

ATTITUDES TO POPULATION AGEING IN EUROPE

**A Comparison of the 1992 and 1999
Eurobarometer Surveys**

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INTRODUCTION

Population ageing is one of the most important policy issues for the European Union (EU) as the twentieth century closes and we enter the new millennium. The European Commission has played a leading role in highlighting the far-reaching policy implications of population ageing, for example by initiating a Programme of Actions for the Elderly 1990-94, declaring 1993 The European Year of Older Persons and Solidarity Between the Generations, establishing a European Observatory on Ageing and Older People 1991-1993, and issuing a series of policy and demographic reports on this topic (Walker, Guillemard and Alber, 1991, 1993; European Commission, 1995, 1997a, 1997b).

One major initiative taken by Directorate General V (Employment, Social Affairs and Industrial Relations) of the European Commission was to order two special Eurobarometer surveys focussed on attitudes to ageing. These were the thirty-seventh in the Eurobarometer series and were carried out between 20 April and 18 May 1992 by INRA (Europe). The first was a 'standard' Eurobarometer survey of the population aged 15 years and over in each of the then twelve Member States of the EU. The second was a special survey of the population aged 60 and over. These twin surveys represent unique European snap-shots of the attitudes of both the general public and older people themselves towards ageing and the policy issues surrounding it. They were the first surveys of attitudes towards ageing in Europe and have been replicated in part or as a whole in various other countries, including Sweden, Australia and Canada (Walker, 1993; Walker and Maltby, 1997).

This year, as part of the European Commission's contribution to the UN Year of Older People, DGV requested a further Eurobarometer survey on the topic of ageing and older people. This was carried out between 12 March and 4 May 1999, again by INRA (Europe), and was the fifty-first in the series. (Detailed information about the methodology for the survey is contained in the appendix.) This survey repeated a few

of the questions contained in the 1992 standard Eurobarometer and, therefore, provides an opportunity to compare the results and to see if there have been any major changes in opinion over the seven intervening years. Thus the main purpose of this short report is to outline the main results from the 1999 survey and to compare them with those from the 1992 survey. Of course it is possible to compare only those questions that were repeated in the 1999 survey from the original survey of the general population aged 15 and over. It is not possible to make comparisons of the attitudes of older people themselves since these were not specifically surveyed in 1999. Moreover the EU has been enlarged in the seven years between the two surveys which means that there is no 1992 baseline data for the new Member States (Austria, Finland and Sweden). The 1998 Eurobarometer survey included a few questions related to ageing and, where relevant, these results are also reported. Finally the reader must bear in mind that the results reported here are not from a panel of the same people but cover two different randomly selected populations.

DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

One of the major successes of the second half of the twentieth century has been increasing longevity, reflecting the improved conditions of health and welfare standards of the population within the EU. Increasing life expectancy is an indicator of social and economic development; the triumph of science and public policy over many of the causes of premature death which truncated lives in earlier times. Europe can be justly proud of the fact that, in the last 50 years, its model of development has allowed increasing numbers of citizens to reach advanced old age and to do so in relative economic security.

However, extended longevity coupled with an important decline in fertility over the last 30 years, has resulted in a fast transition towards a much older population that, according to demographic projections, will last for several decades. The trend towards population ageing is bringing about profound changes for all generations and most areas of economic and social activity. As Europe enters the twenty-first century, the demographic trend towards an ageing society is becoming a highly important issue for

social protection, the labour market, politics, design and technology, education and culture, in short for the whole economy and all of society.

The rate of population ageing differs between Member States and, especially, between regions. In a large number of European regions the population will have stopped growing by the end of the century (European Commission, 1997). This will extend to the majority of EU regions which will see their population levelling off or declining before 2015. The younger generation, the 0-24 age group, represented 31.1 per cent of the population in 1995 and this will decline to 27 per cent in 2015 (some 11 million less). The older generation (65+) will increase significantly and unevenly, throughout the EU. The growth of the very old (80+) appears to be the strongest, in terms of intensity, of the demographic trends. In fact a large share of the total increase in this oldest cohort over the next 25 years (plus 62 per cent between 1995 and 2025) will take place within the five year period 2000-2005. Within those five years the increase will be above 25 per cent in Belgium and France, and almost as much in Italy and Austria. The average increase in the EU will be 18.6 per cent. Italy leads the way: in 2025, 7.1 per cent or one in every 14 Italians, will be over 80. Germany comes next, due to the pre-war baby boom, and Denmark, Sweden and Ireland will follow after 2020. In some regions of France, Italy and Spain the 80+ generation will represent between seven and nine per cent of the population (compared with an average 3.9 per cent in 1995). As a consequence the average age of the population will increase from 38.3 years in 1995 to 41.8 years in 2015. In some regions in eastern Germany, northern Italy, central France and northern Spain the average will be between 44 and 50 years.

As the following graphs show, population ageing is a global phenomenon. Moreover, because it is a function of economic and social development, Europe leads the world in both the increase in the proportion of the population aged 65 and over and in the growth of the age group 80 and over. Graphs 1 and 2 show the global picture for the World Health Organisation regions in which Europe includes not only the EU but the states of central and eastern Europe as well (WHO, 1998). All of the countries of central and eastern Europe, except Poland, will see a decline in their total populations (and those of working age) before 2010. Within Europe the EU has the most

pronounced population ageing trend over the next 25 years and, in global terms, only Japan has surpassed it (Table 1).

Table 1 Evolution in the Average Age of the Population in the EU, USA and Japan

	1965	1995	2025
EU15	34.8	38.8	43.7
USA	31.8	35.7	39.6
Japan	30.3	39.3	45.9

This demographic change raises important challenges for those institutions and policies which originated in an era when the demographic structure and outlook were very different. Its implications are also far-reaching with regard to the institutional and social relations that shape the everyday lives of citizens – labour force participation, marital status, living arrangements and intergenerational relations. When looking at the implications of population ageing and the need for institutions to adjust to the new demographic reality, it is important to recognise all the aspects of this trend, taking account of both the challenges and the opportunities it raises economically, socially and culturally.

