



Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru  
Older People's Commissioner for Wales

# Understanding Wales' ageing population: key statistics

Updated: November 2022

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An independent voice and champion  
for older people

## The Older People's Commissioner for Wales

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales is an independent voice and champion for older people throughout Wales.

The Commissioner is taking action to protect older people's rights, end ageism and age discrimination, stop the abuse of older people and enable everyone to age well.

**The Commissioner is working for a Wales where older people are valued, rights are upheld and no-one is left behind.**

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**Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg // This document is available in Welsh**

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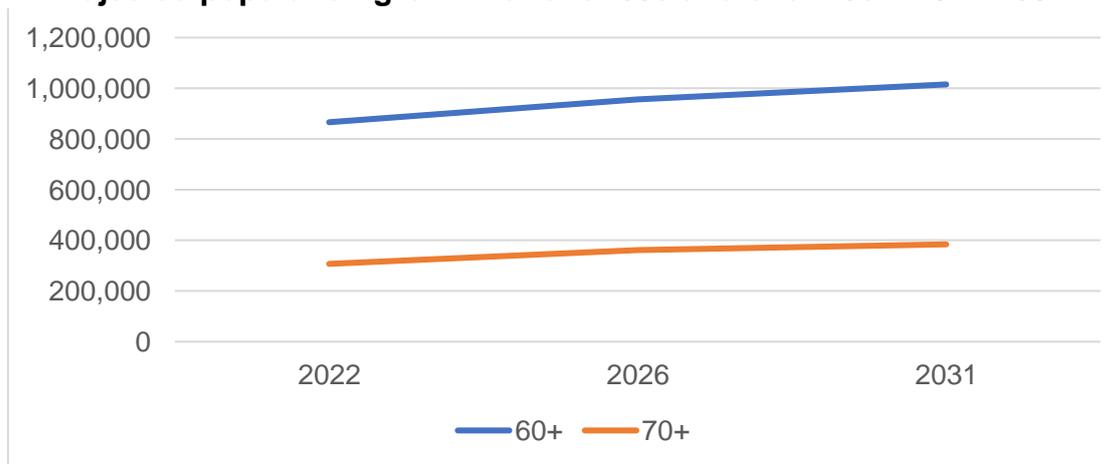
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## Demographics

The latest estimates show that there are **866,006** people over the age of 60 living in Wales. This number is estimated to rise to 956,000 (30% of the population) by 2026, and to 1,015,000 (31% of the population) by 2031.<sup>1</sup> The current estimate is that there are 307,000 people over the age of 75, 90,566 over 80 and 85,160 over 85. The number of over 75s in Wales is projected to rise to 361,000 (11.2% of the population) in 2026 and to 384,000 (11.8% of the population) by 2031.

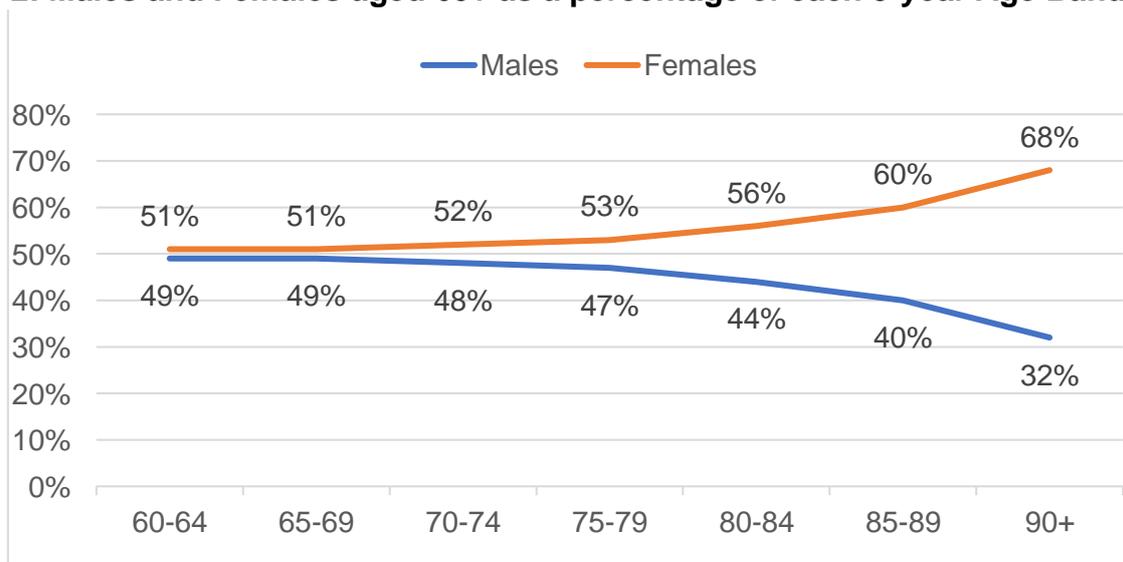
Conwy and Powys have the highest percentage of older people aged 60, at 35% while Cardiff has the lowest, at 19%, followed by Newport with 23%.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1: Projected population growth for over 60s and over 70s – 2022-2031**



