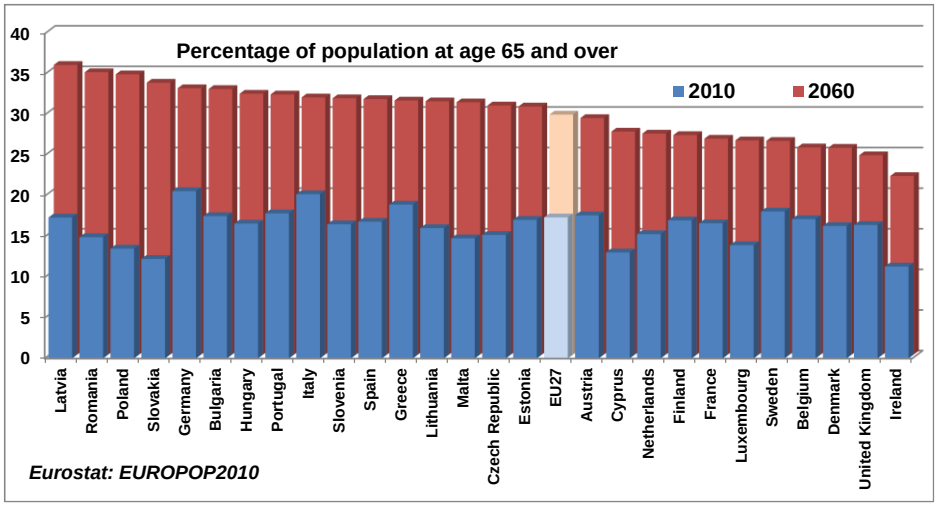
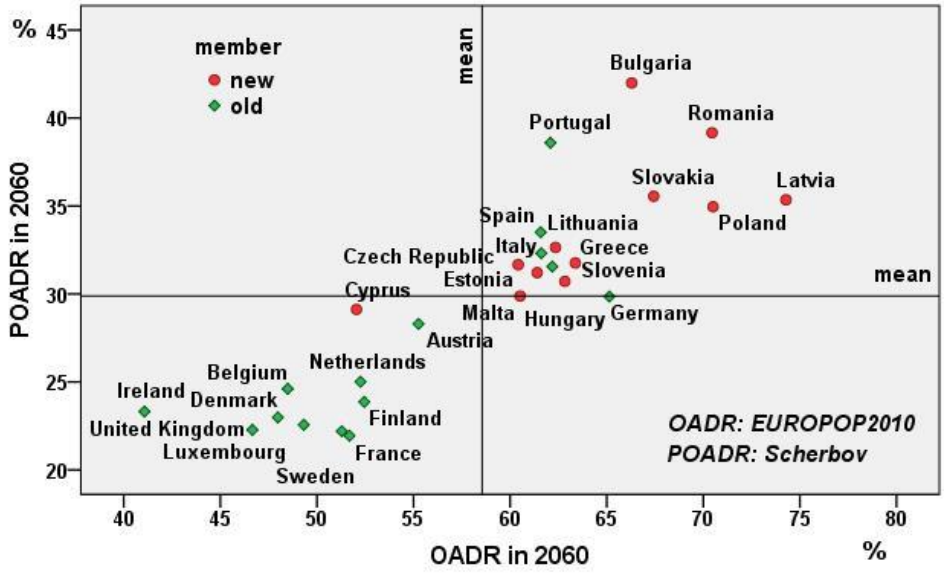
EU27s Population Ageing: Is the Divide in Conditions followed by a Split in Attitudes?

In the future, virtually all countries will face population ageing and the phenomenon is expected to be irreversible. However, the magnitude and speed can vary. The European Union population will remain the world's oldest region into the 21st century. According to EUROPOP projection, the percentage of people in EU27 aged 65+ will increase from 17.4% in 2010 to 29.5% in 2060. However, the pace of ageing will vary across countries. Former Eastern European populations (Latvia, Romania, Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary), while young today will belong among the oldest in the future. On the other hand, Sweden, Belgium, United Kingdom, and France will experience a rather decelerating trend in the population ageing.