ATTITUDES TO AGEING

The Future of Pensions in Europe

One of the biggest policy issues facing the EU is the future of its pensions systems. All Member States have modified their public pension schemes in recent years, for example by raising the legal age of retirement, encouraging greater flexibility in retirement, changing the pension formula, curtailing early retirement or encouraging a mixed system. Such actions have stabilised the projected growth of pension spending as a proportion of GDP. Nonetheless there are continuing pressures towards pension

reform which are stronger in some Member States than others. Certainly this issue has been high on the policy agendas of national governments for more than a decade and international economic agencies, such as the OECD (1998) and World Bank (1994), have espoused the cause of pension reform.

Given the climate of economic opinion favouring radical reform we were interested to know, back in 1992, how the citizens of Europe responded to this issue. We found, on the one hand, a remarkably high level of consensus across the Member States that those in employment have a duty to ensure, through the contributions and taxes they pay, that older people have a decent standard of living (Walker, 1993, p.15). Four-fifths of those questioned agreed with this proposition (37 per cent strongly and 43 per cent slightly) and, more especially, only 3.6 per cent on average disagreed strongly with it. In only two Member States (Germany and France) did less than one-third of the population not agree strongly and, in all of them, at least one-quarter did so. This indicated that the social contract or generational solidarity on which the EU's public pension systems rest was supported by a large majority of EU citizens.

On the other hand, there was also quite a high level of pessimism among the general public about how far the contract will be honoured in the future. Three specific questions were directed at this issue. First of all we asked whether people will get less pension for their contributions in the future and just over one half of the public said 'yes'. When this question was repeated in 1999 the percentage saying 'yes' had risen to over three-fifths (Table 2).

Table 2 Percentage Saying that in the Future People Will Get Less Pension for Their Contributions

	1992	1999
Austria	-	80.1
Belgium	65.5	64.7
Denmark	60.2	69.4
Finland	-	75.9
France	76.1	80.7
Germany	53.1	65.8
Greece	25.2	33.7
Ireland	36.1	37.9
Italy	35.7	56.7
Luxembourg	44.7	64.3
Netherlands	59.8	64.1
Portugal	23.3	41.0
Spain	37.4	42.1
Sweden	-	72.6

UK	49.0	68.1
EU 12 (1992)/15 (1999)	51.3	63.2

Although it is clear that citizens in the new Member States are much more likely than the EU average to say that people will get less pension for their contributions in future, they alone cannot account for the increase in pessimism/realism among the general public. Significant factors in this growing belief that the pensions contract will be modified adversely are likely to be the continuing public debate about the cost implications of population ageing and, especially, the negative terms in which this debate is often conducted, and the fact that, in all Member States, the pensions contract has already been modified to some (greater or lesser) extent.

The detailed 1999 results are set out in Table 3. In 1992 there were only two countries in which the percentage saying 'no' to this question was greater than the percentage saying 'yes' (Greece and Portugal) but, in 1999, only Greece is left as a bastion of optimism. The fact that significant proportions of the public answered 'don't know' in Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain emphasises the air of uncertainty surrounding the future of pensions in some countries, especially those in southern Europe that are in the process of developing Bismarckian-style pension systems. There are no differences in the responses of men and women but age is a significant source of variation, with those in the youngest age group (15-24) being the least likely to say 'yes' (55 per cent) but they are also the most likely to say 'don't know' (21 per cent). Those aged 40-54 were the most likely to adopt a pessimistic view of the future of the pensions contract (68 per cent) and the least likely to say 'don't know' (10 per cent). There are no significant differences of opinion between occupational groups and income groups. However pro-EU respondents are less pessimistic than anti-Europeans, with 61 per cent of the former compared with 73 per cent of the latter saying that people will get less pension for their contributions.

Table 3 In the Future Do You Think that People Will Get Less Pension for Their Contributions? 1999 (percentages)

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Austria	80.1	10.0	10.0
Belgium	64.7	22.9	12.4
Denmark	69.4	25.3	5.3
Finland	75.9	16.4	7.7
France	80.7	11.6	7.7
Germany	65.8	24.8	9.4
Greece	33.7	51.9	14.4
Ireland	37.9	30.0	18.3
Italy	56.7	24.9	18.3
Luxembourg	64.3	22.4	13.3
Netherlands	64.1	29.0	7.0
Portugal	41.0	36.0	23.0
Spain	42.1	30.4	27.5
Sweden	72.6	15.8	11.7
UK	68.1	18.6	13.3
EU 15	63.2	23.1	13.8

Along similar lines, in both 1992 and 1999, the general public was asked whether, as the population ages, people would have to retire later. The comparative results, shown in Table 4, emphasise the hardening of public opinion in the Member States about the inevitability of pension reform. There were only three Member States in which the proportion saying that people will have to retire later declined between 1992 and 1999 (Germany, Greece and Ireland). In the German case, those in the east were much less likely to respond 'yes' to this question in both surveys (32 per cent in 1992 and 30 per cent in 1999 compared with 49 per cent and 44 per cent respectively for the west Germans). Again the public in the new Member States seem to be much more resigned to later retirement than the rest, while those in the south of Europe and Ireland are the least in tune with this prospect. Interestingly there appears to be no relationship between the actions already taken, or in train, within the Member States and public opinion. Thus Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal and the UK have already raised the legal age of retirement but this is not reflected by any consistent pattern of responses by the public in these Member States. Taking respondents as a whole, not surprisingly, it is the managerial and white collar groups that are more likely

to foresee later retirement (44 per cent) and the unemployed the least likely to do so (33 per cent).

Perhaps what is most significant about the answers to this question, though, is the relatively small proportion thinking that people will have to retire later (40 per cent) compared with the higher proportion saying that people will get less pension for their contributions (60 per cent). There is some indication here of the strength of age discrimination in the EU and the deeply entrenched culture of early exit in some Member States – issues to which we return below.

