate skills and knowledge to become more responsible and active players, committed to sustainable and inclusive development that respects the values we want to preserve and pass on to new generations. We conclude that adult education enables knowledge recycling, updating and innovation in the labour market, while contributing to the personal fulfilment of the individual, their well-being and the construction of a fairer and more sustainable society.

Keywords: Agenda 2030 for sustainable development, adult learning in Europe, right to education.

1 INTRODUCTION

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development established a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and universal targets transforming our planet and the people who inhabit it, in pursuit of prosperity and peace. It is based on the principles of the United Nations Charter [6], including respect for international law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, treaties and other international instruments protecting human rights, such as the Millennium Declaration and the Declaration on the Right to Development, among many other outcomes achieved by conferences and summits under the sponsorship of the United Nations.

The primary purpose of sustainable development in its three dimensions: environmental, economic and social is reaffirmed. In accordance with the provisions of the preamble of the 2030 Agenda [1], the SDGs and the goals aim, "recognizing the dignity of the human person as fundamental", to "ensure the human rights of all (...), rights that are integrated and indivisible". In addition, the SDGs proclaim respect for the principles that underpin the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; as well as respect for

race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and equality of opportunity, with a view to the fulfilment of the individual and to achieving the much-desired common prosperity; without forgetting to protect the most unprotected, fragile and vulnerable, such as children, women, the sick, those excluded and marginalised in society, so that they can live in a world free from violence and exploitation, a better, fairer and more inclusive world.

The signatory world leaders commit themselves to implement the plan of the Agenda, seeking to combine, in a balanced and harmonious manner, areas of fundamental importance for both humanity and the planet, such as: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership.

The European Union is aligned with the pursuit of the 17 SDGs and the 169 targets of this universal and transformative Agenda. At the present time, Europe is undergoing profound change: It faces serious development and security problems, witnessing a constant and exponentially increasing flow of regular and irregular migration; a panorama now aggravated by the arrival of war (invasion of Ukraine) within Europe, the economic and financial crisis, the emergence of populist and radical movements, restrictions on press freedom, control/manipulation of the media, the influence of social networks, among many other phenomena that are reflected in the behaviour of voters and decision-makers, calling into question values and principles of democracy that we took for granted in the European Union. In this field, the dissemination of information and communication technologies and scientific and technological innovation in all areas of knowledge are also gaining importance. At the same time, we cannot ignore, on the one hand, migratory and refugee movements and, on the other, demographic reduction and its implications for the productive and other processes on the European continent.

In this study we are interested in highlighting Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda - on the right to education - which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". In particular, it is necessary to reflect on the evolving dimensions of the right to adult education within the framework of target 4.7 of the above-mentioned Goal and to assess its impact on Europe's current momentum, as well as in the future. In this reflection, statistical data on the issue in Portugal will also be analysed.

2 METHODOLOGY

To achieve the outlined objectives, the methodology used consisted of a qualitative and qualitative approach. The first one makes a theoretical and descriptive approach based on the 2030 Agenda, the principles of the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant international instruments protecting human rights, namely the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA).

The quantitative methodology, serves as a basis for the analysis of significant data, recently released by Eurostat, Pordata, among the most relevant.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Agenda 2030, goal 4, target 4.7

Goal 4, target 4.7 provides:

"by 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to promote sustainable development, including, inter alia, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development".

In this goal, in the economy of the present study, we want to briefly highlight point 4.b, which establishes the need to substantially increase the number of scholarships for higher education, including vocational training programmes, information and communication technology [7], technical, engineering and scientific programmes in developed and other developing countries [1] [9].

3.2 Results analysis

3.2.1 *Some data on Portugal*

At this point, we will start by knowing the active resident population in Portugal and its impact on productive activity. We will also establish the relationship between the level of schooling and the economic development of the country. The key question is to understand the importance of adult education in this context. According to Fernando Alexandre, "the origin of the wealth of countries lies in people and their talent for generating knowledge and innovation" [2]. For this Author, the resident population in Portugal reached the historical maximum value in 2010: 10 573 100 inhabitants. Since 2009, the balance is negative, in that the number of deaths is higher than the number of births [3]. From 2011 to 2016, we also saw a negative migration balance. According to the same source, in 2019, the resident population in Portugal was 10 286 263.

