



Scottish Pensioners' Forum
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This response may be published with the name of our organisation.

This response may be shared with other UK Government policy departments.



The **Scottish Pensioners' Forum (SPF)**, the campaigning organisation for older people in Scotland, strongly opposes any proposal from the UK Government to further raise the state pension age.

During the last review of the State Pension Age in 2022, the SPF provided evidence and engaged in discussions with Baroness Neville-Rolfe and her team. Several members of our Executive Committee presented a detailed paper outlining the significant adverse effects that any increase in the state pension age would have on older people in Scotland which included heightened financial insecurity, further exacerbation of health inequalities, and disproportionate effects on vulnerable communities.

We express deep concern that, since assuming office, the current UK Government has continued to pursue policies that appear to attribute responsibility for the UK's current economic challenges to vulnerable groups, particularly older and disabled people, and are working to erode these groups' right to benefits and welfare. Such an approach risks undermining social cohesion and fairness.

This call for evidence response seeks to reaffirm our position and to remind policymakers of the potential detrimental consequences of increasing the state pension age further.

Specifically, such measures would disproportionately affect certain groups and communities, thereby creating inequities in the balance of universal rights across the UK.

This paper is presented on behalf of our members and affiliates.

The UK Perspective

1. Disproportionate Impact on Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Groups

Increases to the State Pension Age (SPA) disproportionately affect individuals from lower-income and working-class backgrounds, as these groups exhibit greater reliance on state pensions and face significant barriers to extending employment.

Research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) showed that when the transition from a state pension age of 65 to 66 took place, this resulted in a marked rise in income poverty among 65-year-olds, equating to approximately 14%, due to limited employment opportunities for this age group.

<https://ifs.org.uk/publications/how-have-pensioner-incomes-and-poverty-changed-recent-years>.

People unable to remain in employment prior to retiring were left dependant on means-tested benefits such as Universal Credit, which provided a substantially lower income in comparison to the state pension.

Manual workers (e.g. in construction, the care sector, retail and factory work amongst others) and those with chronic health conditions are less capable of deferring retirement.

Most Affected:

- Low-income households
- Workers in physically demanding occupations
- Individuals with poor health or disabilities
- Residents of economically disadvantaged regions with lower life expectancies

2. Gendered Disparities in State Pension

Any increases to the state pension age would further exacerbate gender inequality, as women are more susceptible to poverty in later life due to systemic disparities in caregiving responsibilities, and insufficient pension accumulation.

According to their own UK government data, the gender pension gap, which is defined as the differential in pension wealth between men and women, stood at approximately 48% between 2020/2022. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/gender-pensions-gap-in-private-pensions-2020-to-2022/gender-pensions-gap-in-private-pensions-2020-to-2022>

According to statistics from Age UK (2024), single older women are experiencing a poverty rate of 23% in comparison to 13% among pensioner couples.

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/siteassets/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/money-matters/poverty-and-financial-disadvantage-in-later-life-briefing-2024.pdf>

The National Pensioners' Convention has estimated that more than one in five women pensioners live in poverty in comparison to one in six men. <https://www.npcuk.org/post/end-gender-pension-and-pay-gap-so-millions-won-t-retire-as-poor-as-their-grandmothers>

The Women's Budget Group has projected that by 2040, poverty among older women could rise from 20% to 26%, much higher than projected for men from (15% to 19%).

<https://www.wbg.org.uk/article/the-growing-crisis-of-poverty-in-later-life/>

In addition to this, women's employment trajectories are often interrupted by unpaid care work and by having to undertake part-time employment positions with limited private pension contributions.

Most Affected:

- Single older women
- Women with caregiving responsibilities or minimal private pension provision
- Women employed in low-paid or part-time positions

3. Unequal Trends in Life Expectancy

The main assumption underpinning the UK Government's drive to increase the state pension age, that of longevity having vastly improved, is actually empirically flawed. Gains in life expectancy have stagnated and remain highly stratified by socioeconomic status.

Data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) revealed that improvements in life expectancy have plateaued since 2011.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/lifeexpectancies/bulletins/nationallifetablesunitedkingdom/2021to2023additionaldata>

The disparity in healthy life expectancy between affluent and deprived areas is approximately 19 years and in certain localities (e.g., Glasgow, Blackpool, Northeast England), the average male life expectancy actually falls below the current state pension threshold.

Consequently, state pension age rises thereby reduce the retirement duration for disadvantaged groups, with some individuals dying prior to pension eligibility.

Most Affected:

- Residents within areas of social deprivation

4. Escalating Pensioner Poverty

Any further rises to the state pension age risks exacerbating pensioner poverty, which is already at its highest level for a decade.

According to statistics by Age UK (2024), approximately 1.9 million pensioners (16%) live in relative poverty.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) research highlighted that pensioner poverty has risen from 13% in 2011/12 to 16% in 2022/23.

The IFS also proposes that material deprivation amongst pensioners has increased from 6% to 8% between 2019/20 and 2022/23.

