Centre for Ageing Better

A Tale of Two 60s: Unequal Wealth in a Decade of Transition

Full report

August 2026

About us

Centre for Ageing Better

The Centre for Ageing Better is an independent centre of excellence on ageing and demographic change.

We work with national and local government, industries, businesses, and community organisations to improve how people experience ageing. Our work focuses on creating better workplaces, homes and communities, while tackling ageism and addressing inequality in later life.

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Definitions

These definitions are explained in more detail in the Tale of Two 60s Introductory Report and feature throughout this work:

Latent class analysis (LCA) – a statistical technique for grouping people based on patterns in their answers to certain questions. It works on the assumption that people who are similar in measured characteristics share some hidden unmeasured characteristic that can explain behavioural or attitudinal differences between the different sub-groups. LCA was used to identify different sub-groups of people in their 60s in 2002-03 and in 2023-24.

Benefit unit – a single adult or a married or cohabiting couple and any dependent children that are assessed jointly for eligibility for benefit receipt. The number of equivalent adults in a benefit unit, formed the denominator for the derived income variable used in the LCA.

Equivalent adult – a way of converting the number of people in a benefit unit into adult equivalents. For example, a couple counts as about 1.6 equivalent adults, rather than two because of economies of scale in sharing living costs. Children are assigned a fraction of an adult equivalent depending on age, with younger children counting for less than older children or teenagers. The income of the benefit unit is divided by the number of equivalent adults in it to give the income per benefit unit equivalent adult.

When speaking about the different experiences of people in their 60s, our analysis identifies two distinct groupings. There is obviously a range of experience within these, but for the purposes of the report we refer to these as:

Precarious group – a sub-group of 60-69 year olds that Ageing Better analysis of English Longitudinal Study of Ageing data from 2023-24 has found share similar characteristics. These include being more likely to be living on a low income, defined as less than £326 per benefit unit equivalent adult per week, often feeling short of money, living on state benefits, a private renter and certain other characteristics.

Secure group – a sub group of 60-69 year olds that Ageing Better analysis of English Longitudinal Study of Ageing data from 2023-24 has found share similar characteristics. These characteristics include being less likely to be living on a low income (defined as less than £326 per benefit unit equivalent adult per week), more likely to have less than £2,000 in savings, less likely to often feel short of money, more likely to be a home-owner, more likely to be educated to at least O-level and more likely to have a private pension.

Executive summary

This report presents a challenge to the narrative that people in their 60s are a universally privileged group defined by cheap housing and lucrative pensions. Instead, housing and pensions present a picture of deep inequality in later life. Without action, this inequality will only grow in the future.

Changing landscape of housing and pensions policy

Housing and pensions are a central, interconnected aspect of later life finances. Both are central to security in our 60s and beyond and both are shaped by the accumulation of circumstances across a lifetime. This research establishes how this changing landscape of housing and pensions impacts people in their 60s.

For the current cohort of 60-69 year olds, adulthood saw substantial shifts in housing policy. During the 1980s and 1990s, housing policy moved towards home ownership and away from social housing, most notably through Right to Buy. Alongside this, the private rental sector expanded following a period of deregulation.

As these policies took effect, the balance between social housing, home ownership and private renting shifted substantially. The private rental sector expanded, while house prices increasingly outpaced earnings. Between 1988 and 2025, real median weekly wages rose by 44%, compared with a 137% increase in real average house prices. These trends contributed to growing differences in housing outcomes between those who entered home ownership earlier in adulthood and those who did not.

Pensions policy also changed substantially during this cohort's adulthood. Over the past two decades, reforms have shaped the pensions landscape through increases in the state pension age, the introduction of automatic enrolment, greater pension freedoms, and the abolition of the default retirement age. Together, these changes have altered both how people save for retirement and the timing of their transition out of work.

Home ownership for some, anxiety and angst for others

Housing paints a startling picture of inequality in later life.

Outright homeownership among people in their 60s has increased over the past two decades, from 59% in 2002/03 to 65% in 2023/24. Combined with a 26% rise in UK house prices over the same period, this means more people in this cohort have shared in gains from housing wealth than was the case 20 years ago.

However, this headline trend masks a persistent, and likely growing, group of people in their 60s who rent privately. The share of people renting in their 60s has remained relatively stable compared to 20 years ago, and the cohorts behind them are private renting at higher rates than their predecessors. Those approaching their 60s are also less likely to be owner-occupiers, suggesting exclusion from home ownership in later life may become more common in the future. Owning one's home outright is not a guarantee of a later life beyond the reach of poverty and cash poor outright homeowners can find themselves pushed into deep hardship trying to maintain their homes. However, renters and owners with a mortgage are much more likely to experience poverty in later life. Without intervention, the future will see more people in their 60s privately renting and fewer able to call on the security provided by home ownership in later life.

At the sharp end of this housing inequality are the precarious group. They are half as likely to own their home outright than those in the secure group. The result is that many have to navigate housing costs and insecurity into later life, leaving them with anxiety and a profound lack of agency over their home.

This lack of control is evident across housing tenures. For owners with a mortgage, concerns about keeping up with repayments can create anxiety and uncertainty around an asset that forms a key part of their later life financial planning. For private renters, the anxiety comes from the financial pressures of keeping up with rental costs and the uncertainty of a home at the mercy of a landlord. Social renters are powerless to resist circumstances that adversely impact their wellbeing, for example being housed in locations away from friends and family. Further to this, many face homes that are physically unsuitable for their health needs without the power to change their circumstances.

All of these housing experiences point to the insecurity and lack of agency pervasive through the experience of those living a precarious life in their 60s.

The left behind of workplace pensions growth

Workplace pensions present another story of profound later life inequality.

Automatic enrolment has led to a steep rise in the proportion of people saving into workplace pensions. However, for today's cohort in their 60s, its introduction came when they were aged 48-58, limiting the time they had to build pensions savings. Moreover, there is evidence that many people are under saving or not saving at all. The precarious group are more likely to be women, carers and from minority ethnic groups, all of whom have been left behind by this policy. Our conversations with the precarious group highlight the ways in which automatic enrolment has bypassed people.

Some people in the precarious group were largely excluded from the growth in workplace pension saving associated with automatic enrolment. Within this group are:

- People in poor health, who were excluded from the labour market and thus missed out on automatic enrolment.
- Low earners, many of whom spent much or all of their post-automatic enrolment working life with earnings below the £10,000 threshold at which employees must be automatically enrolled.
- People in acute financial need, who felt compelled to opt-out of their workplace pension to use the income to keep afloat.
- The self-employed, who were not covered by automatic enrolment. Some expected to rely on continued employment or housing wealth in place of a pension, However, unexpected health issues disrupted these plans, forcing them out of work and, in some cases, required them to draw on or sell property to survive.

The result is that these people do not have any of the security and income a workplace pension can provide in later life.

The experiences of those in the precarious group with private pensions illustrate the security that they can provide. Those with small pots accrued through automatic enrolment had drawn on them to survive periods of acute need. However, their modest size meant they offered only temporary financial relief. By contrast, the few who reached their 60s with larger pension savings, typically the result of being enrolled in an occupational pension by a public sector employer, experienced more substantial protection from hardship. For these people, pension wealth provided crucial insulation against the damage of later life shocks, such as divorce.

All of this highlights the precarity of those left behind by the changing workplace pensions landscape. Despite the success of automatic enrolment in increasing pension saving, a substantial minority are missing out on the security that a workplace pension pot provides. While policies focussed on improving pension saving remain important for future generations, they offer little to those already in their 60s with inadequate pension provision who are in need of support now.

The State Pension: an inadequate lifeboat

For people with limited access to workplace pensions, the State Pension provides important but often inadequate income.

While the triple lock has played a role in reducing pension poverty, the State Pension alone fails to provide the income needed to keep some people afloat. Those facing precarity in later life reached state pension age (SPA) with little or no workplace pension and continue to struggle financially despite the income of the State Pension. As a result, they often need to maintain income from work, but few have the good health to continue working.

Our conversations with people in the precarious group were marked by both unfairness and confusion around the State Pension. For those yet to reach SPA there was a sense of unfairness that this much needed source of income had moved further out of their reach just as they approached later life. Alongside this was confusion about the level of support they would receive and its interaction with workplace pensions and other state benefits.

The State Pension is clearly falling short as a tool for tackling financial insecurity in later life. At its basic level, the income it brings is insufficient to meet the needs of those facing precarity in their 60s. Further to this it is mired in misunderstanding and muddy information among those most in need of clarity around their income in later life.

Key findings

1. **Those facing precarity have been excluded from two great boons in wealth** that have benefited their peers. Rising outright home ownership and house prices have increased wealth for some, but the precarious group are half as likely to own their home outright. Alongside this, automatic enrolment has caused a sharp increase in workplace pension participation which has almost entirely bypassed the precarious group. The result is that this large minority are often navigating later life without the security of home ownership or a workplace pension. Without action, this inequality will only deepen in the future, with growing private rental numbers among younger age cohorts and some groups facing ongoing exclusion from the current workplace pensions system.
2. **Housing represents a considerable source of anxiety and insecurity in later life** for those excluded from gains in housing wealth. Both owners with a mortgage and private renters face the anxiety of

keeping up with payments and a profound lack of agency over their own home. These are issues underpinned by their limited income and precarious financial circumstances.

