

Brussels, 13 January 2011

## **Eurobarometer survey Active Ageing**

As the 2012 European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations gets off the ground, the European Commission has published an extensive survey on active ageing to understand citizens' views and attitudes towards older people. The survey also covers the contribution of older people in the workplace and society, as well as how best to promote the active role of older people in society.

### **Why is active ageing important?**

Since 1960, life expectancy has climbed by eight years and demographic projections foresee a further five-year increase over the next four or five decades. We are all living longer and, together with low birth rates, Europe's population is ageing fast and it is happening all over the world, except in the poorest countries.

Population ageing presents a number of challenges for welfare systems and public finances. EU Member States spend, on average, more than a quarter of their GDP on social protection. Most of this goes on older people in the form of pensions, health and long-term care. The current economic crisis has left Member States with large public deficits and public debt burden just at a time when the post-war baby-boomers are entering their sixties and starting to retire. The key issue today is how to secure good social protection in an increasingly challenging economic and demographic context.

Active ageing is not just about the participation of older workers in the labour market, it is also about older workers actively contributing to society through voluntary work, including as family carers, or living independently thanks to adapted housing and infrastructure. It is also a central part of the EU's Europe 2020 strategy and its efforts to reach the 75% employment target and to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 20 million by 2020.

### **What are the key results of the active ageing Eurobarometer survey?**

- The majority of Europeans (71%) are aware that the population is getting older, but this is a concern for only 42 %.
- Definitions of 'old' and 'young' differ across countries. On average, Europeans believe that people start being considered as old just before 64 years and are no longer considered young from the age of 41.8 years.
- Most Europeans consider that older people play a major role in society and especially within their families (82%), in politics (71%), in the local community (70%), or in the economy (67%)
- Only one in three Europeans believes that the official retirement age will have to increase by 2030.
- 61% of Europeans support the idea that people should be allowed to continue working once they have reached the official retirement age, and 53% reject the idea of a compulsory retirement age.
- According to Eurostat, the average exit age from the labour market is 61.5 years. However, 42% of Europeans believe that they would be capable of carrying out their current work till the age of 65 or beyond, whilst an additional 28% think they are able to continue their current work until the age of 60-64.

- One third of Europeans state that they would like to continue working after they reach the age when they are entitled to a pension.
- Part-time work combined with a partial pension would be more appealing than full retirement, to two thirds of Europeans.
- 27% of Europeans aged 55 and over engage in activities and voluntary work in a variety of organisations and devote on average 14 hours per month to such activities.
- 36% of Europeans aged 55 and over have, over the past 12 months, provided support informally to other people outside their household. 15% are currently taking care of an older family member, and another 42% have done so in the past.
- The majority of Europeans believe that their country and local area are 'age-friendly'.
- In tackling the challenges of ageing populations, most respondents believe older people's organisations and other NGOs, as well as religious organisations and churches, play the most important role.

