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International Longevity Centre UK

Latest news

ILC Friday three

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- EU elections 2024 - what next for the Green Deal?

Reasons for optimism - a step towards taking fun and play seriously



It's hard work keeping track of global observances. The UN currently observes 218 international days, and this number grows every year. But the first-ever International Day of Play this week seems well worth reflecting on.

When we think about planning for an ageing society, a lot of attention is rightly paid to providing safety, health, care, and financial stability to older people. But that doesn't mean we should forget about the fun stuff! Encouraging creativity, physical activity, and social interaction across the life course is also crucial. We need to ensure that, whatever your age, you have something to get out of bed for, whether that's a music festival, an art class, or a walking group.

But stigma—as well as limited availability and accessibility—is still a big barrier to play in later life and means not everyone can make the most of opportunities to engage in fun activities throughout their life courses.

The concept of play in childhood is clearly understood by most, and in most cultures. We subconsciously realise that play is beneficial for children, which is why many of us seem to accept it more readily. But in our teens, the narrative starts to change. We're told to "grow up" or "act our age." However, from the home corner in our nursery class all the way through to rolling dice in our care home, playing is a significant part of the human experience. And perhaps, rather than dismissing the notion of adult play, we should be paying more attention to its benefits at all ages.

Fun and happiness are vital to our wellbeing and a reasonable objective for policy and financial investment, but there's a tendency to see fun as too 'unserious' to be pursued by public policy.

- In 2022, we spent significantly less on fun than in 2012.
- In 2021/22, people in the top 10% income bracket spent almost seven times more than those in the lowest 10% on sports activities.

Not only is fun undervalued, but there is frequently an adverse approach to it. Universities and colleges offering creative or less traditionally academic courses that students enjoy—and which often lead to lucrative careers—are too often derided and dismissed as "Mickey Mouse" degrees. Meanwhile, young adults and those living on low incomes have perhaps for centuries been targeted as irresponsible spenders if they "waste" their time and money on having fun.

Those in ill health face access barriers to fun, while ageism tells older people that play is for kids. Yet play can give those with severe physical and cognitive deterioration—because of old age or illness—moments of real joy, just like they had as children.

Having fun can mean anything, from spending your free time blasting away aliens on your console, to kicking a ball about in the park. And play, in its many weird and wonderful forms, can offer common ground that brings adults together—from chess during the Cold War to English football fans perhaps cheering on Scotland during this evening's Euro 2024 opening match.

We know money makes the world go round, and there's an argument that play needs to be taken more seriously because it can help here, too. Studies, such as research by Portsmouth University, show that being playful can make businesses better, with effects such as reduced absenteeism, greater commitment, more creativity, better team building, and general happiness. And ILC research found that by 2040, older people could be spending 63p in every pound in the UK economy, boosting GDP by 2% every year, if barriers to spending in later life are removed.

We all have different ideas of what constitutes fun and forcing it is not the answer. However, our *One hundred not out* report has numerous ideas of how we can secure our infrastructure for leisure and fun and encourage providers to adapt what they do to suit the needs of an ageing society.

Ikigai is a Japanese concept that means your reason for being. Assessments have been systematised to cover: what you love; what you're good at; what you can be paid for; and what the world needs. If we had a national 'ikigai' movement that values the importance of purpose across our long lives, and if policymakers acknowledged the intrinsic role of fun, then perhaps all of us would start to take fun and playfulness more seriously. An annual day dedicated to play might just be the starting point we need.

If you have a positive story or a solution for long lives, please do let us know via the button below.

REASONS FOR OPTIMISM

Retirement Income Summit 2024 - are you saving for later life?



We had a particularly busy week which is partly why this newsletter is being sent out later than usual. Yesterday, we held our Retirement Income Summit which from the feedback was a great success due to the stellar line up of speakers and chairs who managed to even make pensions policy interesting and the contribution from an engaged and informed audience. We also benefited from M&G's generosity in letting us use their wonderful auditorium and high tech facilities, and from Canada Life's kind support for the event.

Once we've had a chance to send out thank yous, write up notes and upload the recordings we'll share these—and further reflections of the day in next week's Friday three. But, for now, here are some early findings from new research, supported by M&G, that we launched at the event.

