



# Active elderly

**Wealthier, healthier older people increasingly engage in more active lives having extended careers and becoming more politically involved.**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), by 2020 there will be over a billion elderly people on the planet with 700 million of these in the developing world. In China the proportion of elderly people is on course to double in a period of just thirty years between 2000 and 2030: In France a similar increase took 115 years. In the US, researchers expect the number of people over 65 to move from just under 40 million today to pass 70 million by 2030. Although, as life expectancy continues to lengthen, the number of very old people will rise and so the burden on healthcare systems will increase, for the 55 to 75 age group, improved healthcare and healthier living will result in more active lives than preceding generations. Active ageing is on the rise and, with it, some fundamental changes in society, ranging from employment and parenting to leisure and politics. By 2020, some see that 55 will be the new middle age and many of us will lead independent active lives until our late seventies.

By 2020 there will definitely be a greater proportion of older workers in the workforce than today: experience will be valued as well as economic contribution. Organisations are increasingly aware of the loss of collective memory that occurs when people retire and some, such as P&G, General Mills, Eli Lilly and Boeing, have been using programmes such as [yourencore.com](http://yourencore.com) to tap into this resource.

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At the same time, attitudes to continued work are shifting, with up to half of employees increasingly keen to keep working on a full- or part-time basis after retirement age. Third-generation career workers are regarded as knowledgeable, flexible and experienced workers and are rising higher on the wish-list of many organisations. So we can clearly expect continued participation beyond 65 to be on the agenda for more employers by 2020.

What makes this pretty well certain in many countries is the economic pressure to keep people working, delay retirement and so reduce the pension gap. At the extreme in Japan, with an ageing population and one of the lowest birth rates in the world, the number of workers is on course to reduce from 66 million to 56 million over the next twenty years. With gross government debt heading towards 250% of GDP by 2015, Japan clearly needs people to stay in work and remain economically active for longer. Many other developed economies face a similar, though not so extreme, situation. In Germany, for instance, where the country's over-65 population is expected to double by 2035, the retirement age is rising from 64 to 67 starting in 2012 and politicians are talking

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about 70 as a long-term target; Taiwan recently increased its retirement age from 60 to 65; due to increasing debt, Greece is planning to shift its official retirement age from 61 to 63 by 2015; and even France is adding a couple of years to its pensionable age by 2018. In 2010, the UK government announced that, as well as bringing women into line with men in terms of working life, retirement age will increase to 66 by 2016, will go up to 68 by 2046 and may also hit 70 not long after that. Whether by desire or need, around the world, over the next decade being old will increasingly mean being economically active.

Beyond working, there are several other areas where there is clear evidence for more active elderly going forward. For instance, older parents: pregnancy over 50 has become increasingly possible thanks to advances in reproductive technology and IVF. Already in the UK there are over 20 births a year to women over 50 and in the US the figure is around 1,000 while in India in 2008 Omkari Panwar gave birth at 70 thanks to IVF. 'Men in their sixties and seventies are also becoming fathers partly because they can and more often because they want to.' Certainly in some markets, Viagra has increased the proportion of the elderly having active sex lives but also there is increasing evidence that more elderly divorced men are keen to start a family and begin again.

Attitudes among the over-sixties are also changing to make them socially more active and so more visible on many a corporate radar. Looking ahead, as the Generation X-ers become elderly, many do not expect their values and behaviours to change. Pensioners windsurf and go to Glastonbury, for example. One of the challenges being faced by many companies is how to market products and services to these people. With 70% of disposable wealth controlled by the over-fifties and more than 1 billion people over 60, companies will soon pay as much attention to understanding the different older groups as they have traditionally done to the under-thirties. The traditional stereotyping of old people as the grey market will be turned on its head as marketers focus more on where the money is. Around 90% of global advertising is currently aimed at the young and many in the industry see that the greater wealth in the older generations will lead to a shift towards seniors being as segmented a market as teenagers.

The active elderly are also becoming more engaged around global and local challenges. In the US there are already over 3 million people aged over 65 taking part in voluntary activities in educational, political and religious organisations. More children are being looked after at key times by their grandparents and, in many parts of the world where migration has separated families, surrogate grandparenting

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roles are increasingly being taken by active elderly neighbours. In the world of politics, Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, is 74 while Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, is 78 and there are a host of other government posts around the world being taken by people well past their official retirement age. In some cultures the old have always been respected for their experience and wisdom; in others the ambition and willingness of the active elderly to continue to make a contribution to public life is gaining ground.

Lastly, the seniors of tomorrow will also be more technologically literate than those of today. While around 20% of people in their fifties in developed economies regularly use the internet, as today's middle aged become elderly and connectivity increases, some expect to see even more frequent use. The over-55 group is currently the fastest-growing segment on Facebook and, with more

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access to technology and more experience, some see a reducing digital divide between the young and the old in the future.

In many countries, the average pension of the past was designed to last around ten years, as life expectancy was typically around 73. With average life expectancy already approaching 80 in some regions, the 65-year-olds of 2020 may well have twenty years ahead of them. Being more economically active for longer is an increasing certainty for many, but it is highly probable that the elderly will also be more socially and politically active than ever over the next decade.



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