3. **Precarity in later life is trapping people in unsuitable housing.** This group of people in their 60s lacks the means to move or change aspects of their housing that are unsuitable to their needs. The result is that they are stuck in housing that is physically unsuitable or away from friends and family, adversely impacting their health and wellbeing in later life.
4. **Those facing precarity in later life need the income of the State Pension, but it is not enough.** The income the State Pension provides is crucial to this group, but it is not sufficient to meet their basic needs. The result is that many feel forced to keep working, but this option is only open to those still in good health. The State Pension was originally designed to keep older people out of poverty. It is failing on this test.
5. **The State Pension is marred in confusion and misunderstanding.** People are unsure of how the State Pension interacts with workplace pensions and benefits, how much they are entitled to and if this differs for different groups. This confusion is particularly concerning among those facing precarity in their 60s, who have a deeper need for the income it provides, adding further uncertainty to an already insecure later life.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the eyes of far too many, people in their 60s today are all from a generation privileged by cheap housing and lucrative defined benefit pensions. It is seen as a cohort in which membership alone is a pathway to wealth, security and a comfortable later life. This report is a direct challenge to that misconception, highlighting the wealth inequality that exists among people in their 60s.

The first area of unequal wealth that this report considers is housing. Housing shapes financial wellbeing throughout later life as a potential cost but also as a potential source of security. For renters and those with mortgages, housing costs are a significant and ongoing expense, while homeowners may hold substantial housing wealth that can contribute to financial security or be accessed later in life. As housing patterns and policy continue to change, understanding how financial circumstances vary between different housing tenures is essential to understanding the opportunities and challenges people face as they move through later life.

The second area of unequal wealth this report examines is pensions. That pensions are a central source of later life wealth is an obvious, but important point to make. Workplace pensions and the State Pension offer a substantial, and often the primary, form of income in later life. The level of entitlement people hold varies enormously and can represent an accumulation of life circumstances. Understanding how the picture of pensions has changed for people in their 60s is therefore crucial to understanding how later life outcomes vary.

It is wise to consider these two aspects of wealth together, as this report does. The interaction of these sources of wealth is at the heart of how people move through their 60s and beyond.[1] Housing can offer stability and substitute for income security where people have smaller pensions.[2] Likewise, those not able to work who still have housing costs will likely rely on the income of pensions to cover these. How people accumulate housing and pensions wealth across their lifetime, and how these interact can therefore be definitive in whether they navigate later life with security and agency or in the trap of precarity.

1 Pensions Policy Institute (2026), ‘Pensions Adequacy: Housing, Households and Auto-Enrolment’

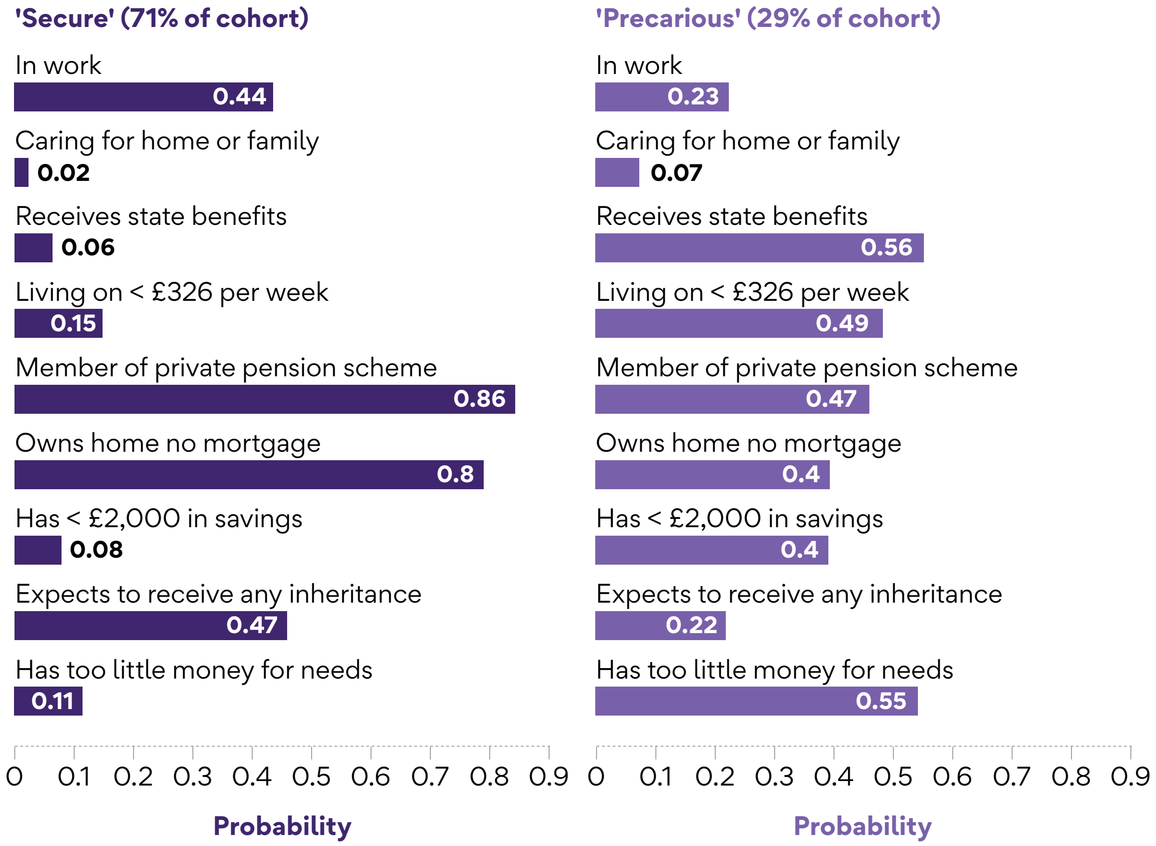
2 Department for Work & Pensions (2026), Lived Experiences of Adequacy in Retirement 2026

This report combines an exploration of the housing and pensions policy context and its impact (Chapter 2) with analysis of secondary quantitative and primary qualitative data (Chapters 3 and 4). In doing so it takes these two issues, housing and pensions, and shines a light on how a substantial minority have been left behind in both areas. Ultimately, it tackles the myth that the current cohort are one without financial challenge, highlighting the severe precarity in housing and pensions that many face.

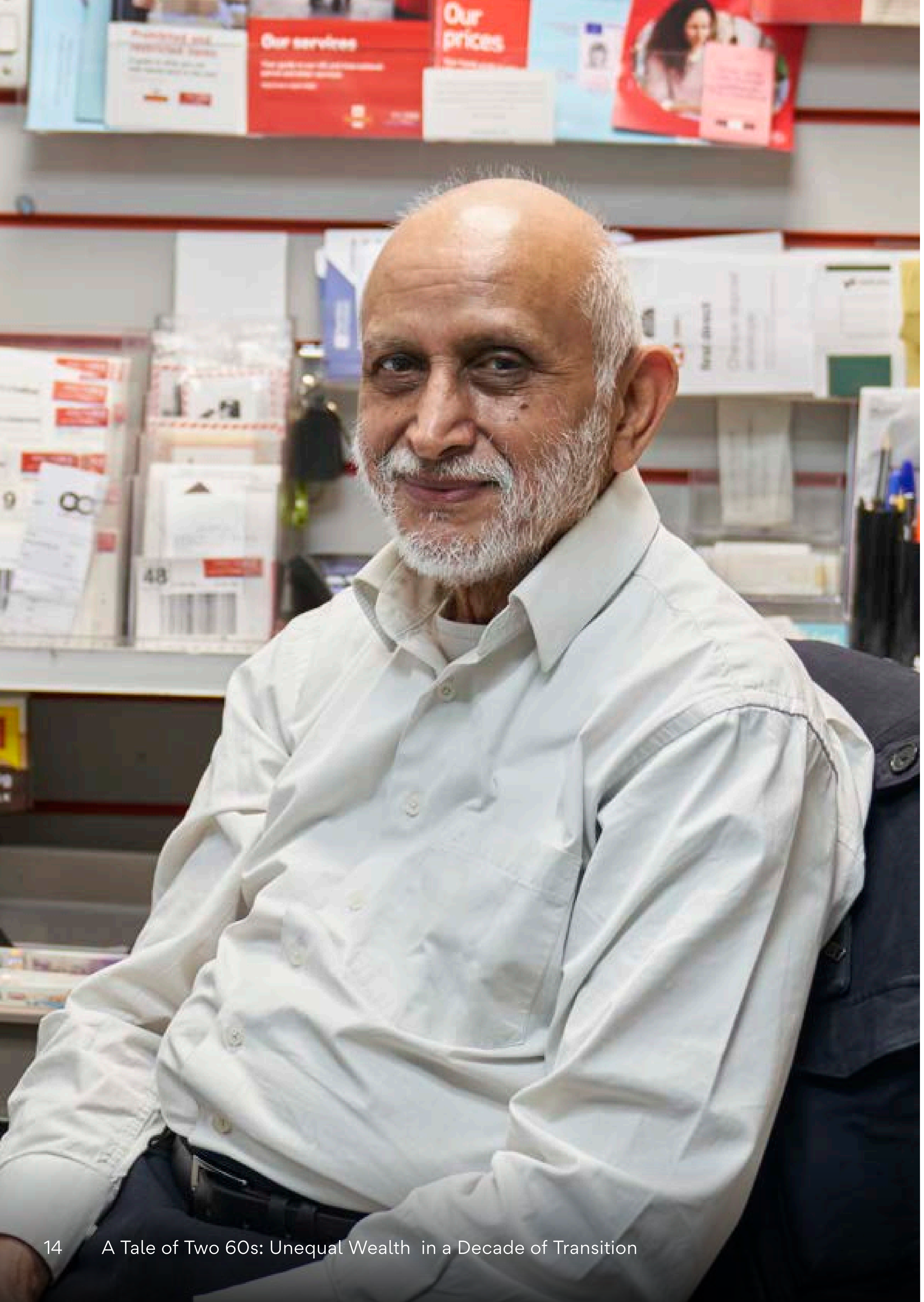
The 29% of people in their 60s likely to fall into the precarious group present vital insight into this unequal wealth. These people are likely to fall on the sharp end of the housing and pensions changes experienced by this cohort. They are more likely to be renters or homeowners with a mortgage, to have little or no savings and are less likely to have private or occupational pensions than other people in their 60s. Exploring their experience of housing and pensions presents an opportunity to understand how unequal wealth presents in and impacts upon later life. As such, the qualitative data in this report draws on their experience of housing and pensions as they move through their 60s.

