

# Social needs and education of older people

## There is no lifelong education without the education of older people

**International conference of the Slovenian third age university network**

Ministry of Education, Ljubljana

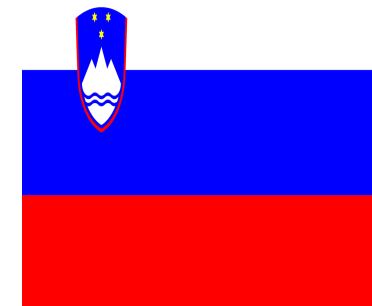
29<sup>th</sup> September, 2023

**The role and importance of education for older people in modern society:**  
**what lessons might 'traditional' universities learn from philosophy and approach of U3A ?**

Maria Slowey

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Population c2.1m



Population c5.1

# Overview of presentation

1. Socio-demographic trends and ageing populations.
2. Crucial to shift focus from 'problems' to opportunities: some myths about 'older' people and the world of work.
3. Challenges posed for educational policy, and 'traditional' higher education institutions.

...Examples of good practice- learning from the type of educational philosophy and practice espoused by the educational principles which U3A embodies.

The thought of Plato remains, the art of Sophocles, the logic and ethics of Aristotle...

No doubt there were hard-headed, practical men [sic] in Athens who stopped before the door of Plato's Academy and asked, what was the use of it all.

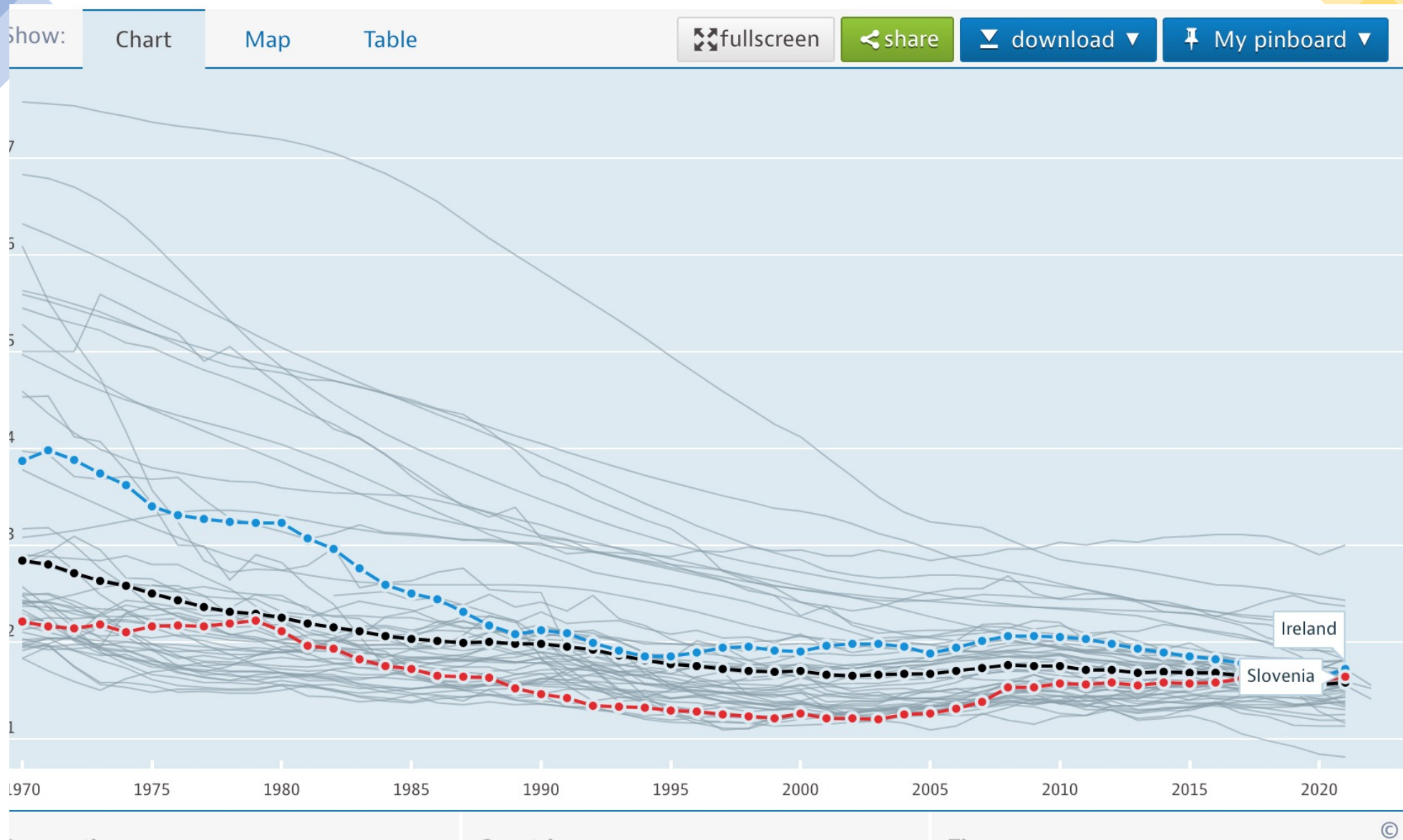
They and their names have vanished; the little Academy became a thousand academies among nations then unborn.

There is a moral, I think, in this history.

It is the usefulness, the transcendent usefulness, of useless things.



## Socio-demographic trends: 'ageing' populations



<https://data.oecd.org/pop/fertility-rates.htm>

# Elderly population

Total, % of population, 1970 – 2022

Source: Labour Force Statistics: Summary tables

Elderly population

Show:

Chart

Map

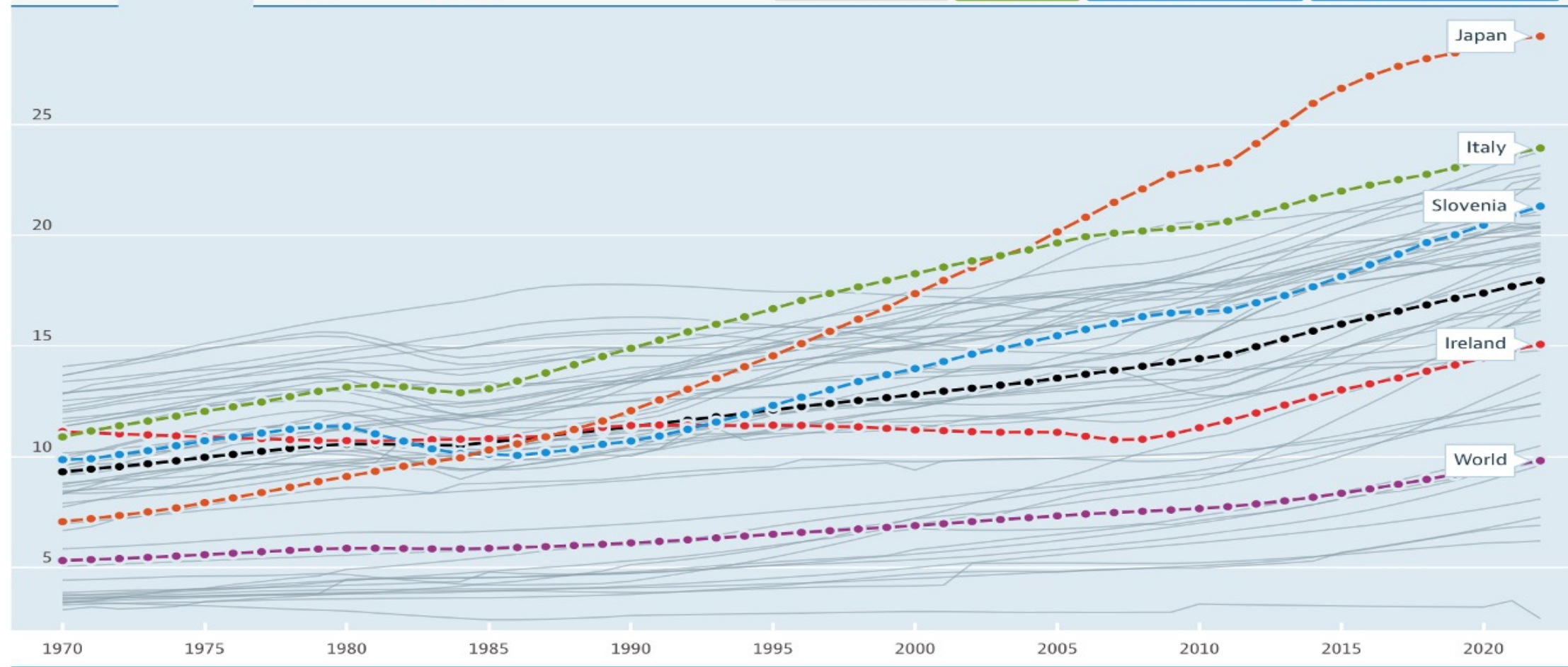
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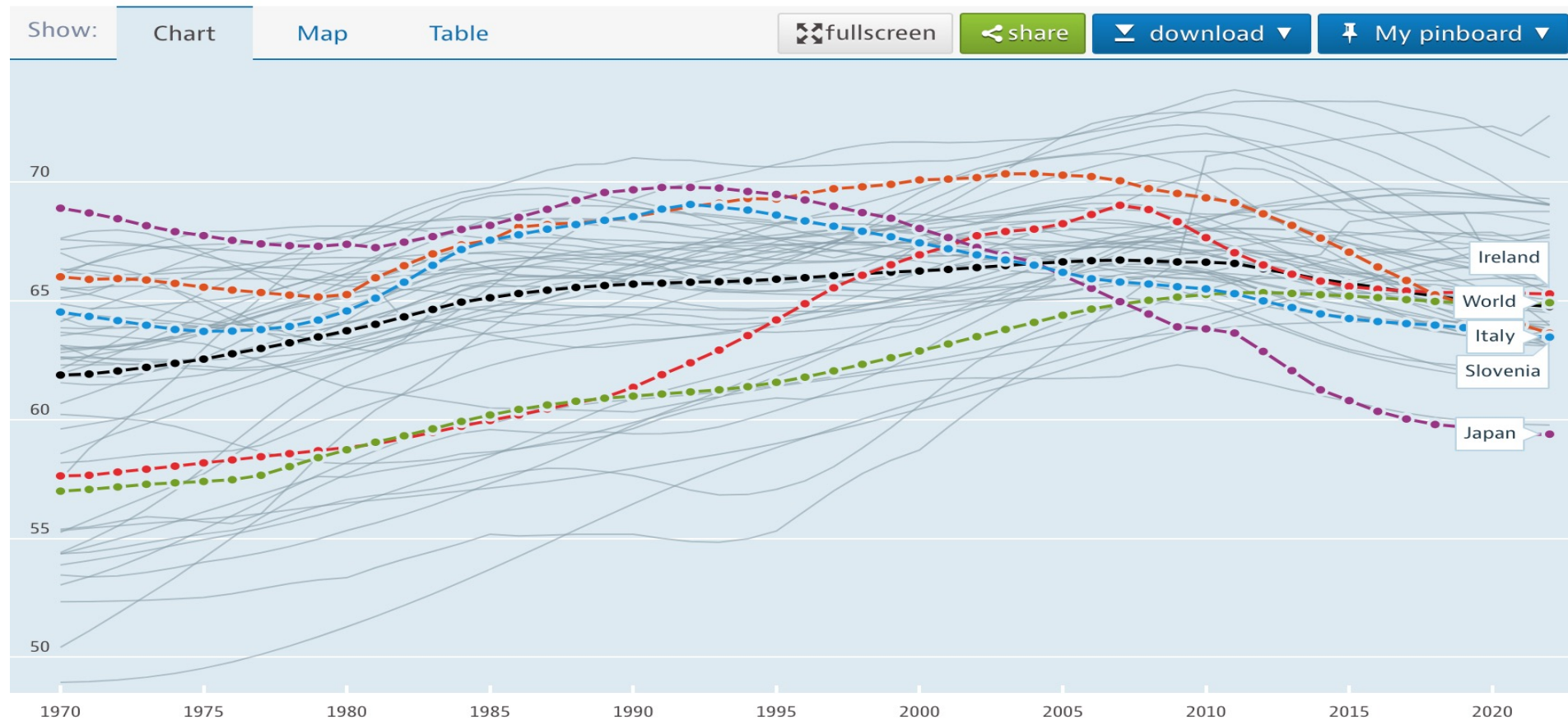
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<https://data.oecd.org/pop/fertility-rates.htm>

## Working age population Total, % of population, 1970 – 2022

Source: Labour Force Statistics: Summary tables



OECD (2023), Working age population (indicator-15 to 64). doi: 10.1787/d339918b-en (Accessed on 14 September 2023)

# So...

- Unprecedented growth of older population, globally and in European countries in particular
- A concern about health budgets and also rise in so-called 'Old Age Dependency' ratios, and resulting pressure on public finances.
- However, much public policy debate tends to focus on 'problems' rather than opportunities.