Across the older population, 53% are women and 47% are men. Between the ages of 60-69, the split is almost equal, (51% and 49%) but this changes for older groups. The 85-89 and 90+ age groups are comprised of 60% and 68% women respectively.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 2: Males and Females aged 60+ as a percentage of each 5-year Age Band**



There is currently little ethnic diversity in the older population, with 97.8% of older people in Wales identifying as White British.<sup>4</sup> However, projections indicate this will change over time

– 98.8% of over 75s identify as White British, compared with 97.2% of 60-74-year olds and 94.6% of 16-64s. There is likely to be greater ethnic diversity in urban areas, with cities such as Cardiff (14.9%), Newport (14.1%) and Swansea (7.5%) all having a higher percentage of people who are Black, Asian and minority ethnic at an all age level when compared to more rural areas such as Anglesey (1.1%), Pembrokeshire (1.4%) and Powys (1.7%).<sup>5</sup>

The limited data available in Wales shows that slightly fewer people aged 65 or over identify as gay/lesbian/bisexual/other when compared to the overall adult population. Whilst the number of older people identifying as heterosexual is almost the same as the overall adult population at around 95%, a higher percentage of over 65s answer ‘don’t know’ or refuse to answer when asked about their sexual orientation.<sup>6</sup>

An estimated 224,000 over 55’s in Wales (26%) speak some Welsh, 88,000 older people are fluent in Welsh, and another 34,000 speak ‘a fair amount’ of Welsh. This means that around 15% of older people in Wales speak ‘more than a little’ Welsh, with 9.4% of older people speaking Welsh daily.<sup>7</sup> 28% of fluent Welsh speakers aged over 65 – an estimated 21,000 older people – feel more comfortable speaking Welsh than English.<sup>8</sup>

In 2019, there were estimated to be 23,000 women aged 80 years in England and Wales who did not have children. In the UK, there is an increasing trend of women over 50 without children. Women born in the peak of the 1960s baby boom (currently aged in their mid-50s) are twice as likely not to have had children as women born post-WW2 (currently aged in their mid-70s).<sup>9</sup> By 2045, when the large 1960s cohort with a high proportion of people without children reaches age 80 years, this is projected to increase to 66,000, over three times the current number.<sup>10</sup>

## Housing

85% of over 65s own their own home, with 10% living in social housing and 4% private renting. The proportion of owner occupiers over 65 is higher than any other age group (59% 16-24s, 66% 25-44s and 80% 49-64s)<sup>11</sup> These numbers have remained similar over the past few years.