Figure 1: Selection of economic variables in the LCA of 60-69 year olds in England

About 29% of English 60-69 year olds in 2023-4 were in a sub-group that is likely financially precarious
Impact of measurable factors on probability of being a member of 'Precarious' vs 'Secure' class of 60-69 year olds



Source: English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, Wave 11, 2023-4 Margins from latent CFAB class analysis CFAB analysis. • n= 2,504



Chapter 2: Policy context

This cohort have been subject to considerable changes in how policy has treated housing and pensions across their adult lives. Understanding the ways policy has changed course over the adulthood of this cohort provides context for the inequality in housing and pensions wealth accumulation.

From renting to owning and back again

Across the lifetime of this cohort, housing policy has shifted in the types of tenure it promoted. This has created a changing landscape of housing across their adulthood.

From the period from 1980-2000, policy shifted away from social housing towards home ownership and private renting. The Thatcher Government's 1980 introduction of Right to Buy enabled council tenants to buy their home at discounted rates. Following this, the 1988 Housing Act deregulated private renting, bringing in assured shorthold tenancies, affording landlords greater control of rents and introducing no-fault evictions. The transformation of private renting in the UK was further entrenched in 1996, when the Major Government passed legislation making assured shorthold tenancies the default private rental agreement.

Table 1: Housing policy changes affecting the 2023-24 cohort of 60-69 year olds

Housing policy change	Date	Ages of subject cohort
Government introduces the Right to Buy, enabling council tenant home purchases at discounted prices	1980	16-26
Private rental sector deregulation introduces assured shorthold tenancies, no-fault evictions and removes restrictions on rent prices	1988	24-34
Assured shorthold tenancies become the default private rental agreement	1996	32-42
Help to Buy scheme is launched to support first time buyers	2013	49-59
3% additional fee is placed on buy-to-let and second home purchases	2016	52-62
Restrictions placed on letting agent fees charged to tenants	2017	53-63
Greater obligations are placed on landlords for property standards	2018	54-64
Most tenant fees charged by letting agents are banned	2019	55-65

Right to Buy led to a decline in social housing and a rise in private renting, alongside home ownership.[3, 4] This is despite rules under Right to Buy stating social housing sold off must be replaced on a one-to-one basis, an aspect of the policy that governments have consistently not adhered to. As a result, the policy saw the social housing stock fall,[5] with four-in-ten former council homes sold under the scheme ending up in the private rental sector.[6] This transformation continued into the new millennium. In England in 2001, social and affordable housing accounted for 20% of dwellings, while the private rental sector for 10%. By 2024 this had shifted to 16% in social and affordable sector compared to 19% in the private rental sector.

3 New Economics Foundation (2024), Reforming Right to Buy

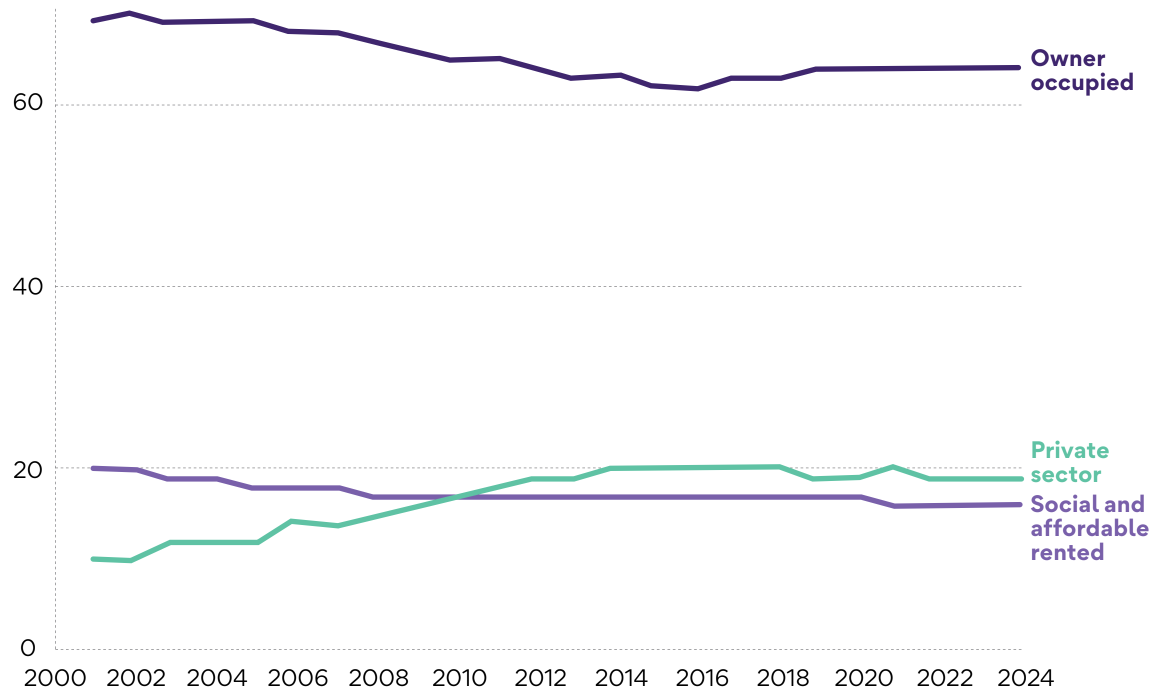
4 Common Wealth (2025) Restoring Council Housing After Right To Buy

5 The Chartered Institute for Housing (2022), 2022 UK Housing Review

6 New Economics Foundation (2024), Reforming Right to Buy

Figure 2: Dwelling stock in England 2001-2024

Dwelling stock in England since 2001
The proportion of housing stock in the private rental sector has risen while social and affordable levels have fallen



Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and local Government, Dwelling stock estimates, England: 31 March 2025

Across their adulthood then this cohort has seen a reduction in the size of the social housing sector, an increase in home ownership and an expansion of a less regulated private rental sector. All of this shapes the way they have been able to access housing in their 60s and whether they do so as a homeowner, a private renter or a social renter. Housing tenure is a crucial factor in later life outcomes, as renters and owner-occupiers with a mortgage appear to walk a very different path to outright homeowners. One way offers asset wealth and low housing costs, while the other presents insecure housing and ongoing housing payments. Given the huge disparity in later life outcomes these likely present, the changes in housing policy and tenure over the adult life of this cohort are of tremendous importance.