However, to ensure the productive potential of a country what matters is its working-age population, that is, between 15 and 66 years of age. In Portugal, this population exceeded 7 million in 2002 and peaked in 2008. Since then, it has declined continuously (-6% between 2008 and 2019). Therefore, only part of the working-age population actually contributes to productive activity. Another part is not in the labour market but is in the home environment supporting the development of their children and another part has decided to go back to school to increase their skills [5]. Then there is the part of those who do not get a job and are unemployed.

It is well known that the integration of workers into the labour market depends on matching their qualifications to the needs of enterprises [2]. Another relevant dimension for labour productivity is the age structure of the population. According to Pordata, in 2019, 71% of the employed population was concentrated in the age group between 25 and 54 years. Young people under 25 accounted for only 6% of the employed population, which is explained by higher education attendance (385,000 in 2019) and the high youth unemployment rate (18.3% in 2019).

Fernando Alexandre [2] presents us with INE's demographic projections that signal an increase in ageing and a decrease in population. The data indicate that by 2050 the population will decrease by around 11%, to 9.2 million. At that time, the population aged 65 or more should represent about 36% of the total population (22.4% in 2020). And he concludes that, "between 2020 and 2050, the working-age population is expected to decrease by about 26% and its weight in the total population will fall from 64% to 53%. The effects of these demographic changes on economic growth and productivity will be very negative. More innovation and investment in workers' skills will be essential to offset the negative effects of the shrinking and ageing population".

From the data presented it is clear that increasing the qualifications of adults may be a factor to be taken into account and may make a difference for the better in the labour market, in the productivity of companies and in the economic and social development of the country.

3.2.2 *PORDATA data on the European Union*

On adult participation in learning: to see and compare data and years in depth and with great interest, see the data provided by Pordata, showing which countries have the highest and lowest percentage of people aged 25-64 receiving formal or non-formal education or training, reported for the year 2021, in the EU and Portugal [9].

Pordata publishes statistical information on a hundred indicators related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, based on Eurostat [9].

The data allow analyzing, in addition to Portugal, the path of the European Union (EU) countries in its implementation over the last decades and the next 10 years.

The results show that the working age population is expected to fall by 5% by 2030, from around 66% to just over 60% of the total population. And that, although there is a trend in the European Union to increase the retirement age, it is thought that such a measure will not be sufficient to solve the problems arising from demographic change.

However, the decrease of active citizens contributing to social security can be compensated by educating adult immigrants, in those areas where there are more labour shortages, adjusting their training skills to the market and offering specialization and language learning opportunities [8].

In this continuous learning may lie the key to solving the problems arising from the changing demography, the shrinking working population and the sustainability of social security.

uma tendência na União Europeia para aumentar a idade da reforma, pensa-se que tal medida não irá ser suficiente para resolver os problemas decorrentes das alterações demográficas.

3.3 European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)

The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) is a European NGO with 123 member organisations in 42 countries and represents more than 60 million learners across Europe [4].

EAEA is a European NGO whose aim is to link and represent European organisations directly involved in adult education. Originally known as the European Office for Adult Education, EAEA was founded in 1953 by representatives from several European countries.

EAEA promotes adult education and access to and participation in non-formal adult education for all, particularly for groups that are currently under-represented.

The most relevant functions of EAEA are: influencing work through non-formal adult education and lifelong learning policies; providing resources; information provision; networking; and community building [4].

4 CONCLUSIONS

In this study, in particular, we were interested in what role adult education can play in the future of Europe. We believe that adult education provides European citizens with the necessary and appropriate skills and knowledge to become more responsible, active and committed actors for sustainable and inclusive development; individuals who respect, finally, the values that we want to preserve and pass on to new generations.

We conclude that adult education enables knowledge recycling, updating and innovation in the labour market, while contributing to the personal fulfilment of the individual, their well-being and, at the same time, to the construction of a fairer and more sustainable society.

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