



FONDATION KORIAN POUR LE BIEN VIEILLIR

PRESS RELEASE

Paris, 4 September 2018

Is feeling useful the secret to ageing well? European seniors aspire to play an active role in society.

**3rd round of the Ageing Well Barometer for European seniors
IPSOS/THE KORIAN FOUNDATION FOR AGEING WELL**

Do European seniors feel good about their age? Is life a source of enjoyment for them? How do they relate to the future? What are their reasons for being happy today? What role do the internet and social networks, and close family and friends, and even love and sexuality play in how they enjoy life? As a whole, how do they feel perceived by society? Do they feel useful? And above all, to what extent do they feel free to do what they want? Where do Europeans stand when it comes to the rights and freedoms of seniors, their ability to hold high-level responsibility, the possibility to have a professional life beyond a certain age, or their right to vote on subjects concerning the future of young generations?

These are among the many questions the Barometer of the Korian Foundation set out to provide answers for this year. The results reveal a portrait of seniors who are raising more and more questions about the place that society offers them. It also shows the large disparity that exists in the lives of seniors from different European Union countries where the study was conducted.

Seniors now start to feel they are getting on in years when they hit 79, far beyond traditional categories of public policies.

On average, European seniors over 65 do not feel 'old' until they reach 79 years, whereas for people under 65, the 'border' lies at 70...

Although a large majority of them (67%) state that overall they feel physically and mentally fit, this perception starts to decline at 80 years and over (58%). This feeling of satisfaction even reaches its peak between 65 and 69 years (70%), which demonstrates that European seniors, for the most part, feel that they manage to stay in good shape until an advanced age, almost the current average life expectancy (between 81 and 83 years old, depending on the country). A large majority state that they take life as it comes, without really thinking about tomorrow (67%), they continue to have fun (68%), like new experiences (67%), and often feel younger than their age (59% overall and 54% for those 80 and over). Many still have romantic feelings (44% overall and 36% for those 80 and over), still feel physically attracted to certain people (43% overall and 34% for those 80 and over, in other words, 1/3 of them), and regularly have sexual relations (36% and 20% for those 80 and over, or rather, 1 in 5). The impacts of ageing are not felt before the age of 80, even though public health indicators show that disability-free life expectancy is no longer improving. This analysis urges public authorities and health professionals to fine-tune the categories used to create policies for elderly care.



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The social role and usefulness of seniors in question: a substantial gap between the aspirations of main stakeholders and the perception of younger generations.

Contrary to common preconceptions, seniors feel more useful than their younger counterparts: the feeling of usefulness among elders is at its highest between 65 and 74 years (85% feel useful compared to 76% of those younger than 65 years). The barometer reveals a difference in the perception of usefulness between seniors and younger generations. On the whole, for society, being useful means being able to manage daily life without any help, whereas for seniors, feeling useful more generally means being able to manage administrative papers and household chores with complete independence. Assistance to others comes only much further in their hierarchy of usefulness. On the other hand, younger generations consider that seniors could feel useful by transmitting their knowledge to young people, giving them advice or helping them. Younger generations overrate the fact that their elders would feel useful thanks to them. For seniors, the main factors for feeling useful are when their autonomy is respected and when society does not treat them like children.

Although 90% of seniors would like to continue to play an active role in society and feel as though they are full-fledged citizens, 'in response' a non-negligible part of Europeans younger than 65 would like to completely limit their status as citizens. This is particularly true in France and in Italy. Approximately one out of two Europeans younger than 65 are favourable to preventing seniors from working once they have reached retirement age (49% overall but 67% in Italy and 53% in France) and from having responsibilities in politics or companies (46% overall but 56% in Italy and 49% in France). Approximately one European out of five would like to limit their right to vote, especially in subjects concerning the future of young generations (19%), like what certain people requested during the Brexit referendum. What is even more surprising is that a non-negligible percentage of people over 65 also support these positions and are favourable to the notion of 'letting go' after a certain age: 46% of seniors would like to prevent the elderly from having high-level responsibilities, and 44% are in favour of preventing them from working once they have reached retirement age.