**How might this narrative be changed?**

How might the focus shift from 'problems', to opportunities: for example, in relation to older people and the world of work





## **Living Longer, Learning Longer - Working Longer?**

### **Implications for New Workforce Dynamics**

Maria Slowey and Tanya Zubrzycki



- Proportion of workers in the EU aged 55-64 is expected to grow by 16.2% (9.9 million) between 2010-2030 (Ilmarinen, 2012, p.1).
- Workers aged 55-64 are expected to make up 30% or more of the workforce in many EU countries by 2030 (Ibid).
- And, talent shortages are being reported in many countries.

# Some people would like to retire at the 'standard' age

- 34% - eligibility for the State Pension 15% - ill health, 13% - the desire to 'enjoy life' and 8% the eligibility for occupational pension
- Ill health was reason for 21% of those with only primary education versus 4% with higher education.

(The Over 50s in a Changing Ireland, 2014).

# However...many people would prefer to work longer

Studies, both international and Irish, show that many individuals either wish, **or** need to, work beyond the State Pension age.

- 75% in Ireland would like to be allowed to work past retirement age
- 60% average across the EU

(National Positive Ageing , 2013)

# Why might people wish to work beyond the 'traditional' retirement age?

- For some, financial reasons are the most important
- But, a majority in Ireland give non-financial (57.5%)
- And, almost half across EU- average 47.2%
- And, of those who would like to work longer, many would prefer work part-time.

# However, what about employers' views?

A study of organisational decision-makers in Ireland showed some regarded workers as being 'older' at the age of... **52... why?**

Older workers perceived as...

- Planning for retirement
- Have reached the pinnacle of their career.
- Older than the prevailing organisational or industry norm
- This has effect on promotion, access to training and development opportunities at work (McCarthy et al, 2014)
- In Ireland (and elsewhere), participation in training declines sharply with age, reaching a very low point for workers in their 60s (SOLAS, 2016)

# Four myths about older workers

- “One of the biggest misconceptions about older workers is that they are unwilling to train and develop in order to keep up with advances in technology and practice” (Flynn, 2014, pp.36-37).
- Research confirms the effectiveness of training and other career development interventions for older workers (e.g. Dauth and Toomet, 2016).
- The risk of an employee leaving the company after receiving training is similar across all age groups (Employing older workers, 2013, p.11)
- While health can be an issue, older workers and younger workers have similar number of incidents of sick leave- however, they do tend to be for longer time periods.

# Evidence of potential benefits older workers can bring to the workplace...

- Experience.
- Addressing skills' gaps being experienced in many countries.
- Mentoring younger colleagues.
- Some studies show customer satisfaction higher with older workers.
- Some evidence pointing to benefits of multi-generational teams.



# In summary-

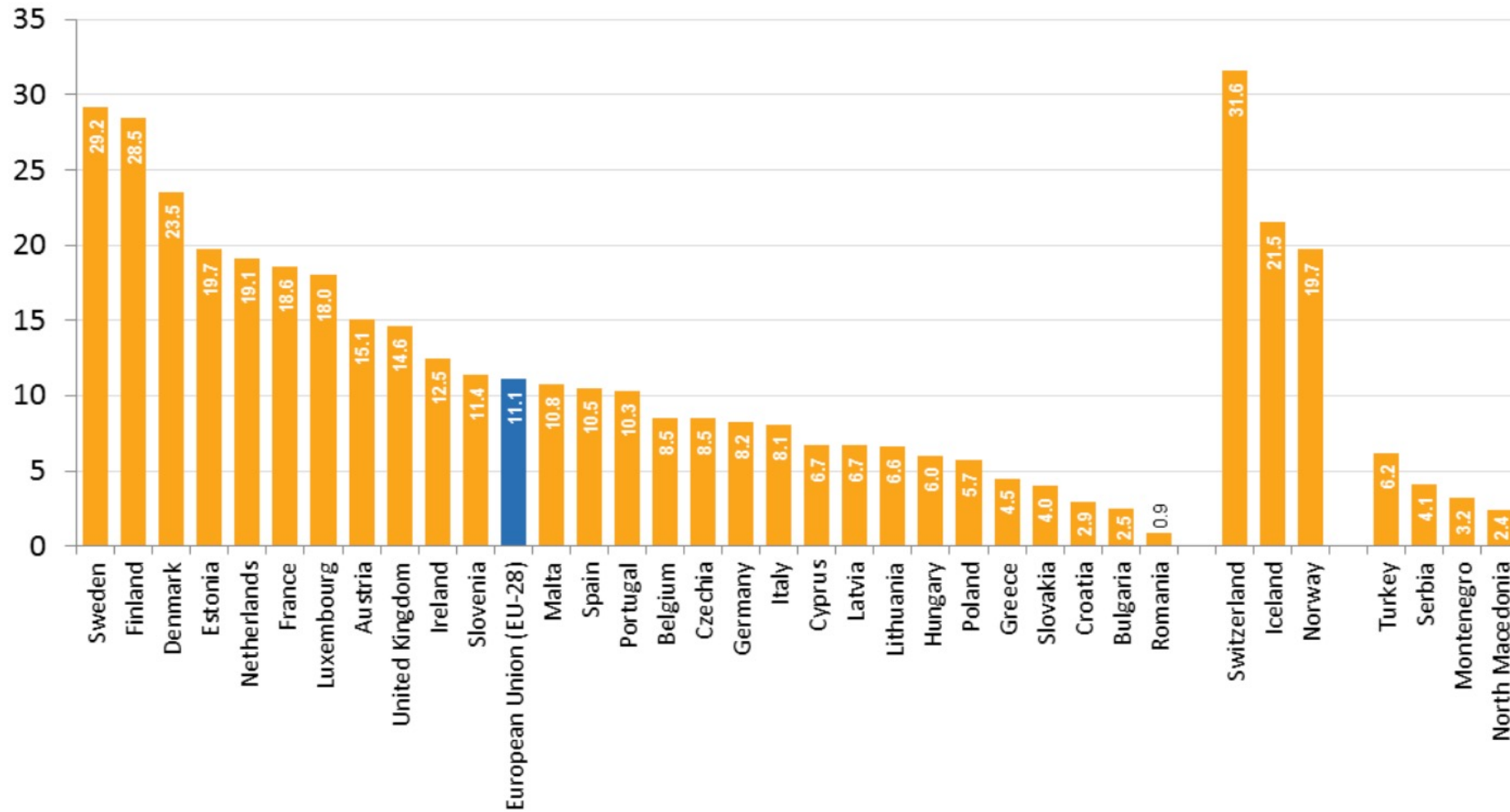


- Traditional concept of 'retirement' is changing and for many people becoming a transition to another type/phase of 'work': part-time; entrepreneurial; freelancing; and- of course, relevant to U3A-engagement with a wide range of voluntary and civic activities.
- Implications for lifelong learning: need to support people of **all** ages with continuing development of knowledge and skills.
- Implications for universities and all networks to support continuing provision for older learners- to support their continuing learning and social engagement.

