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International Longevity Centre UK

Latest news

ILC Friday three

- Reasons for optimism - paid leave for grandparents
- Going for gold - how does your country perform at healthy ageing?
- Marking time - is there ever a good age to step down?

Reasons for optimism - paid leave for grandparents



This week, Sweden, the country that boasts some of the most generous family-friendly policies in the world, extended paid parental leave to grandparents. A couple with a child born in Sweden can now transfer up to 45 days (90 days for single parents) of their generous 480 day paid parental leave to the child's grandparents.

Yet, here in the UK, returning to work after having a baby is prohibitive for many families due to the extortionate cost of childcare. On average parents spend £160 a week to secure a part-time childcare place for a child under two years, according to Coram's Childcare Survey 2024. At over £7,500 per year per child, that's a sizeable chunk of the household income – and still leaves sizeable additional costs or a difficult juggling act if you need or want to work full-time.

Our childcare system is one of the most expensive in the developed world, with prices now double the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average. Many parents – usually mothers – feel compelled to leave the workforce to raise their families thus perpetuating the gender pay gap.

The evidence shows that many UK parents already lean on their own parents for childcare. According to a 2023 survey by SunLife, 53% of grandparents provide some form of childcare during the working week, collectively saving an estimated £96bn in nursery and childminder fees. However, this approach is costly for grandparents who often spend around £80 a week and often need to give up their own jobs or reduce their hours to care for grandchildren.

The concept of grandparental leave has been explored in the UK before with the then Chancellor, George Osborne in 2015, announcing the extension of shared parental leave and pay to working grandparents but in 2018, following a protracted consultation, the plans were shelved.

Some employers, like Saga, have begun to offer limited leave for grandparents, but these initiatives are few and far between. UK employers could do more by encouraging flexible working, providing on-site childcare, and offering enhanced parental leave packages. Supporting parents and grandparents in the workplace would benefit employers too, with numerous positive impacts on business performance.

Ultimately, the UK needs to shift its cultural perspective on parenting. With few fathers taking shared parental leave, raising children is still predominantly seen as women's work. This narrative must be challenged to progress towards shared parenting responsibilities. Improving and simplifying the UK's parental leave system would help – Sweden, by contrast, is much more appealing allowing parents 80% of salary for 390 days.

Some proposals in the King's Speech this week, such as free breakfast clubs in primary schools, will help reduce costs for UK parents but more is needed. While not all grandparents will want to sign up to caring for their grandchildren, even if paid and not all parents have the safety net of supportive, healthy parents of their own living close by. But providing it as an option would better reflect the reality of parenting in 2024 – and, perhaps, Sweden might give the new government some food for thought.

REASON FOR OPTIMISM

Going for gold - how does your country perform at healthy ageing?



Going for gold
How does your country perform when it comes to healthy ageing?

With Paris hosting the 2024 Summer Olympics, there is an opportunity to engage with global policymakers on healthy ageing and the importance of physical activity and preventative health measures. Through our Going for gold project, we have reframed the idea of healthy ageing, using the Olympics as a conduit to ask if healthy ageing and prevention were Olympic sports, who would win?

To answer this, we have produced a "Healthy Ageing Medal Table" that ranks countries and territories on eight different healthy ageing disciplines – described as if they were 'sporting' categories:

- **Jab-elin:** how well nations perform on coverage across five childhood immunisation programmes.
- **Archery:** how well nations perform on meeting WHO immunisation targets for measles and influenza (flu).
- **Prevention Triathlon:** how nations score on the prevalence of three lifestyle circumstances related to prevention (diet, diabetes and tobacco use).
- **Sport climbing:** how far how countries have 'climbed' the Healthy Ageing and Prevention Index.
- **Race walking:** how well nations perform when it comes to physical activity.
- **Marathon:** how well nations perform on healthy life expectancy.
- **100m sprint:** nations with the most centenarians as a percentage of their population.
- **Relay race:** how economic and political blocs perform on the ILC's Healthy Ageing and Prevention Index.

Our final report examines the data from the Table. We find that:

- Despite their ageing populations, Japan and South Korea do best when it comes to healthy ageing, with two medals each and several top 10 finishes.
- Smaller nations such as Niue also win two medals despite having a population of just 1,600 people. Monaco also wins gold with a population of around 40,000.
- African countries dominate the medal table thanks to their higher levels of physical activity, improvements made on the Index, and lower prevalence of tobacco use and diabetes. Botswana wins gold for climbing 24 places on the Index since 2019.
- European countries perform better on healthy ageing metrics such as immunisation, with Denmark, Hungary and the UK each winning medals for achieving high vaccination coverage.

