Older People’s Day 2010

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Coverage: United Kingdom Theme: Ageing

UK Older People’s Day is held on 1 October each year to celebrate older people’s contributions to society and to challenge negative stereotypes. Figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the wider Government Statistical Service (GSS) show the UK population continuing to age.

- Life expectancy at birth in the UK has reached its highest level on record for both males and females, 77.7 years at birth for males and 81.9 years at birth for females (2007-2009)

- The number of centenarians in the UK has more than tripled in the last 25 years reaching 11,600 in 2009

Older people in the UK

Over the last 25 years the percentage of the population aged 65 and over increased from 15 per cent in 1984 to 16 per cent in 2009, an increase of 1.7 million people in this age group. Over the same period, the percentage of the population aged under 16 decreased from 21 per cent to 19 per cent. This ageing of the population is projected to continue. By 2034, 23 per cent of the population is projected to be aged 65 and over compared with 18 per cent aged under 16.

The fastest population increase has been in the number of those aged 85 and over, the ‘oldest old’. In 1984, there were around 660,000 people in the UK aged 85 and over. Since then the numbers have more than doubled reaching 1.4 million in 2009. By 2034 the number of people aged 85 and over is projected to be 2.5 times larger than in 2009, reaching 3.5 million and accounting for 5 per cent of the total population.

The estimated number of centenarians in the UK has more than tripled in the last 25 years and has more than quadrupled since 1981, when the number of people aged 100 years or more was 2,600. By 1884 there were 3,300 centenarians living in the UK. By 2009 this had increased to 11,600. The number of centenarians in the UK is projected to reach 87,900 by 2034, more than a seven-fold increase from the 2009 figure. Of these, more than 100 are projected to be supercentenarians (people aged 110 or more).
The major contributor to the rising number of centenarians is increased survival between the age of 80 and 100, due to an overall improvement in medical treatment, housing and living standards, and nutrition.

Females outnumber males at older ages because, on average, women live longer than men. However, the ratio of women to men of those aged 65 and over is falling. In 1984 there were 156 women aged 65 and over for every 100 men of the same age, compared with the current (2009) ratio of 129 women for every 100 men. By 2034 it is projected that this ratio will have fallen still further to 118 women for every 100 men.

The ratio of female to male centenarians has also started to fall in recent years. In 2000 there were approximately nine female centenarians for every male centenarian, by 2009 there were approximately six female centenarians for every male centenarian.

The falls in the ratios of women to men at older ages are mainly due to recent improvements in male mortality.

**Life expectancy**

National Interim Life tables for 2007-2009 are published today. They show that life expectancy at birth in the UK has reached its highest level on record for both males and females. A baby boy born today could expect to live 77.7 years and a newborn baby girl 81.9 years, if mortality rates remain the same as they were in 2007-09.¹

Females continue to live longer than males, but the gap has been closing. Although both sexes have shown annual improvements in life expectancy at birth, since 1980-82 the gap has narrowed from 6.0 years to 4.2 years. Based on mortality rates in 1980-82, 26 per cent of newborn males would die before age 65, but this has reduced to 15 per cent based on 2007-09 rates. The equivalent figures for newborn females were 16 per cent in 1980-82 and 10 per cent in 2007-09.

Based on 2007–09 mortality rates, a man aged 65 could expect to live another 17.6 years, and a woman aged 65 another 20.2 years.

Within the UK, life expectancy varies by country (Table 1). England has the highest life expectancy at birth, 78.0 years for males and 82.1 years for females, while Scotland has the lowest, 75.3 years for males and 80.1 years for females. Life expectancy at age 65 is also higher for England than for the other UK countries.

¹ These figures make no allowance for any future changes in mortality
Table 1 Life expectancy, 2007-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>At birth</th>
<th>At age 65</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>81.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>82.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>81.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>80.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>81.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office for National Statistics: Interim Life Tables 2007-09

Healthy Life Expectancies

In Great Britain, life expectancy (LE), health life expectancy (HLE, expected years of life in good or fairly good health) and disability-free life expectancy (DFLE, expected years of life without a limiting illness or disability) at birth and at age 65 increased for both males and females between 1981 and 2006 (Table 2).