Table 4 Percentage Saying that in the Future People Will Have to Retire Later

	1992	1999
Austria	-	67.8
Belgium	28.8	40.8
Denmark	26.8	53.8
Finland	-	67.1
France	41.6	60.5
Germany	45.5	41.2
Greece	13.6	5.9
Ireland	29.7	25.9
Italy	32.9	40.4
Luxembourg	25.1	40.6
Netherlands	47.8	50.7
Portugal	22.9	25.1
Spain	29.0	37.3
Sweden	-	80.5
UK	24.8	31.8
EU 12 (1992)/15 (1999)	35.2	40.1

The third element of this test of public perceptions about the future of pensions and retirement consisted of a more general question: *'Do you think that the welfare state will continue to grow and retired people will be better off than they are now?'* In 1992 there was very little optimism among the citizens of the EU, with less than one-third responding positively to this question and only three Member States (Greece, Ireland and Portugal) in which the proportion replying negatively was less than two-fifths. However, by 1999, what little optimism about the welfare states that existed before, had

collapsed completely: only 18 per cent of EU citizens believe that the welfare state will continue to grow and retired people will be better off.

As Table 5 shows, apart from Greece, where optimism has increased slightly, and the Netherlands, where opinion has remained very pessimistic, the general trend is towards a pessimistic, and in some cases highly pessimistic, view of the future of the welfare state and its ability to sustain economic security in old age. Some of the largest concentrations of pessimism are found in countries with the highest pension levels in the EU (such as Austria, Denmark, France, the Netherlands and Sweden) and perhaps the general public in these countries are saying that they do not think it will last. Alternatively they may be saying that it is impossible to improve on their present superior position. The case of the UK confounds such an interpretation because it is consistently at the bottom end of EU comparisons of pension levels but, if the general public is right, then British pensioners should not expect a radical improvement in their fortunes. As in Italy, where public opinion is also pessimistic, there has been considerable public debate (some of it in very negative terms) and extensive reforms of the UK pension system during the early 1990s and this is bound to have had some influence on public opinion. In 1992 east Germans were among the most optimistic about the welfare state (44 per cent saying that it would continue to grow) but, by 1999, their optimism had collapsed to just below the level among west Germans (19 per cent compared with 20 per cent).

Table 5 Percentage Saying that in the Future the Welfare State Will Continue to Grow and Retired People will be Better Off Than They are Now

	1992	1999
Austria	-	12.7
Belgium	27.9	23.5
Denmark	20.8	14.9
Finland	-	19.9
France	25.3	13.1
Germany	25.2	19.9
Greece	36.1	37.2
Ireland	38.7	31.0

Italy	28.8	16.8
Luxembourg	41.5	26.9
Netherlands	16.4	16.3
Portugal	61.0	33.7
Spain	55.7	20.6
Sweden	-	9.3
UK	37.5	15.6
EU 12 (1992)/15 (1999)	31.7	18.3

There are hardly any differences based on gender or age with regard to opinions on the future of the welfare state: men are slightly more optimistic than women and those aged 15-24 are slightly more optimistic than other age groups. Those who are pro-EU membership were less pessimistic than the anti-EU group but the differences are not large (63 per cent and 74 per cent respectively responded negatively to the proposition that the welfare state will continue to grow).

No discussion of the future of pensions, and particularly the future of the EU's welfare states, of which pension systems represent the cornerstone, would be complete without touching on the vexed issue of how to pay for pensions. In order to tackle this difficult question head-on we asked the general public in each Member State how they think that pensions should be provided (Walker, 1993, p.20). Back in 1992 the majority of European citizens thought that pensions should be provided mainly by the public sector and financed from contributions or taxes. The only two deviations from this welfare statist norm were west Germany in which, not surprisingly as the home of the Bismarckian employment contract, a majority favoured employment-based pensions funded by contributions from employers and employees, and the Netherlands which has a long history of private pension contracts. Nonetheless the overwhelming majority of EU citizens (nearly four-fifths) favoured either public or employment-related pension systems with very few (11 per cent on average) supporting private provision. This level of positive support for the European public social protection systems was remarkable in 1992 after a decade or so of political rhetoric in some Member States and from international economic agencies about the need to privatise pensions.

Could this belief in pensions and the social solidarity on which they are based survive the 1990s during which time there have been ever greater pressures towards reducing

the scale of public provision and increasing the role of the private sector? Astonishingly, as Table 6 shows, there is hardly any movement of public opinion away from its 1992 level of solidarism. The largest decline in support for the public sector occurred in Italy, which has experienced an intense debate on the future of its pension system for more than a decade followed by radical reform, and the UK which saw the privatisation of a significant part of its pension provision in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Support for the public provision of pensions in Portugal also fell back but is still way above the EU average. There is no sign in these data that those proposing the privatisation of pension arrangements have won the hearts of EU citizens, though there are variations in attitudes towards the private sector between the Member States.

Table 6 How Should Pensions be Provided?

	Mainly public ¹		Mainly employers ²		Mainly private arrangements ³		Don't Know ⁴	
	1992	1999	1992	1999	1992	1999	1992	1999
Austria	-	52.5	-	23.1	-	15.8	-	8.7
Belgium	58.5	63.7	19.7	16.2	11.8	10.7	10.1	9.4
Denmark	56.2	51.5	28.2	24.8	11.0	18.1	4.6	5.5
Finland	-	26.9	-	54.2	-	8.5	-	10.4
France	51.1	44.5	26.8	30.0	14.4	15.0	7.7	10.5
Germany	37.9	40.3	48.4	40.5	6.7	9.7	7.0	9.5
Greece	60.8	61.4	13.3	13.5	7.9	5.0	18.0	20.1
Ireland	45.2	49.2	25.3	23.4	9.7	13.6	19.8	13.8
Italy	51.9	40.5	23.9	22.8	9.1	17.7	15.1	19.0
Luxembourg	55.1	51.6	20.2	20.5	11.9	14.6	12.8	13.3
Netherlands	32.1	36.6	35.1	29.2	20.4	23.2	12.4	11.1
Portugal	75.6	66.4	8.7	12.7	8.2	5.4	7.2	15.6
Spain	62.9	61.4	14.2	13.5	5.9	5.0	17.1	20.1
Sweden	-	52.6	-	23.3	-	12.9	-	11.2
UK	47.9	38.6	30.9	30.7	12.8	19.5	8.3	11.1
EU 12 (1992)/ 15 (1999)	48.9	44.7	29.8	28.8	10.6	13.7	10.8	12.8

Notes

- Mainly by public authorities, financed from contributions or taxes.
- Mainly by employers, financed from their own and their employees' contributions.
- Mainly by private arrangements between individual workers and pension companies.
- Includes no answer.