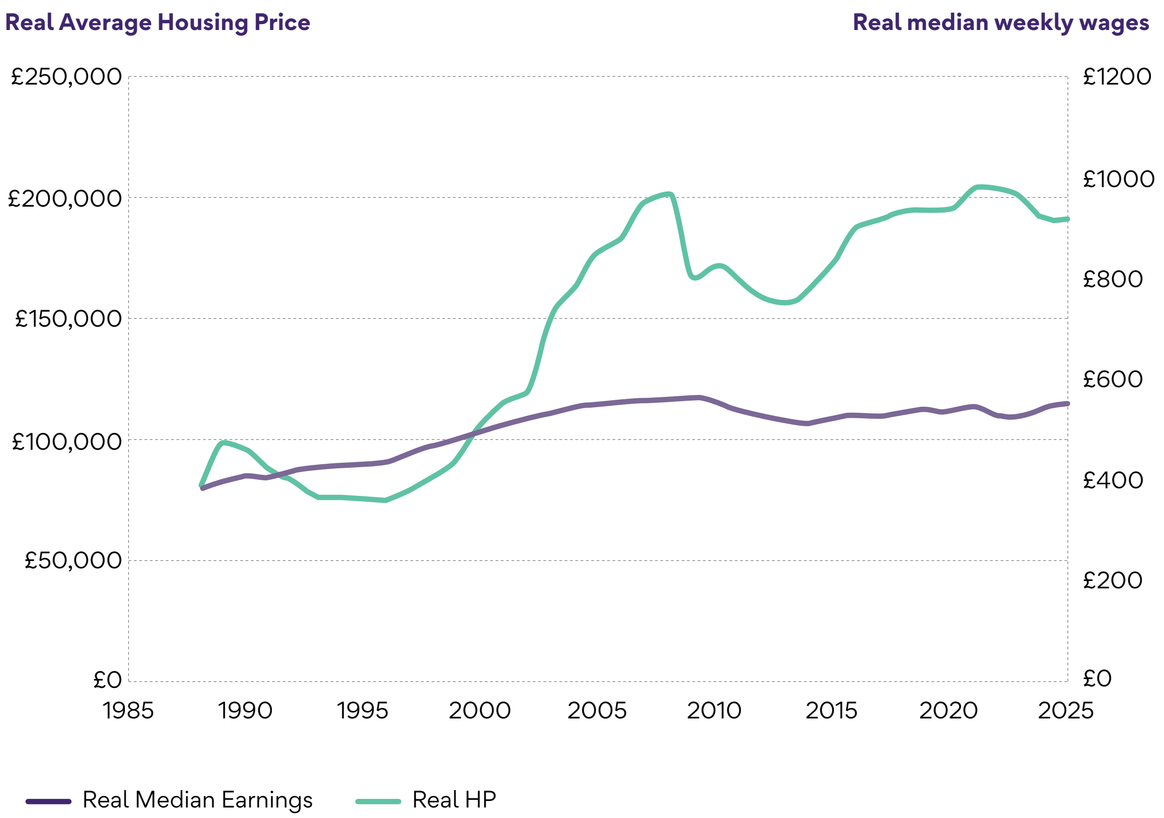
Getting in at the ground floor

The past two decades has seen a boom in house prices. This means that the members of the current cohort of 60–69-year-olds who bought their home earlier in their lives have seen substantial increases in the value of that property.

However, over the same period wages have stagnated. The growing gap between these is startling. Between 1988 and 2025, real median weekly wages grew by 44%, over the same period real average house prices grew by 137%. The result is that owning a home has become hugely challenging for many people, as their incomes simply do not go as far towards purchasing a property as they once would have. Taken together, this points to a substantial inequality among the current 60s cohort between those who were able to get on the housing ladder earlier in adulthood, and those who were not. For the latter group this means navigating later life renting or having purchased property at a higher cost with less relative spending power, all resulting in ongoing housing costs into their 60s and beyond.

Figure 3: Real house prices and real wages 1988-2025

Housing value has grown more than twice as quickly as wages
Real average housing price and real median weekly wages 1988-2025



Source: Housing Price Data, Median Wage Data, Real Wages and Housing Price Calculated using CPI (Base Year 2015)

Chapter 2: Policy context

There are two important caveats to note around this inequality. The first is that home ownership is not a definitive insulation from poverty. Indeed, around one in five (19%) outright homeowners aged 50 and over are living in poverty.[7] Within this will be many cash poor homeowners, who struggle to maintain a home suitable and face precarity in their later life. However, poverty rates are worse for those with a mortgage (26%) and for renters, where the proportion approaches half (46%),[8] which is why this report gives particular focus to these two groups.

The second caveat is that this boom in house prices and the security these assets provide is subject to considerable regional variation. For example, in London real house prices rose by 230% between the beginning of 1995 and end of 2025, while in the North East they rose by 94% across the same time. Similarly, average house prices in London at the end of 2025 were £554,000 compared to £163,000 in the North East. For homeowners in certain regions then the boom in house prices presented a far larger increase in wealth and their house of higher value provides a greater degree of security into later life.

Even considering these caveats, those in this cohort that were able to purchase property earlier in their life will have seen that asset appreciate significantly. By contrast, we know that the precarious group are half as likely to own their home outright (0.4 vs 0.8 in the secure group), meaning many are less likely to have shared in these gains. As such, it is crucial to understand this aspect of later life finances in more detail with a particular focus on the experiences of the precarious group as a window into those likely to have missed out on the benefits of booming house prices.

Shifting sands of pension planning

This cohort has been subject to substantial change in pensions policy.

The first change to note is the shifting state pension age (SPA). The State Pension is an important part of retirement planning for most approaching SPA[9] and is the primary income for one in eight (13%) above SPA.[10] Changes to SPA therefore have huge impact on current and future generations navigating later life.

For most of the working lives of the cohort under examination in this research, the SPA remained stable. For men it was 65, with women's SPA gradually rising from 60 to 65 to achieve equalisation. The Pensions Act 2011 legislated an increase to 66, which took place between December 2018 and October 2020, giving a predictable, albeit complex, timetable for planning.

7 The Centre for Ageing Better (2025), The State of Ageing 2025

8 Ibid

9 Department for Work and Pensions (2025), Planning and Preparing for Later Life 2024

10 Independent Age (2024), An Adequate Income in Later Life

In 2014, the approach changed so that future SPA increases became subject to regular statutory reviews. These reviews take account of life expectancy, economic conditions, and affordability. Two reviews have now been completed, and a third is underway and due by 2029. The latest review, in 2023, confirmed that the SPA rise to 67 will take place between 2026 and 2028, directly affecting those currently in their early 60s.

Table 2: Pension policy changes since 2010 affecting participants of this research

Pension policy change	Date	Ages of subject cohort
Minimum age for accessing private pensions increased to 55	2010	46-56
SPA for women to be gradually increased from 60 to 65 to equalise with men's by 2018	2011	47-57
SPA to increase to 66 by October 2020	2011	47-57
State Pension triple-lock introduced	2011	47-57
Automatic enrolment into workplace pensions introduced	2012	48-58
SPA to increase to 67 by 2026-28	2014	50-60
SPA increases become subject to statutory reviews	2014	50-60
New pension freedoms allowing people to use their pension pots in non-annuity ways	2015	51-61
State Pension simplified from two rates into one	2016	52-62

Alongside changes to the SPA, the current cohort of 60-69 year olds has had limited exposure to the impact of pension automatic enrolment. As shown in table 1, above, this cohort were at the tail end of their working lives when automatic enrolment was introduced. This means the impact of this policy on workplace pensions savings is limited relative to other generations. Pensions adequacy and raising workplace pensions savings is a focus of the Government's Pensions Commission, which is due to deliver its final report in 2027. However, there is a risk that focussing on future generations could bypass a cohort for whom private pension saving existed in only a small window of their working lives. Further to this, the Pensions Commission found in their interim report that automatic enrolment has proved less effective for low earners, the self-employed and those with shorter working lives.[11] This research seeks to explore these issues, to understand more about the savings and pensions landscape for 60-69 year olds including those that existing policy has left behind.

What does this mean for people in their 60s?

When examining the financial circumstances of people in their 60s, it is helpful to consider pensions and housing together. These two elements of wealth present interconnected components of later life security. The current system of pensions was designed on the now outdated assumption of outright homeownership in retirement. Instead, the reality of today is one in which the cost of renting a two-bedroom property falls well above the median pension wealth of those approaching retirement.[12] This raises the question of what this changing landscape of housing and pensions means for people in their 60s today.

Behind this changing picture of housing and pensions is the opportunity for advantage and disadvantage to accumulate. For some there was opportunity for cheap appreciating assets and increased workplace pension savings. However, the success enjoyed by these people hides the hardship suffered by a substantial minority. Indeed, there is significant wealth inequality in the years preceding the SPA, with 62% of 60-65 year olds owning their home with no mortgage and 36% of 55-64 year olds owning assets greater than £1m, while 17% of 60-65 year olds are in households with less than £3000 in savings.[13] Underpinning this is the structural disadvantage between those able to purchase property which increased in value and work in jobs that enabled them to accumulate pension wealth, and those in lower income roles, or with periods out of work, unable to access property.[14] Understanding the pathways to this disadvantage and the lived realities of those navigating them, as this research does, are crucial to tackling them.

11 The Second Pensions Commission (2026), Pensions 2050: Evidence and Future Priorities

12 Pensions Policy Institute (2026), 'Pensions Adequacy: Housing, Households and Auto-Enrolment'

13 Fabian Society (2024), When I'm 64

14 Work and Pensions Committee (2026), Transition to State Pension Age Inquiry, Second Report

Chapter 3: Housing

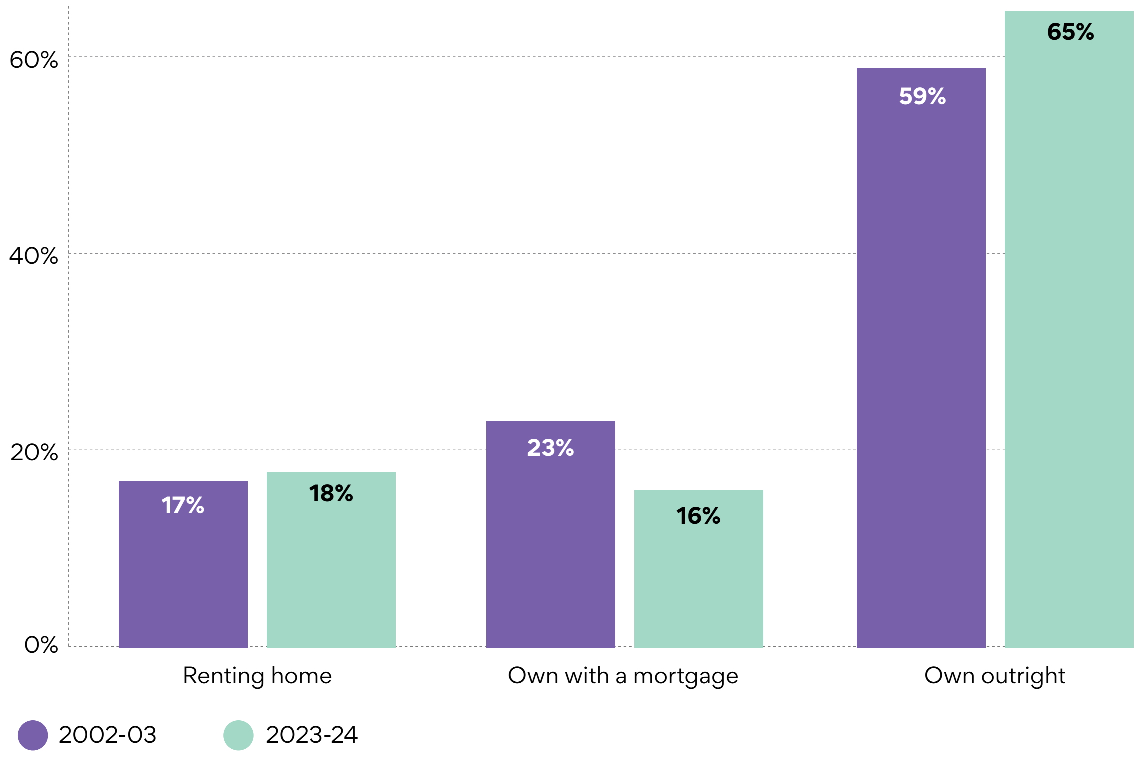
This chapter explores housing as a necessity for life and as a component of an individual's later life finances. It outlines that, despite an overall shift towards increased home ownership among people in their 60s, the precarious group faces uncertain and often unsuitable housing in later life.

