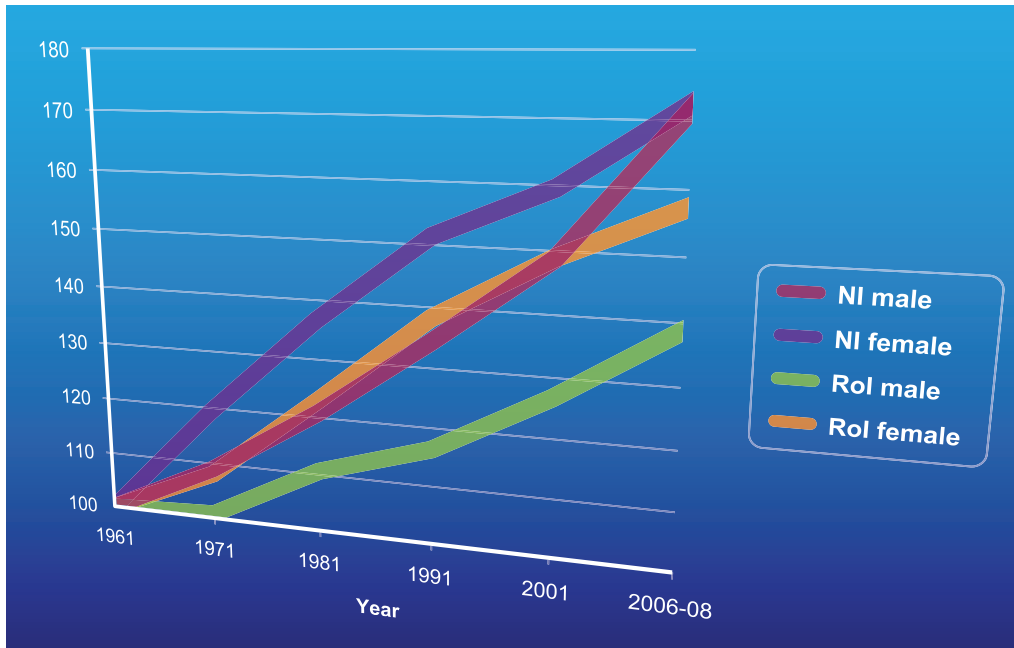


Focus On...

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Centre for Ageing Research
and Development in Ireland



Ageing strategies

Introduction

Following the general election in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) in February 2011, Kathleen Lynch was given ministerial responsibility for older people's issues. The main brief will be to fulfil the commitment in the Programme for Government to introduce a National Positive Ageing Strategyⁱ.

Northern Ireland (NI) cleared the way to appointing a dedicated Commissioner for Older people in November 2011. The principal aim of the Commissioner will be to safeguard and promote the interests of older people, with a wide range of duties and powers.

This article will examine the different approaches and strategies taken by governments around the world to older people's issues. It will assess the strategies and policies on ageing as well as the structures put in place to implement those strategies.

Centre for Ageing
Research and
Development in
Ireland (CARDI)

Forestview
Purdy's Lane
Belfast BT8 7ZX
t: + 44 (0) 28 9069 0066
f: + 44 (0) 28 9064 6604

Level 5
Bishops Square
Redmond's Hill
Dublin 2
t: + 353 (0) 1478 6308
f: + 353 (0) 1478 6319

www.cardi.ie
info@cardi.ie

www.cardi.ie
info@cardi.ie

Key findings

- The US was the first country to have a specific strategy on older people ageing, introduced in 1965 with the Older Americans Act.
- The Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing was the first international instrument on ageing, introduced in 1982.
- The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing was the first international agreement that recognised the potential of older people to contribute to the development of their societies. It is due to be reviewed in 2012.
- The US introduced a commissioner to champion the rights of older people in 1965. Wales has since appointed a commissioner, and Northern Ireland is due to in 2011.
- Two out of the 34 OECD member countries have dedicated ministers to support policy decisions on older people's issues.
- Strategies on ageing need to be designed to balance the specific support required today of older people but harness the contribution of older people, through supporting older workers, carers and volunteers now and in the future.

Policy in an ageing world

We are growing older both as individuals and on a global scale.ⁱⁱ The ageing of the world's population is a permanent social transformation, not just a temporary phenomenon.