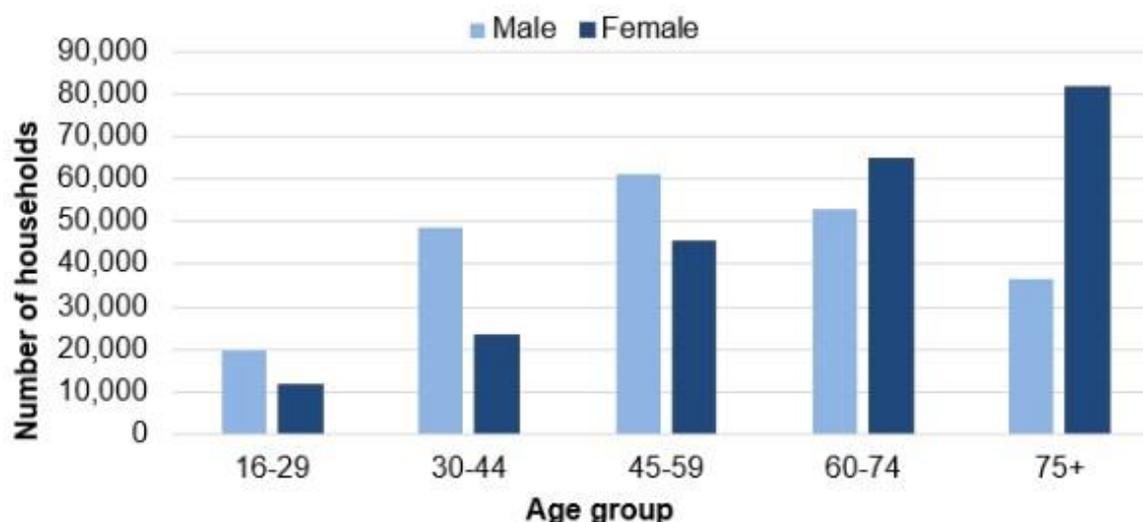
Of those who are owner-occupiers, 93% of 65-74 year olds and 97% of those over-75 own their homes outright without a mortgage. This compares to 51% of 45-64 year olds and 15% of 25-44 year olds.<sup>12</sup>

People in their mid-30s to mid-40s are three times more likely to rent than 20 years ago. A third of this age group were renting from a private landlord in 2017, compared with fewer than 1 in 10 in 1997. If this trend persists into their older ages, in the future, older people will be more likely to be living in the private rental sector than today. Changes in housing tenure patterns could have implications for what life will be like for older people in the future.<sup>13</sup>

30% of older people living in social rented housing are living in relative income poverty, compared to 16% of those living in owner-occupied housing.<sup>14</sup>

There are estimated to be 236,000 older people living alone in Wales, making up 53% of single person households.<sup>15</sup> This is 27% of the older population. There are estimated to be a similar number aged 60-74 (118,000) split relatively evenly between men and women, and those aged over 75 (118,000) who are predominantly women.

**Table 3: Estimated number of one-person households by age group and sex**



Source: Household estimates for Wales, Welsh Government

In 2020-21, 20,651 people aged 65 or over lived in a care home. This represents 3.1% of people over the age of 65, up from 2.4% in 2017-18.<sup>16</sup>

## Age Discrimination

8% of people aged 60+ in Wales have experienced discrimination which they felt was in some way related to their age.<sup>17</sup>

The World Health Organisation’s Global Report on Ageism notes that 1 in 2 people worldwide are ageist and that in Europe, 1 in 3 older people report having been a target of ageism.<sup>18</sup>

Research conducted for the Commissioner’s State of the Nation report found that 1 in 5 older people (21%) say they would not be confident in identifying instances of ageism.<sup>19</sup>