Home ownership for some

The 20 years between 2002-03 and 2023-24 saw a notable increase in the proportion of 60-69 year olds that owned their home outright. This period also saw a 26% increase in UK average house prices. This means that more people are navigating this stage of life with secure housing and a substantial source of wealth. However, the proportion that were renting their home broadly remained consistent. This suggests that home ownership (with or without a mortgage) did not become more prevalent. As such, property wealth and the security of home ownership remain out of reach for many people as they move through their 60s.

Figure 4: Housing tenure among 60-69 year olds in England

Tenure among 60-69 year olds
While a greater proportion own their own home outright than 20 years ago, the proportion renting in their 60s is slightly higher



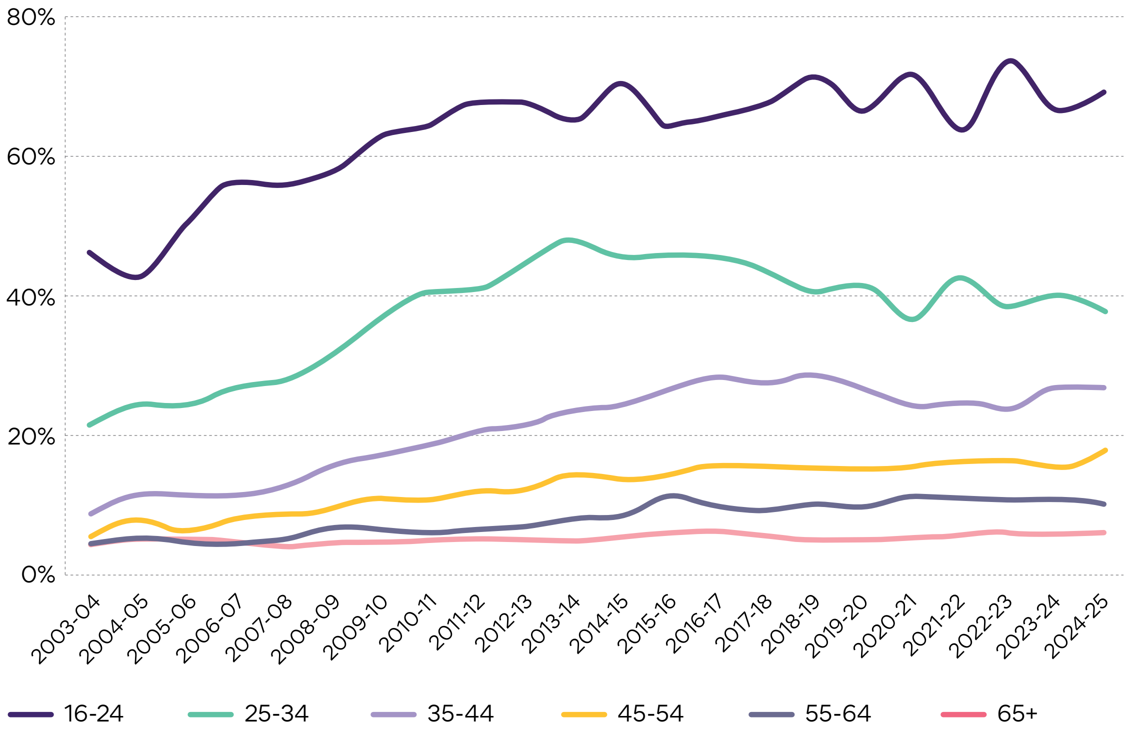
Source: English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, Wave 1, 2002-03, and Wave 2, 2023-24 • CFAB analysis

Beyond this data though, there is a looming problem facing future 60s cohorts. Among 45-65 year olds, 65% of households are owner-occupiers which is down 15 percentage points compared to 20 years ago and 17 percentage points lower than over 65s.[15] This suggests that home ownership in later life is set to fall among future 60s cohorts.

There is also evidence that this fall in home ownership in later life will be coupled with increasing numbers renting their home. As the chart below shows, the proportion of every age group renting has increased, with a substantial proportion of the cohorts behind the current 60s group private renting and at higher rates than their predecessors. The scale of this increase among people in and approaching later life is alarming: a 41% increase in the proportion aged 65+ private renting, a 144% among 55-64 year olds and 231% among 45-54 year olds. Further to this by 2044 it is estimated that almost 2 million more pensioner households will be renting.[16] Without intervention the future for the 60s is one of renting rather than home owning. This brings increased financial costs, less certain housing and a future without the security of property ownership.

Figure 5: Private renters in England by age 2003 to 2025

Proportion of private renters in England by age
The proportion of people privately renting has risen among all age groups over the past two decades



Source: English Housing Survey (2025). 'Headline findings on demographics and household resilience 2024 to 2025'

15 Pensions Policy Institute (2026), 'Pensions Adequacy: Housing, Households and Auto-Enrolment'

16 Ibid

The experiences of the precarious group offer insight into what these trends mean for people navigating later life. Members of the precarious group are half as likely to own their home outright compared to their secure counterparts (0.4 vs 0.8). The precarious group are therefore more likely to be facing the ongoing financial burden of renting or paying down a mortgage for their home. Interviews with this group outlined the lived reality of navigating later life without the security of outright home ownership.

Housing anxiety among the precarious group

For the precarious group, housing, and associated costs, is a source of worry and instability. In the qualitative interviews, participants outlined the stress and financial challenge of renting and trying to pay their mortgage.

Owners with a mortgage

For homeowners, housing anxiety presented in two ways. The first of these was anxiety over the security of an asset central to their plans for later life and beyond.

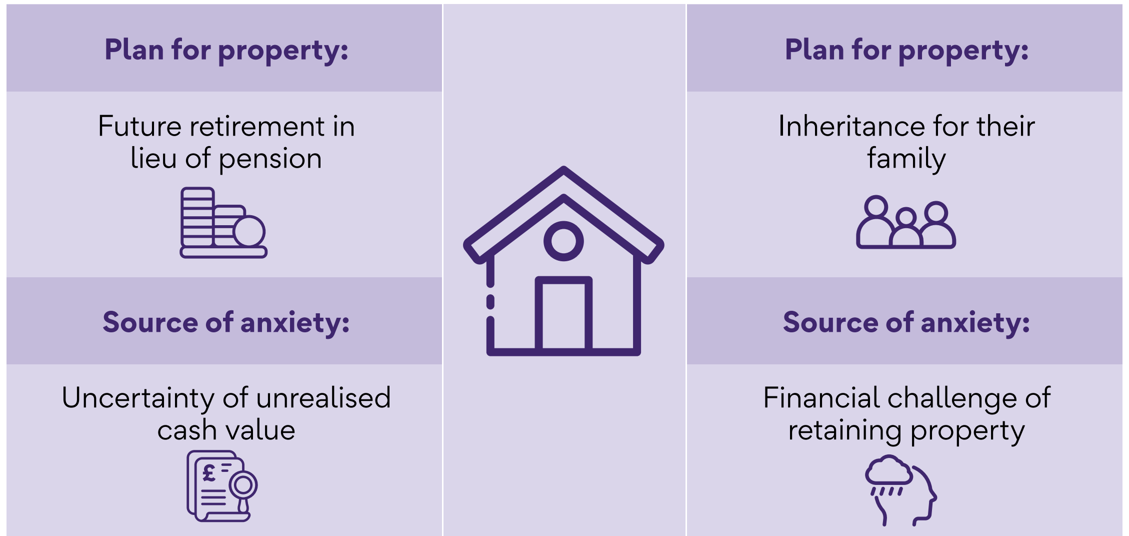
For those who owned their home with a mortgage, this asset was a central part of their retirement planning. These people were hoping to downsize and use the profit either to live off, or to buy a rental property that would serve as regular income. They had little or no private or occupational pensions and viewed their property as their pension. This group were anxious about the uncertainty over whether they would be able to extract the value they needed to provide for their retirement. Their ability to protect and pay down the debt on this asset was therefore likely to be the deciding factor in how secure they were in the years to come.