The feeling of 'well-being' among the elderly remains on the whole quite high, although there are noticeable differences between men and women.

The feeling of being at ease with one's age remains high but has eroded over the last four years, decreasing from 87% in 2014 to 76% in 2016, to finally reach 74% in 2018, or rather, a 13-point drop. The feeling that life is a source of pleasure has also decreased: It dropped from 84% in 2014 to 78% in 2016, to finally reach 75% this year (-9 points). One of the most noteworthy points of this barometer is that this decreased morale among seniors particularly affects women: They receive less retirement compensation and are more often confronted with solitude (widowhood). It seems as though men feel more comfortable about their age (80% as compared to 71% for women). Moreover, the feeling that life is a source of enjoyment remains very stable among men in all age ranges (83% in men aged 65-69 and 80% in men over 80 years old). As for women, only 75% of them between the ages of 65-69 and 57% over 80 state that life is a source of enjoyment, or rather a 7-point gap and a 23-point gap respectively when compared to men of the same age. The male/female inequality in the ability to feel good about one's age exists at the time of retirement but significantly worsens as



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men and women grow older. Professional carers and family members need to better understand this situation in order to avoid ruptures which often speed up the loss of autonomy. Moreover, on the eve of major reforms, especially in France, that will affect the services provided for the loss of autonomy, these inequalities warrant to be considered in order to define pertinent solutions.

Digital tools: essential for feeling useful and favouring seniors' autonomy and well-being.

The internet has become a tool that strongly contributes to creating a feeling of usefulness among seniors. When we asked them to "rank" from 0 to 10 the feeling of usefulness that the internet provides them with, they gave a 6.9/10. It is stronger than being involved in the neighbourhood (4.9/10), volunteering with an association (5.2/10), donating to an association (4.7/10) or even financially helping out their loved ones (6/10). They frequently use it to manage their finances (70% at least once a month - 47% once a week). They frequently use email to communicate (66% at least once a week), but half of them also use social networks (50% at least once a month). Around one senior out of two states that they use Skype to talk with their loved ones, even if not on a regular basis (only 28% talk on Skype at least once a month). Lastly, a small percentage of seniors over 65 go on dating websites (12%), although not very often. The internet is also a tool for consuming culture and information: 44% use it at least once a month to listen to music or watch films. Seniors also go online more frequently to obtain information about their health (40% at least once a month). This phenomenon demonstrates how seniors are taking charge of aspects related to their health: They now obtain information on the internet about the problems they have, possible treatments, and to hear personal accounts from other patients.

Comparison of representations of the self and relationships with society in different European countries.

In France: an increased feeling of depreciation. France is experiencing a significant decrease in morale, where the feeling of being at ease with one's age has reached its lowest point ever (69%, down 7 points since 2016). This trend is most likely due to the different measures implemented over the last 12 months. The fact that French seniors are the ones who claim to participate the most "*in protests and signing petitions*" is not to be taken lightly (38% say they do it often or sometimes, compared to 31% of European seniors). In fact, the feeling of being integrated among French seniors has dropped from 94% to 84%. A large majority of them feel that society as a whole, and mainly public authorities, consider them to be a negligible population (78% and 91% respectively). Although French seniors express a zest for life that is less intense than their Belgian and German neighbours, a large majority of them feel physically fit and mentally happy (63% compared to 67% overall), continue to have fun (63% compared to 68% overall), and take life as it comes without thinking about tomorrow (69% compared to 67% overall).

In Italy: pessimism persists. Among Italian seniors, the feeling of being at ease with one's age has slightly increased when compared to the previous study (73% in 2018 compared to 71% in 2016), but continues to remain behind the other countries.