Many low-income pensioners already struggle with housing costs, energy bills, and food inflation.

Any state pension age increases prolong reliance on working-age benefits, which are significantly less generous than the state pension which they have contributed to through taxation during their working lives.

Most Affected:

- Pensioners on low incomes
- Older individuals lacking occupational or private pensions

5. Barriers to Continued Employment Among Older Workers

Proposed state pension increases presume that individuals in their 60s can sustain employment; however, structural and health-related constraints render this assumption untenable for many older people.

According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS,2024), only approximately 50% of individuals aged 60–64 are engaged in full-time employment.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/bulletins/familiesandhouseholds/2024>

Health deterioration, physically demanding roles, and caregiving obligations often precipitate withdrawal from the employment market prior to reaching state pension age.

Older workers face prolonged unemployment duration and heightened age discrimination.

www.scottishpensioners.org.uk/files/Bullying20%Final.pdf

Analysis by the IFS and the Resolution Foundation demonstrates that state pension age increases have actually redirected individuals toward disability and unemployment benefits rather than employment. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/under-strain/>

Most Affected:

- Older workers with health issues
- Individuals in manual or precarious employment
- Carers often forced to leave paid employment

6. Regional and Class-Based Inequalities

Increases to the state pension age disproportionately impacts individuals in socially and economically deprived areas, where life expectancy and opportunities for employment are markedly lower. <https://www.pensionspolicyinstitute.org.uk/media/15onl20s/202012-bn125-longevity-inequality.pdf>

In affluent areas of the UK (e.g., Surrey, Oxfordshire), men typically live well into their 80s, enjoying over two decades of retirement.

On the other hand, in more deprived areas (e.g., Blackpool, Glasgow, Merthyr Tydfil), male life expectancy often peaks in the mid-70s, thereby receiving minimal or no state pension provision.

These regional disparities ensure that state pension age increases present advantages to wealthier areas while exacerbating hardship among poorer communities.

Most Affected:

- Residents of northern England, Wales, and many parts of Scotland
- Lower socioeconomic classes with reduced health and a lower life expectancy

7. Economic and Ethical Considerations

Although state pension increases generate short-term fiscal savings, they create significant social costs, including heightened inequality and potential long-term expenditure on welfare, health, and social care.

Estimates from the Institute for Fiscal Studies indicate that while state pension age increases reduce Treasury outlays, they simultaneously elevate spending on working-age benefits and healthcare for individuals compelled to work longer or endure poverty.

Normative arguments emphasise that state pensions should guarantee dignity and security in later life, rather than perpetuating hardship. At present, the UK state pension age already sits as one of the highest in the OECD rankings.

Policy discourse increasingly backs calls for enhancing pension adequacy, addressing gender disparities, and promoting voluntary extensions of working life through supportive measures rather than coercion.

The Scottish Context

As state pension provision is a reserved matter, much of the data available, as detailed in the previous analysis, shows things from a UK perspective however as all of our work is based around the welfare and rights of older people in Scotland we felt that it was necessary to touch briefly on how they would be directly impacted by any further increases to the state pension age.

- Life expectancy in Scotland is lower than the UK average and there is a large gap between the most and least deprived areas. For example, women in the most deprived areas have on average a lower life expectancy of approximately 10.5 years in comparison to those in the least deprived and for men the gap equates to approximately 13.2 years. <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/news/2024/life-expectancy-in-scotland-increases>

- According to a report by Independent Age, pensioner poverty is a real and growing issue: about 156,000 pensioners in Scotland are already living in poverty. That is the highest number since the periods 2005-2008. <https://www.independentage.org/Scotland-pensioner-poverty-rise>

- According to Age Scotland, relative poverty for pensioners, after housing costs, sits at around **15%** in recent years (2021-24). Absolute poverty after housing costs is around **11–14%** depending on the measure.

- In 2023, fuel poverty is particularly bad with 39% of over-65s in Scotland living in fuel poverty - up from 19% in 2021. This equates to almost four in ten older households having to struggle with

fuel costs. <https://www.agescotland.org.uk/latest-news/2023/august/pensioner-fuel-poverty-doubles-in-two-years/>

This baseline means many older Scots are already under stress financially, health-wise, and in terms of life expectancy. Any further rising of the state pension age would have a detrimental impact on these already stark inequalities.

We conclude our call for evidence submission on the state pension age by highlighting the plight of the WASPI women, a campaign we have championed since 2016.

This travesty of maladministration has caused many women to lose out on thousands of pounds worth of state pension provision and despite a Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman investigation finding in their favour and recommending compensation, the UK Government is denying causing quantifiable injustice and has ruled that these women suffered no financial loss which merits compensation.

We will continue to campaign against any further rising of the state pension age alongside Unite the Union and the National Pensioners Convention and will stand with the WASPI women until they receive the pensions justice they deserve.

Eileen Cawley
Development Officer
On behalf of the SPF Executive Committee