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.

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...
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