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However, only a minority of them state that they feel physically fit and mentally happy (44%), continue to have fun (40%), and have confidence in the future (40%). Only 61% of them state that they take life as it comes and do not think about tomorrow. Similar to previous editions of the barometer, this mind-set is likely due to the characteristics of Italian society (extra-familial relations that are less developed than in other countries and a stronger feeling of isolation).

In Germany, overall optimism remains quite high despite a limited purchasing power.

Germans are the ones who are least capable of saving money (only 41% compared to 47% overall). Around one senior out of two state that their income allows them to just barely make ends meet (47% compared to 40% overall). Today this trend is a huge concern. Despite the booming German economy, today over 900,000 pensioners in the country are forced to work to round out their pensions. However, for the most part, seniors in Germany say that they feel good about their age (75%), a figure that is higher than among the Italians and the French. Their well-being relies, most notably, on their optimism for the future (66%, the highest). Unlike other European seniors, this confidence is based less on a lack of concern than it is elsewhere. They are slightly below average when it comes to taking life as it comes (64%) and slightly above average when trying to anticipate for advanced age (74%). Being a bit more hard-working and a bit less spendthrift seems to be the secret for German seniors. The fact remains that they are the most numerous to say that they continue to have fun (88%).

Belgian seniors demonstrate the most positive mind-set. “Le Plat Pays” or The Flat Country is where seniors most often express that they feel good about their age (81% compared to 74% overall). Although since 2014 the feeling of well-being among European seniors has diminished, Belgium remains the country where it is the highest. And it is not their purchasing power that explains their heightened optimism and well-being because fewer than one senior out of two say that they manage to save money today (47%). However, this does not prevent them from affirming in mass that they are the ones who most often feel satisfied in their minds and in their bodies (77%). Belgian seniors are the most numerous to say that they take life as it comes without thinking about tomorrow (74%) while, despite everything, trying to anticipate for their advanced age (83%). Less inclined to be nostalgic, more of them also state that they like new experiences (71%). Although the elderly in Germany and Belgium always tend to be the ones who are most at ease with their age (75% and 81% respectively in 2018), this feeling has also diminished quite significantly among Germans (-14 points since 2014) and moderately among Belgians (-3 points).

“These results reflect above the mind-set and aspirations of seniors today: they would like to continue to be in charge of their lives. For them, the key to feeling useful is being independent and connected to the world thanks to new technology. This aspiration, eminently legitimate, must guide the evolution of public policies and care services. Furthermore, we also need to pay attention to widening inequalities, especially for the most vulnerable such as women over 80, or people who are alone or sick. From this stems the importance for the foundation of continuing to build awareness around initiatives for elders, promoting and supporting actions in favour of a more inclusive society, and fighting against the biases between generations”, concludes Sophie Boissard, CEO of the Korian Foundation for Ageing Well.



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Methodology: To conduct this study, Ipsos surveyed over 8,000 people in 4 key countries in the European Union:

- *Over 4,000 seniors constitute a representative sample of the population 65 years and over in each country included in the study (1000 in France, 1002 in Germany, 1012 in Italy, and 1011 in Belgium).*
- *Over 4,000 people constitute a representative sample of the population between the ages of 15 and 64 in the same countries to determine how younger generations differ from older generations (1000 in France, 1004 in Germany, 1015 in Italy, and 1001 in Belgium).*

In each country, the representativeness of the sample is ensured by using the quota sampling method.

About the Korian Foundation for Ageing Well

The mission of the Korian Foundation for Ageing Well is to help change our outlook on ageing and elders. The Foundation develops unifying projects that contribute to the social inclusion of elderly people and support social relations involving elders, carers, and care professionals. Bringing together health and human science researchers, elder care professionals and geriatricians, as well as journalists, designers, and non-profit organisation leaders, the Korian Foundation for Ageing Well conducts societal studies and applied research, helping individuals to be recognised as stakeholders in their local community and in society as a whole, whatever their age, family circumstances, or health.

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