There are no significant differences between men and women in their views on the provision of pensions but younger people (15-24 years) are less likely than other age groups and much less likely than the oldest group (55+) to favour public provision (37 per cent compared with 48 per cent among the 55+ group) and more likely to support private provision (17 per cent compared with 10 per cent). Occupational group is not a consistent predictor of responses to this question, though the self-employed are the most likely to favour private provision, but not the least likely to favour public provision, which was students.

The maintenance of a majority in favour of either public provision or a mixture of public and employer provision is truly remarkable given that the period in question has been one of the most turbulent in the history of European pension systems and one in which the private sector has been promoted actively and extensively as the solution to cost pressures associated with population ageing. It is clear that solidarity is still a potent concept in the EU, at least as far as the preferences of the citizens are concerned. However, there appears to be something of a gulf between what the citizens want and what they think policy makers will do in this field.

As well as asking the general public how it wants pensions to be provided the 1999 survey asked if it thinks that, in the future, most pensions will be funded by private arrangements with the state less involved. In response to this question we see a dramatic difference in opinions, with an average of 61 per cent saying 'yes' compared with only 14 per cent who favoured private provision (Table 6). As Table 7 shows, a majority in all Member States except Greece, Portugal and Spain think that pensions will be privatised increasingly. This is a view taken slightly more by men than women and more by the age group 40-54 (69 per cent) than others and much more than by the youngest group (15-24 years: 53 per cent). The white collar and managerial groups are more likely than others to say 'yes' to this question. Not surprisingly, therefore, higher income groups were more likely than low income groups to foresee privatisation.

Overall this group of questions on the future of pensions indicates, on the one hand, enduring beliefs in the principle of solidarity and the dominant role of the public sector in

combination with occupational welfare in the provision of pensions. Yet, on the other hand, there has been a growth in pessimism on the part of EU citizens about whether or not the pensions contract will be honoured and an acknowledgement, if not an acceptance, that privatisation is on the cards.

Table 7 In the Future will most Pensions be Funded by Private Arrangements with the State Less Involved? 1999 (Percentages)

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Austria	61.7	13.1	25.2
Belgium	53.6	20.6	25.7
Denmark	82.8	8.9	8.3
Finland	65.5	20.1	14.4
France	67.2	15.8	17.0
Germany	59.1	22.4	18.5
Greece	42.0	28.5	29.5
Ireland	50.3	14.7	35.1
Italy	57.8	14.3	27.9
Luxembourg	53.2	25.8	21.0
Netherlands	77.0	11.6	11.4
Portugal	35.1	18.7	46.2
Spain	37.3	20.9	41.8
Sweden	80.5	8.2	11.3
UK	80.5	7.3	12.3
EU 15	61.4	16.4	22.1

Note

1. Includes no answer.

Age Discrimination

Another important policy issue addressed in both the 1992 and 1999 surveys concerns the prospects of older workers in employment. Of course this issue is closely related to that of pensions, and the rising costs of pensions coupled with the ageing of the workforce and predicated shortages of labour in some sectors has led the Member States to discontinue subsidies for early exit from the labour force and to look for ways to postpone retirement and to keep older workers in employment (Walker, 1997).

Age discrimination is a major barrier facing older workers in all EU labour markets. This may take the form of social and economic exclusion from the labour force or prevent older workers from getting access to training or promotion within organisations. The 1992 survey was the first to sample public opinion on this difficult and complex issue.

What we found was an extraordinarily high proportion of citizens in all of the then twelve Member States who believed that older workers are discriminated against with regard to job recruitment (79 per cent), job promotion (62 per cent) and job training (67 per cent) (Walker, 1993, p.26). Moreover there were hardly any differences between age groups in their strong belief that age discrimination exists with regard to employment. This finding had a significant impact in raising the profile of age discrimination in the EU and paving the way for further work on this topic (Drury, 1993, 1997). It is now a significant issue on the EU agenda.

Combating age discrimination is a matter of social justice but it takes on added urgency in the context of workforce ageing. There is considerable controversy surrounding the issue of anti-age discrimination legislation, with some groups arguing that it would be an important source of protection for older workers, while others argue that it would not be enforceable. In 1992 we asked the general public what it thought. By a large majority of two to one it favoured such government action. This question was repeated in 1999 and, as Table 8 shows, the general public is now even more in favour of legislation to stop age discrimination than it was seven years ago. Nearly three in every four citizens of the EU support such action and in only two countries is the majority less than three in every five. Conversely, in the EU as a whole, only about one in eight citizens oppose legislation to combat age discrimination.

There are no significant differences between age groups or men and women in the responses to this question. It is very clear from this evidence that the general public is highly supportive of action to try to stop age discrimination and, therefore, the addition of age to the equal opportunities competences of the EU in the Amsterdam Treaty is likely to command a high degree of legitimacy among the people of Europe.

Table 8 Percentages Saying that the Government Should Introduce Laws to Try to Stop Age Discrimination

	1992	1999
Austria	-	64.4
Belgium	69.8	69.6
Denmark	30.0	58.2
Finland	-	75.2
France	71.5	72.8
Germany	57.7	60.3
Greece	71.8	85.6
Ireland	70.9	81.2
Italy	63.3	69.6
Luxembourg	60.3	64.4
Netherlands	69.6	83.8
Portugal	83.8	79.4
Spain	74.0	77.0
Sweden	-	54.8
UK	72.0	83.0
EU 12 (1992)/15 (1999)	66.6	71.8

Active Ageing?

