

Chapter 5

Problems and Prospects for Current Policies to Extend Working Lives



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Abstract This chapter condenses several of the key take-away points from earlier chapters on empirical, theoretical, and policy issues elucidated in Part One and provides readers with additional context to consider in their understanding of gender and health issues in the country-specific chapters upcoming in Part Two. First, we detail the central problematics associated with ageing populations and the policy initiatives taken so far to extend working lives. Next, we argue that for effective policymaking that would enable extended working lives, it is important to consider the interests of all of the actors affected and to pay attention to different problems that are highlighted by thinking through different levels of analysis—macro, meso, and micro. Further, we challenge the dominant rhetorical frame that policy initiatives undertaken recently have been about extending working lives, arguing instead that most countries' initiatives have been about delaying retirement. This has been embodied by policies very different from those that would be needed to ensure that older workers can remain employed longer in dignified, appropriate, and adequately compensated jobs. Both gender differences and variations in health status differentially empower older workers to continue in employment. Finally, we conclude that research and policymaking that improves understanding and the potential for extended working lives is essential, and that it must be sensitive to variations among differently advantaged sub-groups of older people.

Keywords Pension policy · Delayed retirement · Extended working life · Gender · Health · Older workers · Lifecourse

Introduction

As earlier chapters attest, there are many challenges posed by the changing compositions of national populations. This volume touches on several major issues associated

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Á. Ní Léime et al. (eds.), *Extended Working Life Policies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-40985-2_5

with population ageing and the resources needed to sustain it; that is, the interactions between demographic change and later life work, pensions (whether public or private sector) and income security in old age; and the lifecourses of ageing individuals with different social attributes. Although population ageing is occurring everywhere, efforts to extend working lives take place in national contexts, where demographic processes occur at different rates, and within distinctive economic and labour market conditions, policy legacies, and political climates. Many individual characteristics are routinely associated with unequal outcomes in terms of work and income security at older ages, ranging from race/ethnicity to level of education, as well as gender and health—two of the foci of this book. Further, there are overarching questions: Are the institutions of the 20th century up to the task of meeting the needs of 21st century citizens, given rapid and sweeping demographic, labour market, and political changes? Is there an optimal combination of policies, unrealised potential for effective public/private responsibility and provision, or not-yet-tapped capacity of families that can be identified to provide health and income security for older people? Governments around the world struggle to find the right policy mix to meet the health care and financial needs of older women and men, and are confronted by rapidly evolving labour markets and patchworks of policy changes. The context of such overarching institutional changes as they pertain to extended work and the outcomes they generate are among the main themes of this volume because they are matters of concern and policy action in nearly all nation states and transnational institutions.

Using data from 34 countries (mainly in the EU), research presented in Part Two of this volume documents the main trends in extended working life policies and their gender and health implications for current and future workers. In general, details in most of the country-specific chapters demonstrate that policies designed to ‘extend working life’—that is, policies and practices that support available, adequately paid and meaningful employment within the capabilities of workers (whether physically, or in terms of skills) for later life work—are enacted only rarely. When constructive extended working policies are enacted, as in the Finnish case, there can be positive effects for the health and wellbeing of some older workers, regardless of gender. However, because ‘delaying retirement’ rather than ‘extending work’ policies dominate the political landscapes of most of the country-specific cases considered in this volume, many countries’ current policies have the perverse effects of reproducing (at best) or exacerbating (at worst) gender inequalities and health risks for vulnerable older workers.

The ‘Unaffordable’ Older Population

A conundrum universally agreed is that growing proportions of older people everywhere will increase the need for social spending within limited national resources, regardless of the country under consideration. The growing demands for public spending on pensions, health and social care systems, in turn, suggest sustainability concerns in the context of national budgets. Multi-faceted concerns arising directly

from the growth of older populations occur against an even broader and more complex backdrop. That includes fewer ‘working age’ people to contribute to national tax bases; the transition from industrial to post-industrial and from national/local to global labour markets; large and still growing proportions of women in employment; and, a singular lack of adequate social care options across the lifecycle in most affluent countries. What remains contested, however, is whether earlier pension promises for an ageing population are truly ‘unaffordable’ or ‘too expensive’ for welfare states to honour (see Higgs and Gillear 2010). To date, societies have been able to afford their increasing older populations and changing dependency ratios through changes in labour market participation (particularly the influx of women workers) and efficiencies that have increased productivity at work. Perhaps a more pertinent approach than the one currently in vogue would abandon assertions of unaffordability and instead focus on what policy changes are required to ensure a dignified and adequately resourced later life for older people.

All the foregoing suggests the need for careful policy planning and attention to variation and detail. Yet, as earlier chapters have demonstrated, policymaking around extending working life has tended to encompass simplistic, one-size-fits all approaches that ignore the realities that shape predictably different lifecourses of men and women, or of older people who experience work-limiting poor health or disabled versus healthy individuals. Despite the superiority of carefully designed social policies, the neoliberalist political agenda in many countries has foreclosed progressive action. The transcendence of neoliberalist tendencies in most countries’ political economies has instead seen governments committed to reining in public sector spending, even if it means dismantling traditional social insurance and safety net programmes. This is consistent with beliefs about the limits on state intervention typical of the neoliberal turn and has contributed to tax cuts and deregulation, stagnant wages, struggling national labour markets, austerity and a departure from universalist social policies, all culminating in increased income inequality and insecurity for individuals. It is no surprise that the main idea gaining the most traction and dominating international policy circles is the ‘live longer, work longer’ solution (OECD 2006).

Live Longer, Work Longer

Three intertwined issues undergird the logic of the ‘live longer, work longer’ catchphrase and seem to hint at the potential for the relatively straightforward idea of extended working lives to resolve the mismatch between the demand for and the supply of resources for growing numbers of older people. First is the optimism engendered by the triumph of human ageing—an ‘average person’ in affluent countries now lives a longer, healthier life than at any other time in human history. To enthusiasts for extending working lives, this suggests that there is an increased individual capacity for working longer that can, for most older people, be taken for granted. Second are constraints imposed by attempting to balance state budgets and

manage social policy spending under current national fiscal and political circumstances. Many affluent countries are experiencing economic challenges, including low rates of growth accompanied by national debts and deficit spending, with increasing shortfalls expected for the future. Tax cuts in many countries have led to reduced resources in national treasuries. Inexorable increases in the cost of providing health and pension benefits are linked to the growing tranche of older people in national populations. In light of the apparent disconnect between earlier social policy promises and states' fiscal capacity to meet them (at least in the eyes of extended working life proponents) makes limiting pension promises for current and future retirees seem prudent. A third component of the 'work longer' argument focuses on whether pension systems designed for 20th century demographics and labour markets are suitable for current and future older people. After all, pension systems in most countries were initially designed for the male breadwinner/female homemaker model of industrial economies when life expectancy was significantly lower than it is now, and when larger families (and the assumption of the availability of unpaid caregivers within them) were the norm. Since then, the influx of women into paid work, changes in family forms, and the transformation to post-industrial economies have left most countries with health, social care, and pension systems that have failed to fully 'keep up' with the times. Although many other factors play into the 'problem', these three themes together suggest that the most obvious policy choice should be to keep workers in employment to older ages, delaying the age of entitlement for pensions benefits (and years of receiving them) to mitigate the pressure on national budgets as populations age. Proponents regard extended work as the most obviously desirable solution to the conundrum presented by growing costs associated with ageing populations.