In both ROI and NI the population is set to follow the global trend in ageing significantly. At the 2006 census in ROI, 11% of the population was aged 65 and over. By 2041, this proportion will have doubled to 22%. Similarly in NI, 14% of the population was aged 65 and over in 2008. By 2041, this age group will make up 24% of the total.ⁱⁱⁱ

Figure 1: NI projected rise in older population

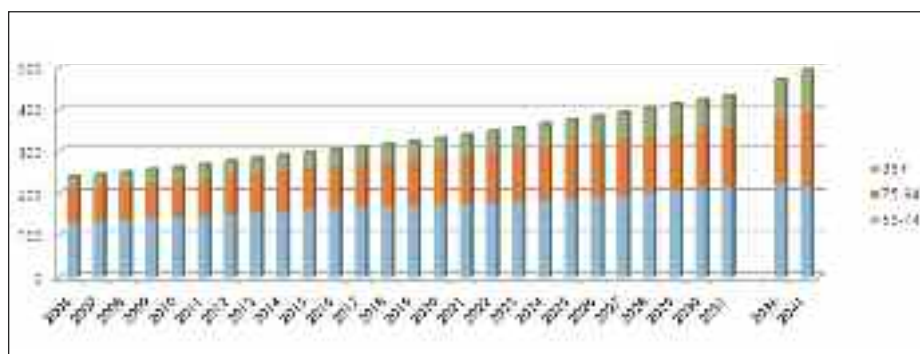
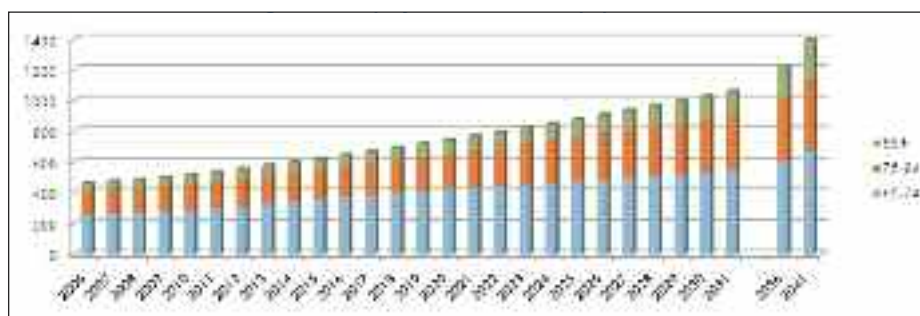


Figure 2: ROI projected rise in older population



Source: CARDI^{iv}

This is having a profound impact on policy-making and government decisions now and in the future. It will affect government spending on pensions, healthcare and long-term care for older people, as well as having implications on areas such as skills and training, transport, the built environment and retirement ages.

The impact on policy-making means that it is important to consider what measures governments are putting in place to prepare for an older population.

Ageing-related government positions

There are specific junior ministers in Ireland North and South with responsibility for older people. Few people with this brief hold a senior position. Only two countries in the OECD (out of 34 members) have a senior minister in the cabinet with direct responsibility for ageing issues. Australia has a Minister for Health and Ageing while Germany has a Minister of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. Several other countries have a junior minister in an ageing-related role. Canada has a Minister of State for Seniors while Japan has a Minister for State in charge of measures for the declining birth rate. There is a Minister for Children and the Elderly within the Ministry of Health in Sweden. Similarly, the Netherlands has a State Secretary in charge of elderly policy within the Department for Health, Welfare and Sport.

There is a school of thought which suggests that governments that are serious about ageing issues do not require a minister. This is because ageing is assumed to be ingrained within the ethos of public policy-making as a major issue affecting the majority of government departments. A ministerial position can be mostly symbolic, particularly if the minister is not responsible for a department.^v

The OECD advocates the adoption of national strategies frameworks to co-ordinate age-related reforms. The key behind this approach is the enhancement of co-ordination across departments to ensure the coherence of public policies.^{vi} A key challenge of this approach is to provide sufficient incentives to co-operate across the various departments, and for them to maintain the status of ageing issues within their respective departments.

Another approach is to create a division within an existing department, e.g. an ageing division within a department of health. However, this can lead to a focus on issues related to the primary activities of the host department: for example, emphasising health issues to the detriment of labour market policies.^{vii}

In line with government positions on children, there has been a growing focus on commissioners, rather than dedicated ministerial positions. In 2006, Wales introduced a Commissioner for Older People.^{viii} The Commissioner's role is to ensure that the interests of people aged 60 and over are safeguarded and represented. The Commissioner is a source of information, advocacy and support for older people in Wales and their representatives. A Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland will be appointed in NI in 2011.

Several governments have dedicated committees to review and make recommendations on ageing issues and policy. The United States Senate has a permanent Special Committee on Ageing, established in 1961. Singapore established a Committee on Ageing Issues in 2004 to report on the ageing population. China has two bodies contributing to policymaking on ageing – a China National Working Commission on Ageing and a China National Committee on Ageing. Similarly, Australia has a Standing Committee on Health and Ageing.

Government policies on ageing

This section examines the policies relating to ageing at an international and national level, with particular emphasis on the focus and priorities of these policies.

International level

Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing

The Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing was the first international instrument on ageing, set up to guide thinking and the formulation of policies and programmes on ageing. It was endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1982.^{ix} The Vienna model was one of protecting older people and treating them as dependent on society.

