

# Emeriti Professors as entrepreneurs

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study explores the roles and opportunities for Emeriti Professors in contributing to academia and society post-retirement.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This study utilizes a comparative analysis of retirement policies across internationally active universities. The research investigates motivations for continued work and the impact of emeritus status on academic engagement. ChatGPT was used to create Tables 1 and 2.

**Findings** – Based on the literature review, media reports, published data on university websites, webinar insights, and personal interviews, the findings reveal diverse post-retirement activities and highlight the potential of Emeriti Professors to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

**Originality/value** – This study underscores the importance of institutional support to leverage the expertise of retired faculty in addressing global challenges.

**Keywords** Emeriti professors, Post-retirement, Academic and non-academic engagements, Global universities, Career policies, 2030 Agenda, Sustainable development

**Paper type** Research paper

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## Introduction

Retirement and average life expectations in the European and North American regions indicate that retired persons, in general, are in good health between 60/65 to 80/85 years of age. Some use this window of longer life expectations to work because their pension fund is insufficient to live a decent life. Others enjoy the new freedom of not having to work and choose to explore interesting tourist attractions, cultural events and other activities like gardening or caring for their grandchildren. However, an increasing number of retirees express interest in continuing to work and engage in meaningful jobs or contribute to solving important societal problems. A small group who has accumulated financial resources during their work life is interested in sharing their knowledge and skills and helping new start-up companies or associations active in the solidarity and social economy.

Ageing university professors share these general physical and psychological conditions of the wider public. At the same time, older professors could decide to work beyond average retirement age in countries where mandatory retirement is not required by law. On the other hand, in countries where mandatory retirement is the rule, the retiring academic professor could be given the title Emeritus Professor, and the title could also be given in countries without mandatory retirement rules. This research focuses on the post-retirement engagement of the Emeriti Professors through a productive ageing lens and to uncover the landscape of their labour market participation.

## Definitions

A general definition of Emeritus Professor provided by Wikileaks states: (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emeritus>)

*Emeritus or Emerita (female version)* is an honorary title granted to someone who retires from a position of distinction, most commonly an academic faculty position, but is allowed to continue using the previous title, as in “Professor Emeritus”. In some cases, the term is



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conferred automatically upon all persons who retire at a given rank, but in others, it remains a mark of distinguished service awarded selectively on retirement. It is also used when a person of distinction in a profession retires or hands over the position, enabling their former rank to be retained in their title. The term *Emeritus* does not necessarily signify that a person has relinquished all the duties of their former position, and they may continue to exercise some of them.

Examples from universities vary and show differences in the emphasis given by the granting educational institutions. Some common criteria and intentions are shown:

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### *USA universities*

*University of California, Berkeley.* An Emeritus Professor is a retired full-time faculty member who has been granted honorary status. This title acknowledges the individual's significant contributions to the university through teaching, research, and service. Emeritus faculty retain certain privileges, such as access to university resources and participation in academic activities. This status is conferred upon recommendation by the department and approval from the university administration. The individual must be officially retired from a full-time academic position at the university ([https://retirement.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/ucb-emeriti\\_brochure\\_f19\\_update.pdf](https://retirement.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/ucb-emeriti_brochure_f19_update.pdf))

*Columbia University.* Columbia University grants emeritus status to retired professors who have significantly contributed to the institution through teaching, research, and service. This status allows them to maintain a connection with the university, access resources, and continue contributing to the academic community, particularly in mentoring and research capacities. Contributions to the institution, such as participation in academic and community service, mentoring students, and enhancing the institution's reputation, are considered. (<https://professorsemeritus.columbia.edu/>)

*Stanford University.* Emeritus status is granted to professors who have retired in good standing with no pending disciplinary actions or unresolved conflicts. This honorary title recognizes their contributions and allows them to retain access to university resources, participate in academic activities, and continue engaging with the academic community. The candidate must be recommended for emeritus status by their department or a relevant committee, and the recommendation must be approved by the university's administration or governing body. (<https://cardinalatwork.stanford.edu/benefits-rewards/saving-retirement/prepare-retire/retiree-status-privileges>)

### *European universities*

*University of Oxford (United Kingdom).* Emeritus status at the University of Oxford is conferred upon retired professors who have made significant contributions to the university through their academic work. The title is honorary and recognizes distinguished service. The person must be retired from a full-time academic position. The title is typically awarded based on a recommendation from the department and recognizes significant contributions in teaching, research, and administration. They often retain access to university facilities, library resources, and may continue to participate in academic events. (<https://www.english.ox.ac.uk/emmeritus-professors-and-fellows>)

*University of Cambridge (United Kingdom).* The University of Cambridge grants the title of Emeritus Professor to retired professors in recognition of their distinguished academic careers who have retired from a full-time professorship, made distinguished academic and administrative contributions, were recommended and approved by university governance. The status provides privileges such as continued access to certain university resources and facilities, and participation in academic ceremonies. (<https://www.econ.cam.ac.uk/people/emmeritus>)