### **Being old...when does it begin?**

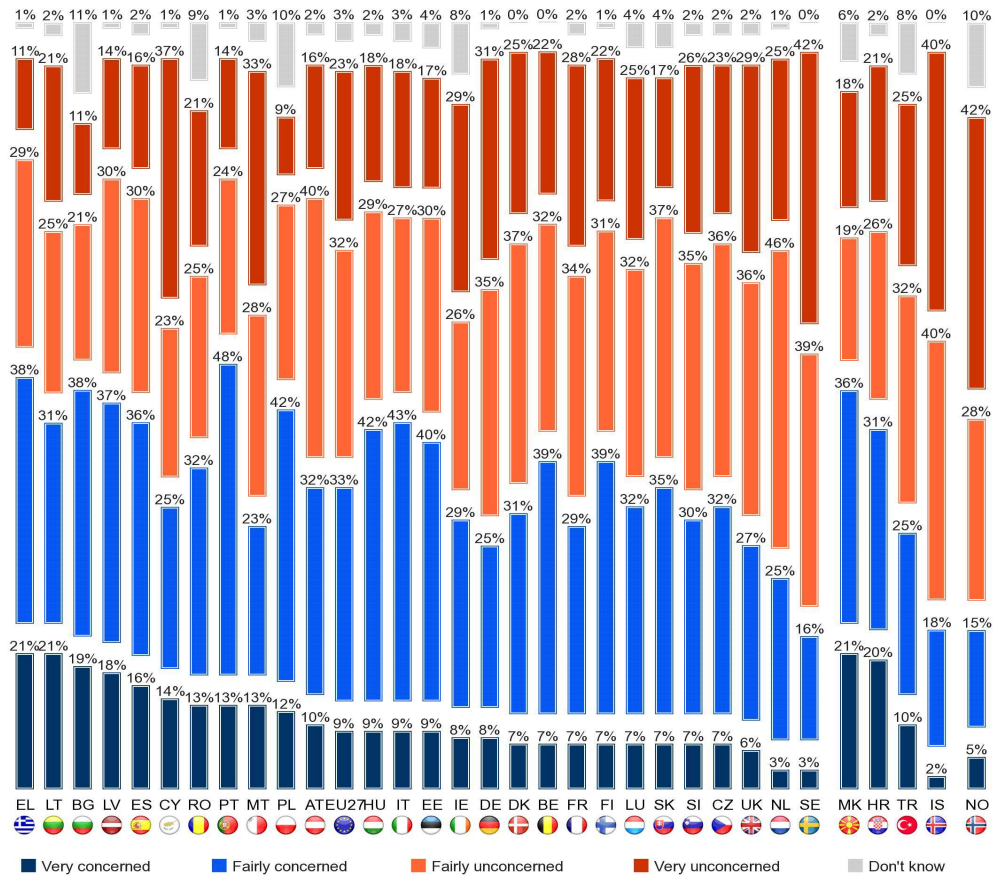
The survey shows that 63.9 is the average age at which one starts being regarded as old, but there is a difference of more than 10 years between countries – 70.4 years in the Netherlands and 57.7 years in Slovakia. Perceptions of old age also vary according to the age of the respondents. As the age of an individual increases, so does his/her views about when old age begins. 15-24 year olds believe that old age begins at the age of 59.1, while over 55s consider that old age begins at the age of 67.1. Women feel old age begins slightly later than men (65 years versus 62.7 years). Across the EU, citizens believe that **a person is no longer regarded as being 'young' at the age of 41.8 years.**

### **The population is getting older. Are citizens really concerned?**

According to the survey, 71% of Europeans believe that, over the next 20 years, the proportion of people aged 65 and over in their country will increase. Over 80% of citizens in the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Denmark, France and Finland expect that the population is ageing (eight out of ten respondents) whereas, citizens in Romania and Bulgaria only think that the proportion of those ageing is 30% and 38% respectively.

Worryingly, only 42% are concerned by this trend. Citizens in Portugal, Greece and Bulgaria seem to feel more concerned than other Europeans, whereas people in the Netherlands and Sweden seem to be least concerned, with only 28% and 19% feeling concerned. 40% of Europeans in the old Member States (EU-15) seem to be concerned in contrast to 49% in the new Member States (EU-12).

QB12. Some people believe that the population is getting older. How concerned are you personally about a possible increase in the proportion of people in (OUR COUNTRY) aged 65 and over? Would you say you are...?