To celebrate these achievements, we awarded medals to delegates from the best-preforming countries and territories at a special awards ceremony in Paris.

This project has been financially supported by Sanofi. You can read the full report find out how your country performs via the button below.

READ MORE

Marking time - is there a good age to step down?

> *"I want a better world. One that offers more options than "step up" or "step down." One that doesn't impose false binaries — employed or useless, competent or incapacitated, "independent" or burden — onto the messiness and ambiguities of being human."*
> Ashton Applewhite, 3 July 2024

We are obsessed with age. But does anyone really care, as the media seems to do, that Gareth Southgate, the outgoing Head Coach of England's football team, is 53 or that the US gymnast, Simone Biles, is 27? Probably not. Perhaps more legitimately, we marvelled at Spain's Lamine Yamal's prowess at "just 16" because of his composed confidence – rather than simply admiring his football skills which would be astonishing regardless. And since Joe Biden's faltering performance in a TV debate at the end of June, the clamour for him to step down due to his "age" has been deafening. This narrative is in stark contrast with that around his competitor, Donald Trump, a mere three years younger – and even more so now after the shocking and tragic events of last weekend.

Our feelings and prejudices around age are complex - and impossible to do them justice in this short piece. But last Wednesday ILC's Chief Executive, David Sinclair, was part of a Radio 4 discussion on these issues. The Moral Maze's producers posed the questions *"Are the elderly blocking the young if they cling on to power and influence? Is it pride that keeps elderly people in powerful positions, a sense that they are irreplaceable, an unwillingness to give up something that defines them and take on another role. What's the morality of stepping down?"* Even media organisations that pride themselves on inclusiveness, frequently use the often 'othering' label "elderly" with all its implications of frailness.

David Sinclair argued *"I think at the heart of it, is that we have not addressed ageism"* referring to the analysis of millions of Harvard implicit association tests (IATs) which show minimal change in US attitudes to age over the last decade unlike for sexuality, race and sex. The researchers estimate that while for sexuality, race and sex, bias will turn to neutrality very soon, it could take 150-200 years until we reach age neutrality. The same goes for ableism and bias against disability.

He argued that *"we're completely patronising to older people in not actually saying to people, look you're not capable of doing the job anymore, you need to step down. We need to be honest with people of all ages about what they can do."* But while agreeing that society was stacked against people under 40 who currently hold just 4% of the UK's wealth, David said their housing or economic challenges won't be addressed "by *firing perfectly capable people"* and that *"mandatory retirement ages are daft in a world where we have a huge shortage of skills"*.

In 1891, David Frederick Schloss contested it's a fallacy that jobs are finite and arguably if people work for longer, they tend to spend money, they create demand in the economy, which plays a role in creating jobs. There is increasing evidence to show that diverse, mixed age workplaces are the most productive – and that access to learning and opportunities or being in good health are the limiting factors, not age.

And back to the future of the US Presidency. On Biden, Ashton Applewhite recently wrote, *"It's easy to come up with reasons why he should* [stand down] *…One is hubris. Biden's intransigence fuels the stereotype of the selfish older who refuses to yield to his successors…Another reason is competence. Age slows. Biden's lapses have become more frequent. During the debate, he was occasionally incoherent."* But while she felt that this ought to disqualify him, she pointed out that *"Trump is incoherent too"*. Arguing that rather than better candidates – few seem willing to do the job anyway – what we need instead is a different approach.

At the ILC we too are obsessed with age – and ageing – but positively and on a population rather than an individual level. In fact we would agree with Ashton Applewhite who in her blog on Biden concludes, *"I want a better world. One that offers more options than "step up" or "step down." One that doesn't impose false binaries – employed or useless, competent or incapacitated, "independent" or burden – onto the messiness and ambiguities of being human"*.

To hear Ashton at ILC's inaugural Greengross Lecture on a world without ageism please click here. And you can listen to David on "The Morality of Stepping Down" via the button below.

LISTEN HERE

During July and August we will be sending this newsletter out every fortnight rather than weekly. Your next Friday three will arrive on 2 August 2024.

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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