The role of retirement and the potential for gainful activity after retirement, again, is closely related to the issues of pensions and age discrimination considered above. Age discrimination may deny older workers access to productive activity prior to retirement and, therefore, heighten the risks of economic insecurity and poverty in old age. But, also, the practice of age barrier retirement operates as a form of age discrimination because it excludes older people from employment at a fixed age regardless of their inclinations and capacities. The fact that the majority of workers in several EU countries leave employment before the legal age of retirement/pension age does not entirely diminish the importance of retirement because it remains the main temporal reference point with regard to being defined as 'old' and 'unproductive'. It is important then to know what the general public thinks about the prospect of retirement and whether those in retirement should still be able to engage in productive activity.

In the 1992 survey we found a majority (55 per cent) of the general public in the then twelve Member States were in favour of flexible retirement, while two-fifths supported

fixed age retirement. We also asked whether people were looking forward to retirement or would find it difficult to accept. This question was repeated in 1999 and, as Table 9 shows, there has been very little change in opinions over the seven years between the two surveys.

In addition there are two particularly interesting aspects of the information contained in Table 9. First there are relatively small proportions in all Member States who say they will find retirement hard to accept – no sign here that workaholism is rampant in the EU (though the Danes – the country with the highest pension age in the EU – are closest to it and the Austrians furthest from it). Second the largest proportion of citizens were those who don't know or who gave the spontaneous response 'I've never thought about it.' This suggests that retirement does not occupy the high priority in the minds of the general public that it in fact warrants. Not surprisingly perhaps it is the 15-24 year age group that dominates this latter response (64 per cent compared with an average of 41 per cent) and the percentage in this category declines with age. But it is surprising that one-fifth of the 55+ age group responded in this way and that a similar proportion of the 15-24 year olds say that they are looking forward to retirement! Also there is a clear correlation between income group and looking forward to retirement (33 per cent of the lowest income group and 45 per cent of the highest).

While retirement acts as an indiscriminant end to paid employment it is not necessarily the case that everyone would accept that, once retired, people should be able to re-enter paid employment in competition with younger non-retired people. The general public was asked this precise question in 1992 and again in 1999: *'do you think that retired people should be permitted to take paid employment, or should they only work on a voluntary basis?'* As can be seen from Table 10, there are significant differences between Member States and, in both years, it is less than one-third of respondents who say that retired people should be confined only to voluntary work. The Member State with the strictest line on paid employment after retirement is Spain and the hardening of attitudes since 1992 is bound to be related to the rapid growth of unemployment in that country.

Table 9 Positive and Negative Perspectives on Retirement (Percentages)

	Looking forward to retirement		Retirement will be difficult to accept		Don't know/ Never thought about it ¹	
	1992	1999	1992	1999	1992	1999
Austria	-	51.0	-	10.3	-	38.7
Belgium	32.8	45.5	18.5	18.2	48.6	36.3
Denmark	40.9	45.7	27.7	30.0	31.9	24.3
Finland	-	53.9	-	19.9	-	26.3
France	41.7	40.2	22.2	19.3	35.6	40.4
Germany	42.2	41.2	13.7	16.6	44.1	42.2
Greece	14.6	17.9	44.7	51.2	40.7	30.9
Ireland	24.0	20.8	19.9	16.0	56.1	63.2
Italy	31.3	39.7	23.9	16.6	44.8	43.7
Luxembourg	30.8	59.6	15.7	14.6	53.6	25.8
Netherlands	32.8	44.8	16.9	18.7	50.3	36.6
Portugal	39.6	34.5	28.2	21.1	31.5	44.3
Spain	30.4	23.1	14.5	19.2	55.1	57.7
Sweden	-	43.2	-	21.6	-	35.2
UK	51.5	44.2	23.8	24.0	24.6	31.8
EU 12 (1992)/ 15 (1999)	40.2	39.2	20.4	19.8	39.5	41.0

Note

1. Includes no answer.

Table 10 Paid Employment or Voluntary Work in Retirement? (Percentages)

	Paid Employment		Voluntary Work		Both ¹		Don't Know ²	
	1992	1999	1992	1999	1992	1999	1992	1999
Austria	-	53.9	-	16.7	-	17.2	-	12.2
Belgium	39.0	43.1	28.5	25.0	25.1	21.2	7.3	10.7
Denmark	62.8	70.9	21.3	12.8	12.0	14.5	3.6	1.7
Finland	-	52.5	-	28.0	-	16.1	-	3.3
France	23.1	16.2	53.9	59.0	14.9	12.2	8.1	12.6
Germany	54.6	49.7	16.2	13.8	20.6	26.4	8.0	10.2
Greece	36.9	37.9	36.0	38.4	13.1	12.8	13.9	10.8
Ireland	51.0	61.4	22.4	12.9	15.0	16.6	11.6	9.1
Italy	21.4	25.0	44.6	42.6	22.5	19.3	11.5	14.2
Luxembourg	29.2	29.9	45.7	50.2	18.6	11.3	6.4	8.3
Netherlands	50.4	62.6	27.9	13.9	16.8	21.2	4.9	2.3
Portugal	40.8	33.0	33.2	39.7	21.1	11.4	5.0	15.9
Spain	29.7	13.7	36.5	60.9	16.3	9.1	17.4	16.3
Sweden	-	66.9	-	12.0	-	16.8	-	4.2
UK	75.7	69.3	14.6	12.2	4.5	11.0	5.2	7.4

EU 12 (1992)/ 15 (1999)	42.4	40.4	31.9	31.9	16.5	16.8	9.3	10.9
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Notes

1. Spontaneous
2. Includes no answer.

Taking Care of Older People

Increasing longevity in Europe means that more and more older people require care and support from families, the voluntary sector or the formal (public and private) sector. It is important not to get this out of proportion: the majority of older people are fit and well and able to take care of themselves even in advanced old age. But there is a correlation between ageing, particularly beyond 75, and functional incapacity. Therefore the ageing of the EU population has important implications for both families (women especially) and governments. Thus long term care is high on the policy agendas of all Member States. We tackled this issue extensively in the original 1992 Eurobarometer survey (Walker, 1993, p.27) and some of the questions have been repeated in the 1999 survey.