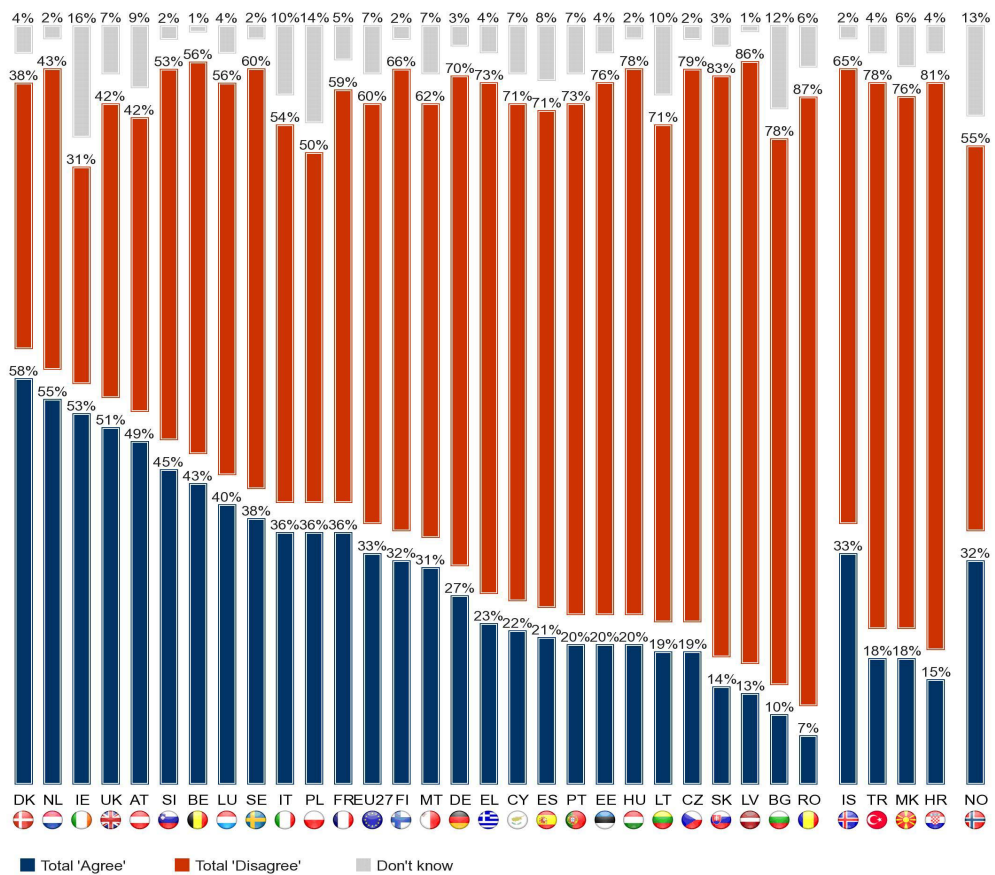


## Do Europeans agree with an increase in retirement age?

Overall, **six out of ten Europeans reject the idea that the retirement age needs to increase by 2030**. This is higher among men, the 55s and over and the well-educated.

The vast majority of respondents in Romania (87%), Latvia (86%), Slovakia (83%) and Croatia (81%) disagree that the retirement age will need to increase in the future. By contrast, respondents in Denmark (58%), the Netherlands (55%), Ireland (53%), the UK (51%) and Austria (49%) recognise the need for the official retirement age to rise.

QB16. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the official retirement age in (OUR COUNTRY) will need to increase by the year 2030?