Table 2 Life expectancy, healthy life expectancy and disability-free life expectancy for males and females at birth and at age 65, Great Britain, 1981 and 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>At Birth</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>At age 65</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males LE</td>
<td>HLE DFLE</td>
<td>Males LE</td>
<td>HLE DFLE</td>
<td>Males LE</td>
<td>HLE DFLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>76.8</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>60.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td>62.6</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>63.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Health expectancies at birth & at age 65 in the United Kingdom

LE increased at a faster rate than HLE and DFLE over the period. Consequently the proportions of life spent in good health fell slightly. However, since 2001 periods of life spent in poor health or with a limiting illness or disability have decreased for males at birth\(^2\).

Life expectancy, healthy life expectancy and disability free life expectancy are all higher for females than males at both birth and at age 65; however, the gap between male and female HLE and the gap between male and female DFLE is smaller than the gap between male and female LE at both birth and at age 65.

In common with the narrowing of the gap in life expectancy between the sexes, the gap between healthy life expectancy and disability free life expectancy of men and women is also narrowing.

\(^2\) following methodological adjustment. For details see background note 13.
Between 1981 and 2006, the difference by sex in HLE narrowed from 2.3 to 2.0 years at birth and from 2.0 to 1.7 years at age 65. For DFLE the difference between the sexes fell from 2.7 to 1.2 years at birth and from 1.0 to 0.6 years at age 65.

National estimates of LE, HLE and DFLE hide greater differences between smaller area clusters and sub-national populations. Recent research comparing Lower Super Output areas (LSOAs) in England, grouped into quintiles of area-based measures of deprivation, showed that people living in the most advantaged fifth of LSOAs can expect to spend 10 per cent more of their lives in favourable health states compared with those in the most disadvantaged areas.¹

Local variations
As a result of increases in the number of older people, the median age of the UK population is increasing.² Over the past 25 years the median age increased from 35 years in 1984 to 39 years in 2009. It is projected to continue to increase over the next 25 years rising to 42 by 2034.

However, the age profile of the UK population varies considerably geographically. In 2009 West Somerset had the highest median age in the UK, at 52.4 years. Other areas with high median ages were located in coastal areas of England and included Christchurch, Rother and East Dorset on the south coast, and North Norfolk on the east coast. The coastal area in the North East with the highest median age was Berwick-upon-Tweed at 49.9 years. During the year ending June 2009, the South West had the highest net internal in-migration of people aged 60 and over of all English regions. This distribution reflects retirement to coastal areas.

Oxford and Manchester had the lowest median age in 2009, both at 29.5 years. Cambridge, Nottingham, Southampton and Leicester also ranked amongst the ten local areas with the lowest median ages in the UK. The number of higher education institutions in these areas increases the population of young adults, reducing the average age.

Many inner London boroughs also have low median ages, reflecting relatively high proportions of young adults in their populations and low proportions of older adults. The ten local areas with the smallest proportions of their populations aged 65 and above (with less than ten per cent in this age group) were all inner London boroughs; Tower Hamlets had the smallest percentage of people aged 65 and over (7 per cent) (Figure 1). During the year ending June 2009, London had the highest net internal out-migration of people aged 60 and over of all English regions but the highest net internal in-migration of people aged 20 to 29.

² Median age is the age at which half of the population are younger and half are older.
In the UK in 2009 there were 78 men aged 65 and over for every 100 women of the same age; however, this sex ratio varies by local area. Glasgow and Belfast had the lowest sex ratio of people aged 65 and over in 2009 (about 65 men per 100 women of the same age). The five local areas with the highest sex ratio of men to women aged 65 and over were located in East Midlands and East of England, all with sex ratios above 85 men for every 100 women.

**Housing tenure and living arrangements**

Older women are more likely than older men to live alone and the percentage increases with advancing age. In 2008 in Great Britain, 30 per cent of women aged 65 to 74 lived alone compared to 20 per cent of men in this age group; and for those aged 75 and over this increases to 63 per cent and 35 per cent respectively.
The majority of older person households (where the household reference person was someone aged 50 and over) were owner-occupied in Great Britain in 2008, with more than half of these owning their homes outright and only one in five having a mortgage.

The percentage of owner-occupied households decreases with age, from 79 per cent for those aged 50-64, to 61 per cent for those aged 85 and over. Whereas the percentage of older person households in social rented accommodation increases with age, from 16 per cent for those aged 50-64 to 33 per cent for those aged 85 and over.