Equality challenges to public policy, and educational provision

# Adult participation in learning, 2018

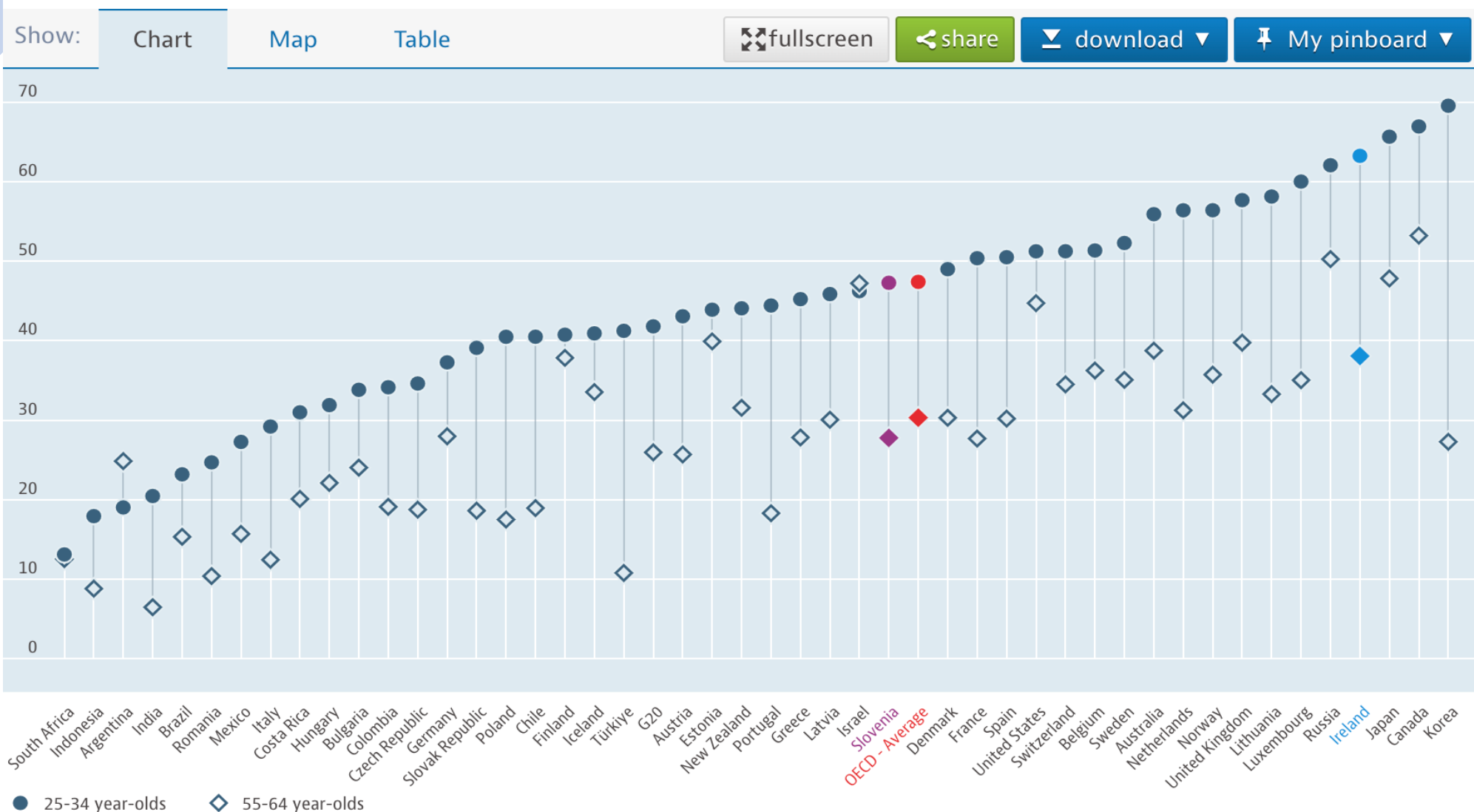
(% of population aged 25-64)



[ec.europa.eu/eurostat](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat)

# Population with tertiary education 25-34 year-olds / 55-64 year-olds, % in same age group, 2022 or latest available

Source: Education at a glance: Educational attainment and labour-force status



OECD (2023), Population with tertiary education (25-34; 55-64): Slovenia and Ireland  
doi: 10.1787/d339918b-en (Accessed on 14 September 2023)