Twenty years later, the updated Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) was the first international agreement that specifically recognised the potential of older people to contribute to the development of their societies. The MIPAA calls for changes in attitudes, policies and practices at all levels in all sectors, so that the potential of ageing in the 21st century may be fulfilled. Governments have the primary responsibility for implementing the recommendations of MIPAA, which identified three priority directions:

- older persons and development;
- advancing health and well-being into old age;
- ensuring enabling and supportive environments.

MIPAA commits member states to a systematic review of the plan through Regional Implementation Strategies.^x

The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing led to national governments implementing overarching strategies to meet the challenges and opportunities of ageing. The UN Commission for Social Development is in charge of reviewing MIPAA and the second review and appraisal exercise is due in 2012, during the tenth anniversary year of the Second World Assembly on Ageing.^{xi} During the first review, reports were considered from 37 countries, including the UK. ROI did not submit a report for review.

World Health Organization ageing initiatives

The World Health Organization (WHO) has recognised the issue of ageing in its work and has a dedicated section on its website, along with numerous tools and publications, to inform discussion and formulation of action plans that promote healthy and active ageing. The WHO age-friendly cities initiative began in 2006 by identifying the key elements of the urban environment that support active and healthy ageing. The WHO also has a specific director and department dedicated to ageing and life course.

European Union ageing initiatives

Ageing issues fall under the remit of the Social Protection and Social Inclusion section of the Directorate for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of the EU. While there is no overall capability for the EU to act on ageing issues, it co-ordinates and encourages member governments to tackle the challenges posed by demographic change and to prepare for the effects of population ageing by focusing on emerging opportunities. EU states are also encouraged to learn from each other and identify what policies work best in combating poverty and social exclusion.

National level

Ageing strategies at the national level are becoming more common as the scale of the demographic challenge becomes apparent. Strategies can be introduced to address existing problems on ageing issues or to plan ahead for policy challenges and opportunities in the future.

How ageing is viewed in strategies is an important determinant of government action on and toward older people. For example, older people can be viewed as dependent on friends, family and society, which leads to ageing strategies being developed which focus on how older people are cared and provided for. However, older people are generally healthier, more active and more able than ever before, leading to the potential of a more positive construction of ageing. Ageing strategies traditionally focused on social inclusion and care provision, but there is now a shift towards positive ageing. Ageing strategies that take this view focus more on the positive contribution that older people can make to society, through working longer, volunteering, providing unpaid care and supporting families.^{xii}

England

Building a Society for All Ages^{xiii} was introduced in 2009 to implement policies on ageing. It focuses on responding to the demographic shift by making people's later years both productive and fulfilling. There is a strong emphasis on working across government departments to deliver the strategy. The strategy is rooted firmly in a vision for the future of society based on positive ageing rather than a "care model".

NI

The NI Plan, *Ageing in an Inclusive Society*,^{xiv} was introduced in 2005, and is due to be updated in 2011. The focus of the 2005 strategy is on social inclusion, with strategic objectives on a secure income; health services; secure lives; access to services; equality; and a co-ordinated government approach. Compared to the UK approach, the NI strategy had less of a long-term focus on future generations of older people, concentrating instead on the today's cohort of older people.

ROI

An ageing strategy is underdevelopment in the ROI. An Office for Older People was established to lead this work and a extensive consultation on the key components took place during 2010. The four biggest political parties in ROI have all made a commitment to publish a new national positive ageing strategy.

Comparison

The table below lists 12 common action points linked to ageing issues.

Table 1: Action points from five ageing strategies

	Australia ^{xv}	New Zealand ^{xvi}	Northern Ireland ^{xvii}	Scotland ^{xviii}	England ^{xix}	Wales ^{xx}
Accessible transport	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Adequate health services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Affordable housing options	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Age discrimination	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Community safety and crime reduction		✓	✓		✓	✓
Home care				✓		✓
Rural exclusion		✓	✓			✓
Secure income	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Support for older carers	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Support for older workers	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Technology for older people	✓			✓	✓	
Volunteering		✓		✓	✓	✓

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Implications for the future

The balance between a model of care and dependency in an ageing strategy, rather than a strategy that promotes the economic and social contribution of older people, has enormous consequences and implications. For example, if policies continue which do not encourage older people who are able and willing to work for longer, state pension systems will become unsustainable. One predictive model estimates that median total government spending by the late 2030s will account for 50% of GDP, climbing to 60% in 2050, if no policy changes are made to meet demographic challenges. Median age-related spending will reach 24% of GDP by 2050 with no policy changes.^{xxi}

Wider societal attitudes are also important: research by Age UK shows that 64% in the UK and 44% across Europe see age discrimination as a serious problem, which indicates that there are wider issues to address.^{xxii}

Although the scale of the challenges brought about by our ageing populations is becoming clear, policy-making to meet these challenges has been several steps behind the research. The economic crisis and rise in public debt evident in ROI and the UK have received most attention, to the detriment of analysis of long-term ageing issues. However, the rise in public spending means that ageing strategies and government policy must be forward-thinking. The tables below show how ROI and UK spending on pensions, health care and long-term care for older people as a percentage of GDP is predicted to increase between 2010 and 2050. ROI spending on pensions is set to rise by 3.9% of GDP, health care for older people spending by 5.2% of GDP and long-term care by 0.9%. In UK government spending on older people will rise by 1.4% on pensions, 6.2% on health care and 0.4% on long-term care.