**Labour market**

The employment rate of both men and women aged 50-64 in the UK increased between 1995 and 2010. In May to July 1995, 65 per cent of men and 49 per cent of women in this age group were employed; by May to July 2010 this had risen to 72 per cent and 58 per cent respectively. The employment rate of men and women aged 65 and over also increased over this period. In May to July 1995, 8 per cent of men and 3 per cent of women in this age group were employed; by May to July 2010 this had risen to 12 per cent and 7 per cent respectively.

**Old Age Support Ratio**

The old-age support ratio (OASR) represents the number of people of working age to the number of people of state pension age (SPA) and over. In 1971 there were 3.6 people of working age to every person of SPA and over. By 2009 the OASR had fallen to about 3.2 (Figure 2).

![Figure 2  Old age support ratio, UK, 1971 to 2031](chart)

Under current legislation, SPA for women is increasing from age 60 to 65 between 2010 and 2020 (Pensions Act 1995), after which there will be a gradual increase in SPA for both men and women from age 65 to 68 between 2024 and 2046 (Pensions Act 2007).

Despite these changes it is projected that by 2034 the OASR will have fallen to about 2.8 people of working age for each person of SPA and above; without the increases in SPA, the OASR would have been projected to drop further to about 2.2 by 2034.

The old age support ratio is a demographic ratio and does not take into account possible future activity rates. Inactivity owing to factors such as early retirement, health problems, disability and caring responsibilities may prevent people from working; on the other hand, some people of SPA will choose to extend their working lives into later life.

**Income, expenditure and poverty**

In the UK average gross pensioner incomes increased by 44 per cent in real terms between 1994/95 and 2008/09, ahead of the growth in average earnings.

In 2008/09, pensioner couples received an average gross income of £564 per week, single male pensioners received £304 per week and single female pensioners £264. The largest source of income for pensioners is 'benefit income', which includes state pension income and benefits. Occupational pensions are also a significant source of income.

Average incomes conceal considerable variations between poorer and richer pensioners. When incomes are ranked and divided into five equal groups (quintiles), pensioner couples in the highest quintile in 2006-09 received a median net income 3.8 times that of those in the lowest income quintile. Single pensioners in the highest quintile received a median net income 3.1 times that of those in the lowest quintile.

On average, older pensioners have lower incomes than younger pensioners. In 2008/09 couples where the household head was aged 75 or over had an average gross income of £469 a week compared with £602 for those aged under 75; single male pensioners aged 75 and over had an average gross income of £301 per week compared to £308 per week for single male pensioners aged under 75; and single female pensioners aged 75 and over had an average gross income of £250 per week compared to £280 per week for single female pensioners aged under 75.

In 2008, the average weekly expenditure of households headed by someone aged 65 to 74 was £354, of which 32 per cent was spent on food and non-alcoholic drink, domestic energy bills, housing and council tax. For households headed by someone aged 75 or over, average expenditure was £217 per week, of which 40 per cent was spent on food, energy bills, housing and council tax.
Despite increases in pensioner incomes, in 2008/09, an estimated 1.8 million pensioners in the UK were living in poverty according to the most commonly used official measure (less than 60 per cent of \(^5\)equivalised contemporary median income after housing costs). However, the number of pensioners in poverty has declined over the last decade, from an estimated 2.8 million in 1999/2000.

**Ageing mapping tool**

Last year ONS launched an interactive ageing mapping tool which allows users to analyse the age structure of the population over time at local level using indicators such as median age and percentage of population in different age groups. Today, ONS launches version 2 of the tool which includes two new indicators – ‘sex ratios at age 65 and over’ (the number of males per 100 females) and ‘old age support ratio’ (the number of people of working age to the number of people of State Pension Age and over). The new version of the tool also has added functionality, including a new facility to locate local areas of interest; the facility to display a chart showing the number of local areas in each category of each indicator; the facility to highlight and zoom in on specific local areas and the facility to export jpegs of static maps.

The ageing mapping tool can be accessed at:


Data sources for all figures reported can be found in the background notes below.