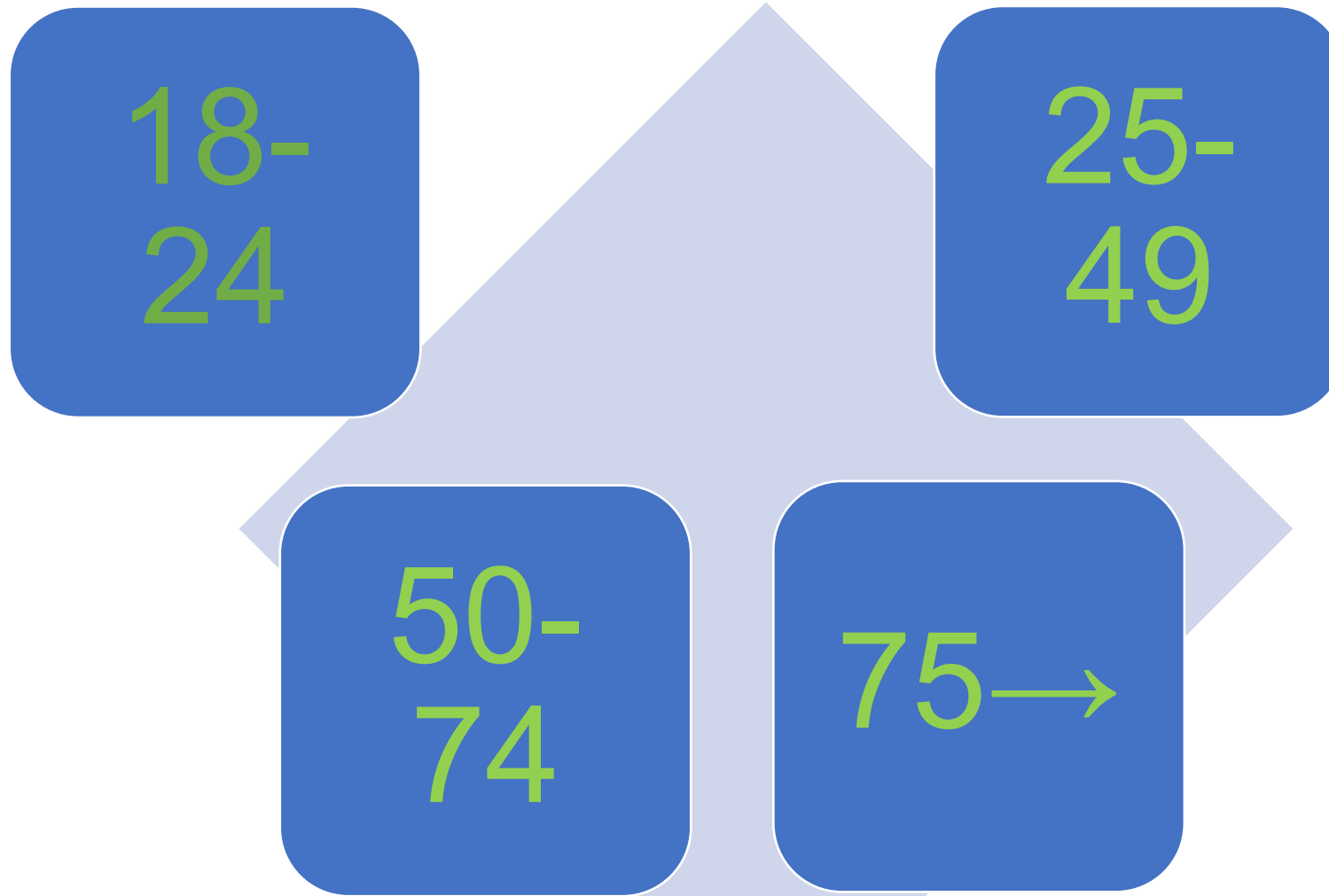
# →Significant challenges for public policy and equality agenda...



- Engagement of adults in continuing education and training is increasing across OECD countries.
- However, 'non-work' related adult education activity stayed **at about same levels** between 1990-2012 in many countries, while work-related education and training for adults and employer support grew '**dramatically**' in same period
- Employers more likely to invest in employees with existing good basic skills (e.g. literacy skills) (Desjardins, 2018)
- However, up to 45% of adult population even in advanced industrialised countries, have low levels of proficiency in key foundation skills such as literacy and numeracy (OECD, 2013).

Also: need to recognise and respond to dramatic changes taking place in people's lifecourse patterns ...

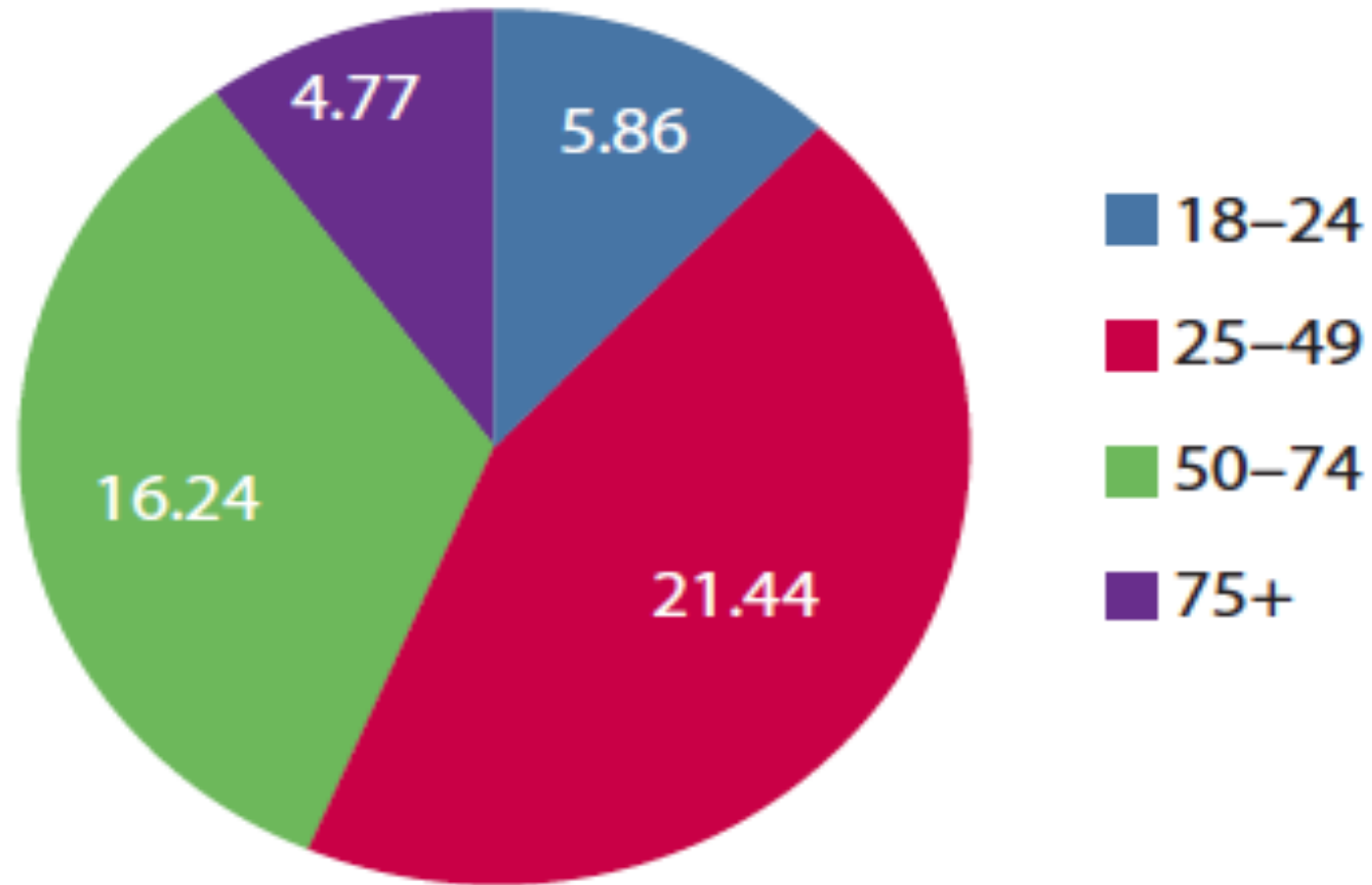
# Emerging new lifecourse patterns- ages & stages