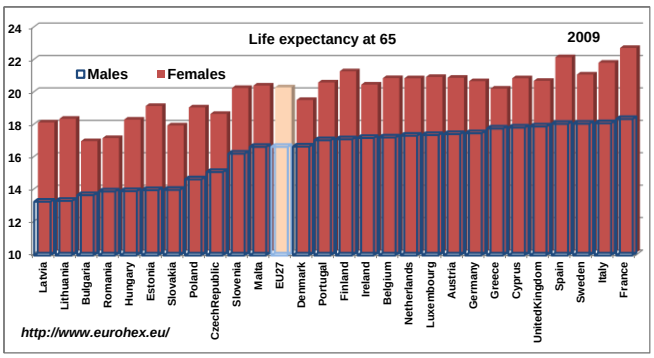


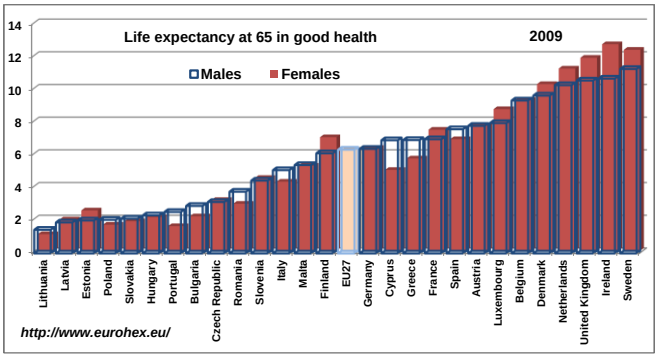
The shift in the proportion of the age groups will result in the increase of old age dependency ratio (OADR=P_{65}+/$P_{20\text{-}64}$ in %). The traditional backward looking definition of OADR based on chronological (retrospective age) has recently been replaced by a new concept of forward looking prospective age (POADR, Sanderson, Scherbov 2007). Regardless of the approach used for the year 2060, we see that former Eastern Europe and Southern Europe will be affected with rapid population ageing the most (POADR data kindly provided by S.Scherbov).



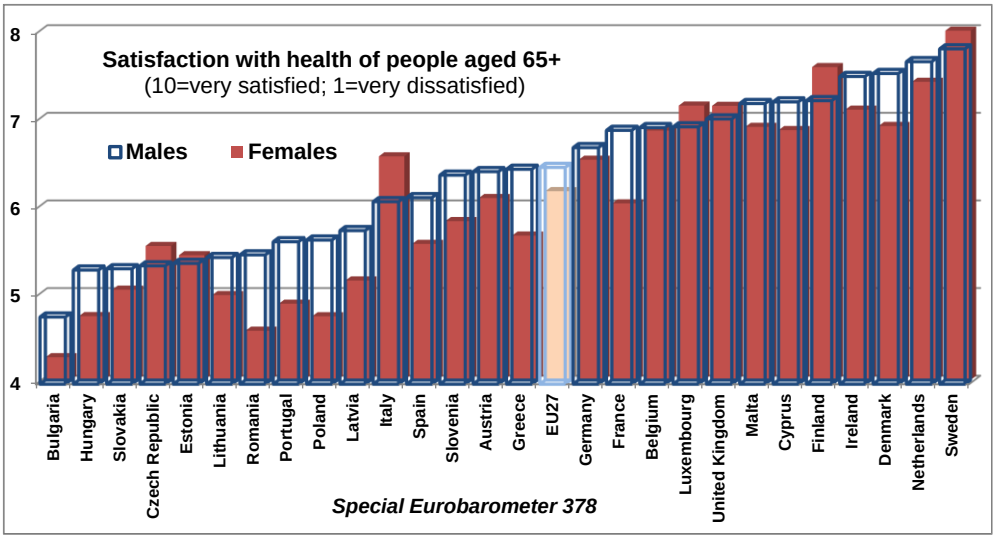
These results raise many questions: How healthy will the populations be? What age is considered as the starting point of being old? What will the attitudes be towards the elderly? How will people be satisfied with their own health? Can we expect that the adjustment to the new conditions

will promote stronger intergenerational solidarity and good perception of senior population? Will the fast ageing populations of Central and Eastern Europe adapt to the new conditions? Is there a risk of an intergenerational conflict?





