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German experts fuel debate about retirement at 70

AP Associated Press

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AP - FILE - In this May 6, 2009 file photo two elderly persons walk in downtown Stuttgart, Germany. Younger ...

By VERENA SCHMITT-ROSCHMANN - Wed Aug 11, 7:02 pm ET

BERLIN — Germans are famous for being hard workers — but retirement at 70?

That's the prescription of two think tanks, which say years more toil are inevitable due to stubbornly low birthrates and the ballooning costs of the cradle-to-grave welfare system in a country that already has decided to bump up the [retirement age](#) from 65 to 67.

Germans already feel like the workhorses of Europe and fumed at the idea of footing the retirement bill for profligate Greeks. It's not clear if they would stand for three more years on the job, but without an influx of highly skilled immigrants, they may have no choice.

"If we look at the [higher life expectancy](#) and the shrinking birth rate in Germany, retirement age 70 will have to be introduced over time," Michael Huether, chief of the conservative IW, told the daily

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Rheinische Post.

The proposal echoes a similar assessment by the European Commission which said last month that the 27 member states need to hike their [retirement ages](#) to 70 by 2060. The topic is on the agenda everywhere in Europe, but no country is planning to go beyond 68 at this point.

Klaus Zimmermann of the liberal DIW told the Handelsblatt daily that "raising the life work time to 70 years is the most humane way to deal with the challenge."

Many Germans bristle at the idea of working more years.

"I'm already worn out now — how do they expect us to work several years longer?" asked Norbert Schmittbauer, a 50-year-old construction worker in Berlin.

"My body hurts so much and I start working every day at five in the morning," Schmittbauer said. His assessment of the think tank proposal: "Insane."

Many critics agree, adding that there are also too few jobs for the elderly, leaving them no choice but to retire early.

That trend is also hitting the United States, where more people decided to retire early and file for [Social Security benefits](#) in 2009 — 2.74 million — than any year in history, due to a slumping job market.

The German group VdK which is lobbying for retirees' interests said Wednesday only about one-fifth of those unemployed at age 60 or above currently ever find a job again, and only every second business in Germany even employs anyone above the age of 50.

VdK chief Ulrike Mascher said in a statement the idea to push retirement back even further to 70 is "utopian." She added that a quarter of German employees aged 55 to 59 need to retire early because they are too sick to work.

Benjamin Ladiges, a 32-year-old Berlin lawyer, said that while some jobs allow later retirement, professions with physical strains should be exempted.

"For some professions, especially desk jobs, it may make sense to push the retirement age, for others it, especially physical work, it is not an option," he said.

The debate is complicated by the fact that Germany's shrinking work force means the nation will face an increasingly acute shortage of skilled labor in some sectors — despite generally strong resistance in the nation to higher immigration.

The suggestion of retirement at 70 has fired up an already fierce debate about an unpopular law, passed in 2007, to raise the retirement age from 65 to 67 from 2012 through 2029.

The Social Democrats, then part of the government coalition, backed the law at the time, but took a beating from their constituency for it in the 2009 general election and have since raised questions about sticking with the plan.

The government has defended the law saying the job market for the elderly is improving. But Economy Minister Rainer Bruederle has made it clear there are currently no plans to go beyond 67.

Raising the retirement age for full benefits to above 67 is also being floated in the United States, along with a small cut in benefits, a slight increase in payroll taxes, or subjecting more income to taxes. House Democratic Leader Steny Hoyer suggested raising the retirement age recently, and Republican leader John

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Boehner said it maybe should go to as high as 70. The notion was immediately attacked by Speaker Nancy Pelosi, also a Democrat.

Doing nothing would require about a 25 percent cut in benefits for U.S. retirees a couple of decades from now.

All of Europe is facing the same trend of aging populations. While there are currently four people working for each retiree, projections indicate that by 2060 on average there will be only two.

However, responses to the politically hot topic have been very diverse across the 27 member bloc, and retirement ages are not at all uniform.

While the French government has struggled to raise the retirement age from 60 to 62, the British government is talking about plans to go for 68 by 2040. Currently Britain lets women retire at 60 and men at 65, as do Poland and Italy.

Spain and the Netherlands have debated raising their retirement ages from 65 to 67, whereas Portugal and Denmark want to stick with 65 for the time being.

Sweden has a flexible retirement age which allows people to retire as early as 61, but as late as 67. The Christian Democratic party, a small member of the governing coalition, has proposed allowing the window to be kept open until 70, arguing that it is important for the nation's future development.

"But it is also necessary that the elderly get more space to elaborate themselves with a flexible pension age, have the opportunity to scale down successively, the possibility to change jobs and start up their own businesses," the party has said.

AP writers Kirsten Grieshaber in Berlin, Malin Rising in Stockholm, Sweden, Stephen Ohlemacher in Washington, DC and AP correspondents across Europe contributed to this report.