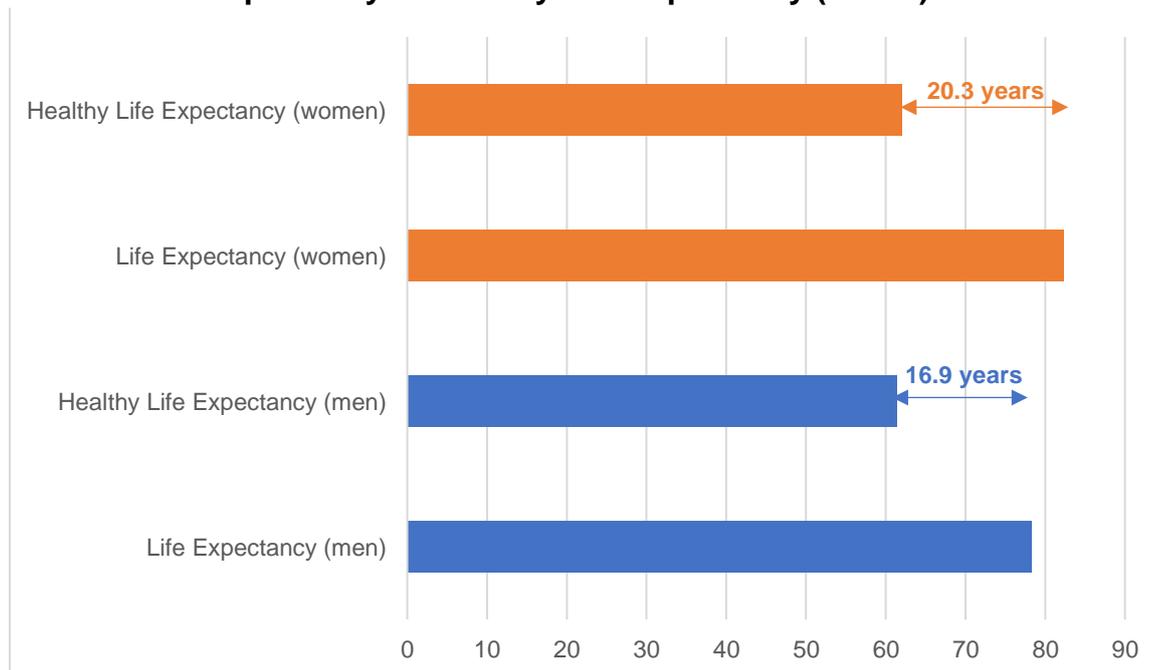
8% of older people in Wales report that they have been made to feel too old to receive health services.<sup>20</sup>

## Health and Wellbeing

At birth, life expectancy on average for men in Wales is 78.3, but healthy life expectancy (the number of years on average lived in good general health) is only 61.4, a difference of almost 17 years. Life expectancy for women in Wales is 82.3, whereas healthy life

expectancy is 62, a difference of over 20 years. Healthy life expectancy ranges from 59.5 for men and 59.3 for women in Blaenau Gwent to 69.8 and 70.1 in Monmouthshire.<sup>21</sup>

**Table 4: Life Expectancy vs Healthy Life Expectancy (Wales)**



67% of over 65s reported living with one longstanding illness, down from 71% in 2020, and 32% with two or more longstanding illnesses, mainly musculoskeletal, heart, or circulatory complaints, down from 39%. This figure rises from 62% of 65-74s to 72% of over 75s.<sup>22</sup>