Yet, as Ogg and Rašticová in Chap. 1 have observed, the extended work solution is neither as simple nor empirically as appealing as it appears at first glance. Further, the real world circumstances in the countries where the single prescription of extended work must be applied vary substantially. Krekula and Vickerstaff further underscore several fundamental problems of 'live longer, work longer' at the theoretical level. As they point out in Chap. 2, the imprecise and evolving use of the language that frames policy debates assumes that privileged people and men are representative of the normative experiences implied by the notion of working longer. This has foreclosed important avenues of discussion about extending work for people with much more varied lifecourse trajectories than are acknowledged by policymakers.

Challenging some of the key assumptions embedded in the conflated work longer/delay retirement argument points to the importance of the availability of high quality data for evidence-based decision-making. In the third chapter, Addabbo, Gstrein and Siemieńska discuss some of the untapped potential for policymakers and researchers alike to capitalise on existing data and use various research techniques to tease out the implications of extended working lives for individuals with different social characteristics. Despite the range of datasets Addabbo and colleagues identify, weaving together comprehensive data that could unpack the interconnectedness of women's and men's differing lifecourses (such as employment histories, health statuses and caring responsibilities) in conjunction with representative organisational data (that simultaneously accounts for the practices and preferences of employers) is

not currently possible. In fact, the lack of systematic data about employer behaviour, particularly because so much is proprietary and unavailable to either policymakers or researchers, is a serious impediment to an empirical understanding of how and which older workers could ‘work longer’ and for which particular employers. Quantitative data from representative national and international samples, particularly when from time series data over long periods, have noteworthy utility for understanding the interactions among policy effects, organisational behaviour, and individual outcomes. But representative longitudinal studies are relatively rare and very expensive, and often lack the data to flesh out nuances and distinctions among people’s lived experiences. To supplement quantitative data, qualitative research is also needed for more refined understanding of the influences of family circumstances, employment trajectories, health statuses and caring histories under particular work and pension policy regimes for later life outcomes.

Such data limitations operate in tandem with policymaking that overlooks even the already well-documented (in)capacities of many disadvantaged subgroups of older workers and the precursors to low incomes for many retirees. To restate the obvious, this is especially the case for individuals (mostly women) with heavy caring responsibilities, workers in physically demanding and stressful occupations, people with impaired health and physical capacities, those in precarious and low paid employment, or whose careers have been spent in vanishing industries. Vulnerable workers have the deepest stake in adequate state pensions provided at an appropriate age, because they among all workers have the least capacity to generate employment alternatives. Yet rather than protecting that group best, in most instances the sweeping introduction of older ages of eligibility for pensions without readily available employment for older workers has and will continue to hurt vulnerable sub-groups of older people the most.

The fact is that policies are made (whether lacking data or ignoring it) by building on or departing from existing policy regimes that have established the ‘ground rules’ or starting points for individual expectations and later policy innovations. In confronting similar problems, policy learning can and does occur across regions and nations, which emphasises the value of policy toolkits discussed in Chap. 4 by Duvvury and colleagues. They highlight processes likely to generate good practices, committed to making practices and outcomes more transparent, especially if working longer must be a dominant approach for the future. Combining insights gleaned from data analysis and policy exemplars can provide firmer empirical ground for estimating the effects of policy choices associated with extended working lives, documenting how policies and individuals’ lifecourses and workplace experiences intersect, and developing policies and practices to improve income security in retirement for more people with varied lifecourses and social characteristics.

Paradoxes in the ‘Big Ideas’ in the Debate

There are several paradoxes, some of which are discussed below, that contribute to concerns over outcomes related to the impact of health statuses and gender differences in the extended work debate.

Precurity Versus Flexibility

One woman’s flexibility is another’s precarity. One of the recommendations to employers in the quest to extend working lives is for employers to permit flexible working arrangements for their employees. Focusing on the potential for flexible work to help employees remain employed to older ages, the expectation is that for many workers a range of flexible arrangements—phased retirement, opportunities for part-time work, home-based working, among others—would encourage persistence in the labour market at older ages. However, it is uncertain whether there is sufficient labour market flexibility routinely available, particularly in private sector employment, for good choices about working hours or whether a soft exit from paid work is available for many older workers who would like to take advantage of it. There is another problem at the other end of the flexibility spectrum, which highlights the qualitative difference between flexibility that is chosen, and ‘flexibility’ that is imposed. More and more workers in precarious positions must work flexibly if they are to work at all—in seasonal or short-term work, zero hours contracts, or the ‘gig’ economy for example (Standing 2011). They may find incomes and hours from such non-standard employment insufficient to meet their needs, yet be in the only jobs they can find. In the case of workers who want to remain employed, but in non-standard or full-time work arrangements, flexibility for individuals gives them additional resources when they choose to extend work as they approach the end of their working lives. However, some work is so precarious that, while it may benefit the flexible needs of the firms offering it, it actually invokes anxiety and insufficient security and income for the precariously employed (Burnay 2018).

Choice Versus Compulsion

A huge body of literature notes the importance of autonomy for psychological well-being, and certainly having choices about whether to continue working or to stop at older ages are important considerations (Calvo et al. 2009). If individuals extend their working life because a job is perceived as meaningful, interesting, and rewarding (monetarily and intrinsically), choosing to work longer is a positive experience (Ní Léime and Street 2019). In a six-year study of a panel of older Dutch workers, for example, researchers found that both workers who retired voluntarily and those who continued working had higher levels of life satisfaction than workers who were

retired involuntarily, emphasising the importance of autonomy for measures linked to satisfaction with life. The researchers concluded that their study ‘clearly demonstrate[s] that an organizational exit that occurs at the ‘right time’ and on the basis of one’s own volition represents the best case scenario when it comes to the prospect of experiencing late life psychological well-being’ (Hershey and Henkens 2013: 242). In contrast, being desperate to remain in work or become employed at older ages because financial needs cannot be met otherwise is stressful and unpleasant for individuals who have no other choice but to settle for a poor job (Burnay 2018). In terms of extended work, for many individuals being compelled to remain in or try to find any job, even if poorly paid, physically demanding, dangerous, boring, or fleeting, is a recipe for unpleasant compulsion related to extended work (Vickerstaff 2010).

Good and Good Enough Jobs

The job elite—people in stable employment, with good wage and benefit packages, secure positions, and interesting work—have jobs whose bundle of characteristics may be appealing enough to entice workers to remain in the labour force to older ages, or perhaps even to love their jobs so much that they imagine they will never want to leave them (see for example, Dorfman 2002, 2009). Such good jobs are the exception rather than the rule, however. For most workers, the best they can hope for is a good enough job, one that is feasible to perform within their skillset and physical capacities and which can sustain incomes until a later retirement date is reached. The third, implicit category of work is the ‘not good enough job’. Many older individuals have little choice, if they are to be employed at all, but to settle for low quality work—done under adverse or stressful conditions, at relatively low levels of pay, and without certainty that hours or duration of work will generate income sufficient to meet current needs or to enable pension contributions (Ní Léime and Street 2019). Job quality obviously matters critically in the context of extending working lives because raising state pension ages means that many older workers are compelled to work longer in low paid stressful jobs (Hunefeld et al. 2019) because they typically do not have occupational/private pensions which might allow them to retire sooner. This has negative implications for their health and means that many will miss out on any healthy years in retirement, something that many workers believe they are entitled to at the end of already long working lives (Kim 2011; Pond et al. 2010).