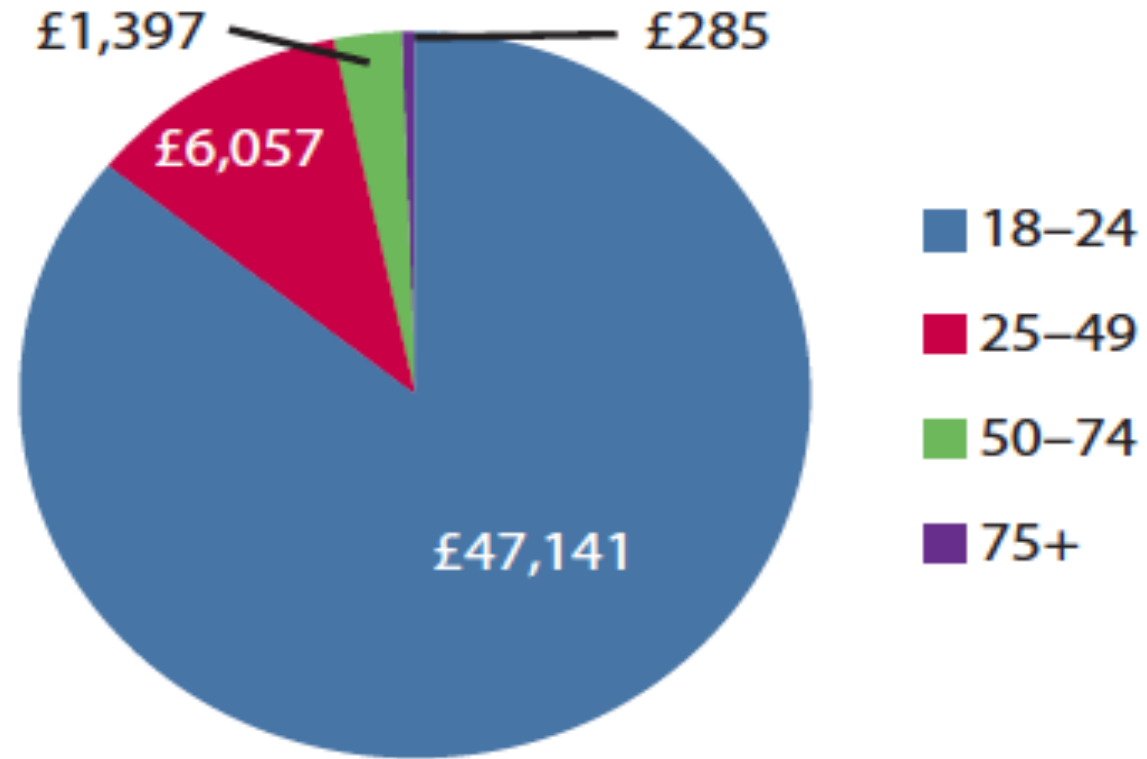
D.Watson and T.Schuller (2010) Learning Through Life: Report of the Commission on Learning into Lifelong Learning, NIACE.



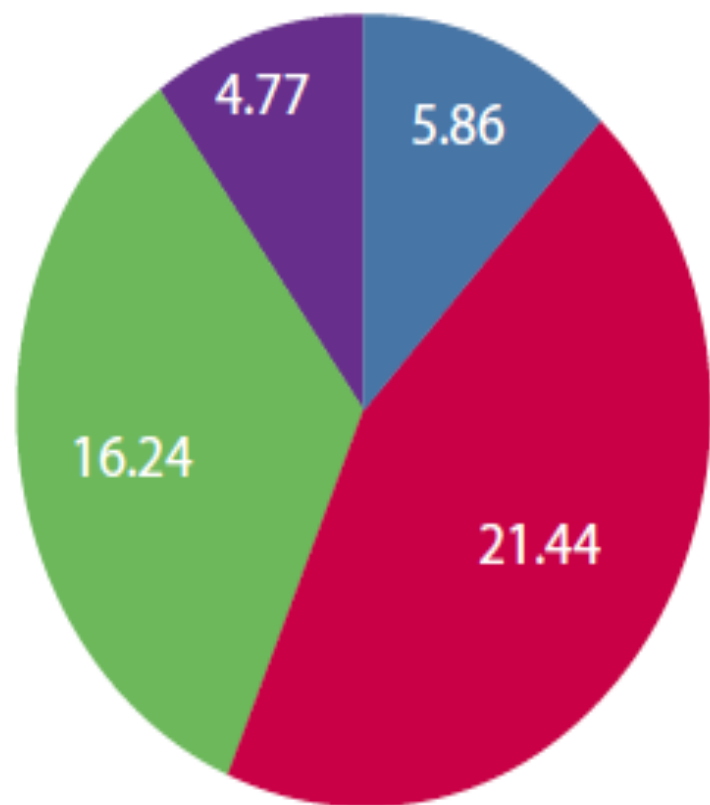
Example, of population breakdown (England) by age group. Schuller and Watson, *Learning through Life*.



