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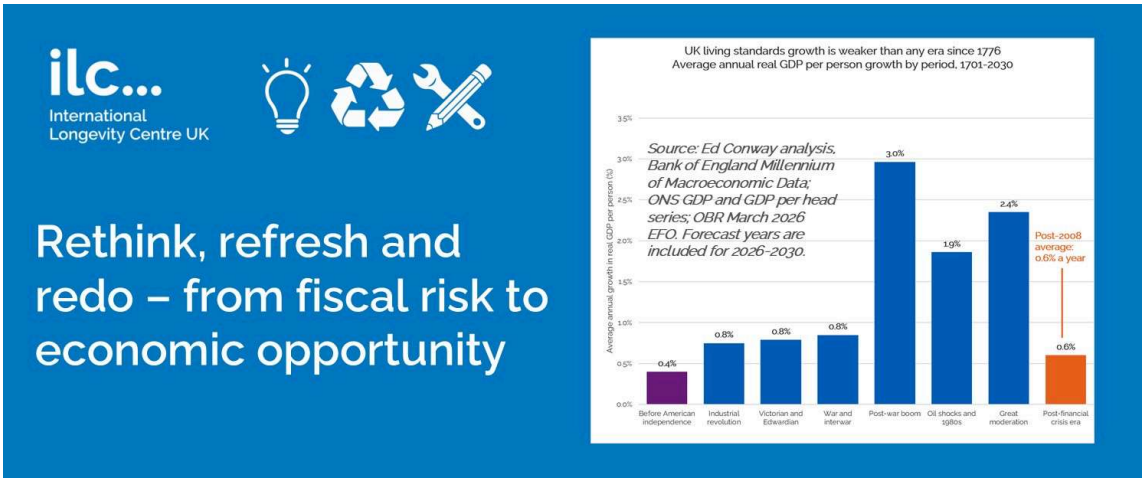
International Longevity Centre UK

Latest news

ILC Friday three

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- Against the tide – keeping momentum on climate and healthy ageing

Rethink, refresh and redo – from fiscal risk to economic opportunity



By 2075-76, if today's policies remain unchanged, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) expects public debt to reach almost 300% of GDP – up from around 95% today, effectively trebling relative to the size of the economy. State pension spending rises from 5% to 9% of GDP over the same 50-year period. Health spending climbs from 8% to 13% of GDP, while adult social care spending increases by half, from 1.2% to 1.8%. Overall, day-to-day government spending rises from 40% to 49% of GDP. By the end of the projection, net interest payments alone account for more than half of the increase in government borrowing – in effect, borrowing to pay the interest on previous borrowing. This is not a prediction of what will happen. It is the OBR's baseline projection of what happens if today's policies stay largely unchanged.

The OBR is careful to say these scenarios are not destiny. Long-term projections are highly sensitive to their starting assumptions, which is why the report tests a range of policy choices rather than presenting a single future. Uprate the state pension by earnings instead of the triple lock, and the projected rise in spending is around a fifth smaller. Uprate non-pension welfare by CPI rather than earnings, and it is around two-fifths smaller. Constrain health cost pressures so they grow no faster than the economy, and almost three-fifths of the increase in primary spending disappears. Each of these represents a rethink of a policy setting that currently runs on autopilot. Each also comes with trade-offs in poverty, incentives and fairness that the OBR is explicit are for politicians to weigh, not economists.

Sky's Economics Editor, Ed Conway, brought together the report and new Bank of England analysis on AI investment to explore the economic challenges facing Andy Burnham's new ministerial team. Drawing on the Bank of England's long-run macroeconomic dataset, built on historical estimates by Stephen Broadberry and colleagues, and spliced with ONS outturns and OBR forecasts, he showed that UK economic growth since the financial crisis is now the weakest sustained period since before 1776 – older than the United States itself. His question for the incoming leadership was blunt: "Does he recognise that and what is he going to do about it?" Ed Conway's message was that the UK's biggest economic challenges are converging. Growth has been historically weak, the population is ageing and the country risks missing out on the productivity gains from AI. Together they make the case for reform more urgent, not less.

Look out for the Work and Pensions Committee's report on the transition to State Pension age (SPA), published tomorrow. It examines pension adequacy and the rise in the SPA, raising difficult questions for Andy Burnham's ministerial team about fiscal sustainability and fairness within and between generations. ILC's Deputy Chief Executive, Ben Franklin, gave oral evidence to the inquiry, warning that the drive for a leaner pensions system carries its own risks. "A really sustainable system could also

leaner pensions system carries its own risks. "A really sustainable system could also undermine and limit fairness," he told the Committee. That is the tension the OBR's spreadsheet cannot resolve on its own. Fiscal sustainability and fairness do not always pull in the same direction.