Ageism

Extended working life relies on the assumption that employment is readily available to older workers. Yet there is ample evidence that is not the case. Age discrimination by employers is widespread in relation to recruitment, retention and re-employment of older workers (EU-OSHA et al. 2017; Karpinska et al. 2011; Neumark et al. 2015; Russell et al. 2008). This can lead to situations where labour markets have low levels of unemployment generally, but where older workers experience problems becoming

employed or re-employed after a ‘certain’ age (Lahey 2008). When state pension ages are increased and older workers face age discrimination, this can force them into involuntary unemployment. Beyond generic ageism, there is also substantial evidence that age discrimination in the workplace is gendered. In many occupations, employers consider women ‘too old’ at younger ages than men (Clarke and Griffin 2008; Duncan and Loretto 2004; Handy and Davy 2007).

The foregoing are but a few of the paradoxes that beleaguer clarity in the ‘live longer, work longer’ formulation. Other factors that contribute to the myriad relationships among gender, health, and extended working life revolve around the different levels of analysis—macro, meso, or micro—that confound the issues as currently debated. Nonetheless, researchers and policy makers need increased engagement with the complexities involved if they hope either to comprehensively understand the social contexts within which extended work might occur or to optimise extended work policies and practices. Understanding the role of actors at different levels of analysis, and the entrenched interests that inform their preferences can contribute to more clarity as to which policies could be effective, and which seem less likely to work.

Macro, Meso and Micro Perspectives

Debates about working longer unfold very differently for actors with different interests and institutional locations, (transnational institutions, governments, employers, individuals) including the varied perspectives and realities of actual people being required to meet new expectations to ‘live longer, work longer’. How to balance the realities of older citizens’ experiences, the changing structure of labour markets, and the increased demands on social, health and pension systems they represent is far from settled, not least because the debates occur in different national contexts and individual circumstances. For example, at the macro level, transnational actors ranging from the World Bank to NGOs to the European Union and the OECD, weigh in with advice on targets and expectations for extending work in countries within their orbits of influence. The advice on offer is often provided quite generically with a dogmatic commitment to increasing retirement ages—while mainly ignoring the very tangible cross-national, multi-cultural and regional barriers to accomplishing extended work goals without causing genuine hardship among defined groups of older people. National policymakers, responsible for enacting policies to benefit citizens of all ages, must simultaneously attempt to reconcile the fewer workers/shrinking tax base + more pensioners = higher pension spending/budget strain equation, while weighing also how policy choices shape electoral politics. Private employers have very different concerns that shape, at least indirectly, the ageing population/extended working lives/adequate benefit provision nexus, since their activities structure labour markets (Mulders et al. 2014). Differing corporate/private sector concerns on extended work and pensions are no surprise, since corporations have fiduciary responsibilities to generate profits to ensure shareholder investment returns and to expand business, not

to provide social rights. Except in countries such as Poland, France, and Finland, where trade unionism and/or social partnership is still strong, meso level engagement in extending work/delaying retirement is mostly episodic and at the margin of debates. Households and individuals, too, have varying perspectives on the ‘best’ approach to extend working lives (or whether extended work is possible at all), shaped by factors ranging from the age, gender, education, health status and employment conditions of individuals located within the constraints of individual and family resources and national labour markets and policy regimes. There is rarely individual level consultation on the merits of macro level policies or meso level practices that will be applied to improve the employment prospects of older workers (see Chap. 2).

Current policy debates fluctuate in their terminology, whether the frame is ‘extending working life’ or ‘delaying retirement’, an issue to which we return later in this chapter. For now, the starting point of our argument is that conflation of the two phrases as nearly synonymous is based on mistaken assumptions that policies reflecting one concept could be the same for the other—despite very different conceptual connotations of each proposed policy remedy (see also Chap. 2). Treating the goals of delaying retirement and extending work as interchangeable obfuscates serious policy considerations; masks the potential, problems, and inequalities inherent in each approach; and mystifies and muddies important debates that should occur within the ‘live longer, work longer’ construct. After all, ‘extending work’ sounds somewhat more positive than its more negative and less desired ‘delaying retirement’ counterpart. We argue, instead, that treating delayed retirement and extended work as more or less equivalent is a conceptual error, because the goals logically associated with each are different. Acknowledging the distinctions matters, as it is important for researchers to be precise and for policymakers to be more nuanced about policies that so fundamentally affect individuals’ later lives. To be sure, concerns associated with ‘extending work’ and ‘delaying retirement’ overlap somewhat, but they are decidedly not identical.

Take the ‘delaying retirement’ construct and the different interests this particular policy approach encompasses. Delaying retirement is a national social policy choice that imposes new limitations on when individuals are entitled to full state pensions. State-mandated retirement delays are designed mainly to serve state fiscal interests, rather than those of individuals who must either postpone their transition from work to retirement, or suffer permanent financial penalties. As for employing organisations, there is no robust evidence that employers are particularly eager to postpone retirement for most of their employees (see for example Mulders et al. 2014), although the shrinking number of employers still offering defined benefit occupational pensions would also see a fiscal savings via later retirement. The interests of the state do not necessarily align with the interests of the organisations or individuals affected by delayed retirement, providing a plausible rationale for casting the issue more as a matter of extending work than delaying retirement.

In contrast to the ‘delay retirement’ approach, careful conceptualisation of ‘extending work’ requires policies that could actually support individuals, with a wide range of employability characteristics, working to older ages. Effective policies for extending working lives require distinctive approaches that address the realities

of current and future labour markets and the supply and demand for older workers (including especially job opening/skills mismatches), the quality of work conditions and wages, the health and physical capacities of potential older workers, and the willingness of organisations to employ them. Further, effective extending work policies would have to take into account the varied lifecourses of individuals in different types and sectors of employment, the normative expectations surrounding unpaid carework in national cultures, new family forms and structures in which individual workers are embedded, varied socioeconomic circumstances, and the vagaries of localised labour markets.

Despite competing interests among different actors, what has occurred so far in the ‘live longer, work longer’ policy space has been a mainly one-sided exercise of assumed economic imperatives rather than social needs. There is scant evidence that citizens or employers have lobbied governments to enact policies to extend working lives, nor is there much evidence that governments have enacted effective policies that enhance older individuals’ employability, although there have been some attempts to do so in a few countries, notably Austria, Finland, France and Germany (Chaps. 2, and 3; see OECD 2017b). Anti-age discrimination legislation or the removal of mandated retirement ages in several countries could be construed as reflecting the interests and preferences of some organisations and individuals that support working longer. Yet, anti-age discrimination legislation appears to have had little effect on workplace realities and the desire to work longer is concentrated in a relatively privileged (and small) subset of national populations.

Far more important than employers’ and individuals’ preferences in the policy arena have been the actions of macro level actors. Some international organisations have pronounced the unavoidable need for individuals to work longer; others have set targets for achieving such goals (European Commission 2018; OECD 2006, 2013, 2017b). National governments have taken up the ‘work longer’ baton, but mainly by focusing on legislation that raises pension ages and facilitates the trend away from defined benefit pensions to defined contribution retirement savings schemes. This is what defines the ‘delay retirement’ approach. Cross-nationally it is well-developed and pervasive. To the extent that governments have promoted any ‘extend work’ initiatives, they have in most countries been piecemeal, limited, and exhortatory rather than thought-through, comprehensive and mandated (see country chapters; OECD 2017b). The contrasts between the two approaches—delaying retirement or extending work—are discussed in the following section.