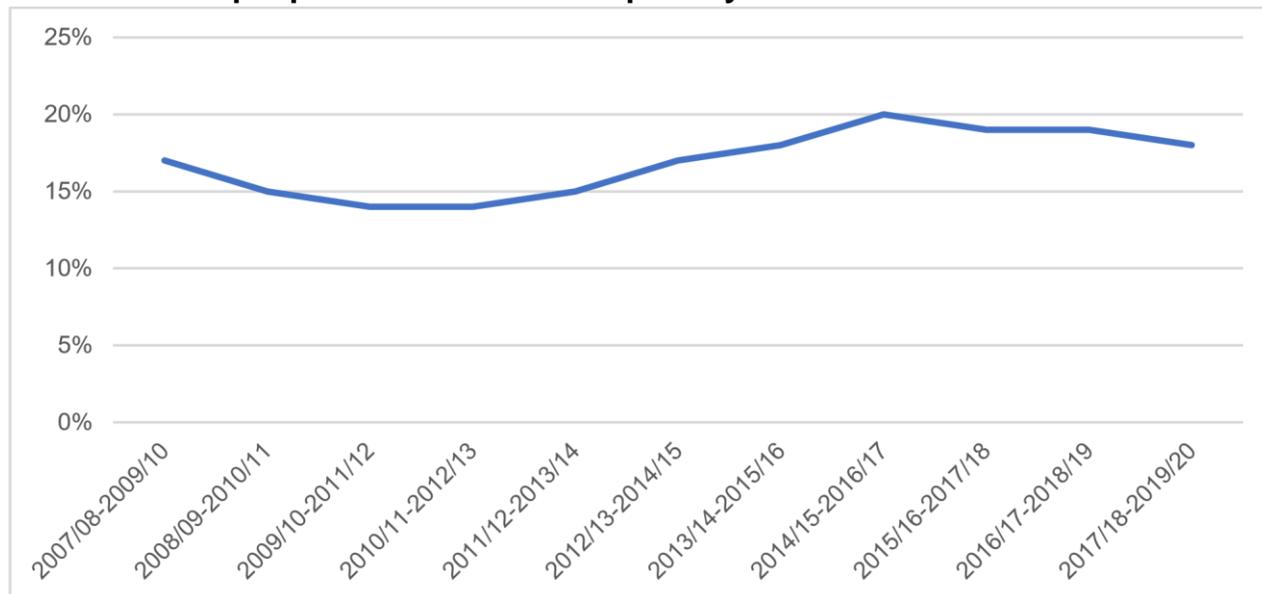
The National Survey for Wales reports that almost three quarters of people aged over 65 (72%) (down from 75%) report feeling lonely sometimes, compared to 70% of those aged 45-64, while 10% of older people in Wales – an estimated 91,000 people – feel consistently lonely.<sup>23</sup> These figures are slightly lower than during the pandemic (75% and 11%).

## Income

Nearly 1 in 5 older people in Wales live in relative income poverty (18%).<sup>24</sup> Relative income poverty is where a person is living in a household where the total household income from all sources is less than 60 per cent of the average UK household income.

The rates of relative income poverty increase with age, with 16% of 65-69 year olds and 19% of 70-79 year olds living in relative income poverty.<sup>25</sup> The figures available for those over 80 are based on very limited sample sizes so are low quality statistics – 16% for 80-84 year olds and 21% for 85+.

**Table 5: Older people in relative income poverty 2007/08-2009/10 to 2017/18-2019/20**



24% of single older women are living in relative income poverty, compared to 14% of older couples. The figures available for single older men are based on very limited sample sizes so are low quality statistics – 24% also.<sup>26</sup>

The basic state pension is £141.85 weekly (£7,376.20 annually) and the new full state pension (those that retired since April 2016) is £185.15 weekly (£9,627.80 annually).

For the latest month available, May 2022, there were 82,436 people who were recipients of pension credit (a benefit for people over State Pension age which tops up weekly income up to £177.10 a week) in Wales.<sup>27</sup>

However, according to the Department for Work and Pensions, 33% of eligible single male older people, 33% of eligible single female older people and 31% of eligible couples still do not receive Pension Credit.<sup>28</sup> Across Great Britain this equates to 130,000 couples, 160,000 single men and 480,000 single women. At present, there is no comparable breakdown for Wales.

In October 2022, there were 21,525 people in Wales over the age of 60 who were recipients of Universal Credit.<sup>29</sup>

