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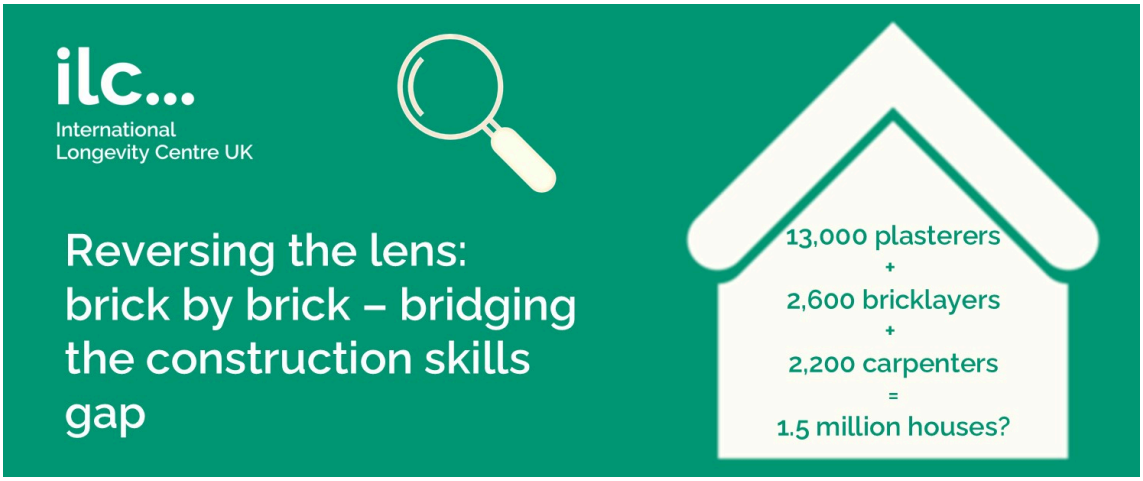
International Longevity Centre UK

Latest news

ILC Friday three

- Reversing the lens - brick by brick, can the skills gap be bridged?
- Sharing and caring - what's the impact of prosocial behaviours on happiness?
- ILC update - some of our recent work and upcoming events

Reversing the lens: brick by brick – can the skills gap be bridged?



Alongside a gloomy economic forecast and the serious negative impact assessment of the welfare cuts, the "spring" in the Chancellor's Spring Statement, delivered earlier this week, was the promised £2 billion investment in social and affordable housing. More homes and improving British infrastructure are key parts of the UK Government's growth strategy. Construction represents around 6% of gross domestic product and underpins growth in other sectors. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) said that the planning reforms included in the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) will lead to 170,000 additional homes built over the forecast period.

However, the UK's construction industry faces a significant challenge: a critical skills gap – so we thought we'd take a closer look.

Recent official figures reveal a concerning 38,000 unfilled construction vacancies for the period December 2024 to February 2025. The sector has historically faced challenges in attracting and retaining skilled labour and is reliant on contractors and subcontractors. The industry struggles with diversity, particularly in gender representation. This limits the potential talent pool and makes it even harder to attract new talent.

Consider the current skills landscape: the latest official data showed that in 2022 there were approximately 2,600 people who met the skills requirements for bricklayers, 2,200 for carpenters and joiners, and 13,000 for plasterers. All of this is compounded by an ageing workforce and fewer younger entrants. Many skilled workers are already nearing retirement age. The Construction Products Association projects that 25% of the construction workforce (500,000 employees) will retire within the next 10 to 15 years.

This makes the Government's ambition to build 1.5 million homes – at a rate of 370,000 a year – appear insurmountable. However, to ensure the construction industry has the capacity to deliver the plan to get Britain building, the Government has committed a £625 million package for construction skills, expected to provide up to 60,000 more skilled workers during this Parliament.

But what more is needed to bridge the gap? Importing skills is one solution – but such an approach is politically unpopular and potentially unsustainable. Should we be so reliant on traditional skills such as bricklaying in the construction industry? Possibly not. Speaking at the New Statesman Igniting Growth conference this week, Mike Reader MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Infrastructure (APPGI), commented, *"I don't think we have a skills problem – we have a methodology and productivity problem."*

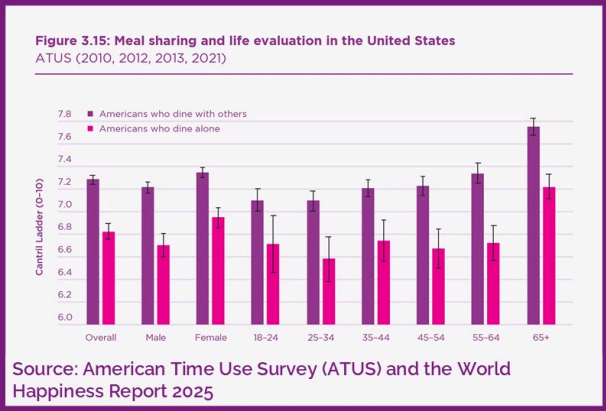
The ILC has long argued for a comprehensive workforce strategy that looks across the whole economy. We can't keep plugging the gaps as issues arise from sector to sector. Whether it's construction or care workers, we must ensure we create quality jobs that people can – and want to – stay in. This means supporting healthy

jobs that people can – and want to – stay in. This means supporting healthy workplaces, supporting carers and creating flexible conditions that suit people's needs. We need to remove barriers to people returning to work – whether following time out caring, dealing with a health need or taking parental leave. And we need to consider the role of technology and automation in addressing labour market gaps.