Delaying Retirement or Extending Work?

Who wants to delay retirement? The short and most obvious answers are fairly straightforward, but vary across and within different levels of analysis. We also caution that while some interests are obvious and dominate, complexities also abound. Still, at the macro level, most governments are enthusiastic about the prospects of

delayed retirement. Far less is known about the preferences for encouraging delayed retirement among meso level organisations and employers. For example, there may be different perspectives on delayed retirement between public and private sector employers. While public sector practices may be somewhat more transparent, private sector businesses' position on delaying retirement unfolds mainly in a black box. There are a few notable exceptions where companies occasionally champion hiring older people, for example as in Do It Yourself (DIY) stores such as B&Q in the UK, because of the assumed appeal of age-contemporary staff to older customers. At the micro level, many older workers prefer not to be compelled to delay retirement past long-established normal retirement ages (Ní Léime and Street 2019). The job elites—stably employed and highly-remunerated individuals and professionals—may sometimes prefer to delay retirement and remain employed. However, job elites' circumstances are not representative of older workers, whose employment conditions and financial circumstances are very different. Across these three levels of analysis and considering the interests of actors within them, the desirability of delaying retirement varies considerably. Most governments want delayed retirement, but few individuals do. The stance of employers—the key 'brokers' between states and individuals that connect the structures and security of retirement, the experiences of older workers, and the value of pension benefits—is largely unknown (although see Barnes et al. 2009; Mulders et al. 2014).

As mentioned earlier, policies can encourage or require people to postpone anticipated retirement dates. Governments impose new conditions for public pension entitlement, accomplished most directly by raising the age of entitlement for full retirement benefits (incrementally or in a single instance) as in most countries considered in this volume. Many also restrict eligibility for early retirement (either by increasing the age of eligibility for reduced pensions, or by reducing the value of pensions accessed before state pension age, as has occurred in Finland, Greece, Italy or Germany (see relevant country chapters). Retirement delays can also be accomplished somewhat less directly. The indirect approach can include substantially increasing the cost, length or number of contributory periods required of individuals to earn full benefits, as happened in Ireland and elsewhere. It can also occur by giving higher pensions to those who delay accessing their pension (as in over half of the countries considered in Part Two including Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Israel, Poland, the UK and the US), or by allowing workers to combine pensions with paid employment (as in France, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, UK and others). Not all workers experience the effects of delayed pensions similarly. Being compelled to wait longer for a pension is a very different prospect for older individuals who have little to no income in the immediate years before qualifying for a pension, or who cannot find adequate employment in the aftermath of a redundancy, than for the job elites whose work is simultaneously intrinsically rewarding, very lucrative and preferred.

At the macro level and from the perspective of the state, delaying retirement has several perceived advantages. Political contestation aside, accomplishing the policy goal is straightforward. Workers who expected to retire at younger ages (previously established in national pension policies) must wait until the newly mandated older

age is reached. Older pension ages reduce the value of state pension promises to some current and all future pensioners, and raise contributory costs in PAYG systems, at least against the yardstick of previously established retirement ages. Thus, delaying retirement postpones claims on PAYG first tier contributory social insurance pensions, and saves governments money on social pensions paid out of general revenues, unless some expensively unintended consequence like higher health and social care costs come into play. International policy experts, informed by neoliberal principles, claimed that state pension systems were unaffordable and unsustainable. Following their advice to raise retirement ages has saved countries several years of pension benefit outflows, appearing to improve the fiscal circumstances of the state by bringing contribution increases/benefit decreases into play and thus appealing to proponents of ‘unaffordability’ arguments. Further, some governments reduced the value of or eliminated social and defined benefits pensions that had explicitly promised predictable pension income in later life by transitioning to individualised defined contribution pensions. In most places, governments have changed regulations and, in some cases, their own social security systems in ways that have shifted more responsibility for ensuring retirement income away from governments onto individuals.

With rare exceptions, the actions and preferences of employers are an essential conduit to extended work/delayed retirement for most people, but employers’ roles are seldom invoked except tangentially in policy debates and studies on delayed retirement (see Chap. 2). For example, relatively little about employers’ responsibilities is discussed in policy debates concerning delayed retirement or extended work, or is enacted into law. Instead soft policy measures such as ‘awareness campaigns’ and/or codes of practice (non-legally binding) are the preferred mechanisms for employers (OECD 2017b). Neither are employers typically required to take action to make it possible for their employees to delay retirement, nor to hire older workers seeking jobs. There are instances, for example in Italy, Spain and Finland, where employers are given incentives to hire older workers (OECD 2017b) but they are not compelled to do so except to earn the subsidy. Instead, policymakers and policy papers exhort employers to create desirable working conditions to retain, and when possible, to attract older workers through adapted work places, re-training, or flexible work arrangements, but with no requirement to do so. For example, codes of practice which are not legally binding are provided for employers, and employees in Ireland, providing guidance on best practice in negotiating retirement/extending working life (OECD 2017b). The neoliberal turn mentioned earlier has, in most countries, also been a contributing factor to employers converting traditional defined benefit (DB) occupational pensions to defined contribution (DC) schemes, further undermining later life income security for workers with occupational benefits.

Overall, the shift in pension types DB pensions to DC savings has delivered predictably adverse outcomes for many women workers and those with low income or precarious jobs, particularly in the private sector. As employment relations have become more flexible in recent decades, at least some private sector workers have lost occupational retirement plans entirely, with recourse only to individual retirement savings beyond state pensions. Further, depending on the investment achievements

of such individualised schemes—whether occupational DC or individual retirement savings—means that luck-based windfalls are possible in hot markets, and catastrophic losses during recessions, as in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis (Duvvury et al. 2017). In ideal circumstances, DC retirement savings plans may actually have some perverse effects in vibrant markets if delayed retirement is a universal goal, since windfalls can nudge people to retire early when times are good. However, many people (especially women) have insufficient surplus income to contribute to DC or individual accounts and even when they do, they could be desperate to stay in work even during periods of high unemployment, to try to recover from investment losses in periods such as the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis.

At the individual level, the expectation that retirement can or must be delayed doubtless varies by individual circumstances. Previously, at least some could have managed to persist in work until they reached the retirement age established by earlier policies, or could receive bridging benefits until the state pension kicked in by qualifying for disability or unemployment benefits that took health status and employability in the immediate pre-retirement years into account. However, for many individuals, remaining employed for the extra years now required in most countries may be impossible. Recourse to disability and unemployment benefits has been severely restricted in many countries (OECD 2017b) despite the extent of layoffs and redundancies that pushed people out of jobs, relegating some to a status of ‘not working, not retired’ and rendering their financial plight grave.