First of all we asked the general public in each Member State whether they had extra family responsibilities for looking after someone with a long-term illness, who is handicapped or elderly. In 1992 one in ten people aged 15 and over were providing care to someone within their own household as a result of long-term illness, disability or old age. In addition, one in seven were providing out-of-house care. In 1999 it is, again, exactly one in ten that provide in-house care and one in seven that provide care out-of-house.

Co-residence caring is less common in the EU than non-co-residence caring but, of course, this is mainly a function of the type of relationship involved. Nearly half of those providing care to someone living with them were spouses or partners (half of them to a spouse/partner under 60 and half to an over 60 year old). Surprisingly the country with the largest amount of such care for both spouses/partners under as well as over 60 is Germany (5.8 per cent and 4.7 per cent respectively). Greece registers the lowest

proportion of in-house carers for spouses/partners under 60 and the Netherlands for those over 60.

In contrast out-of-house care is more likely to be provided to other relatives (mainly parents) or friends over the age of 60. Over half of those providing care to someone not living with them were doing so for kin aged 60 and over. A further 2.6 per cent are providing such care for a friend aged 60 or over. Interestingly four per cent of EU citizens, on average, provide help and support to older persons not living with them who are neither relatives nor friends. This voluntary service provision is most common in the Netherlands (10.5 per cent), followed by Ireland (7.3 per cent) and Belgium (6.3 per cent). It is least common in Spain (1.1 per cent). The figures for east Germany and west Germany are 8 per cent and 5.1 per cent.

The provision of co-resident and non-co-resident care to older relatives is directly related to a country's location on the north/south axis of the EU. As Table 11 shows those in the south are more likely to be co-resident with the older relative, while those in the north prefer 'intimacy at a distance'.

Table 11 Providing Care to Older Relatives¹ 1999 (Percentages)

	Co-resident	Non-co-resident
Austria	2.4	10.4
Belgium	1.2	8.1
Denmark	0.5	12.5
Finland	1.3	19.8
France	2.0	7.3
Germany	3.8	9.0
Greece	6.5	5.5
Ireland	1.9	12.9
Italy	2.9	4.6
Luxembourg	1.7	5.1
Netherlands	0.9	13.4
Portugal	5.8	3.9
Spain	4.0	2.6
Sweden	0.7	11.9
UK	1.2	8.6
EU 12 (1992)15 (1999)	2.7	7.5

Note

1. A relative, 60 or over.

Taking the EU as a whole the proportions of men and women providing both in-house and out-of-house care are roughly equal. The age group that takes the biggest share of the care of co-resident older relatives (not spouses/partners) is those aged 40-54 but the differences between the age groups is not large. With regard to out-of-house care for older relatives again it is the 40-54 year old age group that takes the largest share but the gaps between the age groups are greater than for in-house care: 15-24 (6.5 per cent), 25-39 (7.1 per cent), 40-54 (10.8 per cent) and 55+ (6.2 per cent). Women are slightly more likely than men to be providing care on a voluntary basis (for example as neighbours) to a person who is not a relative or a friend – 4.4 per cent compared with 3.6 per cent and those aged 55 and over are more likely than those aged 15-39 to do so: 4.6 per cent compared with 3.4 per cent. The unemployed and retired are slightly more likely than all of the employed and house persons to provide such voluntary care.

Turning now from the personal caring commitments of EU citizens to the key policy issues, we will focus first on community care versus residential care. Policy makers in all Member States express a preference for community care (Walker, Guillemard and Alber, 1993) and, as the cost of residential and hospital care has risen, this preference has become stronger. There are plenty of other good reasons for a policy of community care, not least the expressed preference of older people themselves to remain in their own homes or to 'age in place'. What do the general public think? In the 1992 survey we put it to the people in this way: *'Some say that older people needing personal care should go into residential/nursing homes, while others say that the social services should help them to remain in their own homes for as long as possible. Which comes closest to your opinion?'* The vast majority of the general public (four out of five and nine out of ten of those that express an opinion thought that older people should be helped to remain in their own homes. The only countries where in more than one-fifth chose the residential care option were Denmark and Portugal (both 27 per cent). In 1999 support for community care among the general populations of the Member States remains as strong as it was in 1992 (just under four out of five and nine out of ten of

those that expressed an opinion). Denmark and Portugal are still the countries with the strongest preferences for residential care but the strength of this preference has dropped (23 per cent in Denmark and 24 per cent in Portugal). The next highest levels of support for residential care are in Luxembourg (19 per cent) and Austria (15 per cent).

Men are slightly less in favour of community care than women (75 per cent versus 80 per cent). Also the preference for community care and, conversely, the dislike for residential care is directly related to age, as Table 12 shows. If those responding 'don't know' are taken out the differences are not so marked but, nonetheless it remains clear that the closer one is to the prospect of needing care the more one prefers ageing in place.

Table 12 Residential or Community Care? (Percentages) 1999

	Age Groups			
	15-24	25-39	40-54	55+
residential care	15.8	11.4	10.1	9.2
community care	68.5	75.2	80.0	82.2
Don't know	15.7	13.4	9.9	8.5

The 1998 Eurobarometer survey approached this issue in a different, more complex way. It posed the question: *'Let's suppose you had an elderly father or mother who lived alone. What do you think would be best if this parent could no longer manage to live on his/her own?'* Table 13 shows that the residential care option is consistently the one favoured by only a minority and is most strongly supported in the northern Member States. It appears that the Portuguese preference for residential care, mentioned above, disappears when the question applies to their own parents. But the most striking feature of the table is the relatively high proportion of EU citizens saying that the parent should either live with them or one of their brothers or sisters (by a ratio of ten to one it was the former rather than the latter). Again the variations between Member States are

very clearly on the north/south axis, emphasising the maintenance of close family relations in the south and the more private and intimate but spacially separate relations between the generations in the north. Nonetheless in 11 out of 15 Member States at least one-third of citizens would see co-residence as a response to the frailty of one of their parents. This indicates that intergenerational solidarity within families in Europe is remarkably resilient in the face of all the social and economic pressures currently besetting family life.