The Health and Social Care Committee's latest report also presses Baroness Casey's Commission on adult social care to refresh its own timetable. Phase two recommendations are not due until 2028 – a date the Committee and others have warned would miss the 2027 Spending Review entirely and land in the middle of the run-up to a general election. Minister Stephen Kinnock told the Committee he disagreed with the Chancellor and the Prime Minister on the timing and wants it brought forward.

Baroness Casey made the same point herself this week, telling local government leaders at the LGA conference in Bournemouth that "delay is not an option", ahead of a national conversation she plans to launch this summer on what social care should cover and what people should expect from the state in return. With the OBR projecting social care spending to grow at almost the same rate as state pension spending over the long term, bringing that timetable forward could make the difference between reforming the system while there is still fiscal room to do it, and reforming it after that room has gone.

Three reports, and three things need to happen: redo the growth numbers, rethink how we support longer lives and refresh the timetable for reform before the money and the moment both run out. But the prize is not simply lower public spending. It is a healthier, more productive population, stronger economic growth and public finances that become more sustainable because more people are able to contribute for longer. Demographic change is not simply a fiscal risk to be managed. With the right policies, it is one of the UK's biggest economic opportunities.

READ MORE

Beyond the conference hall - what Amsterdam taught us



I am 64 years old. My mother-in-law in her 90s thinks I'm still young. My 33-year-old son thinks I'm pretty old.
Anita Witzier, Dutch TV presenter who opened the Nieuw Oud exhibition

Lyndsey Gorely, ILC's Head of Operations, spent part of this week standing in front of a photograph in an Amsterdam gallery. The exhibition, Nieuw Oud, was curated by ILC Netherlands' Professor Tineke Abma, Director of Leyden Academy on Vitality and Ageing, whose new book of the same title brings together portraits that challenged familiar stereotypes about later life. It was a fitting way to begin a week spent asking how societies need to change as we all live longer.

ILC Netherlands also hosted the annual meeting of the ILC Global Alliance alongside the 23rd International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics (IAGG) World Congress. Held every four years, the congress brought around 4,000 delegates to Amsterdam's RAI Convention Centre. Colleagues travelled from across our global network, including Singapore, South Africa, India, China and Czechia.

We rarely have the chance to sit together in one room. When we do, we make the most of it. Some of the best conversations happened away from the lecture theatres, in galleries, corridors and coffee queues.

That is what makes IAGG unusual. Where else does an immunologist end up talking to a sociologist studying care systems, or an expert in musculoskeletal health share ideas with someone designing age-friendly cities? The disciplines mix in a way that rarely happens elsewhere. The formal programme matters, but so do the conversations between sessions.

We were there to contribute as well as listen. As part of an ILC Global Alliance workshop on age-friendly places, we presented our work on the night-time economy. What began as a project in Greater Manchester has become part of an international conversation about how cities can support economic growth while remaining inclusive as populations age. It is a good example of what ILC tries to do: take an idea rooted in one place and test whether it works elsewhere.

We also used the congress to test the next phase of our Healthy Ageing and Prevention Index. Experts from India, Canada, Taiwan and the United States challenged our assumptions and helped shape the next wave of the index, due later this year.

Vaccination was another theme running through the week. Around 200 delegates joined a Pfizer-supported symposium where David Sinclair, ILC's Chief Executive, spoke alongside Professor Stefania Maggi, an Italian geriatrician and epidemiologist, and Professor Jean-Pierre Michel, Emeritus Professor of Medicine at the University of Geneva, about the growing evidence that vaccines do more than prevent infectious disease. They may also reduce the risk of heart attacks, stroke and

prevent infectious disease. They may also reduce the risk of heart attacks, stroke and possibly dementia. Effective vaccines already exist. Getting them to the people who would benefit is the harder problem. A Sanofi-supported dinner contributed to a new consensus statement on healthy ageing, while a breakfast session gave us the chance to test emerging policy ideas on respiratory illness with an informed and critical audience.

Evidence alone rarely changes policy. Part of our role is helping researchers move good science beyond academic journals and into decisions that improve people's lives. That is exactly the gap our forthcoming Research Impact Collaboration Hub aims to fill. More on that soon.

No congress is perfect. Representation from African countries remained disappointingly small, with registration costs still a significant barrier for many researchers from lower and middle-income countries. The UK delegation also felt smaller than usual, reflecting the pressure on university travel budgets. Health and care dominated much of the programme, while prevention, economics and pensions received less attention than they deserved. AI was discussed, but often without the urgency now shaping debates elsewhere.