Such discouraged workers—that is, older individuals who want to work but who have given up active job seeking because they cannot find employment—exist in something of a limbo status and are understudied. Yet social scientists know that long durations of labour market risks doubly stigmatizing discouraged older workers, who already experience the effects of systemic ageism. Such individuals could hardly be considered early retirees, at least in the voluntary sense of choosing or being in a position to retire—that is, needing or wanting to retire. Nonetheless, after some lengthy period of being unemployed, discouraged older workers might choose to self-identify as “retired” rather than “unemployed,” thus shedding a stigmatized identity (see Heslin et al. 2012; Froidevaux et al. 2019). How large this “limbo” group of older people is for each country featured in this volume is difficult to ascertain due to data constraints. However, the OECD estimates that discouraged workers are a significant part of labour forces, and analysis of US *Health and Retirement Survey* (HRS) indicated that over half of retired older Americans characterized themselves as wanting to work but being involuntarily pushed or encouraged out of employment (Johnson and Gosselin 2018), clarion calls for extending work aside. While many factors go into individual employment and retirement decisions, it is certain that changes to state pension policies, including age for receiving full retirement benefits, are strongly structuring individual level experiences (see Börsch-Supan et al. 2019, for an economic analysis of features of pension systems that encourage early retirement or delayed retirement).

Changes in the Average Age at Retirement for Men and Women

Many women have had their retirement plans disrupted even more than men by increases in state pension ages. This is because several countries had until relatively recently (Germany, UK) or still have (Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Chile, Czech Republic, Israel, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland and Turkey, mainly former Soviet and/or countries with conservative gender norms) lower state pension ages for women than for men. Consequently, women have had to or will have to adjust more quickly to having to work longer (see Table 5.1, with gender differentiated retirement ages highlighted in bold). Having a lower state pension age for women, although often touted as an advantage, is associated with higher women's poverty in old age, since pension systems are increasingly being linked to participation in paid employment (EIGE 2017).

Adjustments to 'pre-retirement' policies—early retirement, disability pensions, extended unemployment insurance are intertwined with the extend work/delay retirement agenda. Many governments (*e.g.* in Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Germany, Switzerland) have removed early retirement options or give actuarially reduced pensions for those who access their pensions before state pension age, for example in Switzerland where early retirement in the public pension's scheme is possible from age 63 for men and age 62 for women. The full pension benefit value is reduced by 6.8% for each year of early claiming (OECD 2017a). Following the encouragement of the OECD and other international organisations, several other governments (including Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland) have made it more difficult to access disability pensions—which used to be another route of exit from employment for older workers.

Of all the pension related policies, the one that is most consistent or bridges to extended work is the ability to continue working while being in receipt of a pension. This is possible in several countries including Australia, Estonia, France, Ireland and Poland, among others. Another popular policy present in several countries is one that allows workers to accrue higher benefits through postponing retirement/more years of work. The latter is possible in at least 15 of the countries under consideration (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Israel, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, US).

There is ample evidence that women already have lower pension incomes approaching retirement and tend to be more reliant than men on safety net state pensions due to their different lifecourse trajectories, which typically include more periods away from formal paid employment for caring (Bettio et al. 2013; Dewilde 2013; Ginn et al. 2001; Ní Léime et al. 2017). Some of the pension reform policies advocated by the OECD and implemented by several countries such as increasing the number of contributions necessary to access a minimum and maximum state pension, make it even more difficult for those who provide most informal care (women) to build up adequate pensions (OECD 2006, 2013).

An assumption underlying extended working life policies is that an undifferentiated 'adult worker' model of working life prevails across most countries and that it is

Table 5.1 State pension age/normal retirement age

Country	% of population aged 65+ ^a	Pension age/retirement age in 2016 ^b
Albania	12.23	65 for men; 60 for women gradual increase to 2024. To equalise for men and women by 2056 at age 67
Australia	25	65 for men and women. Will increase to 67 by 2023
Austria	30.5	65 for men; 60 for women. The retirement age for women will increase to 65 between 2024 and 2033
Belgium	30.6	65 To be 66 in 2025 and 67 in 2030
Bosnia and Herzegovina	14.4 (CIA 2017)	65
Bulgaria	19.5 (CIA 2018)	64.2 men; 61.2 women. To increase to 65 years by 2029 (men) by 2037 (women)
Chile	11.1 (CIA 2018)	65: men; 60: women. Proposal in 2018 to EWL
Croatia	19.9	65 for men. To increase to 65 by 2030 for women. To increase to 67 for all from 2031 to 2038
Cyprus	12.4	65: men and women. To increase every five years aligned to changes in life expectancy 2023
Czech Republic	19.4	63: men; 62 years 4 months: women (2016). To increase to 66 yrs, 8 months for both by 2019. To increase by 2 months per birth cohort (unlimited)
Denmark	19.4	65 years (2016). To increase gradually to 67 years from 2019 to 22 and to 68 in 2030. Then increases directly linked to life expectancy
Estonia	20.2	63 years. To increase gradually to 65 by 2026 for all
Finland	21.5	65 years To increase in line with life expectancy subject to maximum of 2 months per year
France	19.8	66 years, 7 months (for people born in 1954). Age of full-rate pension to increase from 65 to 67, depending on the year of birth, by 2022
Germany	22.4	65 and 4–5 months. To increase to 67 (for those born in 1964)

(continued)

Table 5.1 (continued)

Country	% of population aged 65+ ^a	Pension age/retirement age in 2016 ^b
Greece	21.1	67 (With 40 years, can retire at age 62)
Ireland	13.3	66. To increase to 67 in 2021 and 68 in 2028
Israel	11.6	67 for men. 62 for women to increase to 64 by 2022
Italy	21.7	66 years and seven months with minimum 20 years contributions. To increase in line with life expectancy to 67 in 2021
Lithuania	19.9	In 2017, the old-age retirement age is 62 years for women and 63 years and 6 months for men (Ministry for Social Security and Labour 2017)
Netherlands	19.1	65.5 (2016). To increase to 66 in 2018 and 67 in 2021. To increase linked to increase in life expectancy
New Zealand	15.6	Ten years' residency since age 20 (including five years after age 50) entitles people to public pension from age 65
Poland	17.5	Poland restored statutory retirement age of 65 for men and 60 for women, reversing 2013 commitment to increase the age to 67 by 2020 for men and by 2040 for women. In October 2017, statutory retirement age decreased by 14 months
Portugal	20.3	The normal age of retirement with an old age pension was 66 years and 2 months in 2016, to be increased by linking to life expectancy gains. Age of retirement can be reduced by 4 months for each year's contributions exceeding 40 yrs
Romania	16.8	65: men; 60 years and 8 months: women. Plan to increase women's to 65
Serbia	19	65 (men); 61 (women) (Milovanovic et al. 2016). To increase and equalise retirement age by 2032 at age 65

(continued)

Table 5.1 (continued)

Country	% of population aged 65+ ^a	Pension age/retirement age in 2016 ^b
Slovakia	16	62 years for men, lower for women with children (58.25 for women with 5 or more). To increase to 62 for women by 2024. To increase in line with life expectancy from 2017
Slovenia	20.1	59 years, 4 months (men); 59 years (women). To increase to 60 in 2018 (men); 60 in 2020 (women)
Spain	18.2	65 years, four months (all). To increase to 67 in 2027
Sweden	20.4	From age 61—unlimited deferral possible. Retirement age 65 (guarantee pension)
Switzerland	18.3	65 (men) and 64 (women)
Turkey	7.8	60 (men) 58 (women) To increase to 65 for men and women by 2044
United Kingdom	18.2	65 (men and women) by 2018. To increase to 66 by 2020 and 67 by 2028
United States	16	Normal retirement age = 66. To increase to 67 by 2022

^aSource Central Intelligence Agency (2018)

^bSource OECD, (OECD 2017a) Pensions at a Glance, unless otherwise indicated various countries and amended with subsequent legislative updates

therefore easy for women to continue working past traditional retirement age. However, even a cursory comparison of pension policies and reforms across countries indicates that there is a wide variation in pension systems with 13 out of the 34 countries studied still retaining lower pension ages for women than for men, thus making the increase in pension ages more punitive for women (see Table 5.1). This partly reflects a wide variation in gendered social norms regarding caring and a variation in family friendly policies which would support women both to work and to provide child and elder care (Ní Léime and Loretto 2017; country chapters, this volume).