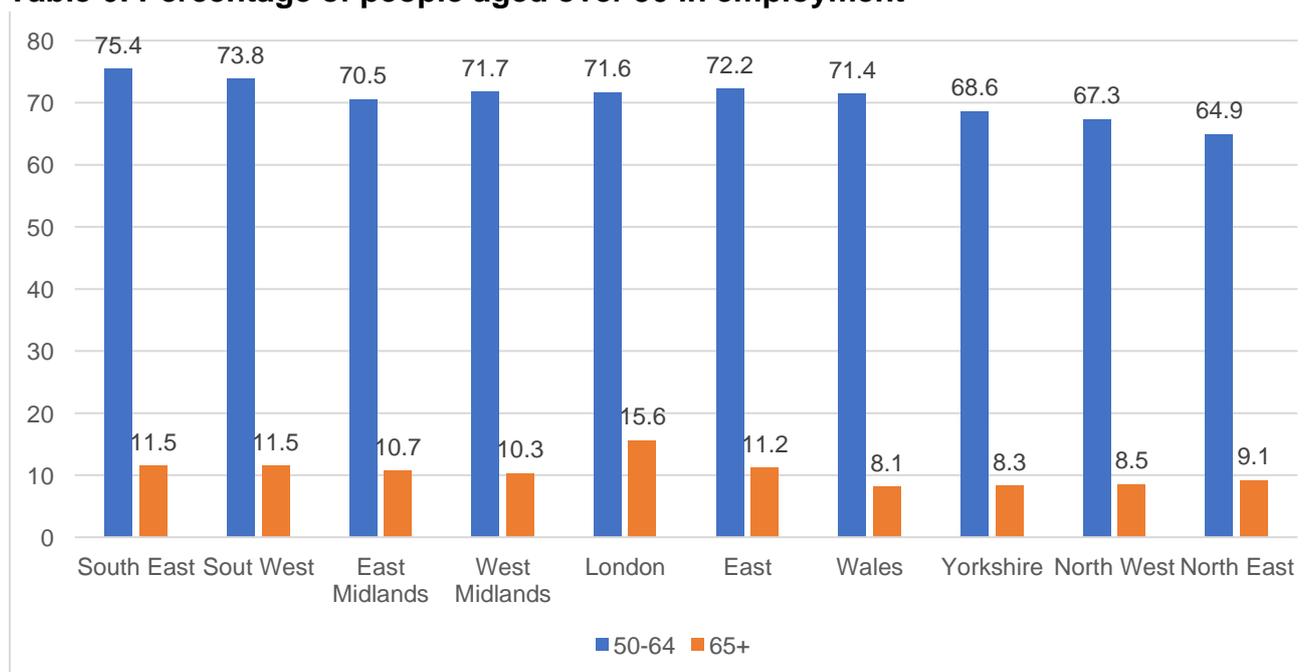
As at 1 October 2021, 22% of single pensioner households, and 13% of pensioner couple households are in fuel poverty.<sup>30</sup> Fuel poverty is when a household spends more than 10% of its income heating their home. The latest estimates suggest that up to 45% of all households in Wales could be in fuel poverty from April 2022 as a result of the increasing costs of fuel and increases to the price cap.<sup>31</sup> Older people are likely to be disproportionately affected by these changes.

The National Survey for Wales has recently reported that in June 2021, 8% of older people said they sometimes struggle to pay bills.<sup>32</sup>

## Employment

The latest figures (Jul-Sep 2022) show that the level of employment amongst 50–64-year olds is 67.9%, which is the third lowest of all the nations and regions of the UK.<sup>33</sup> 9.9% of over 65s in Wales are in employment, the fourth lowest of the regions of the UK. 73.5% of men aged 50-64 are in employment, compared to 62.6% of women. Increasing the level of employment amongst older people to match that of other age groups (currently around 75%) could be worth nearly £4bn a year to the Welsh economy.<sup>34</sup>

**Table 6: Percentage of people aged over 50 in employment**



427,000 (67.9%) people aged between 50-64 were in employment in July-September 2022, in addition to 65,000 (9.9%) over 65s.<sup>35</sup>

Employment levels amongst older people differs between men and women, with 62.6% of women aged 50-64 and 7.8% of women over 65 in employment, compared to 73.6% of men aged 50-64 and 12.3% of men over 65.<sup>36</sup>

For older people who want to work but are not employed, 33% of 65-74 year olds and 54% of 75+ say their age and 39% of 65-74 year olds say a long-term illness or condition, or a disability is the reason why they are unable to work.<sup>37</sup>

Older workers are also more likely to be made redundant, and often find it more difficult to find work following a job loss or redundancy, particularly as the support available to help them find work is often not suitable to meet their specific needs.<sup>38</sup>

