

Independence

We may hope that as we grow older and face poorer health and reduced independence, our children can be close by to help us. However, as more young people move to find employment, families are living further apart. The cost of health and social care is expected to increase as societies age. Currently a large share of these costs is covered by older people themselves – through contributions to public and private insurance plans or because they pay for health care. As people live longer, finding (and funding) more cost-effective ways of providing in-home care will become increasingly important.

Solidarity

Everyone fares better when they feel part of a community; this is especially true of older people. As we age, it's important to maintain connections with our families, friends and communities as these allow us to have experiences and relationships that keep us happy and involved. If we can't stay physically close to our families, we can still build relationships with others. We can spend time with people from different generations by participating in things that interest both young and old. For instance, in Europe the over-65s are on average at least as active as younger people in nearly all volunteering areas. Regularly spending time with those older or younger than you can help you create a social network beyond your family; these community connections can help keep you engaged and happy as you age.

Future

In most European countries birth rates will only increase slightly up to 2060. Only a few countries will reach the so-called "replacement level" (an average of 2 children per woman). This means that the next generations will be smaller. A growing number of retirees and smaller future generations means that fewer people will be working to support the pensions of a greater number of retirees. We can reduce this imbalance by retiring later, creating a more age-friendly job market. Whether we will benefit from a longer life depends largely on our lifestyle, our family and social networks, and how society supports older people.



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TEN THINGS ABOUT HOW TO GET TO 100 AND ENJOY IT!

What are your chances of living to 100?

How do your early years, your family life, where you live, your lifestyle and your work affect these chances?

With one in three children born expected to live to 100, these questions have never been more important.

Our unique interactive exhibition explores how our population is changing...

Life Expectancy

A person living today could live twice as long as someone living 100 years ago. In fact, since 1850, we have increased our life expectancy by around 2 ½ years per decade. Advances in medicine, better diets and healthier living environments have all helped, but unequal access to education and medical care means that this general increase in life expectancy varies across the globe. Lifestyle has a big influence on life expectancy, so making small changes can have an impact on how long a person might expect to live.

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Early Life

The circumstances of your early life – even before you are born – can have a big influence on your life expectancy. For example, potential economic or social crises (such as famines and wars) but also your mother's age and even the month you were born in play a role in how long you may live. This environmental effect carries on into adult life. However, only 25% of our ageing is determined by our genes, meaning that a large proportion of our lifespan is down to our behaviour.

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Family



Families come in many different forms. Compared to fifty years ago, couples are having their first child later and are having fewer children. At the same time, we have an increasingly ageing population. Having fewer children means there will be fewer working adults to support older people and their pensions in the future. Also, young people have become more mobile and don't live as close to home as they once did, creating implications for parents and grandparents, who might hope to rely on them for help as they grow older.

Career



Increased life expectancy may mean we can re-evaluate the structure of our working lives. These days many people are switching careers, continuing their education into adulthood, and anticipate working beyond the age of 65. In the future, with adaptations to our social security systems, young people may be able to work fewer hours while they build their families and make this time up later in life. Longer lifetimes may allow us the opportunity to have more flexible work and family lives.

Neighbours



Mobility within and between countries is important in social, economic and political development, especially where the population is ageing rapidly. Because work and study are major drivers of immigration, migrants tend to be younger than native-born people, with medium- to high-level qualifications and employment rates equivalent to their native-born counterparts. This is important because young working immigrants can help stimulate the economy by being employed, paying taxes and being consumers. For instance, as the population of the UK continues to age, migration can help finance public pension programmes and fill jobs left by retirees.

Work



In previous generations many people retired at 65. However, as we live longer and healthier we may need to extend our working lives in order to sustain public pension programmes and to keep ourselves active. Retaining older people in the workforce – with their knowledge and experience – benefits employers and younger co-workers. But employers will have to increase job flexibility for older people, allowing them to work part-time, on freelance contracts or as consultants; and they will need to adapt workspaces and may have to adjust the physicality of certain jobs – such as construction or nursing – to accommodate them. Given some small changes to work expectations, people can continue to have fulfilling working lives as they grow older.

Health

Today 70 is the new 60! As our life expectancies have soared, not only are we living longer but we've added 10 healthy years to our life course. This means that on average in Europe, at least three-quarters of life expectancy at birth consists of healthy years. However, growing older inevitably involves physical and mental limitations. Men tend to suffer from cardiovascular conditions, women from musculoskeletal ailments and neurological and psychological problems. We can combat the onset of these by eating well, remaining physically active and mentally engaged and maintaining relationships with family, friends and communities. Continuing healthy behaviours can help us stay happy, which is a key to keeping healthy in old age. Engaged, active, happy people tend to live longer, healthier lives.

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