

9 December 2008

Coverage
United Kingdom

Theme
Population and Migration



Benefits and challenges of an ageing population

Population Trends 134 - Winter 2008

The ageing of the UK population and growth in the numbers of older people will bring benefits but also new challenges in the coming decades, the National Statistician reports today.

The second Annual Article on the Population by Karen Dunnell, published in the Office for National Statistics journal *Population Trends*, presents a wide-ranging overview of the factors shaping the UK's ageing population.

It reports that falling mortality rates mean that more people are reaching retirement age, while those at older ages are living longer.

Last year, the number of people above state pension age exceeded those aged under 16 for the first time ever, and older people now make up the fastest-growing group in the population. In 2007, 9.8 million people were aged over 65 but by 2032 this figure is projected to rise to 16.1 million – equivalent to almost one in four of the population.

At the same time, the numbers of the 'oldest old' – people aged 85 and over – will more than double, rising from 1.3 million in 2007 to 3.1 million in 2032.

While more people will enjoy longer lives, the ageing of the population and increases in the number of older people will also bring new challenges.

These will include a decline in the ratio of workers to pensioners, placing a greater pension burden on those in work. At present, there are 3.3 people of working age to each person above state pension age (SPA). By 2032, and taking into account anticipated changes in the state pension age, this figure will have fallen to 2.9 people of working age to each person above SPA.

Issued by

Office for National Statistics
Government Buildings
Cardiff Road
Newport
NP10 8XG

Media contacts

Media Office 0845 604 1858
Media Office on-call 07867 906 553

www.statistics.gov.uk

Health and social care providers will also have to adapt to the UK's ageing population. Although people are staying healthier for longer, a greater number of older people suggests that there will be greater numbers in ill health, in absolute terms. Such developments are likely to place new demands on care services.

Research and statistics play a central role in helping policy makers understand and plan for these developments, and the National Statistics Centre for Demography has a wide-ranging work programme to understand the social and demographic impacts of an ageing population.

Recent developments include collaboration on the New Dynamics of Ageing, a major research initiative launched by the five UK research councils to promote understanding of ageing. ONS is also contributing to the work of the Centre for Population Change, an initiative of the Economic & Social Research Council.

Also in this edition of *Population Trends*:

Articles

Population 'turnover' and 'churn' – enhancing understanding of internal migration in Britain through measures of stability.

The role of the national population projections' expert panel survey.

Reports

Marital status estimates, 2006.

Annual updates

Births in England and Wales, 2007.

BACKGROUND NOTES

1. ***Population Trends 134 (Winter 2008)*** is published by Palgrave Macmillan, priced £32.50. Also available free on the National Statistics website: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/Population-Trends-134.pdf

2. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the Media Relations Office.
3. **National Statistics** are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference. © Crown copyright 2008.