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Reality sucks. Either provide for yourself or work until you die.

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Kent Paul Dolan, Retired ... Wed Aug 11, 2010 09:33 pm PDT | [Report Abuse](#)

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As I posted elsewhere about the US, and as this article confirms about Germany, the main problem is the lack of jobs for the elderly. It is insanity to raise the retirement age to 70 if no one past age 60 can find a job.

The problem of course is rampant age discrimination, which is supposedly illegal and instead is the norm throughout the US job market.

Cure the "no jobs" problem and lots of people would work long past age 70 voluntarily. My partner's dad is 82, but he still goes every day to help his son with work on the farm that the son bought from the dad. This could be the new norm if age discrimination were eliminated.

xanthian, involuntarily retired by age discrimination at age 60, and not liking it.

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Nasdaq	2,179.76	0.00 0.00%
S&P 500	1,071.69	0.00 0.00%
10 Yr Bond(%)	2.6290%	+0.1700
Oil	74.31	+0.49 +0.66%
Gold	1,226.20	-1.00 -0.08%

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Crank Wed Aug 11, 2010 06:16 pm PDT | [Report Abuse](#)

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If we have a problem, then find a solution; or in the case of current politics we pass the buck on to previous administrations. Here are some potential ideas to fix the problem:

One idea: Offer retirement with a top notch health plan at age 60 but no cash. If you have saved enough then you can retire. Offer a health plan with top notch health care with copays and some cash and retire at 65. Offer a top notch health plan with no copays and cash with retirement at 72.

Or

Allow for individuals to have a percentage of their contribution earmarked for themselves. Then raise the cap. High tax payers would pay more but they would actually get personalized accounts which would give them a larger piece of the pie for their increased contribution. The increase in revenue from the high end could keep pace with what the government is losing by allowing us to earmark our own money. Just a few ideas to take us out of the ponzi scheme we have now.

Just some suggestions, its easy to complain and ask for other peoples money but difficult to find fair solutions.

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StuartK Wed Aug 11, 2010 06:10 pm PDT | [Report Abuse](#)

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I have no problem with the concept of ownership and pursuit of wealth in America or the world. I do have a problem with the idea that "labor" is the way to increase profits or decrease losses. All the while those at the top take more than they rightfully deserve: win or, more often, lose. It is the corporate leaders who have paid to ship our jobs overseas. This has impacted both sides of the pond. It is the corporate leaders who have taken wage disparity beyond the levels of Nero or Southern Plantation Owners. No one is worth millions if the jobs they begrudgingly offer pay so little their employees must live at or below the poverty line with no hope of raising a family and saving for the future.

Maybe some form of Maximum Wage Disparity laws are necessary. Nothing stimulates the economy like discretionary income for everyone.

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- Wed Aug 11, 2010 06:05 pm PDT | [Report Abuse](#)

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Just because theres a higher life expectancy doesn't mean people should work longer. Its already hard enough at those ages to even find employment career change or not. Not to mention how your body physically wears down over the years. I dread getting to those years and thinking about having to work but we'll all be there at some point. Retirement should be at 55 everywhere, so you have some time to enjoy and reflect on your life-I mean Jezus you'll already have worked for 40 YEARS. 70 might be ok with politicians who have the best benefits and income, but not for the rest of us. Wether were here for a reason or not, it's sure as hel isnt to work our lives away.

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Gabrielle Wed Aug 11, 2010 06:00 pm PDT | [Report Abuse](#)

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Does ANYONE see the true irony in all of this? Why do they need to have this "rule"? I will tell you---it's because of entitlements in government pensions! They DO not have the money to cover their elderly and they need for you to work longr to collect more in taxes!

No fears our German pals---The USA crooked government will have us all retiring at 160 after Obama and his Liberal Congress spend us into HELL!

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Talking Hamster Wed Aug 11, 2010 05:50 pm PDT | [Report Abuse](#)

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What about prostitution industry?
same age? anyone?
cannot imagine:-)

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Talking Hamster Wed Aug 11, 2010 05:45 pm PDT | [Report Abuse](#)

0 2

70?
Well, you don't retire, most people just die on their job:-)
ha ha ha ha ha ha

How about 90?
the German gov thinks their citizen are idiots?

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Budlight Wed Aug 11, 2010 05:38 pm PDT | [Report Abuse](#)

0 3

Every other country they work hard America is lazy?? Just take a look around immigrants own businesses, every store gas station, bank, bar, restaurant, minorities work at these places, We have a black president, These are signs americans are lazy and cant do the job thats why minorities will take over this country.

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 **Sawmill** Wed Aug 11, 2010 05:30 pm PDT | [Report Abuse](#)

are they NAZI'S ????? EXPEL THOSE NJTS....I WANT TO RETIRE NOW AT 63.....

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