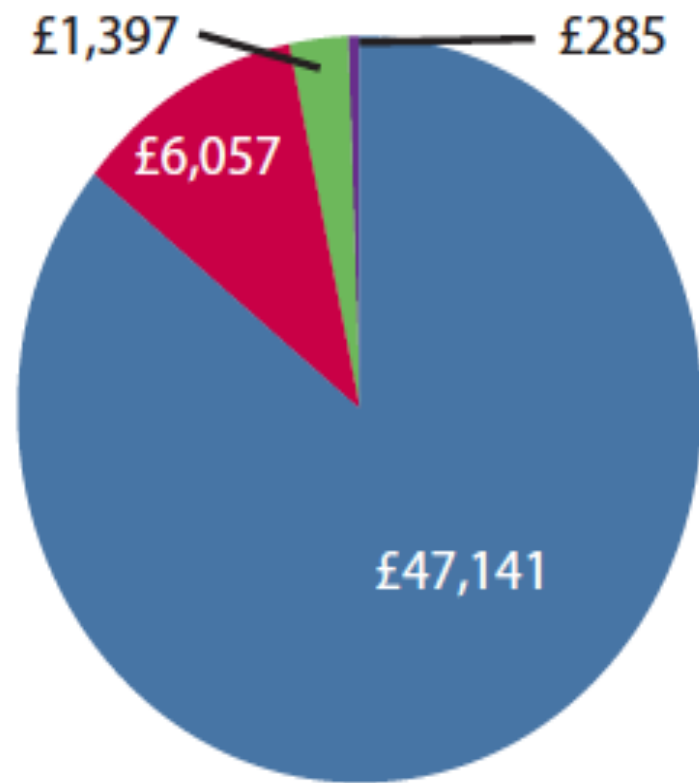
Example of England, estimate of expenditure on education and training per person by age group (Schuller and Watson)



## Comparison...



■ 18-24  
■ 25-49  
■ 50-74  
■ 75+



■ 18-24  
■ 25-49  
■ 50-74  
■ 75+

# And... the challenges facing older women have to remain high on the agenda



- Empirical research highlights a particular need for discussion around the gender implications and the impact of longer working on the well-being of the ageing population.
- The situation facing women is especially challenging in terms of the earnings gap, pension coverage and caring responsibilities.
- Significant proportion of the workforce in Ireland was found to lack any cover beyond the State Pension; the pensions averaging approach particularly affected women as they tend to have more interruptions in their careers.



# Challenges to higher education

- One part of the response to these challenges involves widening access for adults of **all ages** to higher education
- How might higher education institutions better support continuing learning, knowledge expansion of adults in this new phase of human development?

# Key

- **Partnership** working: with other educational providers, adult education associations, public bodies and employers.
- **Pro-active**: in identifying needs
- **Flexibility** in responding.

- The system of higher education must constantly adjust to changes in the field of labour.
- At the same time, it must accept the responsibility for creating conditions favourable to change to introducing innovative activities.
- Ana Krajnc (1998) 'The possibility of in-service and recurrent higher education'



# Three examples of how higher education might learn from the U3A philosophy and approach

1. Age Friendly University (AFU)
2. Intergenerational learning
3. Adult education philosophy and approaches

# Typical 21<sup>st</sup> century students...?





# Or ... even these students?



Workshop on Inclusive Technologies  
27 January 2016 (Dr Emma Murphy, HERC)

- ✓ Strategic support from University President
- ✓ Track record
- ✓ Interdisciplinary Working Group
- ✓ Extensive consultation
- ✓ External Advisory Board
- ✓ Partnership working

=====10 Core Principles=====

1. To encourage the **participation of older adults in all the core** activities of the university, including educational and research programmes.
2. To promote personal and career development in the **second half of life.**
3. To recognise the **range of educational** needs of older adults (from those who were early school-leavers through to those who wish to pursue Master's or PhD qualifications).
4. To promote **intergenerational** learning to facilitate the reciprocal sharing of expertise between learners of all ages.

5. To widen access to **online educational** opportunities.
6. To ensure that the university's **research agenda** is informed by the needs of an ageing society and to promote public discourse.
7. To increase the **understanding of students** of demographic changes.
8. To enhance **access for older adults** to the university's range of health and wellness programmes and its arts and cultural activities.



9. To engage actively with the university's own retired community.
10. To ensure regular **dialogue** with organisations representing the interests of the ageing population.

Intergenerational learning

At level of individual universities and also networks of universities



# DCU: intergenerational learning (technology)

- In Ireland, 71% of employers and 75% of employees who participated in a survey believe that the pace of change of technology is challenging for older staff in the workplace.
- 87% of those unemployed thought the pace of change in technology “made it more difficult for older candidates to secure employment” (William Fry, 2016, p.14).



Pace of change very rapid: benefits of knowledge exchange...younger to older learners.