Health

Average healthy life expectancy at birth is 64.2 years for women and 63.2 years for men in the European Union (Eurostat 2019). Against this backdrop, setting retirement ages at 67 or more, as advocated by the OECD, is very high, offering little or no time for healthy years in retirement for many older workers. Most evidence points to lower life expectancies and poorer health for workers in low-paid, physically demanding occupations and lower socio-economic status (Majer et al. 2011; Marmot and Bell

2012). There is increasing recognition of a strong relationship between health (physical/mental/stress) conditions across the lifecourse limiting the realistic potential for extending working life (EU-OSHA 2016). Physically demanding work is a predictor of disability retirement (Pohrt and Hasselhorn 2015). There is considerable evidence that workers in construction, manufacturing and services sectors are more susceptible to work-related chronic health conditions such as musculo-skeletal disorders (MSDs) and workers aged 55+ report health as a reason for wanting to retire within the next five years (EU-OSHA et al. 2017). Violence, harassment and stress are more likely to be reported by workers aged 55+ in the health, transport and education sectors as reasons for planning to retire in the next five years (Eurofound 2015). A higher proportion of managers and professionals aged 55+ in the EU28 (75–80%) compared to workers in elementary occupations, manufacturing and craft workers (60–65%) report that they will be able to work at age 60 (Eurofound 2015). This varies by country with over 80% of workers in Ireland, Portugal the Netherlands and Sweden expecting to work at age 60, compared to 55–61.5% of those in Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia. However, a recent report by major EU agencies on the working conditions of older workers (EU-OSHA et al. 2017) recommends further research on specific situations related to job, occupation and sector to investigate implications of working in each occupation on possibilities for extending working life.

Changing Employment Trends

Employment trends away from the manufacturing and clerical jobs available in the mid-late twentieth century in Europe and North America due to globalisation and automation combined with many older workers' lower levels of education and age discrimination, leave few good choices for many older workers. In fact, older workers are likely to be forced into the only readily available jobs—low-paid precarious employment in the services sector (EU-OSHA et al. 2017; Standing 2011). While there may be fewer physically demanding jobs in the future with the introduction of digitisation, not only does it eliminate jobs workers already do, this can also result in more sedentary jobs, which in turn can cause damage to backs, necks and other MSD. The impact of such changes on the health of workers both across the lifecourse and as they grow older in terms of their employability at later ages is not yet well understood. Older workers (aged 55 and over) tend to have lower education and many may not have training in digitisation (Eurofound 2017). To ensure that such workers are employable, governments and employers would need to provide training for those who are unemployed and/or whose current jobs may be about to change to keep abreast of new technology. Carefully designed training might safeguard against a mismatch of skills with available jobs so that older workers are not disadvantaged. Yet, there is evidence that older workers are less likely than younger workers to participate in training, suggesting that they may be less employable (Eurofound 2017).

In fact, what the country reports in Part Two show is that there are not many promising initiatives to support older workers' employment—only a few rather underdeveloped initiatives in a small number of countries. For the most part, (and with the exception of countries such as Finland and Austria) rather than taking a coordinated comprehensive approach, even the handful of countries with explicit supportive extended work policies (versus delayed retirement policies) are mainly involved with employment opportunities offered by a small cadre of exemplar employers. This very limited foray into extended work policies and practices belies the utility of 'extended working life' for current policy initiatives and emphasises instead the 'delaying retirement' agenda that has been enacted almost everywhere. Taking seriously the need to describe accurately policies and practices with real potential to extend work poses several questions. What would programmes to extend working lives need to look like if they were to work for more than a handful of workers? What would employers need to do to make extended working lives more possible? Could most older workers reasonably be expected to work longer? Are there categories of older people who could not? If extended work is possible for some, will there be sufficient training offered to enable older people to be trained appropriately for existing job vacancies, rendering them able to adapt to rapidly transforming job markets and real employment opportunities? Can researchers and policymakers actually identify the employment sectors where extending work would be most possible? Answers to such questions emphasise the gaps in knowledge about employment prospects for older individuals, and point to some directions for future research and more attentive policymaking attuned to the life circumstances of older people presumed able to extend their working lives.

Current Extended Working Life Debates and Their Potential Policy Futures

Participants in extended working life policy debates often prefer language that is relatively vague and which emphasises the positive side of policies governments plan to enact. Transnational and national policy elites have asserted that taking advantage of increased longevity means more years in work. The tendency is to use positive but non-specific rhetoric associated with the hegemonic 'active ageing' agenda and to 'naturalise' the idea of extending working lives. The sleight of hand invoked by 'extending working life' language masks the more specific and less optimistic formulation invoked by 'delaying retirement', obfuscating both the intent and outcomes likely to be associated with the policies that are actually enacted. Public audiences have been conditioned for decades with messaging about 'too many, too expensive' applied to ageing populations (see, for example, Willetts 2010; also see early Street and Quadagno 1993 and later Higgs and Gilleard 2010 critiques). If the sense of unavoidably having to work longer is insufficient to motivate older individuals to try to accomplish what for many is impossible, the spectre of intergenerational conflict

has always lurked in the background as a rough and ready rationale for postponing entitlement to retirement benefits (Higgs and Gilleard 2010; Quadagno 1990; Street and Quadagno 1993). The inevitable conclusion drawn from the way debates about extended work/delaying retirement unfold is that, with rare exceptions, everyone everywhere must work longer.

Perusal of the country chapters in Part 2 demonstrates that there are many additional topics not fully covered in this concluding chapter for Part One, which are essential to understand if future older people are to have any meaningful prospect for retirement. Sociologist Myles (1989) characterised retirement as ‘the right to stop working before wearing out’, but increasingly, employment is drying up, pension promises are being withdrawn and retirement in the future may be an elusive goal for many individuals if the focus of policy action continues to be on delaying retirement rather than extending meaningful, dignified work.

Taking a gendered perspective on the ‘live longer, work longer’ framework, persistent gaps in pay compared to men during their working lives both deprives many women of the surpluses they would need to save for their own retirements and ensures that their earnings-related state pensions are calculated on lower lifetime earnings. Consequently, the gender pay gap reaches into and magnifies in multiple ways the even greater gaps between women and men in retirement. On top of lower pay, the hit to lifetime earnings due to the additional time that (mainly) women spend outside of paid employment or in part-time or temporary positions to perform carework for children, disabled family members, and frail elders, and their pay disadvantages multiply. Time out of work for childcare, even when partially compensated by credited time built into state pension contribution formulas, ensures that many women miss out on early career advancement, pay rises and occupational pension credits, which then become compounded over a lifetime of work. The compounding effects of earlier lifecourse time out of employment is not the only issue for older workers with care responsibilities. Adaptations such as temporary or part-time work in the face of heavy caring responsibilities for older family members deprive their unpaid family caregivers—typically women—of income in the years leading up to retirement. As state retirement ages increase, women appear likely to be disproportionately affected by persistent gaps in pay and breaks from employment needed to perform the unpaid work their societies expect them to do.