*Humboldt University of Berlin (Germany).* At Humboldt University, emeritus status is granted to professors upon their retirement in recognition of their academic contributions

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and service to the university. They must be retired from an active professorship and have made significant contributions in research, teaching, and administration, should be recommended by the faculty and approved by the university senate. They retain access to university resources, including libraries and office space, and can participate in academic activities. ([https://www.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/de/bereiche-und-lehrstuehle/emeriti-ehemalige-professor\\_innen](https://www.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/de/bereiche-und-lehrstuehle/emeriti-ehemalige-professor_innen))

### *Asian universities*

*University of Tokyo (Japan).* In Japan, the title of “Meiyo Kyōju” (Honorary Professor) is conferred upon retired professors who have demonstrated exceptional service. Awards emeritus status to retired professors who have made exceptional contributions to the university, who have officially retired from a professorship, made outstanding contributions in academic research, teaching, and university service, are recommended by the department and approved by the university administration. They often have access to university facilities, libraries, and may continue their research activities. (<https://www.rcast.u-tokyo.ac.jp/en/research/people/emeritus.html>)

*National University of Singapore (NUS) (Singapore).* NUS grants the title of Emeriti Professors to distinguished faculty members upon retirement, acknowledging their significant contributions to the university and the academic community. They must be retired from a full-time professorial role, have made a distinguished academic career with substantial contributions to research and education, be recommended by the department and be approved by the university’s governing bodies. They retain access to university resources, including research facilities, and can continue to be involved in academic activities. (<https://nus.edu.sg/registrar/administrative-policies-procedures/nus-statutes-and-regulations/list-of-emeritus-professors>)

*Peking University (China).* Peking University bestows emeritus status on retired professors who have had a distinguished career and have made significant contributions to the university. They must be officially retired from an active professorship, have made distinguished contributions in teaching, research, and service, were recommended and approved by the university administration. Emeriti Professors often retain access to university resources and may continue their involvement in academic projects and mentoring. (<http://edurank.org/uni/beijing-foreign-studies-university/alumni/>)

These examples illustrate how different universities across the USA, Europe and Asia recognize and honor their distinguished retired faculty members by granting them emeritus status. This status often provides them with continued access to university resources and opportunities to remain engaged in academic activities.

### **Research and professional associations concerning Emeriti Professors**

Research was conducted in early 2010 about the general experience of retiring Emeriti, mostly in the USA. Recently, a new series of studies has been done in South America ([Helal et al., 2021](#); [Da Nobrega and Helal, 2023](#)), Spain ([Diaz-Sarachaga and Ariza-Montes, 2022](#)), Ghana-Africa ([Salifu, 2023](#)), and Ireland ([Cahill et al., 2023](#)).

Besides academic research on emeritis, there are associations founded by retired academics which are not only self-help organisations but also have rich sources of anecdotal stories of emeritis. How they made their transitions into retirement and how their organisations can be excellent bridges to universities, educational ministries and various stakeholders groups. Two examples are given below. Other regions and countries most likely have their own retirement organisations.

In the USA, The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) was founded in 1915. The AAUP was established to advance the standards and values of the academic profession and to ensure higher education’s contribution to the common good. Its founding was spearheaded by prominent figures such as Arthur O. Lovejoy, a professor of philosophy at

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Johns Hopkins University, and John Dewey, a noted philosopher and educator (<https://www.aaup.org/about/mission-1>).

The European Association of Professors Emeriti (EAPE) started more recently in 2017. Its founding members were emeriti from Greece, Italy and Slovenia as well as other European countries particularly from Southern Europe. The EAPE issues e-newsletter and organizes conferences on a regular basis with the aim to promote the rights to participation of retired professors (<https://europemeriti.org/index.php/en/>).

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The Emeriti Professors Network, a member of EAPE, is based in Slovenia and focuses on digital literacy of older academics (<https://eregion.eu/slovenia-professors-emeriti/>) and defends emeriti's rights to request access to emails of their pre-retirement universities. The author organized a webinar on 12 June 2024 with the Emeriti Professors Network titled "Emeriti as Entrepreneurs" speakers were Dr. Richard Welke, Regents Professor Emeritus, Georgia State University, Atlanta, USA; Dr. Jerome Katz, Robert H. Brockhaus Endowed Chair of Entrepreneurship, Department of Management, Saint Louis University, St. Louis, USA; and Dr. Peter Fong, President, Hong Kong Public Administration Association, Hong Kong, China (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmgYXg20NDs>). This webinar served as an exploratory exchange on the topic of effective utilization of the human capital present in the form of Emeriti Professors.

#### *Pioneering survey and findings*

Fishman conducted the first survey in 2009, which remains a very often cited pioneering research on emeritis. His research is being summarized below as it remains pertinent for emeriti researchers. Fishman interviewed fourteen US emeriti faculty members and asked them about their experience as Emeriti Professors, which was summarized in his article "The merits of emeriti" (Fishman, 2012).