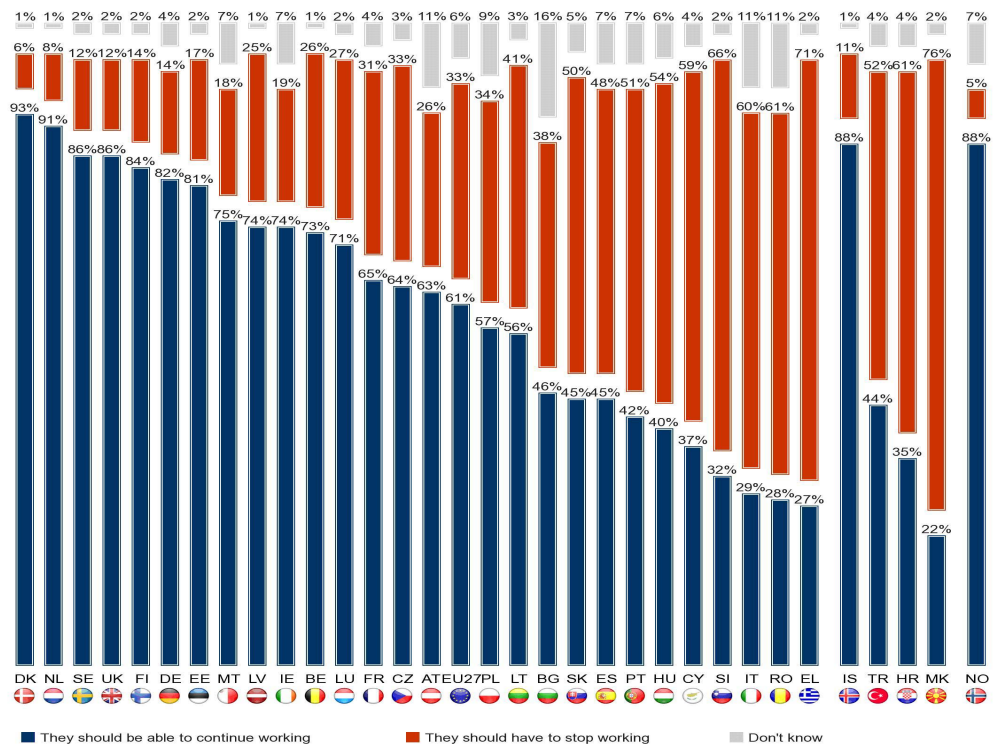


## Should people be allowed to continue working beyond retirement age?

Almost two thirds of Europeans believe they should be allowed to continue working beyond the official retirement age. There are variations across Member States. At one extreme, nine out of ten respondents in Denmark and the Netherlands believe that they should be able to do so, while only three out of ten respondents believe so in Greece, Romania, Italy and Slovenia.

One **third of Europeans currently in work say that they would like to continue working after they become entitled to a pension**. This proportion ranges from over half of the respondents in Denmark, the UK, Estonia and Latvia to just over 20% in Spain and Italy and 16% in Slovenia. Moreover, **the older they get, the more people are likely to want continue working longer**: 41% of people aged 55 and over tend to be keener on working beyond the age at which they are entitled to a pension, in contrast to younger respondents (ranging between 30% to 33%).

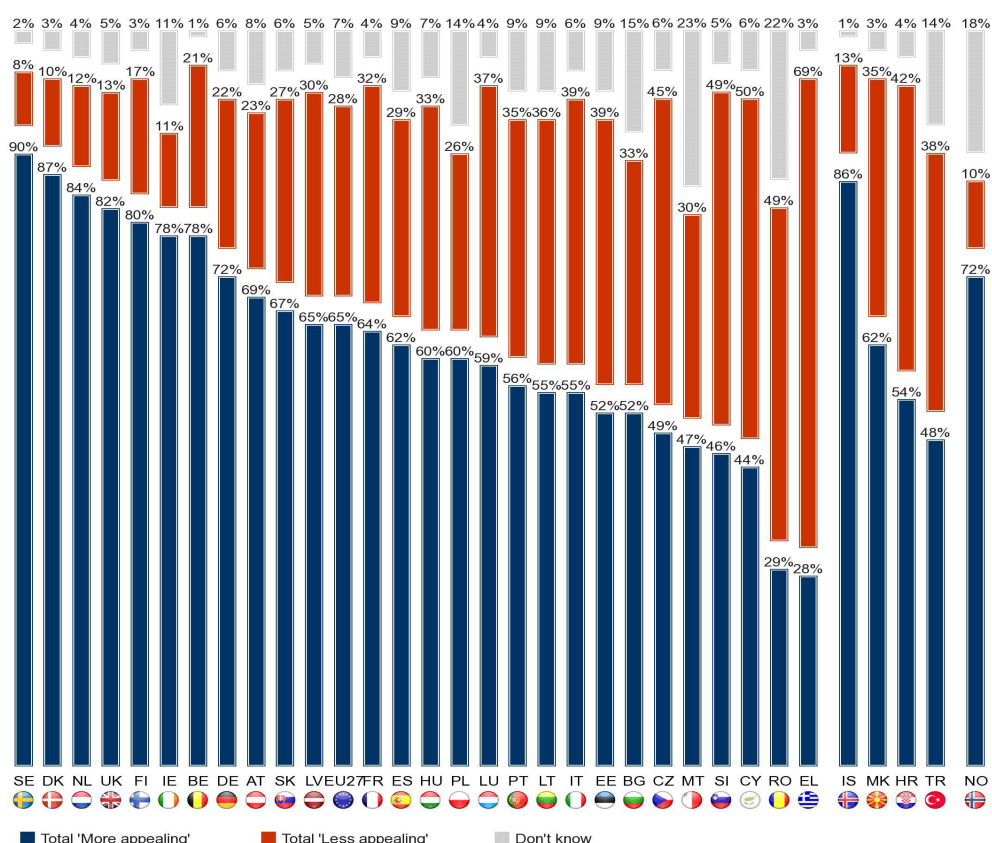
QB19. Would you say that people should be allowed to continue working once they have reached the official retirement age, or should they have to stop working?



