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Theme: Sustainable and inclusive societies

Further Reading: Ní Léime, Á, & Street, D. (2018). Working later in the USA and Ireland: Implications for precariously and securely employed women. *Ageing and Society*, 1-25.
doi:10.1017/SO144686X18000508

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Read More About: [Gender and Public Policy research cluster](#) within the Whitaker Institute for Innovation and Societal Change

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Extended Working Life policies; gender and health implications in Ireland

In recent decades the European Union has promoted Active Ageing and the OECD has strongly encouraged governments to introduce policies designed to extend working life (EWL) as a means of addressing population ageing and anticipated increased pension costs. From 2012 onwards, Ireland has introduced several such pension reforms including raising state pension age, – now 66, to increase to 67 in 2021 and 68 by 2028. Pensions are now linked more closely to time spent in paid work, by increasing the number of contributions required for a minimum pension, increasing the number of bands and paying less to those with fewer contributions.

Research Findings

A recent Marie Curie funded study on older workers in Ireland (GENDOWL, P.I., Áine Ní Léime, Irish Centre for Social Gerontology) analysed their employment trajectories (www.genderewl.com). COST Action IS1409 analysed Extended Working Life policies. It was found that women are more likely than men to be in part-time or precarious employment, and may not be able to afford to contribute to private pensions and are more likely to be dependent on the state non-contributory pension. Raising state pension age penalises all workers in physically demanding or stressful work who develop health challenges earlier and who may find it extremely challenging to work past age 65 or to find alternative work if they become unemployed.

Employment policies were also introduced. Anti-age discrimination legislation was strengthened to include people aged 65 or over. While state pension age has increased, many Irish private sector employers have not increased the retirement age from 65, leaving a gap between the end of employment and eligibility for the state pension. A recent Code of Practice on Longer Working (S.I. 17) provides guidelines on best practice in the approach to retirement, but also allows compulsory retirement ages if they can be ‘objectively justified’ on a range of grounds.

Policy Implications

- All future pension reforms should be gender-proofed.
- Working past age 65 should be an option rather than being enforced by raising state pension age.
- For those in physically demanding or stressful work, there should be an option to retire at 65 or earlier.
- Introducing a Universal Citizen’s Income/ pension would ensure that unpaid care work (mainly performed by women) is valued.
- Precarious employment needs to be addressed by the government.
- Measures to improve the health and well-being of workers of all ages are needed
- Further research on the gender and health implications of extending working life is needed.