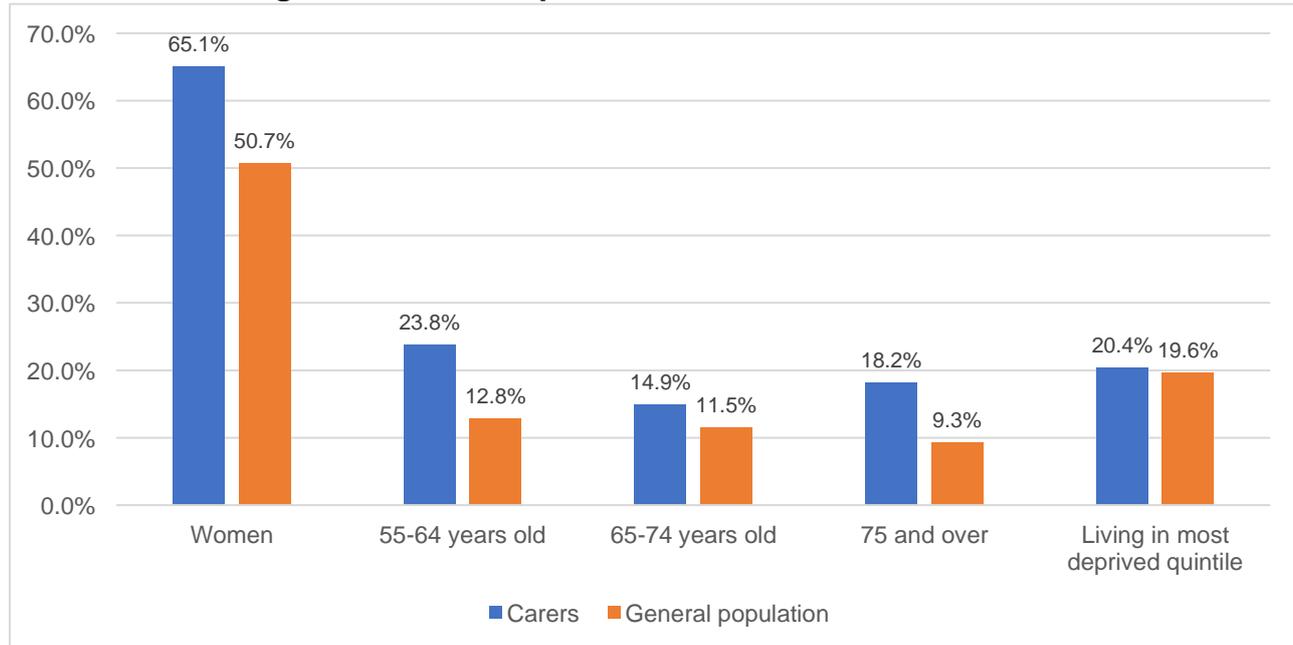
90% of older people believe that they have transferable skills to move roles or industry if they were offered training, but only 35% of employers surveyed would be prepared to hire and offer training to someone over 55 in a new industry.<sup>39</sup>

The Welsh Government extended the eligibility criteria of Apprenticeships and Workplace Learning Schemes to people of all ages in 2016. However, only 465 older people participated in such schemes during 2020-21– just 1% of the total number of participants.<sup>40</sup>

## Unpaid Work

Approximately 55% of carers in Wales are over the age of 55, this means that there are now roughly 275,000 older carers in Wales.<sup>41</sup> Unpaid carers are more like to be female, older and living in more deprived communities.<sup>42</sup>

**Table 7: Percentage of carers with particular characteristics**



Social Care Wales estimate that 12 per cent of the population of Wales are unpaid carers and this figure could increase to 16 per cent by 2037. Wales has the highest proportion in the UK of older carers and of carers providing more than 50 hours' care a week.<sup>43</sup>

Due to the cost of living crisis, 26% of carers have reported cutting back on essentials such as food and heating, and 87% said that the rising cost of living is one of the main challenges they will face over the coming year.<sup>44</sup>