"We would only extend our mortgage by maybe 10,000 because we knew our pension would be our property."
Pre-SPA, owner with a mortgage, female

A few other participants viewed their home as something to leave behind to their family after they died. These participants were concerned that their circumstances would prevent them from doing this. Their fear was that they would be forced to sell or fail to make mortgage payments on their home due to their ongoing financial insecurity.

Figure 6: Sources of anxiety among homeowners with a mortgage in the precarious group, as identified in the qualitive interviews

Property represents an uncertain asset and cause for anxiety for some of the precarious group



For both of these groups of people, their home represented an uncertain asset of unreleased value that was central to their future planning.

The second form of housing anxiety among owner-occupiers, was the short-term pressure of keeping up with the costs of owning a home with limited financial means. This anxiety was driven by sudden, unexpected costs and the ongoing costs of paying their mortgage.

Unexpected housing costs presented a sudden challenge for owner occupiers in the precarious group. In a few cases, some had even owned their home outright but had been driven back into housing debt. These unexpected costs came with the need to purchase half the marital home following divorce or the need for urgent repairs on their home. As a result, they had to take out costly new mortgages later in life or equity release on their home. This pushed them into challenging financial circumstances, trying to manage these increased housing costs on a single income, sometimes alongside caring for a family member and working multiple jobs post-SPA. This shows how those living precariously simply do not have the financial capacity to weather shocks without suffering undue hardship. These shocks can even wreak havoc for those who own their home outright and result in the loss of this form of later life security.

Chapter 3: Housing

“My house is full of damp, I've got an old house. The trouble is I will have to move eventually when I get bit doddery, but I can't afford to move twice and I'm not decrepit enough to go into a flat or something [now] and because my house needed so much doing to it I had to make a choice. Do I sell it and lose masses of money on the house or borrow to repair and stay? So I chose that option and the only way I could get the money was equity release.”
Post-SPA, owner with a mortgage, female, single

It was not just sudden, unexpected costs that presented a challenge, but the issue of paying down a mortgage in the face of a precarious later life. The precarious group typically presented with lower incomes, so keeping up with mortgage payments with limited cash presented a challenge in and of itself. This issue was exacerbated when people faced limitations to their capability to work, due to health issues or caring responsibilities. As a result, these people were concerned that the limitations on their capability to work would result in their loss of a home they had invested significant money into. This shows the precarity facing cash poor owner-occupiers, particularly when common later life challenges, such as health issues and caring responsibilities, present.

“It's like, very, very bad. The combination of that high mortgage, no income but low income from PIP [Personal Independence Payments] and income support, depletion of savings to support the situation.”
Pre-SPA, owner with a mortgage, female, single

Renters

Housing presented different causes for concern and insecurity among renters.

For social renters, there tended to be an acknowledgement of the stability this provided. Often, they expressed a sense of good fortune in having this security. However, a few social renters did harbour frustration at being housed in towns away from their friends and family, something they felt would improve their wellbeing as they moved through later life. This situation also likely has implications for these people’s potential future needs for unpaid care, which is often delivered by close family and friends. This highlights how a lack of agency in securing suitable social housing, despite the security it provides, can undermine the wellbeing of the precarious group.

"If they can house me in London, I think I would live a better standard of life because... a lot of my family will be able to pass by, visit me, see me."
Post-SPA, renter, male, single

The private rental sector represented a mix of financial pressure and instability. A few participants were able to access housing benefit which alleviated the pressure of paying rent, highlighting the value for this kind of financial relief among the precarious group. Aside from the financial pressure, a few participants expressed general anxiety about the uncertainty of the private rental sector[17] and the dependence on a landlord's goodwill. There was also a sense of frustration at being in the private rental sector in later life, rather than having the security of home ownership.

"I can't get a house and the frustration over that is... I pay a high rent, because I pay a high rent I can't afford to save up a deposit and it's a catch 22 because if I could, if I could get the deposit, the mortgage would be so much lower than my rent."
Post-SPA, renter, female, single

The anxiety the precarious group feels around their housing is emblematic of the insecurity with which they are forced to navigate later life. This vital component of life too often represents a stressful uncertainty marred in a lack of control. For social renters, a lack of control over the location of their home in later life, for private renters a lack of control as they rely on the goodwill of their landlord, and for owners with a mortgage a lack of control over an asset of unrealised value. Housing represents another substantial source of precarity, uncertainty and challenge for far too many as they move through their 60s and beyond.

Housing (un)fit for later life

A few participants were, or had recently been, in housing that had an adverse impact on their health and wellbeing.

This was most commonly physically inappropriate housing. In these cases, mobility issues meant participants were unable to access the upstairs of their house, forcing them to primarily live in the downstairs of their home. This undermined their wellbeing, as they became excluded from parts of their own home.

For one participant, they also faced mental health challenges caused by unsuitable housing. This person was provided with social housing in a different town, away from all their friends. The resulting loneliness had an ongoing impact on them, presenting an additional wellbeing challenge alongside their existing mental health issues. This example highlights how the value of housing in later life stretches beyond the purely financial, by providing or limiting important connections to friends and family.

"I live on my own. I suffer with isolation because I don't know anybody up here."
Post-SPA, renter, male, single

For people facing unsuitable housing their financial limitations restricted their options. This left them powerless to escape homes that adversely impacted their health and wellbeing, trapping them in damaging conditions beyond their control.

Only one of the participants who had experienced inappropriate housing had been able to resolve the issue. This participant had a daughter that worked in social housing and was able to effectively advocate on their behalf so that they could access social housing appropriate to their mobility issues. They had been unable to effectively advocate for themselves before their daughter got involved, unaware of how to successfully apply for suitable social housing. That this single example of successful advocacy required insider, professional knowledge of social housing is a sign that something needs to change. Otherwise more people will continue suffering housing incompatible with their physical needs and damaging to their wellbeing as they move through later life.

"I had my daughter from Australia. And she did all the negotiating for me. She's been my advocate for four months, and she got me, not only did she get me surgery out of out of nowhere, but she got me a flat, a council flat, and I wasn't even on the list."
Pre-SPA, renter, female, single

For others, being tied down to an interest free mortgage and struggling to access social housing in the town they had lived in for years were ongoing issues they could not resolve. All of those who had struggled with inappropriate housing had shown some feelings of powerlessness and frustration at their situation.

The trap of housing unsuitable for their health and wellbeing is one that the precarious group is too often unable to escape from. However, this does not need to be the case. Social housing can, and should, be able to provide the conditions for a healthy later life to residents. For those navigating private renting, there needs to be avenues of support so that they have the freedom to pursue housing that meets their physical and social needs in later life. Without action, too many will be forced to suffer unsuitable housing into their 60s and beyond.

17 NB interviews were conducted before the reforms of the Renters' Rights Act became law on 1st May 2026

Chapter 4: Pensions

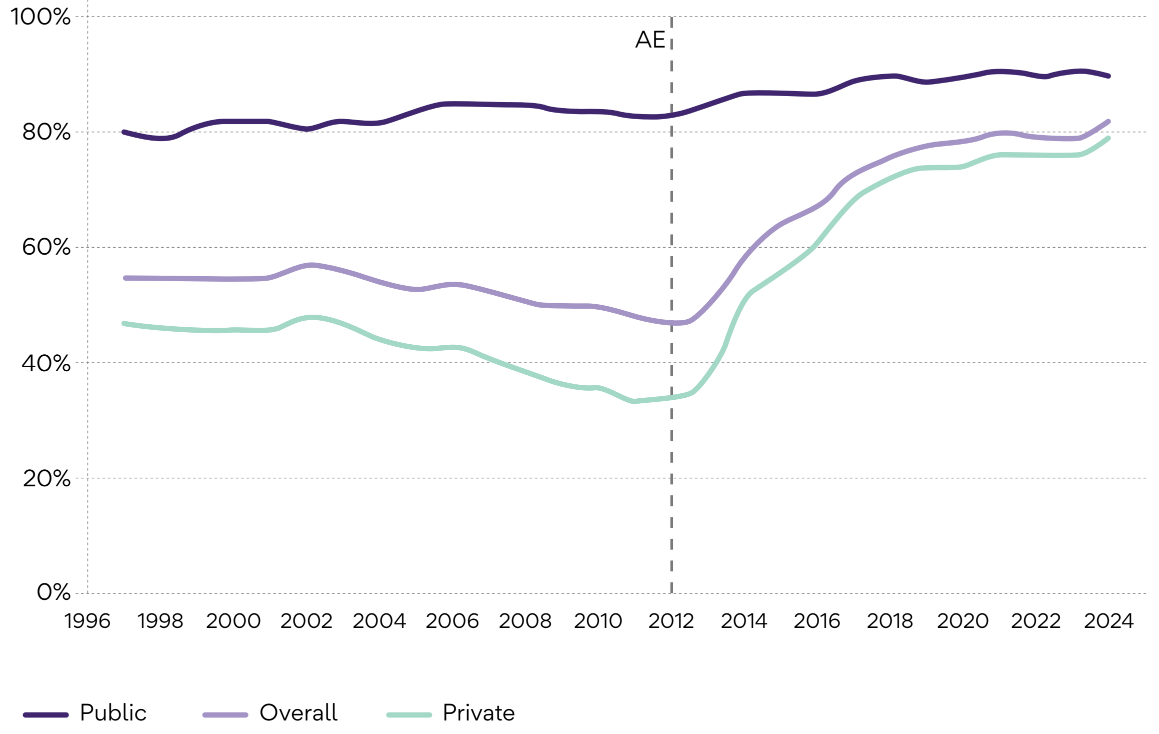
Pensions are an important part of personal finances in later life. This section explores how this aspect of wealth and income has changed over the past two decades and what it looks like for those in the precarious group.