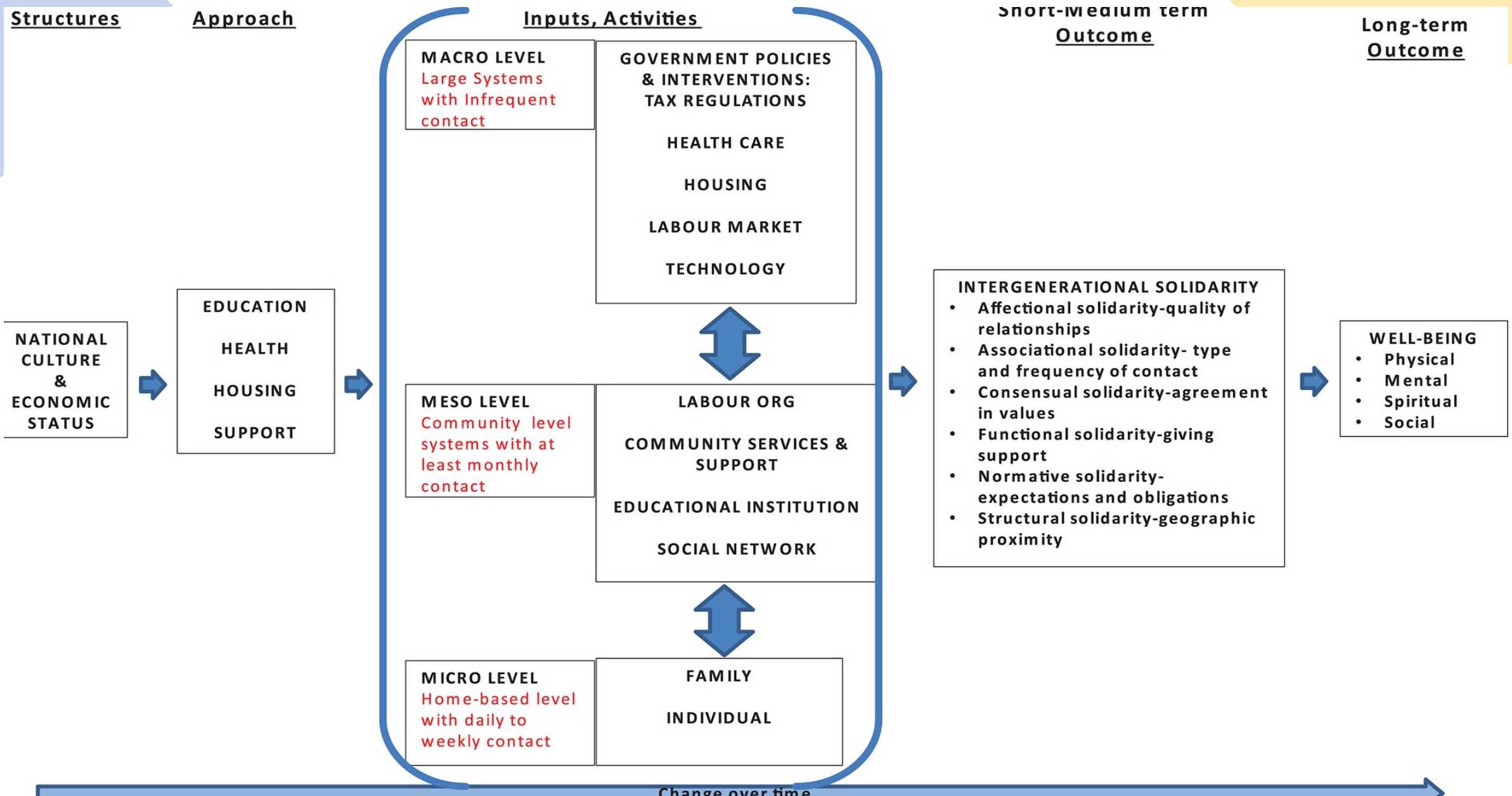


Diagram from: M.B Zlotnick, van Groenou, et al. Lessons Learned From 11 Countries on Programs Promoting Intergenerational Solidarity. *Family Relations*, 70(2),

Finally, but not least, the enduring value of an educational approach based on philosophy and approach of adult education principles

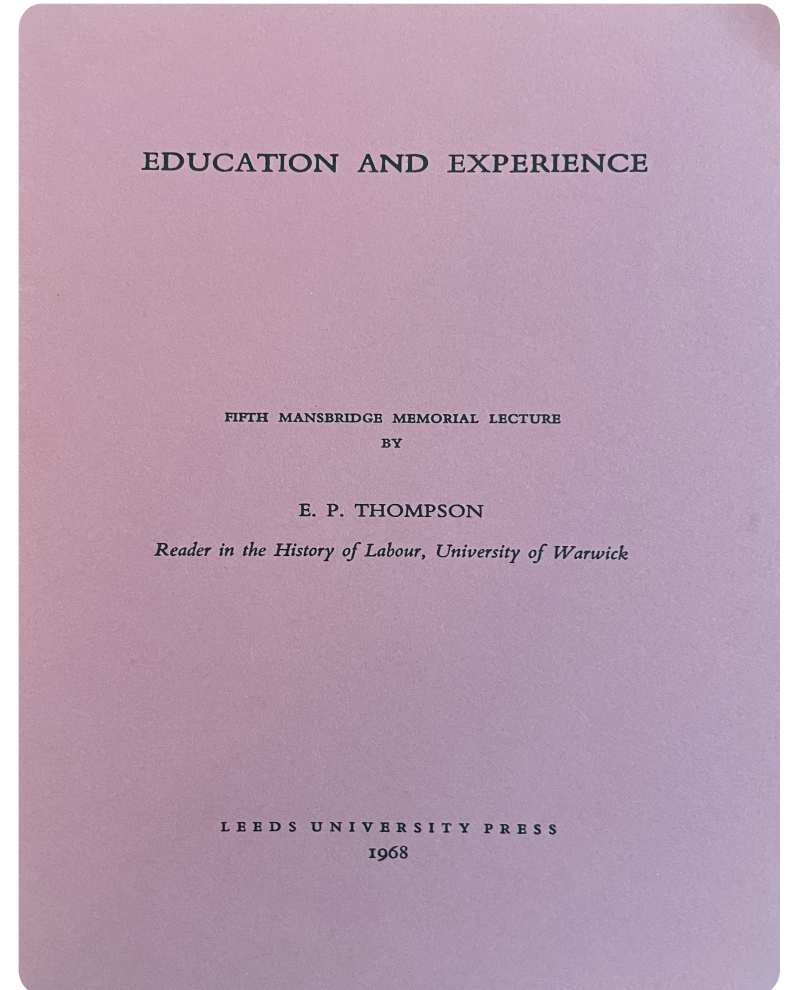
...we live at a time when the language and rhetoric of the speculative market have become embedded in the educational culture and have brought some university practices down a precarious road.

...intellectuals [are] challenged to recover the moral purpose of original thought and emancipatory scholarship; a time when we must seek to recapture the human and unifying capacity of scholarship.

President of Ireland, MD Higgins,

Speech at the European Universities Association (EUA) Annual Conference  
National University of Ireland, Galway, 7th April 2016

All education which is worth the name involves a relationship of mutuality, a dialectic: and no worthwhile education list conceives of his [sic] material as a class of inert recipients of instruction.



...in liberal adult education, no tutor is likely to last out of session- and no class is likely to stay the course with him - if he [sic] is under the misapprehension that the role of the class is passive.

**What is different about the adult student is the experience which he [sic] brings to the relationship.**

This experience modifies, sometimes subtly and sometimes more radically, the entire educational process: it influences teaching methods, the selection and maturation of tutors, the syllabus: it may even disclose weak places or vacancies in received academic disciplines and lead on to the elaboration of new areas of study.





...inequalities are sharpening and lack of access to education is one cause of this.

I've been driven all my life by the conviction that everyone has the right to knowledge, but that knowledge is not just information. ..For us in universities it includes analysis, interpretation and critical appraisal, as well as the release of creativity.

Learning, Liberty and  
Social Purpose:  
A reminder of our radical liberal  
inheritance in Adult Education  
and some thoughts on its future

FIFTEENTH ALBERT MANSBRIDGE MEMORIAL LECTURE

BY

Lalage Bown  
*Professor Emeritus, University of Glasgow  
and Honorary Professor, University of Warwick*

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

DEPARTMENT OF ADULT CONTINUING EDUCATION

1995

- We need to **question orthodoxies** 'education is about constant enquiry'.
- **Empowerment** at both the individual and the collective level.
- An **international** perspective: beyond the rich countries of the world.
- And, a whole new approach to helping develop skills of '**critical appraisal** of new communications media.



**Hvala vam!**

Thank you!

**Go raibh maith agat!**

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