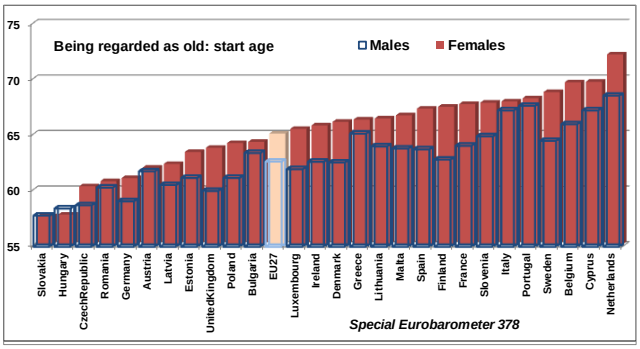
The future oldest populations will be less healthy compared to people living in more economically advanced countries of Western and Northern Europe. How will the oldest populations cope with the accumulation of unfavourable conditions (weaker economy, more seniors, and worse health)? The study will primarily focus on confronting demographic indicators of ageing with investigating the attitudes towards the elderly based on the recent survey on Active Ageing (Special Eurobarometer 378, 2012).

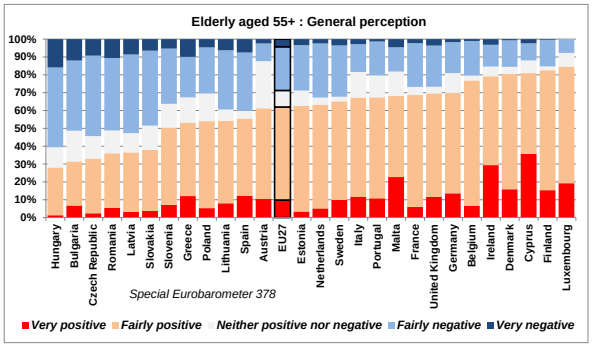


Older women are overall less satisfied with their health than older men despite the fact that women enjoy longer life expectancy. However, in several countries (Czech Republic, Italy, and Finland) women complain less about health than men. The East-West divide observed through demographic indicators of mortality and health is also repeated in attitude patterns. Citizens in former EU15 tend to be more satisfied with their health than those in NMS12 (12 New Member States).

People view the beginning of old age differently across EU. People are most likely to set old age lower in Slovakia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania, Germany, etc. However, women consider themselves as old at a higher age than men. This pattern is almost universal. This gender gap is contrary to the health views expressed by men and women as mentioned earlier.

General perception of the elderly at age 55 and over is the most positive in Luxembourg, Finland, Cyprus, Denmark, Ireland, Belgium while it is very negative in Hungary, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Romania, Latvia, Slovakia. Former socialist countries do not show old-age friendly environment despite the fact that currently they still belong among the youngest populations. Therefore, for such countries it will be a significant challenge in the future to cope with the fast population ageing.





Are all those above described patterns country specific or are they different by gender or according to the age groups? Deeper analysis will take into account each gender separately and include broad age groups. This approach could shed more light on EU27 divides regarding attitudes towards the elderly.

The first results of such an analysis are presented in the next table. The first model addresses the perceptions of an old age. The start of old age is increased by older respondents compared with youngsters. Women feel that old age begins later than men do. After adjustment for gender and age, country ranking does not change too much, compared with an unadjusted picture. To feel old at a lower age can be found in Slovakia, Hungary, Czech Republic, while not feeling too old despite higher chronological age is seen in the Netherlands, Cyprus, Portugal, Belgium, etc.

Are people aged 55 years and over perceived positively? There is very little difference by gender; men perceive older people more positively than women. Older respondents were more likely to see negative attitudes towards people over 55 years of age in their country. Negative opinions towards elderly are particularly seen in Hungary, Czech Republic, and Bulgaria. Therefore, controlling for gender and age does not primarily change the unadjusted picture.