## What would encourage Europeans to work after the official retirement age?

Working arrangements seem to encourage people to work longer for example, combining part time work and a partial pension is more appealing than full retirement to almost two thirds of Europeans. Many Europeans consider that the lack of gradual retirement options hinders longer careers. More Europeans (69%) in the 15 Member States which joined the EU first (EU-15) find the idea of a combined part-time work and partial pension more appealing than full retirement – compared with 52% of those in the EU12.

QB23. If it was possible to combine a part-time job and partial pension instead of full retirement, how appealing would this be to you?



## Are Europeans involved in voluntary work?

One in four Europeans engage in an organised way in voluntary work. Citizens in certain countries seem to be more prone to engaging in voluntary work than in others, for example in Sweden (55%) and the Netherlands (50%). In other countries like Portugal (6%) and Greece (8%), organised volunteering could also be less embedded in the culture.

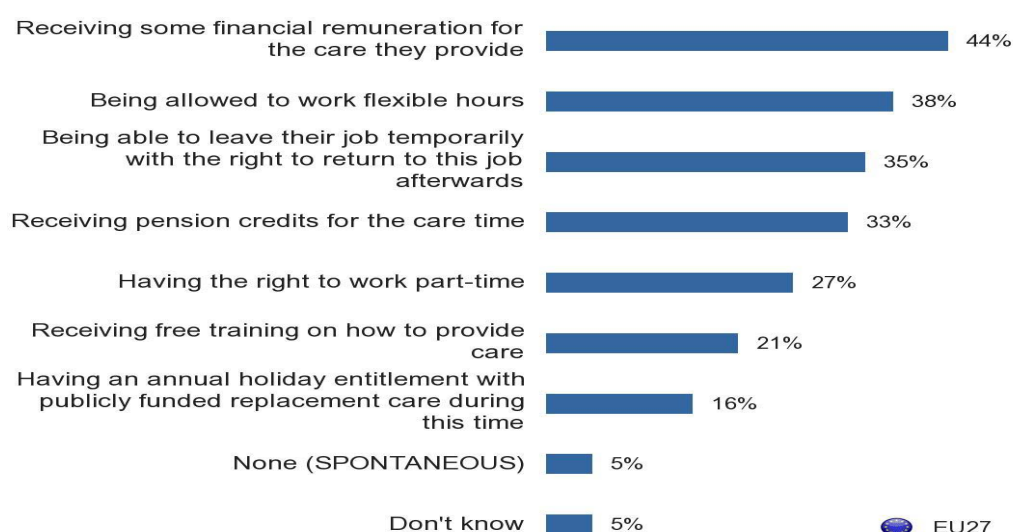
Although 74% are not doing voluntary work per se, 67% of Europeans have performed some sort of 'unofficial' voluntary work during the last 12 months. 15% of Europeans take personally care of an older member of a family and 27% have done so in the past, but over a half (57%) have never done so. Women and those who are aged 55 are more likely than others to have looked after older family members.

## What can governments and society do to help people take care of elderly?

Many Europeans believe that **governments can do more to support carers**, notably by helping them financially (44%), by offering the possibility of working flexible hours (38%), through carer's leave (35%) and by offering pension credits for care time (33%).

Remuneration of carers was most frequently mentioned in Slovakia (65%) and Sweden (61%). Flexible working hours was cited by over half of the respondents in Iceland (57%), Denmark (56%), Cyprus (53%) and the Netherlands (52%). Most people in Denmark feel that being able to leave one's job temporarily would be useful (55%).