The Netherlands has reached a demographic milestone. For the first time, there are now more people aged over 65 than under 20. Around one in five Dutch residents is already over 65, rising to around one in four by 2050.

The exhibition and the congress were, in different ways, responses to the same reality. One challenged how we see older people. The other explored how societies adapt to longer lives. Both were reminders that population ageing is no longer something to prepare for. In many countries, it has already arrived.

MORE ON ILC GA HERE

Against the tide – keeping momentum on climate and healthy ageing

Well-designed, sustainable communities benefit people of all ages – young, old, and everyone in between – whilst also nurturing the environment. At its heart, an effective strategy for managing an ageing society is likely to also be effective for managing climate change and other environmental challenges...
Esther McNamara, former Co-Chair, ILC Global Alliance Climate Committee



ILC Healthy Ageing and Prevention Index (2022)

For much of the last decade, it felt as though the direction of travel was set. Net zero had become part of the mainstream.

That consensus now looks far less certain.

Last year, The Guardian newspaper asked whether 2025 was the year business retreated from net zero. Political change – particularly the return of Donald Trump to the White House – has emboldened businesses and politicians to slow, delay or abandon previous commitments. Major companies have watered down climate pledges, financial institutions have stepped back from climate alliances and the political consensus that once existed has become increasingly fragmented.

The UK has not been immune. The second Trump presidency has altered political debate well beyond the United States. As the Institute for Government has argued, British politics does not operate in isolation from developments in Washington. Net zero has also become a political dividing line here, rather than a shared national ambition, with the challenge framed around costs, fairness and whether Britain's contribution makes enough difference to justify the transition.

Yet stepping back from climate action would also mean stepping back from one of the biggest public health opportunities of our time.

That is something we have been reflecting on at ILC. Our Global Healthy Ageing and Prevention Index includes environmental performance as one of the building blocks of healthy ageing. Cleaner air, safer streets and lower emissions are not simply environmental goals. They influence respiratory disease, cardiovascular health, physical activity and ultimately how well we age.

China ranks just 127th out of 153 countries for environmental performance. It has an enormous distance still to travel.

But during my week in Guangzhou learning about the Silver Economy, China's pace of environmental action surprised me.

The very first question I was asked after arriving was "How many people have electric vehicles in the UK?" More than 60% of new car sales in China are now electric – overtaking the UK, where the equivalent figure is now a little over half. Many people I met spoke about the transition with real confidence, and evident pride in moving quickly.

Count Binface, standing against Nigel Farage in the forthcoming Clacton by-election

Count Binface, standing against Nigel Farage in the forthcoming Clacton by-election, has one tongue-in-cheek manifesto commitment: to make water company bosses swim in Britain's polluted rivers until they are clean again. It is, of course, satire.

Except something remarkably similar has happened in Guangzhou for years. For more than two decades, the city's mayor has joined thousands of residents in the annual swim across the Pearl River. The tradition began as a public demonstration of confidence that the river was becoming cleaner and has continued as a highly visible symbol of civic accountability.

Hotter summers increase illness and deaths across the population, with the greatest risks falling on older people, young children and those with underlying health conditions. Poor air quality contributes to chronic illness. Floods disrupt health and care services. At the same time, healthier, greener places encourage people to walk, cycle and remain active for longer. They are two sides of the same challenge.

The ILC Global Alliance Climate Change Committee wants to help refresh that momentum.

On Thursday 30 July, from 12.30pm to 1.30pm BST, the ILC Global Alliance Climate Change Committee, supported through the ILC Partners Programme and in partnership with the Government Actuary's Department (GAD), will host a global webinar exploring the links between climate change and population ageing.

Bringing together experts in health science, actuarial modelling, epidemiology, social research and communications, the discussion will examine how climate change affects health directly and indirectly, how those effects vary across populations and generations and what this means for the health, care and financial systems we rely on as we live longer lives.

Professor Rayne Stroebel, Co-Director of ILC-South Africa, will chair the discussion, joined by Georgina Bedenham, Head of Climate and Disaster Risk at the UK Government Actuary's Department (GAD) and Professor Liat Ayalon, Clinical Psychologist and Professor in the School of Social Work at Bar-Ilan University in Israel.

Do join us and register for the webinar using the button below.

REGISTER HERE

The Friday three newsletter, edited by Emily Evans, ILC's Head of Engagement and Communications, is usually sent out fortnightly.

To keep up-to-date with ILC events throughout the year, please continue to check our website on a regular basis. If you are interested in learning more about our Partners Programme, please click here.

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