The ILC and M&G commissioned a YouGov survey of over 2,000 adults, that revealed more than half (55%) of respondents over 25 believe government support for older

generations will decrease by the time today's younger generations reach retirement age.

More positively, faced with a hypothetical £10,000 windfall, there was a strong appetite for savings more generally with almost three quarters (73%) of respondents aged 18 to 24 and half (50%) of those aged 25 to 49 say they would put a portion into savings.

However, less than one in 10 respondents aged 18 to 49 said they would save a portion for retirement (8% for those aged 18 to 24 and 9% for those aged 25 to 49). In comparison, a third (31%) of those aged 50 to 64 would save a portion for retirement.

The YouGov survey represents just part of ILC's *Strengthening the intergenerational contract* project, supported by M&G, which seeks to explore people's perceptions and experiences of intergenerational inequalities, with a view to identifying solutions that will help strengthen the intergenerational contract and support the wellbeing of all generations.

We will cover more of these early findings in next week's newsletter but you can read the full snapshot summary report via the button below.

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European Parliament elections 2024 - what next for the Green Deal?

When the last European Parliament elections were held in 2019, a "green wave" saw climate-focused politicians winning seats across the continent. In the years that followed, the EU approved a European Green Deal, with goals to cut emissions by 55% by 2030 and reach net-zero by 2050. But what might the 2024 results cost this progress?



Last weekend saw a mammoth election across the EU – elections took place in all 27 member states, with over 350 million eligible voters casting their ballots for the 720-seat European Parliament.

Notably, this was the first European Parliament election since Brexit. As results trickled in, it was soon evident that the biggest gains were for right-leaning parties. While the centre-right European People's Party is set to increase its seat share and become the biggest bloc in the Parliament, the pendulum has swung further towards those who are more critical of the EU.

This has come at the expense of those on left-leaning and centrist parties. The biggest losers were Renew Europe and the Greens, set to lose 21 and 18 seats respectively (although final results are yet to be calculated). This highlights a real

shift in voter thinking, given the Greens' exceptional performance in 2019 off the back of growing concerns towards the climate emergency and Greta Thunberg's introduction to the political stage.

Yet as Harold Macmillan once said: "Events, my dear boy, events." And the political events over the past five years have dramatically changed European politics. COVID-19 and the ongoing war in Ukraine have put huge financial strains on the pockets of ordinary Europeans, who have suffered the consequences of post-pandemic inflation and Russia's invasion sending energy prices soaring.

Convincing the electorate of the benefits of green policies and collective European action was always going to be difficult. The economic struggles of individuals in Berlin, Paris and Rome are going to seem far more important than the green policy ambitions of policymakers in Brussels or Strasbourg. And, like politicians, us voters can be rather short-sighted—failing to link climate change to the likelyhood of increased migration, for example.

Since 2019, the EU's environmental performance has significantly dropped too, possibly reflecting the current lack of willpower expressed by the electorate. The ILC's Healthy Ageing and Prevention Index finds that the EU's environmental performance has fallen by 13.3 points from 72.8 in 2019 to 59.5 in 2022. Not only has environmental health fallen, but population health has taken a knock too – healthy life expectancy is down by 0.2 years, as is overall life expectancy. This doesn't seem like much, but that's 2.4 months taken off the average EU citizen since 2019.

Addressing the social, economic, environmental and health challenges in an ageing Europe is fundamental to securing longer, healthier and happier lives. These European Parliament elections have shown a shift in attitude towards politics, with those on lower incomes and in poorer health more likely to vote for those on the right, or not engage in politics at all. The EU needs to address this political apathy and find solutions that empower people and allow them to benefit from longer lives.

The ILC Europe Network convened its members, academics, policymakers and health industry stakeholders in March to find solutions to address the challenges facing an ageing European society. Ahead of the elections last week, the Network launched its policy priorities for the 2024-29 European political cycle, calling for more action on:

1. **The longevity dividend:** We need to support older adults to participate in the labour market and retail economy.
2. **Healthy ageing and prevention:** We need to keep people living healthier for longer and prevent ill-health.
3. **Stronger communities:** We need to strengthen our communities and ensure they work for people of all ages.

Over the next five years, the ILC Europe Network will continue to engage with the European Parliament and other EU policymakers to ensure that Europe's ageing population and demographic change is addressed through meaningful policies that ensure longer, healthier and happier lives. Find out more via the button below.

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