



For further information, please contact:
Nicola Cerbino
nicola.cerbino@unicatt.it

There is a gap in life expectancy between low and high educated European people, with the largest gap in Eastern countries.

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A gap in life expectancy exists between high and low educated individuals in all European countries: those individuals with a tertiary, or post-secondary, education can expect to live more years after the age of 50 than those without a tertiary education. There is also clear geographic variation, with the difference in life expectancy being larger in Eastern Europe. The difference runs to 11 years for Estonian men whereas it is less than 3 years in Sweden. The difference is generally larger for men than women. Moreover, people with a high educational level live more years without disability.

These are key results from the ongoing European project 'FACTAGE' (Fairer ACTIVE AGEing for Europe). The findings were presented by Mikkel Barslund (Centre for European Policy Studies) at the conference "Increasing the Knowledge Base on Demographic Change", which took place on the 13th of February in Brussels (Hotel le chatelain - Rue du Châtelain 17). The conference was organised by the JPI MYBL to stimulate dialogue in the area of demographic change by bringing together stakeholders including national policy makers, funders, scientists, health care professionals, industry representatives and NGO's.

"These first results originate from a comprehensive survey of the literature of socio-economic differences in life expectancy at the age of 50 in European countries," Barslund explains. "The difference runs to 11 years for Estonian men whereas it is less than three years in Sweden. It is generally larger for men than women. Moreover, people with a high educational level live more years without disability. There is also a clear geographic variation with differences being larger in Eastern Europe."

"Results are not available in a systematic way for all countries due to lack of data. The project also addresses this issue in experimental work on existing EU databases. In particular, researchers have used the EU survey on income and living conditions to look into life expectancy differences in countries where no results currently exist."

"We also looked at differences in health outcomes. Here the focus was on the trend over time. Specifically, we ask if socio-economic differences in health outcomes are worsening over time, or if health outcomes became more equal. The main result, looking at the ten European countries where data is available, is that differences are not increasing, and there is some evidence that differences are shrinking. In particular for women in Spain, Italy and Greece: these countries tended to have large differences in 2004 - the first year of measurement."

"Planned research will explore, among other things, the impact of a longer working life on gender equality within the domestic household, the emergence of new types of work, as well as on subjective wellbeing. Further work will also be done analysing life course trajectories and fairness issues in the pension system. Building on the work on socio-economic inequalities, the FACTAGE project will focus on how to deliver longer working lives in an equitable way prospectively."

THE PROJECT

FACTAGE starts from the premise that there is substantial scope for increasing the length of average working lives and active ageing in its many facets. Realising this potential requires paying careful attention to questions of equality concerning the elderly, not least prospectively. Furthermore, there is the fundamental issue of how to adapt the requirement to work longer with intergenerational distribution concerns.

The FACTAGE project aims at making an impact on three levels. At the basic level it will advance the knowledge base on the association between longer working lives, well-being measured along several dimensions, and emerging inequalities related to the labour market, as well as development over time in socio-economic differences in health and mortality.

Based on accumulated evidence within the FACTAGE project the researchers aim to contribute directly to the discussion on equitable pension systems designs from a life course perspective. This will enable a discussion based on quantitative analysis with civil society groups and social partners on how probable events (i.e. caring commitments, skills upgrading and unemployment spells) throughout the life course and working career should affect pension contributions and the effective retirement age.

<https://www.factage.eu/>

Notes for editors:

For interviews please contact

Mikkel Barslund (@mbarslund)

Research Fellow

CEPS

p: +32 2 229 39 49

a: 1, Place du Congrès, 1000, Bruxelles

w: www.ceps.eu e: mikkel.barslund@ceps.eu

<http://www.jp-demographic.eu/news/jpi-mybl-2018-brussels-conference/>