The left behind of workplace pensions growth

Since 2012, the overall story of workplace pensions has been one of increased participation. As the chart below shows, there has been a substantial increase in the proportion of people enrolled in a workplace pension since the introduction of automatic enrolment.

Figure 7: Participation in workplace pension 1997-2024

Workplace pension participation
Automatic enrolment has seen a substantial rise in the proportion saving into a workplace pension



Source: DWP (2025). 'Workplace pension participation and saving trends of eligible employees: 2009-2024

This story of increased overall participation masks challenges in pension saving that have persisted beyond automatic enrolment. Around four in ten (43%) of the working age population are saving below the aspirational target replacement rates set out by the first Pensions Commission.[18] On top of this, almost half of working-age people are not saving into a pension on a typical month.[19] Behind the increase of people enrolled in workplace pensions is under saving and no saving, outlining the challenge future 60s cohorts will likely face without action to improve their financial prospects in later life.

There is also evidence that certain groups have been left behind in the broader picture of progress since automatic enrolment. The Second Pensions Commission interim report noted that women, carers, disabled people and some ethnic minorities were all less likely to be saving into workplace pensions.[20] This also shows crossover in the left behind and the precarious group *A Tale of Two 60s* has identified, with members of this group more likely to be women, carers, in poor health and from a minority ethnic group.

Furthermore, we found that membership of a private pension scheme is an insulating factor against falling into the precarious group. Respondents in the secure group had a 0.88 chance of being members of a private pension scheme compared to a 0.53 chance among the precarious group. Those in the precarious group are therefore less likely to enjoy the security of a private pension.

Pathways to no private pension

People entering later life with no private pension savings are among the most disadvantaged. There is evidence that this group are likely to have no or low-level qualifications, be social renters, be single or divorced and not working due to poor health or caring responsibilities.[21] All of these are characteristics the precarious group of 60-69 year olds are more likely to possess. The qualitative interviews therefore outlined some of the pathways that have led people into later life with little to no private pension wealth.

Many participants had no private pension because they had not saved before automatic enrolment and then been bypassed by it when it was introduced. For some this was because ill health had excluded them from the labour market before and after automatic enrolment. Other participants had fallen below the £10,000 threshold at which employees must be automatically enrolled into a workplace pension, often because their circumstances (e.g. health issues, caring responsibilities) forced them to

18 DWP, 2025, 'Analysis of Future Pension Incomes 2025'

19 DWP, 2025, 'Family Resources Survey: financial year 2023 to 2024'

20 The Second Pensions Commission (2026), Pensions 2050: evidence and future priorities – interim report

21 Work and Pensions Committee (2026), Transition to State Pension Age Inquiry, Second Report

work part time. A few had chosen to opt-out of their workplace pension, needing the income to keep afloat. All of these people faced circumstances (ill health, low income and acute financial need) that meant the impact of automatic enrolment had no impact on their lives. The result is that they do not have the security and income of a workplace pension in later life. This is a group already facing multiple barriers to employment in later life (as outlined in the *A Tale of Two 60s: Work in a Decade of Transition* report), so not having access to a workplace pension further inhibits their income in the years leading up to SPA and beyond.

"I didn't do a private pension because, to be honest, I didn't think I'd need it. I didn't. I think I thought I would have been OK with my work and I could save and I would have been all right."
Pre-SPA, renter, female

Participants who had been self-employed for large portions of their working lives also found themselves without pensions savings. This group had expected to continue working into later life, which many were currently unable to do due to health issues. Many had seen property ownership as a replacement for their pension, but having faced health issues and the associated loss of income in their 50s and early 60s, this asset was either lost or at substantial risk. These people were in a highly precarious situation in which they did not have the security of private pensions if they stopped working so were left facing severe hardship when their health prevented them doing so.

For these people, workplace pensions were a source of security they had not been able to access. When considering the future of pensions, as the Second Pensions Commission is currently doing, attention must be paid to those people who have been untouched by automatic enrolment. Otherwise, people will continue to be excluded from the secure later life workplace pensions can provide.

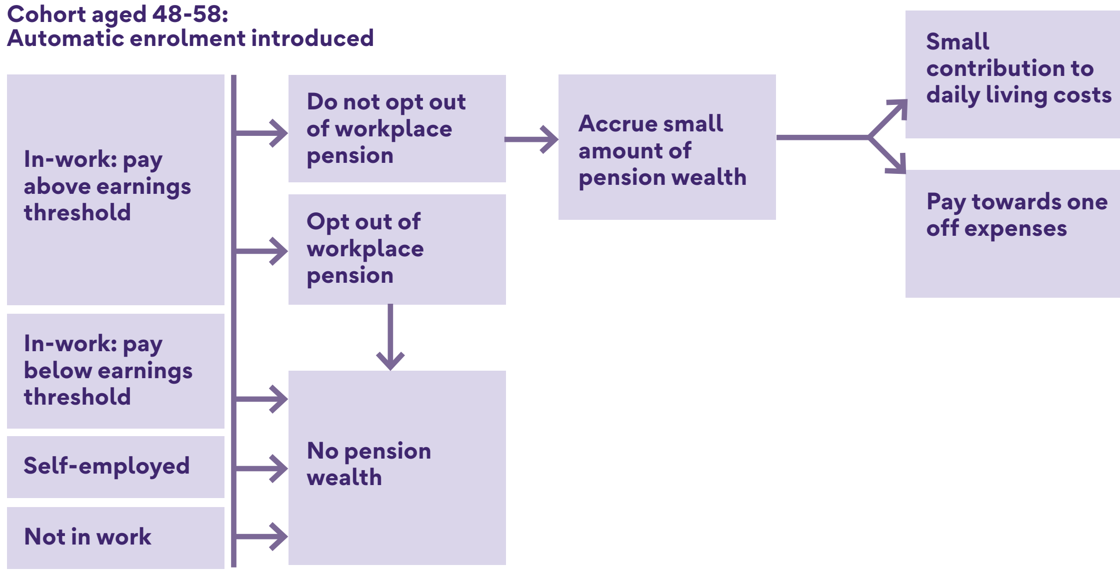
Small private pensions

Some participants had accrued small amounts of private pension wealth in the years following the introduction of automatic enrolment but had opted to take it as a lump sum. In most cases they had spent this at the time of the interview so private pensions did not form an ongoing source of income. The motivations behind this were mixed, typically it was money they had not expected to have, which was spent on daily living costs or put towards one-off expenses. In all of these instances, their pensions were small pots spent on necessary life expenses that often simply helped keep people above water in times of acute need.

"I have a personal pension from when I was at a the telecommunications company where I was very well paid, but I haven't paid anything into it, but it has accumulated and I took a £15,000 tax free withdrawal from that several years ago to try and help the financial difficulties that I was in at the time because I wasn't earning enough and was in rent arrears."
Post-SPA, renter, female

Figure 8: Engagement with workplace pensions by the precarious group following the introduction of automatic enrolment, drawn from qualitative interview data

The precarious group are often untouched by automatic enrolment



This group highlights the acute need among a cohort that was approaching later life when automatic enrolment was introduced. For people that saved after this period, their relatively small private pensions represented a minor lifeline in a wider picture of precarity. As such, any discussion of pensions and support that only focuses on improving saving in the future risks ignoring the needs of a group struggling now.

Pensions as security

A few participants enjoyed the security of occupational pensions. This typically came from working in public sector jobs (NHS, civil service, schools), reflecting the strong pensions that are often part of the good working conditions provided by these employers. This group found themselves coming into later life with a substantial, and necessary, source of financial security.

These people tended to have been with their employers for a reasonable amount of time. From nearly ten years to more than four decades. Often these participants had paid pensions little or no attention, it had just been something their employer had automatically enrolled them into. This meant that all had accrued reasonable pots and the few who had been with them for a substantial amount of time had a very strong pension entitlement.

"I never really thought about pensions until I was about maybe fifty. It was just something that was there, you know, and I didn't really pay much attention, never looked at figures or thought about it."
Post-SPA, owner with a mortgage, female, single

A couple of cases highlighted the tremendous value afforded by this protection. These participants faced divorce in later life, a shock that can often push the precarious group into real hardship (as outlined in *A Tale of Two 60s: Introducing a Decade of Transition*). Their occupational pensions provided a stable income and access to a substantial lump sum, used to cover the substantial costs from divorce in later life (e.g. legal fees, increased housing costs). Through this protection, people were able to weather the storm of a later life relationship breakdown without falling into spiralling hardship. These experiences highlight the valuable protection pensions provide in later life but also the element of luck in securing this among the pre-automatic enrolment generation.

All of this highlights that, while improving workplace pension saving might improve prospects for future generations, there is a group in their 60s now that cannot benefit. For the precarious group now and those imminently approaching their 60s, focusing on pensions adequacy in the long-term, as the government's Pensions Commission does, offers no respite. Action to tackle insecurity among people in their 60s now and in years to come needs to look beyond workplace pensions. Otherwise, it will fail to touch the insecurity faced by those who have been unable to benefit from workplace pension schemes.