Figure 3: ROI government spending, 2010-50

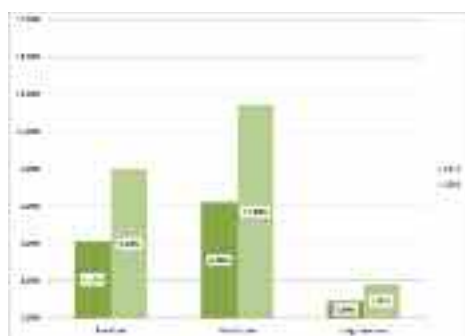
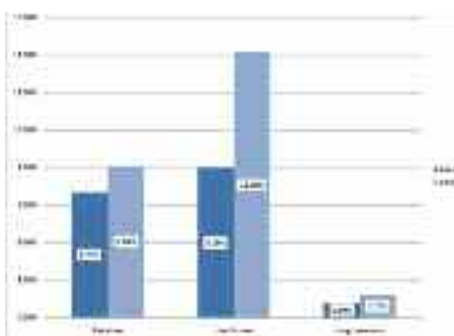


Figure 4: UK government spending, 2010-50



Source: Standard & Poor^{xxiii}

With the predicted rise in spending, it is important that government strategies on ageing harness the contribution of older workers, carers, volunteers to the economy, community and society. For example, one estimate shows that the over-65s made a net contribution of £40 billion to the UK economy in 2010 alone.^{xxiv} This contribution was made through provision of social care, volunteering and family donations. In ROI, it has been estimated that carers contribute over €2.5 billion each year in providing unpaid care alone.^{xxv} Dr Brendan Murtagh of Queen's University Belfast has spoken on this theme, stressing the important role that the social economy has to play in meeting the needs of the growing older population. He found that older people in the UK spend £90 billion per year but much of this money is not recycled within the older population.^{xxvi}

In addition to unpaid care and volunteering, 9.1% of people aged 65 and over in ROI and 9% of people aged 65 and over in NI are still in employment.^{xxvii} This proportion is growing steadily. With the number of people aged 65 and over increasing, opportunities to make a positive contribution through work, caring or volunteering will only grow.

Theories of ageing

"All social policy is based on theory at some level... Everyone involved in policy-making, individually and collectively, is engaged in 'everyday theorising'. They hold articulated or unarticulated ideas about the behaviours and needs of people and what direction social policy could take to address these" (Pierce and Timonen, 2010). Considering the "theories of ageing" can help in the development of ageing strategies and policy. For example, in the area of pensions, theories show that older people should be viewed as a diverse group, and more flexibility should be allowed in working life. This can help to share the risks in providing for a financially secure retirement between the individual and the state.^{xxviii}

In terms of long-term care, theories of ageing can help to assess the fairness of long-term care policies and who is expected to pay for care. Currently, neither ROI nor NI has a long-term care insurance system whereby individuals would be entitled to a level of service or payments corresponding to their need for care. Rather, provision relies heavily on means tests and co-payments.^{xxix}

Ageing strategies influenced by the life course perspective are more forward looking and view ageing as an issue for everyone, not just people who are currently over the age of 65.

Ageing strategies influenced by the life course perspective view ageing as an issue for everyone, not just people who are currently over the age of 65. New research from Demos in the UK reinforces the position that ageing is a unique experience for each individual, which varies according to personal characteristics, experience and outlook. The report states: "Each individual's experience of ageing, including their health, well-being and financial security, will be determined by their life-course in its entirety, rather than by the events of their later life in isolation. Therefore, policy activities to support positive experiences of ageing must aim to build people's resilience throughout their lives, to prevent problems such as poor health or social isolation from arising."^{xxx}

Conclusion

Our ageing populations present both challenges and opportunities in terms of public policy. While spending on pensions, health care and other age-related areas is set to increase, so too is the enormous economic contribution made by older people to societies and economies.

Ageing strategies designed to be forward-looking and best harness the contribution of people in later life emphasise this throughout the life cycle approach and provide the opportunities for supporting older workers, carers and volunteers. It is also important that ageing be recognised in the culture of public policy-making as a major issue across government departments – ageing is an issue for us all not just today's older people.

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