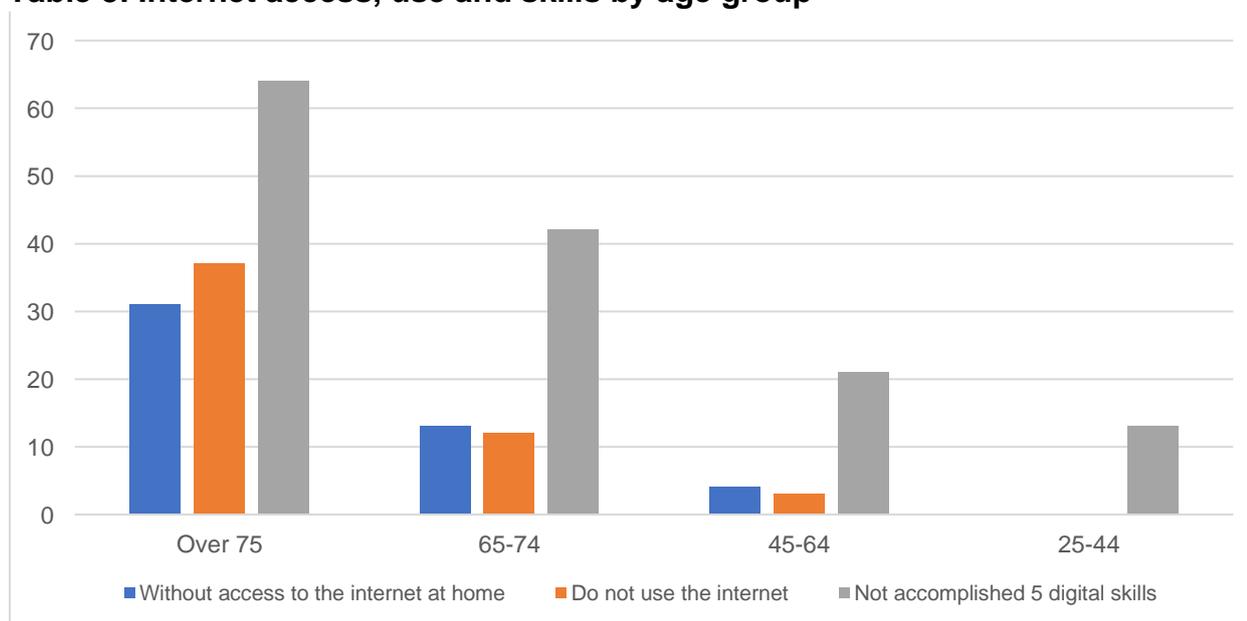
In 2017-2018, 35% of 65–74-year-olds and 27% of over 75s volunteered. This decreased to 30% and 26% respectively during 2019-2020.<sup>45</sup> 29% of over 65s volunteered in 2021-22. Polling showed similar results, with only 14% of older people currently volunteering, compared to 19% prior to the pandemic.<sup>46</sup>

Around 65% of grandparents provide some form of childcare, with the median number of hours of care per week at 11.3. The value of childcare contributions that grandparents (50+) make has been estimated to be £6.94 billion in the UK, equating to around £325 million in Wales per annum.<sup>47</sup>

## Digital

31% of over 75s do not have access to the internet at home and 33% of over 75s do not use the internet (including Smart TV and handheld devices), compared to 13% of 65-74s and 0% of 25-44s.<sup>48</sup>

**Table 8: Internet access, use and skills by age group**



Older people are far less likely to have accomplished 5 [digital skills](#) in the past 3 months compared to other age groups – 36% of over-75s and 58% of 65-74 year olds, compared to 79% of 45-64 year olds, 87% of 25-44 year olds and 89% of 16-24 year olds.<sup>49</sup>

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- <sup>49</sup> Welsh Government (2022) National Survey for Wales April-June 2021. Available at: <https://gov.wales/national-surveywales-results-viewer>