Table 13 How to Help a Frail Parent Who Can No Longer Manage Alone? 1998 (Percentages)

	Live with me/ another sibling	Move closer together	Go into a residential/ nursing home	Stay at home and receive support there	It depends/ Don't know
Austria	33.8	13.4	9.7	28.5	14.6
Belgium	33.6	3.2	20.1	28.0	15.3
Denmark	10.3	9.6	30.9	43.3	6.0
Finland	15.6	6.6	15.3	51.9	10.6
France	33.5	3.7	13.6	36.8	12.5
Germany	43.3	12.8	10.1	22.3	11.6
Greece	70.7	16.6	0.4	10.8	1.4
Ireland	44.9	8.1	3.2	24.6	19.3
Italy	51.6	8.6	1.7	25.6	12.5
Luxembourg	37.1	2.9	23.1	17.4	19.6
Netherlands	14.3	6.0	32.7	39.0	8.1
Portugal	67.1	2.4	9.1	12.2	9.3
Spain	73.1	3.1	4.9	9.5	9.4
Sweden	11.0	4.5	40.6	38.4	5.5
UK	33.8	12.5	14.1	25.1	14.5
EU 15	43.1	8.6	11.3	25.5	11.5

The general public was then asked, in 1998, *'irrespective of their answer to the previous question, who should mainly pay for taking care of elderly parents?'* Table 14 confirms the higher levels of family responsibility felt by children in the south than the north (with the exception of Austria) and also the much greater availability of alternatives to family support in the northern EU states, particularly the Scandinavian countries. The fact that more than two-fifths of the general public in all but three Member States and more than half in five of them say that the state/community should mainly pay for the care of older parents, indicates the continuing strength of the belief in the western European model of solidarity and the risk pooling that entails, as opposed to allowing the costs of long-term care to be borne solely by the individuals and families who are unfortunate enough to be affected. This point is reinforced when those who responded spontaneously 'everyone equally' are added to those who responded 'the state or the community' (including local government). In other words, a significant majority of European citizens favour sharing the risks associated with long-term care.

Table 14 Who Should Mainly Pay for the Care of Older Parents? 1998 (Percentages)

	Older People Themselves	Children	State/Community	Everyone Equally ¹	Other/Don't know ¹
Austria	10.6	41.4	21.5	19.5	7.0
Belgium	20.6	10.7	48.6	14.6	5.5
Denmark	5.4	2.0	87.8	1.8	3.0
Finland	11.3	3.4	64.5	14.3	5.5
France	15.8	16.4	45.8	13.5	8.3
Germany	19.0	11.0	46.4	18.1	5.3
Greece	9.1	27.4	40.5	22.0	1.1
Ireland	5.7	16.3	41.9	21.2	14.9
Italy	11.9	23.5	41.5	16.4	6.7
Luxembourg	23.1	13.6	37.0	18.0	8.2
Netherlands	13.9	6.8	65.1	9.8	4.4
Portugal	7.9	29.1	46.4	11.3	5.3
Spain	12.4	30.1	35.9	14.0	7.5
Sweden	8.8	2.5	79.7	6.7	2.2
UK	11.6	12.5	55.0	11.8	7.2
EU 15	14.0	17.1	47.7	14.7	6.4

Note

1. Everyone equally and other were spontaneous.

When it comes to the question of who should take the lead responsibility for the care of dependent older people, there is an overwhelming opinion among citizens that it should be the state, either central or local (Table 15). The only countries in which less than three out of four people think that the state should be mainly responsible for the long-term care of older people, Austria and Germany, are those where there is a long tradition of social care provision by voluntary (not-for-profit) organisations. There has been much debate in Europe recently about a 'mixed economy' of care provision but, as far as the citizen's view of who should be responsible for the care of dependent older people is concerned, the strong preference is for the state, by a ratio of nearly three to one. Roughly one in six, on average, favour non-profit making associations but only one in fourteen people think that this should be left to the private sector.

Table 15 Who Should be Mainly Responsible for the Care of Dependent Older People? 1998 (Percentages)

	Local/National government	Private companies	Associations	Don't know
Austria	57.5	8.1	23.3	11.1
Belgium	76.3	8.1	9.4	6.2
Denmark	86.6	10.2	1.8	1.4
Finland	89.7	4.0	1.8	4.5
France	82.2	5.2	8.7	3.8
Germany	53.1	11.4	29.4	6.1
Greece	77.1	7.5	12.9	2.5
Ireland	87.6	0.8	3.2	8.3
Italy	63.4	11.1	18.6	6.9
Luxembourg	69.2	8.3	13.0	9.5
Netherlands	94.0	0.4	2.8	2.8
Portugal	88.2	1.4	8.0	2.4
Spain	77.2	5.0	9.1	8.7
Sweden	82.6	12.3	2.3	2.9
UK	83.5	2.3	5.5	8.6
EU 15	72.4	7.2	14.3	6.2

Table 16 shows the results from another question in the 1998 survey which suggested that, in the future working adults may have to look after their parents more than they do now. The responses emphasise the general prevalence of family solidarity and the significant difference between the Scandinavian Member States and the southern ones.

Table 16 In the Future Working Adults May Have to Look after Their Parents More Than They Do Nowadays 1998 (Percentages)

	Quite a good thing	Quite a bad thing	Neither	Don't know
Austria	55.0	10.3	21.9	12.9
Belgium	37.8	22.9	30.2	9.1
Denmark	47.4	36.1	13.4	3.0
Finland	38.6	40.6	15.2	5.6
France	42.8	27.1	19.9	10.3
Germany	49.4	14.6	24.2	11.8
Greece	89.4	4.5	5.8	0.2
Ireland	64.0	7.7	18.6	9.6
Italy	76.3	5.8	11.1	6.7
Luxembourg	45.2	27.9	16.5	10.4
Netherlands	38.2	44.6	15.6	1.6

Portugal	60.3	7.2	23.0	9.5
Spain	58.6	10.5	23.8	7.1
Sweden	30.1	46.4	18.0	5.5
UK	53.3	21.6	17.7	7.4
EU 15	54.6	18.0	19.1	8.3

The final question in this short series concerning European attitudes to ageing and older people focuses on one of the most contentious issues in the field of long-term care. We have seen that EU citizens have a preference for the pooling of long-term care risks and a strong preference for the state to take a lead role but whose voice should prevail in determining which services are appropriate? We asked this question in 1992 and pointed out in the report that for most younger adults, this sort of question never arises (Walker, 1993, p.30). But, in the care of older people, it is very often a third party (be it family member or professional/quasi-professional) who makes the crucial decisions. Thus, older people may be dis-empowered even by highly well meaning and loving relatives or by highly skilled and compassionate professionals. The general public's response in 1992 was that the older person themselves should decide but this was followed closely by a professional (usually a doctor) and then by a relative or close friend.