For more information on any of the reported research and analysis related to the older population or for any queries please email ageing@ons.gov.uk

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\(^5\) Equivalisation involves adjusting households’ incomes depending on household size, to better reflect their needs.
Background Notes

Older People in the UK


   National population projections are not forecasts and do not attempt to predict the impact that future government policies, changing economic circumstances or other factors (whether in the UK or overseas) might have on demographic behaviour. They simply provide the population levels and age structure that would result if the underlying assumptions about future fertility, mortality and migration were to be realised.

3. The 2002-2008 estimates of the very elderly (including centenarians) for England and Wales have been calculated using the revised mid-year population estimates 2002-2008, published 13 May 2010.

4. Estimates of centenarians prior to 2002 are 1st January but from 2002 onwards are mid-year estimates. This difference in reference date does not affect the overall trends. Percentages given in the text are calculated using unrounded figures.


Life expectancy


   The period life expectancy figures are taken from the Interim Life Tables. These are produced annually for the UK and its constituent countries. Each table is based on the population estimates and deaths for a period of three consecutive years.
10. Period life expectancy is the average number of additional years a person would live if he or she experienced the age-specific mortality rates of the given area and time period for the rest of their life. Therefore it is not the number of years someone in the area in that time period is actually likely to live, both because the death rates of the area are likely to change and because people may live in other areas for at least part of their lives. Life expectancies that allow for actual or projected changes in mortality during a person’s lifetime are known as 'cohort' life expectancies.

Health life expectancies
11. HLE and DFLE incorporate an adjustment to LE using information from survey data sources for general health and limiting illness or disability to arrive at expected years of healthy life or life free from disability.
12. A full description of the methodology and sources used in ONS’ calculations of HLE and DFLE are available in Health Statistics Quarterly, volumes 07, 26, 29.
13. 2005-2007 is the final period in which ONS will report estimates of HLE based upon the traditional 3-point general health question. From 2005-2007, estimates of HLE will be based exclusively upon the 5-point general health question endorsed by the European Union’s Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). This will result in a substantial fall in HLE although underlying trends are likely to remain consistent. The transition of health expectancies from the traditional to the new EU–HLE measure is reported in Health Statistics Quarterly, volumes 41 and 45. www.statistics.gov.uk/hsq/hsqissue

Local variations
16. Subnational population refers to population at local areas, that is, local and unitary authorities in England and Wales, council areas in Scotland and local government district areas in Northern Ireland.
17. Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are used for reporting local statistics, and are formed from groupings of Output Areas. Their key advantages are that they are small, reasonably consistent in size and, unlike wards, are not subject to regular boundary change. In England and Wales LSOAs have a minimum size of 1,000 residents, with an average of around 1,500 residents.
20. 2008 based sub-national population projections for Scotland, available at:  

21. 2008 based sub-national population projections for Northern Ireland, available at:  
http://www.nisra.gov.uk/demography/default.asp47.htm

22. Latest on internal migration estimates, available at:  
http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=7070

23. Quality report for subnational population projections can be found at  

Housing tenure and living arrangements
24. Housing tenure and living arrangements estimates are from the Office for National Statistics, General Lifestyle Survey, 2008, available at:  

25. Quality report for the General Lifestyle Survey, available at:  

Labour Market
26. Latest on Labour market statistics, available at:  

27. Employment rates are given for men and women aged 50 to 64. From August 2010, working age employment and inactivity rates were replaced by headline rates based on those aged from 16 to 64 for both men and women. This change brought the UK into line with current international practice.

28. See further analysis in Pensions Trends, Chapter 4 available at:  
http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pensiontrends/


Old age support ratio (OASR)
30. OASR represents the number of people of working age (16 to SPA) to the number of people of SPA and over.
31. Method used to calculate population of working age and SPA and over for national population projections, available in Tables A6-5 and A6-6, page 14 at:

32. See further analysis in Pensions Trends, Chapter 2 available at:
http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pensiontrends/

33. Information on Pensions reform, available at:
http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/pensions%2Dreform/

**Income, expenditure and poverty in retirement**

34. Pensioner income figures come from the Pensioners' Income Series of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which measures the income of 'pensioner benefit units', defined as 'a single adult over state pension age or married or cohabiting pensioners where one or more are of state pension age', available at:
http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=pensioners_income_arc


36. See further analysis in Pensions Trends, Chapter 11 available at:
http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pensiontrends/

**Ageing in the UK: interactive mapping tool**

37. Available at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/ageingintheuk/default.htm

38. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the Media Relations Office.

39. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.