QB33. What would be the most useful things the government could do to help people who care for older family members?



## How 'age-friendly' is our environment?

More than half of Europeans (57%) feel that their country is 'age-friendly' and almost two thirds (65%) believe so as far as their local area is concerned.

Younger people tend to feel more positively about the 'age-friendliness' of their countries than older people (60% of those aged 15-24 compared to 55% of those aged 55 and over). Those who live in rural areas describe their local area as 'age-friendly' more often than those who live in large towns.

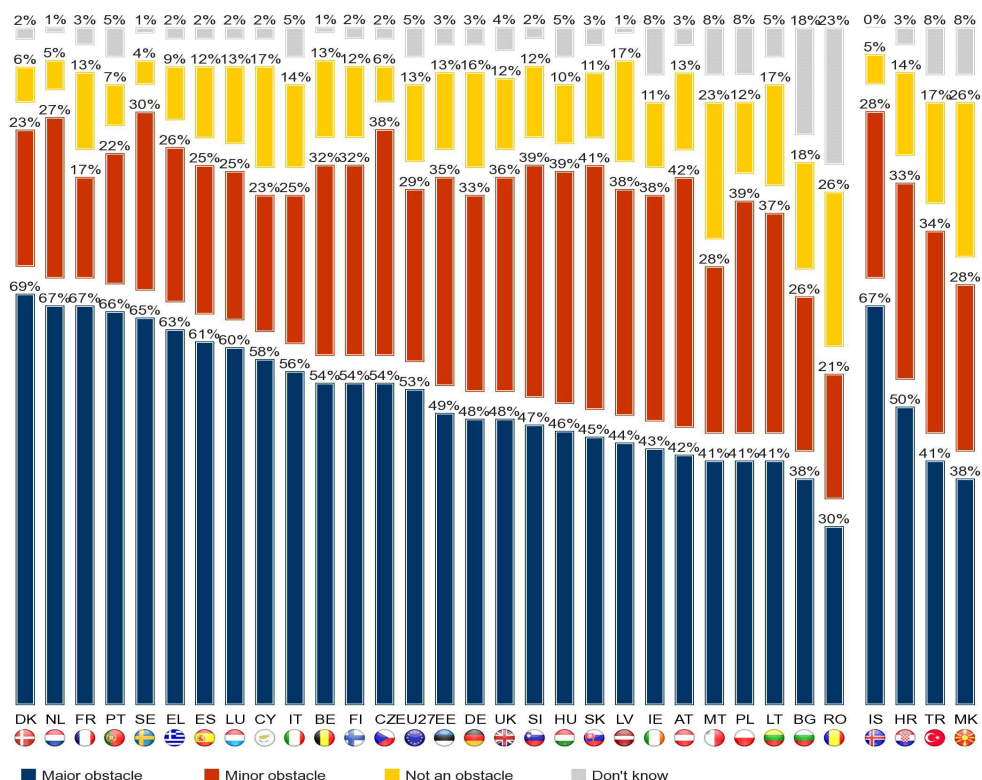
Improvements most frequently mentioned are facilities for older people to stay fit and healthy (42%), better public transport (40%) and roads and road safety (31%). Public areas such as parks (25%), commercial premises (17%) and public buildings (15%) seem to be regarded as less problematic.

## Is technology an obstacle for older people when interacting with public services and businesses?

The use of information technologies by public services and businesses to interact with the public is a major obstacle for older people according to 53% of Europeans. People aged 40-54 and 55 and over believe this more than others (56%).

Nine out of ten of citizens in Sweden, in the Netherlands, in Denmark and in the Czech Republic perceive technology as an obstacle, whilst only five out of ten feel the same in Romania.

QB34. These days, many public services and other organisations use technology such as the Internet or mobile phones to interact with their customers instead of traditional means such as meeting in person. In your opinion, do you think this is a major obstacle for older people, a minor obstacle or not an obstacle?



For more information, see also: [IP/12/16](#)

Special Eurobarometer 378: Active Ageing ([Report and Factsheets](#))

[Flash Eurobarometer report](#) (April 2009) on attitudes to intergenerational solidarity