By 1999 opinion has shifted more in favour of the older person and a relative or close friend and against the medical profession. In other words, there is an even stronger feeling today that the voices of older people or those close to them should prevail (the combined totals come to nearly seven out of ten citizens holding this view). What is remarkable, in addition, in both surveys is the tiny proportion of the general public in the EU that thinks the service provider should decide which services are appropriate, indeed this proportion has shrunk slightly since 1992. There are hardly any differences between men and women in responses to this question but there is a tendency for those responding 'the older person' to increase with age: 15-24 (33 per cent), 25-39 (37 per cent), 40-54 (37 per cent), 55+ (41 per cent).

There are powerful messages here from citizens to policy makers and service providers. The European model of intergenerational solidarity remains strong both within families and within society as a whole. This points to policies aimed at risk

pooling – such as the German long-term care insurance scheme or the Scandinavian public service model – rather than privatisation. There is an equally strong belief that older people and/or their families and friends should be empowered to take decisions themselves about their own care and that service providers should not be allowed to do so.

CONCLUSION

This report has reviewed the findings from questions in the 1999 Eurobarometer survey which replicated those in the special 1992 Eurobarometer survey conducted in preparation for the European Year of Older People and Solidarity Between the Generations. The questions focussed on four of the issues which are still high on the policy agendas of the Member States individually and of the EU as a whole. The key findings may be summarised as follows:

- continuing belief in solidarity and occupational welfare as the basis for pension provision;
- increasing pessimism that policy makers will keep faith with the pensions contract;
- very strong support for legislation to outlaw age discrimination;
- a generally permissive attitude towards paid work after retirement;
- enduring strength of intergenerational solidarity within families in the care of older people;
- strong support for the state taking a lead role in the care of dependent older people; and
- increasing support for the empowerment of older people in the care process.

There are remarkable consistencies in opinion between the two surveys but also some significant changes, the growth of pessimism about the future of the pensions contract being the most dramatic one. The general public does not always speak with a clear voice but there are important and powerful and, to some extent, uncomfortable messages here for policy makers, if they choose to listen to the voices of the people. If

they don't there is a danger of a gulf opening up between the policy makers and the people, particularly with regard to pensions.

Differences between the Member States are enduring, particularly on the north/south axis. But there are also clear signs in this report of a reduction in this gap since 1992. The southern states are in transition and by the time this survey is repeated again this gap will have narrowed further.

Overall these results suggest that the EU is coming to terms with population ageing in a steady and considered way but that there is rather too much uncertainty on several policy fronts. Most importantly the results show that older people are well regarded by citizens as a whole both as family members and as the subjects of public policy.

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For each country a comparison between the sample and the universe was carried out. The Universe description was derived from Eurostat population data or from national statistics. For all EU member-countries a national weighting procedure, using marginal and intercellular weighting, was carried out based on this Universe description. As such in all countries, minimum sex, age, region NUTS II were introduced in the iteration procedure. For international weighting (i.e. EU averages), INRA (EUROPE) applies the official population figures as provided by EUROSTAT in the Regional Statistics Yearbook (data for 1997 or 1996). The total population figures for input in this post-weighting procedure are listed above.

Readers are reminded that survey results are estimations, the accuracy of which, everything being equal, rests upon the sample size and upon the observed percentage. With samples of about 1,000, the real percentages vary within the following confidence limits:

Observed percentages	10% or 90%	20% or 80%	30% or 70%	40% or 60%	50%
Confidence limits	± 1.9%	± 2.5%	±2.7	± 3.0%	± 3.1%

Table 17 The Best Person to Decide on Appropriate Services for Older People Needing LTC (Percentages)

	Relative or close friend		Older Person		Service Provider		Another Professional (doctor)		Don't know ¹	
	1992	1999	1992	1999	1992	1999	1992	1999	1992	1999
Austria	-	26.5	-	42.0	-	6.3	-	20.5	-	4.6
Belgium	24.0	20.9	43.0	46.0	8.1	8.0	22.3	23.0	2.7	2.2
Denmark	24.8	29.7	48.1	44.4	9.0	12.5	17.0	11.4	1.0	1.9
Finland	-	26.1	-	56.8	-	2.2	-	12.5	-	2.5
France	25.7	26.9	34.9	37.2	3.7	2.7	34.7	31.4	0.9	1.9
Germany	20.0	23.9	45.4	48.1	3.7	5.2	28.5	20.0	2.3	2.8
Greece	37.8	21.4	35.0	44.0	8.7	12.4	16.9	21.8	1.6	0.5
Ireland	41.5	34.6	22.3	38.5	5.8	4.9	26.8	17.6	3.6	4.3
Italy	30.9	37.8	18.2	20.9	7.5	6.6	42.2	32.8	1.2	1.9
Luxembourg	25.7	25.4	33.0	32.6	5.6	8.4	30.1	31.2	5.7	2.3
Netherlands	18.7	24.9	32.7	45.3	11.7	8.7	33.4	19.1	3.5	2.0
Portugal	38.6	39.8	22.6	22.1	14.1	8.4	24.0	27.7	0.6	3.0
Spain	38.4	36.1	36.1	30.8	3.8	2.0	16.6	29.0	5.1	2.1
Sweden	-	26.4	-	54.6	-	2.1	-	14.3	-	2.6
UK	29.6	41.3	29.8	38.8	4.3	5.7	30.6	10.1	5.7	4.1
EU 12 (1992)/15(1999)	28.4	31.2	33.5	37.8	5.6	5.3	29.7	23.1	2.9	2.5

Note

1. includes no answer