The State Pension: an inadequate lifeboat

This research found evidence of the importance of the State Pension but also of its limitations and adverse impacts. For those at SPA, there was evidence of security provided by the State Pension, but this was not enough to survive on alone. For those not at SPA, it was mired in confusion and a sense of unfairness.

The State Pension forms a crucial aspect of retirement planning for many people. Two-thirds (65%) of people aged between 45 and SPA say the amount of State Pension they receive is important or very important in their decision on when to retire[22] and the majority of people believe it will serve as the foundation of their income in retirement.[23] Its importance to the most vulnerable has risen in recent years, with the introduction of the triple lock playing a significant role in reducing pensioner poverty.[24] Even with the advent of automatic enrolment, it clearly forms a central part of people's plans and expectations for later life now, and for future generations.

There was some evidence of the protections provided by the State Pension and pension age benefits in the LCA. Reaching SPA offered modest insulation from falling into the precarious group, whose members had a 0.38 probability of being at or above SPA compared to a 0.48 probability among the secure group.

It was no surprise then that the State Pension was often mentioned in interviews with the precarious group, who are less likely to have workplace pension wealth. Common was a sense of a lack of fairness for their generation, that moving the SPA had disrupted some of their plans for this stage of life and moved a source of financial security further from their reach. A few participants did acknowledge a broader economic need to adjust the SPA. These participants reflected on the ageing population and noted the financial implications of it. However, these views did exist alongside a strong sense of unfairness for their cohort.

"I understand why the government thinks they need to put it back a couple of years if people are living so much longer. But it's not really our fault. You know, we still shouldn't be penalised for modern medicine working a bit better, you know, therefore you suffer for longer."
Pre-SPA, renter, female, single

22 Department for Work & Pensions (2025), Planning & Preparing for Later Life

23 Standard Life Centre for the Future of Retirement (2025), Jam Tomorrow? Work, finances and retirement in an era of rising State Pension age

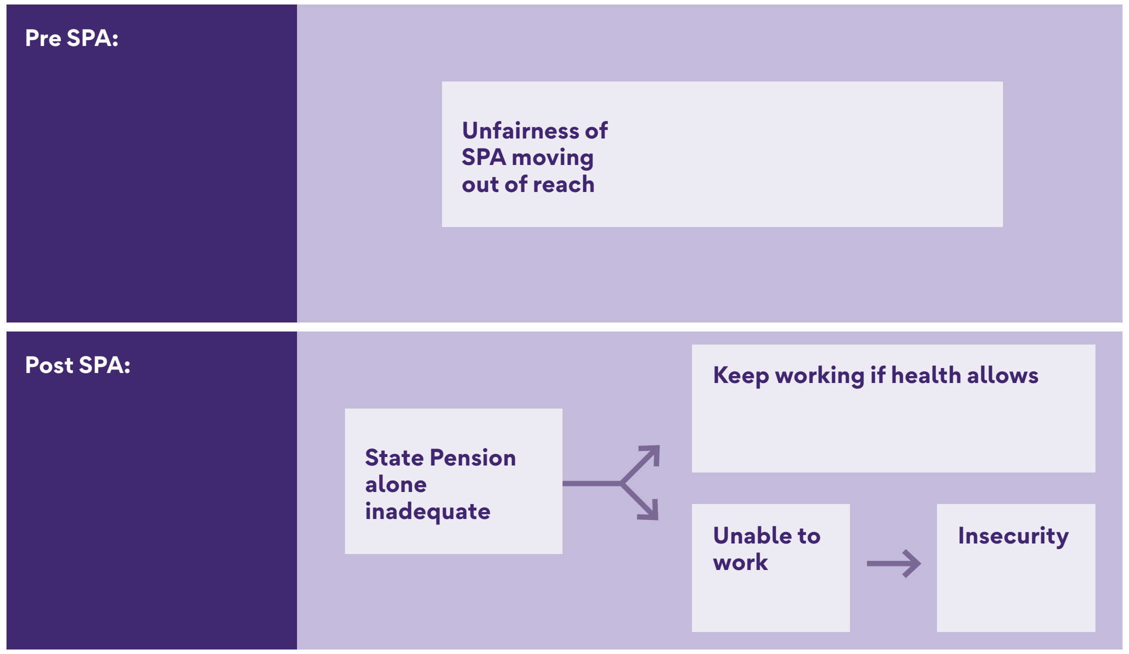
24 The Second Pensions Commission (2026), Pensions 2050: Evidence and Future Priorities

Despite its importance to people, knowledge about the State Pension is sometimes low. Across the public as a whole just 18% were able to correctly identify the current SPA[25] and 11% of people in their 60s were unaware of their own SPA.[26]

This misunderstanding presented in our qualitative discussions with the precarious group, who do or will come to rely on this income. This included thinking reaching SPA would reduce their benefits entitlement, that the maximum amount women could be entitled to was less than it was for men and that their workplace pension savings would reduce the amount of State Pension they could expect to receive. For a group that is more reliant on their State Pension, a lack of understanding of a primary income source for them in later life is a substantial concern that needs to be tackled.

Figure 9: Views of the State Pension among the precarious group

Despite being a crucial part of later life income, the state pension is seen as unfair and inadequate



There was some evidence of the positive financial effect of reaching SPA in the qualitative interviews. Often participants who had reached SPA found receiving their State Pension offered increased financial security. There was also increased income for those receiving benefits moving from working age benefits to Pension Credit. For those who had reached SPA, it had resulted in a notable improvement in their circumstances.

25 Standard Life Centre for the Future of Retirement (2025), Jam Tomorrow? Work, finances and retirement in an era of rising State Pension age

26 The Institute for Fiscal Studies (2025), How aware are people of next year’s state pension increase?

Chapter 4: Pensions

“I have reached that age, so I get a State Pension now... and that does help for sure. That certainly helps. You know, I know we pay into these things and you [don’t] get a huge amount back, but it's, you know, it's a bit of a cushion. And it means I can help my grandsons and things like that.”
Post-SPA, owner with a mortgage, female, single

Despite the increased security that reaching SPA provides, it is also worth noting that it is not a protection from hardship. The UK has one of the lowest State Pension provisions of all OECD countries and, despite the triple lock, the State Pension does not provide pensioners in this country with a basic standard of living, even when it is topped up by Pension Credit.[27] Ours is a pension system built on the expectation of workplace pension pots alongside other forms of wealth (primarily, home ownership). The inadequacy of the State Pension alone was reflected in this research, as participants at SPA continued to struggle and needed to work beyond SPA.

“[I anticipate working] Forever probably. I don't have anything in place apart from obviously a State Pension, but I don't have anything else in place so at the moment it looks like it could be for a long time, as long as I can, I guess.”
Post-SPA, owner with a mortgage, female, single

The State Pension can, and should, be a tool for tackling later life insecurity. Too often though its function, including its interaction with other benefits, is misunderstood. Further to this, the income it brings is often insufficient to meet the needs of those facing precarity in their 60s. It needs to be at an adequate level and sufficiently understood by people to meet their needs and allow them to plan for the future. Currently, it is falling short on both of these counts.

27 House of Commons Library (2024), Pensions: International comparisons

Conclusions

The findings of this report challenge the popular perception that people in their 60s are, as a group, financially secure and benefiting from rising housing wealth and growing pension savings. While this is true for many, it is far from the whole story. Behind this narrative sits a substantial group of people who have reached later life without the security that home ownership and workplace pensions can provide.

Their experiences show that housing and pension inequalities are not separate issues. They often reinforce one another. Those unable to build housing wealth are more likely to face ongoing housing costs into later life, while those without adequate pension savings have fewer resources to manage those costs. The result is not simply financial insecurity, but reduced choice, control and confidence about the future.

Importantly, these inequalities did not emerge overnight. They are the result of opportunities and constraints accumulated across working lives shaped by changes in housing, work and pensions policy.

The findings also raise important questions for policymakers. Much of the debate on housing and pensions focuses on improving outcomes for future retirees, whether through increasing housing supply, supporting home ownership or encouraging pension saving. While these goals remain important, they do little for people who are already approaching or experiencing later life without the assets and savings that many policies assume they have. Greater attention is needed for those who have reached this stage of life with limited opportunities to improve their financial position.

There are also important implications for future research. As home ownership rates fall among younger cohorts and concerns about pension adequacy persist, there is a growing need to better understand how housing, pension wealth, health and wellbeing interact over the course of later life. In particular, more attention should be paid to the long-term experiences of people renting into older age and those who enter retirement with little workplace pension provision.

Perhaps most importantly, the experiences documented in this report should not be dismissed as affecting a small group left behind by historical circumstances. Instead, they may point to challenges that future generations will face in even greater numbers. If current trends continue, more people will reach later life without the housing wealth and pension resources that have provided security for many of today's older population.

The central message of this report is clear: housing and pensions remain fundamental to security and wellbeing in later life, but access to both is deeply unequal. Unless policymakers recognise and respond to this reality, the insecurity experienced by some people in their 60s today risks becoming a much more common feature of later life in the future.

Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.
Let's make ageing better.

The Centre for Ageing Better is pioneering ways to make ageing better a reality for everyone, including challenging ageism and building an Age-friendly Movement, creating Age-friendly Employment and Age-friendly Homes. It is a charitable foundation funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and part of the government's What Works Network.