Another emerging topic associated with extending work involves demographic changes whose contours are not yet entirely clear. For example, one concern about income sufficiency in old age (and thus pension costs) has been the greater longevity of women. Although women experience the onset of chronic conditions at earlier ages than men, women also live longer. This highlights the risk of policies that delay retirement, in that many women may be unable to continue to work and save, despite the likelihood of living longer on lower incomes. While the various gender gaps—in longevity, pay, and pensions—have so far insured that older women will be more likely to live in poverty than older men, the longevity gap at least seems to be narrowing somewhat (Glei and Horiuchi 2007). How the decreasing longevity gap might play into the tension between ‘delaying retirement’ and ‘extending work’ is not clear. Another demographic trend is recent evidence of declines in life expectancy

among subsets of ageing populations in affluent countries—fluctuations in many countries, but likely a trend in at least the US and the UK (Ho and Hendi 2018). Many factors contributing to longevity are systematically linked to social advantage and disadvantage, and it appears that growing social inequalities may contribute to more and earlier deaths among some of the most vulnerable groups of older people. This vulnerable category often includes individuals with low levels of education who started work at young ages, at least compared to those with higher levels of education and later onset of employment. They have experienced the lifetime disadvantages associated with lower levels of education, early employment in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs, often with high physical demands, low pay and job insecurity. Rarely are policy remedies developed to compensate, but there are some exceptions. In Austria, there are provisions for people involved in heavy physical work for a certain period to retire earlier (OECD 2017b). A blanket mandate for working to older ages in already long working lives for such vulnerable people seems, at face value, to be inequitable. Recognition of some earlier lifecourse employment disadvantages can be built into policies to extend work, too, but that has not yet happened widely. Still, developing these kinds of policies would make extended work that is adequate, dignified, and feasible for different categories of workers possible to accomplish.

On a more positive note, there are some policy changes in several countries that permit workers who want to postpone retirement until later ages not only to make that choice but to reward them for it. For example, in countries like the United States, Denmark, France and others individuals who postpone receiving state pension benefits beyond the normal retirement age (up to a maximum) receive actuarially determined permanent increases to pension benefits for doing so. Not surprisingly, this is especially appealing to professionals who enjoy their work, but could also benefit other workers whose health and capabilities permit them to work longer. Other policies permit individuals who reach the new higher state pension ages to both work and receive state benefits at the normal retirement age (without penalty), encouraging individuals who can combine pension income and employment income to stay on the job. Unfortunately, both of these examples of pension-linked policies that provide some good choices to extend working life are of the greatest value to the job elite who have already experienced lifetimes of high quality employment rather than most workers in most countries. At the other end of the employment quality spectrum, such policies seem entirely irrelevant for individuals whose job characteristics, health status or caring responsibilities render a choice to continue working impossible.

The foregoing highlights another challenge. An inescapable reality is that, for all the rhetoric surrounding the need for public/private partnerships and individual thrift to ensure later life income adequacy as populations age, only states can guarantee a predictable later life income. The proliferation of private/individual savings schemes for retirement that rise and fall with the fortunes of financial markets, employers' replacement of DB with DC retirement plans, the declining value of states' pensions and the fact that earlier promises by governments cannot now be depended upon is the current situation of the ongoing public/private partnership. This will affect current workers in the future (not just older people now) blurring the locus of responsibility

for later life income security. Pensions were designed initially, after all, to ensure a floor of protection for retirees because their needs could not be met entirely through employment, individual thrift, or family support. In the latter half of the 20th century, expanding state pension systems and robust occupational defined benefits pensions provided a pension income guarantee that established the institution of retirement for most workers. But will retirement persist into the future?

The relationship between public and private responsibility that institutionalised retirement income systems has been transformed. The advent of DC retirement savings that have come to dominate the occupational benefit sector has shifted outcomes from a pension promise to investment (or loss) potential, and previously shared social responsibility onto individuals (Russell 2014). The individualisation of retirement income responsibility has exposed some in recent generations to potentially greater reward (higher retirement incomes) when economic markets are thriving, but to serious risk when markets fall—as in 2008—or worse if they fail, as in the Great Depression (Russell 2014). It also raises a more fundamental issue. One of the partners in the retirement income guarantee of the last century, that is, employers that provided traditional DB occupational pensions, no longer has the fiduciary responsibility to keep a pension promise to employees, only to provide a savings and investment mechanism in DC schemes. Not only that, but employers' role in policies considered to extend working lives is, at best, relatively undefined and unclear despite claims that population ageing requires public/private partnerships to find solutions to the 'problem'. What is the appropriate role for private sector organisations in the face of population ageing? Can they be compelled to provide employment for older workers, or to stop discriminating based on age or to provide secure occupational pensions?

The relationship between declining health status and disability is complicated. Sometimes a person is not completely disabled, but neither can they perform all the activities of their usual employment. For instance, individuals may perceive their health to be good, yet still have decrements to strength or stamina, or suffer disabilities associated with repetitive tasks, such as back or knee problems, which make accomplishing job tasks difficult or impossible. Others experience age-related onset of chronic health conditions that interfere with employment, or the combination of poor health and declining physical abilities or overwhelming stress that prevent them doing what had been their usual employment at younger ages. The complexity of establishing a 'fair' approach to compensation in such situations needs to be considered in the context of policies to extend work. As the example of Austria shows, one strategy is for governments to allow workers in physically demanding jobs to retire earlier. There, a measure was introduced with specific rules for claiming early retirement for long-term employees engaged in strenuous work for at least 10 of the 20 years immediately preceding retirement age ('heavy labour pension') (OECD 2017b). A similar system facilitating earlier retirement for physically demanding jobs exists in France, but many countries have no such provisions. The longevity gap between individuals with low lifetime earnings and the top 5 or 10% of workers (and thus the length of time different individuals can expect to receive retirement income benefits) presents another complexity in reforms intended to be equitable in terms of extended work or delayed retirement.

If an individual has the skills needed for hard physical labour, such as construction or personal care jobs, but no longer has the physical ability to work in that area, what could possibly be the prospects for continued employment? In some countries, including Belgium, governments subsidise the wages of those who are forced to take lower paid work if they are no longer able to continue with heavy work (OECD 2017b). Although job training or skills re-training are often touted as the answer to the job capacity/job availability/skills mismatch, the fact is that there is very little systematic evidence that suggests training increases employability beyond a handful of individuals (Fadula 2018). For example, in a carefully designed evaluation of federally-funded job training programmes conducted for the US Bureau of Labour concluded that evidence from the evaluation of nationwide training funded by the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs ‘does not have positive impacts in the 30 months after study enrolment’ (Mathematica 2017: xxxiii). Logically, it seems as though training should work. However, training is decidedly not a panacea. The hollowed out middle of employment opportunities that has accompanied de-industrialisation and off-shoring limit employment possibilities. Job training on offer frequently diverges from preparing trainees for the skills that local employers need. High local unemployment rates and low demand for workers can render training ineffective if the desired outcome is landing a training-related job with decent pay and stable employment. And from an individual perspective, post-training outcomes may be poor because of how difficult it is for people to uproot and job seek outside their immediate locales and supportive social networks, or to relocate speculatively to areas where job openings consistent with new training might be available.

