

# Population

## An ageing population

The United Kingdom is an ageing population. There are now more people aged over 60 than there are aged under 18. By 2037 it is predicted that for every 1,000 people, there will be 365 people eligible to, or already retired. As this number grows, should society adjust its opinion of what it means to be 'old'? What consequences does an ageing population have for retirement age? What challenges do we face in terms of including older people in society and caring for an ageing population? The ESRC Centre for Population Change addresses such challenges.

In 2018 the Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimated that the UK population was the largest it has ever been, at 66 million. Life expectancy had increased, with girls born in 2015 expected to live to 82 and boys to 79 years of age. By 2039, more than one in 12 of the population is predicted to be aged 80 or over. This increase, combined with an ageing population, means that extra pressures will be put on services such as education, housing, healthcare and pensions.

The issue of an increasing older population can be seen in the media too, with some reporting on the challenges of an ageing population. It's not all doom and gloom, though. Age UK argue that older people contribute to society through other means such as caring for a partner or grandchildren and by volunteering in their communities.

“Global population ageing is the outcome of the remarkable success of the twentieth century in improving mortality, ensuring more people survive into later life.” *Professor Jane Falkingham*

Established in 2009 the ESRC Centre for Population Change (CPC) is the UK's first research centre to focus on population change, and is led by Professor Jane Falkingham at the University of Southampton. CPC aims to improve the understanding of what drives population

change and what the implications may be. The Centre researches a range of ageing-related issues, including retirement, isolation and mental health in older age.



In March 2016 the government announced that it was to review the state pension age (when working people can retire and collect their government pension). The review, called '*Smoothing the Transition*', was published in April 2017 and recommended that the 'state pension age should increase to age 68 over the two-year period 2037–2039.' A research project led by Professor Maria Evandrou is exploring the consequences of an ageing population and the age at which working people retire. 'Extending working lives: implications for work-life balance' explores why some people choose to carry on working beyond the age that they can collect a state pension. Other research is examining how people in mid-life are juggling responsibilities between caring for an older parent and staying in employment. The research shows

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that for some, combining employment and care of an elderly parent is not an option, meaning that some people have to give up work to provide the care needed. This has an effect on their own prospects, especially their income, in later life. The research highlights the need to make workplaces more age and carer friendly.



Another area studied by CPC researchers is the transition to living alone in later life. Professor Falkingham led a team that looked into why people lived alone, what effects this had on their mental health and how this compared to people who had always lived alone. *'The transition to living alone and mental health in later life'* research project aimed to explore the factors that could help identify those at risk of developing mental health problems following the transition to living alone.

The project found that simply living alone didn't necessarily mean that you would be likely to experience poor mental health, but that it depended upon what a person experienced before the transition to living alone. They also found that there wasn't a strong link between someone's socioeconomic status (their financial position and social standing) and the accessibility of social support as to whether they were likely to develop mental health problems.

CPC's research has contributed to an Age International publication, *'Facing the facts: The truth about ageing and development'*.

A globally ageing population is changing the shape of a global society. It's predicted that by 2047 there will be more people aged over 60 than children under the age of 16. By 2050, it is anticipated that nearly eight in 10 of the world's elderly will live in low and middle-income countries. This presents challenges for those countries to enable those older people to live with quality of life and with working health and social care systems. Professor Falkingham states: 'Global population ageing is the outcome of the remarkable success of the twentieth century in improving mortality, ensuring more people survive into later life. However, some countries in the global south face the challenge of growing old before they grow rich. It will be essential to ensure that older people living in low resource settings, such as the slums in many of the world's major cities and in isolated rural areas, are not left behind in terms of access to health and social care and social security. Our research aims to contribute to this debate, ensuring that old people remain visible in the discussions around the UN sustainable development goals.'

### Key facts and figures

- **There are 868 million people across the globe who are over 60.**
- **There are now more people in the UK aged 60 and above than there are under 18.**
- **Girls born in 2015 can expect to live up to 82 years of age.**
- **Boys born in 2015 can expect to live up to 79 years of age.**
- **By 2039, more than one in 12 of the population is projected to be aged 80 or over.**
- **The government recommends that state pension age should increase to 68 years over the two-year period 2037–2039.**

# Changing language