The good news is that Sir Charlie Mayfield – appointed by the Secretaries of State for Work and Pensions, and Business and Trade in November 2024 to lead the independent Keep Britain Working Review – is very clear on this. He's said, *"It is already evident that tackling this issue will not be achieved by small changes. It requires system change."* Let's hope, this time, the Government listens.

READ MORE

Sharing and caring - impact of prosocial behaviours on well-being



Not only do we find sharing meals and dining alone to be important predictors of wellbeing compared to income and employment, but in many cases, they seem to be even more so.
World Happiness Report 2025

The International Day of Happiness was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2012 and is now celebrated throughout the world on 20 March. Every year on this day, the UN publishes its World Happiness Report, which ranks countries by their happiness levels using wellbeing data from over 140 countries.

There is a lot to unpick in this year's report and, while the top-ranked countries have remained much the same since before the pandemic, this year there has been more change. All five Nordic countries are in the top ten, with Finland taking top spot for the eighth consecutive year. Costa Rica and Mexico both are in the top ten this year. The report states that *"Latin American societies, characterised by larger household sizes and strong family bonds, offer valuable lessons for other societies that seek to enrich relational satisfaction and improve overall happiness metrics and research approaches."*

While much of the media coverage in the UK focused on how our position in the table fell from 20th to 23rd place, the research showed something more interesting that we have some control over – namely, that happiness correlates not just with levels of wealth, education or even material security, but specifically with a shared belief in the kindness of strangers. Far too many of us are overly pessimistic about the benevolence of others. For example, when wallets were dropped in the street by researchers, the proportion of returned wallets was far higher than people expected. And in the happiest countries, both the expectation and reality of returned wallets are significantly higher than in less happy places.

The 2025 report also highlights the significant role of social interactions in wellbeing. Sharing meals with others is strongly linked to higher happiness levels. However, in the United States – whose position in the table has fallen one place to 24th – the number of people dining alone has increased by 53% over the past two decades, correlating with decreased happiness.

Countries exhibiting higher levels of prosocial behaviour, such as generosity and volunteering, tend to have lower rates of 'deaths of despair', including suicides and substance abuse-related fatalities. This suggests that fostering community support can mitigate such adverse outcomes.

This year's report also highlights that, in 2023, 19% of young adults worldwide reported having no one to count on for social support – a 39% increase compared to 2006. Each year, an additional 0.1% of young adults report not having anyone they can count on. This may seem negligible, but globally it represents 1.7 million more young adults each year reporting they have no one to rely on. Such a trend raises concerns about growing social isolation among younger populations.

According to the report, the decline in happiness and social trust in Europe and the US explains a large share of the rise in political polarisation and anti-establishment votes. Therefore, it is in the self-interest of governments everywhere to look at ways of supporting social connection among their populations.

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Happiness is key to healthy ageing, which is why the ILC's Healthy Ageing and Prevention Index includes happiness as one of six indicators ranking 153 countries on how well they prepare for long lives. We are currently conducting further analysis on the Index and will launch our new findings alongside the World Health Assembly in Geneva on 20 May 2025. If you would be interested in attending, please click the button below.

MORE HERE

ILC update - some of our recent work and upcoming events



HIV and long lives: A global prevention provocation

With recent reports highlighting the severe impact of aid cuts on global HIV treatment, our dinner discussion last week on how governments can better support people ageing with HIV was timely.

At the dinner, we were lucky enough to be joined by Lord Norman Fowler and Baroness Elizabeth Barker who shared their knowledge and experience working on policy around the prevention and treatment of HIV and AIDs. We presented the initial findings from our research, supported by Gilead, and heard from experts on what solutions Governments and healthcare systems need to adopt to support people living and ageing with HIV.

We'll be continuing this conversation alongside the 78th World Health Assembly in Geneva on 20 May 2025, you can register to join us here.

Lunchtime webinar - Irreplaceable: Adapting to lower birth rates and longer lives Tuesday 29 April, 1.00 - 2.00pm (BST)

Too often, the conversation around declining birth rates is reduced to pulling levers to maintain "replacement rate". This short-term approach risks us potentially sleepwalking into a crisis that will impact all parts of our lives.

Join us for our lunchtime conversation, kindly supported by the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries (IFoA), which will set out how longevity and declining birth rates are the transformational demographic trends of our time. The panel will explore how governments should think differently to make the best of longer lives, and adapt to birth rates as they currently are, instead of what they could be.

Speakers include:

- Professor Stuart Gietel-Basten, Hong Kong University of Science & Technology
- Rina Biswakarma, Global Reproductive Health, University College London
- Dermot Grenham, Council Member, IFoA

You can register for the webinar here.

Work with ILC at party conferences 2025

We will be launching the findings from our brand-new UK Long Lives Index alongside the party conferences. This interactive tool will help us understand how well different regions across the UK support their populations to live healthier, wealthier and more connected lives.

Using insights from the Index, we plan to engage senior politicians and decision-makers at the party conferences, driving urgency around the need to adapt to longer

lives. We are seeking partners for joint activities – such as a fringe event exploring how different constituencies perform on the Index, and which policy interventions make the greatest impact across health, care, work, finance, places and communities.

We invite funders and partners to join us in making this a reality. Your support will help shift the dial on long lives at a critical moment – ensuring we can all enjoy longer lives that are healthier, more equitable and better supported across the UK.

If your interested in working with us at Party Conferences this year, please get in touch via events@ilcuk.org.uk. For more information click here.

MORE EVENTS HERE

The Friday three newsletter is generally sent out once a fortnight.

To keep up-to-date with ILC events throughout the year, please continue to check our website on a regular basis.

Please follow us on social media via the links below for our latest news and event updates. Help support these events and our independent analysis. Donate to ILC here.

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