Unemployment rates are higher in some countries than others, but even the most robust labour markets have barriers to older workers’ employment. Most employers prefer the cheapest labour they can find and this attribute is usually characteristic of first time job seekers. For example, even in the vibrant US job market with very low official levels of unemployment, older workers who became unemployed in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis remained unemployed for significantly longer spells than younger workers (Street and Tompkins 2017). Once unemployed, older workers typically have the longest periods of unemployment (if they can find work at all) and often end up underemployed (in jobs with less job security and/or pay than previous employment) or discouraged (and not counted in national unemployment statistics at all). Some countries recognise this situation and provide policies aiming to address these issues. For example, in Poland, Romania and Spain, the government provides subsidies to employers who hire unemployed older workers (OECD 2017b). In other countries, such as Belgium, governments supplement the wages of workers who have been forced to move to a lower paid non-physically demanding job in the same company as they become less able to perform their previous more physically taxing role (OECD 2017b).

Concluding Thoughts

Pensions reflect economic relationships and national pension policies reside within technocratic realms. But what has been lost in most current debates is the fact that it is not only the national economic and demographic circumstances that must be considered to get extended working life policies right, but also the moral economy of ageing—the value societies place on older people—as well. The rhetorical flourishes of the extended working life debate have been fraught with crisis language and scare-mongering, starved of emphasis on the connection between the lifelong contributions that older people have made to their entitlement to benefits. The challenge of ageing populations and scarce resources are seldom framed in the context of how to develop effective, sustainable policies that take into account the disproportionate advantages and disadvantages that are currently and will in the future be experienced by older people (see Phillipson 2019).

What does it really mean if societies accept the idea that pensions—and the older people who depend on them—are unaffordable? What entity can be responsible for provision of income security in old age? The responsibility increasingly is being shifted away from public or employer responsibility where risks could be shared and onto individuals and families. But if countries are struggling to plan effectively in the face of relatively more older people/fewer younger workers—what then are families expected to do? Families face the challenge of bridging an increasing number of provision gaps with more older members/fewer young members, albeit on a smaller scale and with decidedly fewer resources to pool risks.

A more optimistic perspective could take advantage of promising practices in some countries that can be adapted to the particular cultural contexts and political economies of others. In countries like Finland and Belgium, policies to extend good quality work (and not simply delay retirement) have been implemented. For example, following evidence-based research and discussion between the social partners, a number of measures were introduced in Finland to enhance working conditions for older workers. These included improving preventive health measures at work to address issues of not only physical but also psychological wellbeing for older workers. There are a range of flexible working arrangements for older (and all) workers in Finland. The Finnish Ministry for Social Affairs emphasised the necessity of employers, employees and government collaborating to improve health at work. Finland worked with the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work to introduce campaigns to promote an integrated management approach to the problem of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), emphasising that employers, employees and government should work together to tackle MSDs (OECD 2017b). In Belgium, an Employment Opportunity Plan was introduced in 2013, for all older workers in private firms with more than 20 employees. Employers may choose from a number of measures aimed at recruiting or retaining older workers. Next, the Flexible and Workable Work Act (2017) reformed training and, more importantly, improved working conditions for older Belgian workers throughout their careers, enabling them to work longer, rather than simply increasing state pension age. In other countries,

such as France and Poland, their relatively low ages for entitlement to full retirement benefits hint that (if labour markets can provide jobs for older workers), it might be possible to emulate other countries' practices by gradually phasing in extensions of working lives for individuals who, by international comparison, are relatively 'early' retirees. But in many countries, assertions that future pensions are unaffordable and policies must change to make them less expensive (or rhetorically, more sustainable) by extending work for entire populations is an impoverished pathway to the more holistic goal of extending working lives. In fact, the typical approach to 'affordability', rather than honouring the contributions of older citizens and dignifying later life work seems instead to guarantee low incomes in old age, expanding rather than contracting the legions of older people who already struggle on limited incomes. On average, women, workers with low lifetime earnings, and people with physical frailty or poor health will be chief among the older citizens whose poverty will be 'baked into' most extended working life/delayed retirement regimes as they are currently configured.

A richer debate about extended work would incorporate attention to the unavoidable links between earlier lifecourse experiences and variation in life chances for adequate later life outcomes that are systematically associated with gender, health status and other social characteristics (Phillipson 2019). For example, explicit attention to temporal issues would require more focus on minimising systemic disadvantages associated with essential unpaid caregiving, whether for child or elder care. There is wide variation among countries in terms of addressing (or not) unavoidable breaks in employment associated with caregiving to avoid perpetuating lifelong disadvantages for carers. The amount and value of public pension contributions credited to carers who must reduce hours of work or leave employment to care, if provided at all, vary and the issue of accounting for carers' socially necessary and valuable unpaid work is seldom addressed in extended work and pension policy debates, to the disadvantage of (mostly) women. Or, consider the work effort of individuals with relatively low levels of education who often enter paid work—frequently in un- or semi-skilled jobs—during their late teen years. Policies designed to extend working lives would recognise that starting employment up to a decade younger than highly educated professionals is already an extension of working lives, merely at the younger end of the lifecourse. Exhorting such early workers to avoid newly defined 'premature' or 'early' retirement once they have reached the earlier-established pension age hardly seems equitable. That is especially true given that globalisation and automation have decimated many formerly good paying jobs, sectoral disruptions in labour markets force redundancy and economic downturns eliminate jobs, or physical limitations and caring responsibilities limit employment capacity. The structural character of such impediments to extended working lives demonstrates the need for comprehensive and appropriately refined policies that take lifecourse issues seriously, since the interconnectedness of lifecourse trajectories and later life outcomes is undeniable.

The last words on the problems and possible merits of extended working lives will be rendered far in the future. In this volume, we have tried to complicate the conversation and the country chapter authors have communicated the current state of the extended working life debates in their own countries. It is obvious that, with very

rare exceptions, there is not much yet to be optimistic about in terms of thoughtful and effective policy outcomes. There are occasional forays into devising programmes that can help, such as the Finnish and Belgian policy measures described above, suggesting that policy innovations can be designed to facilitate extending work. But examples of effective extended work policies are few and far between. The Finnish experience demonstrates the need for debate, evidence-based research and an integrated approach among partners—employers, employees, trade unions and government (national, regional and local) to devise appropriate policies to achieve good quality employment for older workers (Takala et al. 2015). The international focus so far has NOT been on extended working life policies that would deliver adequately compensated, appropriate jobs for older workers, but rather on delaying retirement benefits to later ages. We have argued that, although the two processes have some obvious overlaps, they are two distinctly different ways of thinking about policy approaches for ageing populations and that serious attempts to extend working lives will require policies that take that goal seriously.

The complexities associated with extending working life highlighted here cannot be addressed by simplistic unilateral policies imposed by governments. If we are to avoid deepening existing health and financial inequalities in later life associated with working in particular kinds of often low-paid, precarious, physically demanding or stressful occupations, more nuanced policies need to be designed. The realities of local labour markets and older workers' skills mean that globalisation and digitisation/automation have to be taken into account for reform proposals to make sense. Similarly, if we are to ensure that gender inequalities and the disadvantages experienced by individuals with poor or diminishing health are not to be further entrenched, reforms must recognise and compensate for the existing gender and health inequalities embedded in pensions, pay, and employment participation, and the imbalance in unpaid caring responsibilities that exist. There is a need for coherent and imaginative policies devised in cooperation between employers, trade unions, government and workers to address occupational health and gender equalities in pension building across the lifecourse and to ensure that extending working life is an appealing choice rather than a punitive imposition.

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