Population ageing is fundamental and historically unprecedented, therefore European societies and particularly social policies should address those new challenges. Ageing related policies have many components: pension system, health and long-term care, employment, migration and integration or infrastructure development. Despite apparently negative connotations, population ageing should be seen as a human success story – the triumph of public health, medical advancements, and economic development over diseases and injuries that had limited human life expectancy for millennia (*Kinsella* and *Philips* 2005). To compute demographic and statistical indicators, including modelling and forecasting, is important. However, population attitudes are no less important for coping with our future. Public and scientific debates often address convergence scenarios of population developments. Despite the expectations, EU27 remains divided in many aspects, including those related to attitudes.

Bibliography

Active Ageing, Special Eurobarometer 378, 2012

Sanderson, W. and Scherbov, S. 2007: A new perspective on population ageing. Demographic Research. 16(2), pp.27-58

Kinsella, K. and Philips D.R. 2005 : Global Aging : The Challenge of Success. Population Bulletin 60 (1), pp.342-16

Dependent variable: **Start age when being regarded as old**	Estimate	Pr > ChiSq	Probability modeled is positive perception *Dependent variable:* **General perception of elderly aged 55+**	Estimate	Pr > ChiSq
Male	-2,00	<.0001	Male	0,08	0,0078
Female	*0*		*Female*	*0*	
15-24	-8,89	<.0001	15-24	0,32	<.0001
25-34	-6,13	<.0001	25-34	0,36	<.0001
35-44	-5,06	<.0001	35-44	0,29	<.0001
45-54	-3,90	<.0001	45-54	0,09	0,0547
55-64	-2,34	<.0001	55-64	-0,02	0,6298
65+	*0*		*65+*	*0*	
Slovakia	-12,41	<.0001	Hungary	-1,44	<.0001
Hungary	-12,41	<.0001	Czech Republic	-1,17	<.0001
Czech Republic	-10,90	<.0001	Bulgaria	-1,16	<.0001
Germany	-10,87	<.0001	Latvia	-1,07	<.0001
Romania	-9,63	<.0001	Romania	-1,04	<.0001
Austria	-8,62	<.0001	Slovakia	-0,93	<.0001
United Kingdom	-8,46	<.0001	Lithuania	-0,36	0,0406
Latvia	-8,23	<.0001	Spain	-0,34	<.0001
Estonia	-7,83	<.0001	Slovenia	-0,34	0,1203
Poland	-7,42	<.0001	Greece	-0,19	0,1176
Bulgaria	-6,70	<.0001	Poland	-0,09	0,2914
Luxembourg	-6,57	0,0018	*Netherlands*	*0*	
Denmark	-6,14	<.0001	Sweden	0,05	0,6621
Ireland	-5,78	<.0001	Estonia	0,09	0,7554
Finland	-5,39	<.0001	France	0,29	0,0007
Lithuania	-4,96	<.0001	United Kingdom	0,30	0,0004
Spain	-4,95	<.0001	Portugal	0,53	<.0001
Malta	-4,90	0,0335	Italy	0,65	<.0001
Greece	-4,58	<.0001	Germany	0,67	<.0001
France	-4,57	<.0001	Belgium	0,68	<.0001
Slovenia	-4,01	0,0003	Malta	0,77	0,1977
Sweden	-3,90	<.0001	Austria	0,95	<.0001
Italy	-3,21	<.0001	Ireland	0,95	<.0001
Belgium	-2,63	<.0001	Denmark	1,00	<.0001
Portugal	-2,39	<.0001	Finland	1,03	<.0001
Cyprus	-1,63	0,3187	Cyprus	1,26	0,0091
Netherlands	*0*		Luxembourg	1,50	0,0265
Generalized linear model Higher negative value of the estimate, younger start age being old is reported SAS 9.3 GENMOD			Binary logistic regression: Positive vs negative perception Positive= very positive+fairly positive Negative=very negative+fairly negative SAS 9.3 LOGISTIC		