These participants, with an average age of sixty-eight and a mix of academic backgrounds, shared their retirement journeys. Interview questions covered retirement decisions, satisfaction, involvement with their former institution, perquisites, what they missed about their academic roles, and advice for current faculty. It is important to recall that there is no mandatory retirement requirement in the USA. Therefore, interviewees of this survey chose to retire voluntarily.

The main findings of his study were:

1. A sense of liberation: Feeling of freedom from rigid schedules and work-related stress but some also reported health issues and financial concerns
2. Active post-retirement lives: Despite initial difficulties, many retirees remained active, by engaging in academic activities like writing, consulting, and professional associations. Some pursued new careers or community involvement.
3. Emeritus title and perquisites: The Emeritus title, commonly awarded based on tenure and contributions, served as a status symbol, a connection to the institution, and a means to access campus benefits such as library access and free parking.
4. Desire for continued engagement: Retirees wanted to stay connected with their departments and continue contributing, emphasizing that such involvement could be mutually beneficial. Activities could include mentoring, volunteering, and maintaining alumni networks.
5. Institutional support and recognition: Institutions like the University of Minnesota and Michigan State University have programs to support continued engagement of retired faculty through grants and awards.

Fishman concluded his article by stating that the academic community and institutions should recognize retired faculty as valuable resources capable of significantly contributing to academic and community life. He also highlighted the importance of considering the personal

and professional needs of retired faculty. Their continued involvement can enrich academic communities, provided institutions offer appropriate support and recognition. As the academic workforce evolves, understanding and addressing the needs of retired faculty will become increasingly vital.

International diversity of retirement regulations

International comparisons of retirement rules and laws of academic professors show great disparities across continents. First, there is a remarkably strong difference between countries whose laws require mandatory retirement. This is particularly strong in European continental countries like France, Italy, and Greece (Table 1), while Anglo-Saxon countries or countries with English legal traditions, such as the USA, UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Table 2), do not impose mandatory retirement rules.

No mandatory retirement offers job security for those who prefer to continue in their professional track, which could make it more difficult for them to experiment with new and different professional ventures. Staying in the same career path means following a more monochronic professional development that is more limited in terms of exploring different lifestyles. It is rather a choice of staying put in their golden cage environment at the expense of broader lifelong learning and development. The opposite can be true for those professors who are forced to retire or, what is called in France, face the “guillotine”. In view of the growing extended healthy life expectancy and the fast-changing technological environment, some of the academics made Emeriti Professors most likely would lose opportunities to continue building on their acquired deep knowledge and expertise. Their continued educational contributions to the students and larger society could be lost after forced retirement, possibly also resulting in a loss for the respective countries’ level of scientific excellency.

Continued labour market participation: professoriate and demographic bottlenecks

Putting current retirement trends into the larger context of the labor market, gaps have emerged in an increasing number of countries regarding demand versus supply of the labor market. The baby boomer generation is retiring, but in several manufacturing and service sectors, the younger generation is already fewer than the number of retirees (Fowers and Schaul, 2023). University manpower demographics show that current academic labor force compositions

Table 1. Countries With Mandatory Retirement Age for Professors

Country	Mandatory Retirement Age	Notes
China	60 (female), 65 (male)	Professors typically have to retire at these ages; however, some exceptions exist based on special contracts or extensions.
France	67	Professors are generally required to retire at this age; some exceptions may apply based on individual contracts or institutional policies.
Italy	70	Professors are required to retire at this age; extensions are rare and subject to specific institutional policies.
Greece	67	Professors are required to retire at this age, but some may receive extensions based on specific institutional needs or contracts.
India	62-65	Varies by institution and state regulations; some central institutions allow professors to work until 65.
Indonesia	65	Professors are generally required to retire at this age; extensions may be possible based on specific institutional needs or contracts.
Philippines	65	Professors are generally required to retire at this age; some institutions may have policies for contract extensions based on need and performance.

Source: By author

**Table 2.** Countries Without Mandatory Retirement Age for Professors

Country	Notes
USA	No mandatory retirement age since 1993 for college faculty; professors can work into their 70s and 80s (Academia Stack Exchange).
United Kingdom	No statutory mandatory retirement age for professors; institutions can set their own policies but must justify compulsory retirement ages (Pinsent Masons).
Canada	Mandatory retirement for university professors eliminated in 2006; professors can work beyond 65 (University Affairs).
Australia	No mandatory retirement age for professors; they can work as long as they are able (Wikipedia).
New Zealand	No mandatory retirement age for professors; they can work beyond the traditional retirement age (World Population Review).
Ireland	No statutory mandatory retirement age for private sector; employers can impose if justified (Pinsent Masons), professors typically not subject to mandatory retirement.

Source: Author’s own compilation based on information from the following publications gathered by ChatGPT:  
1. Mandatory retirement - Wikipedia ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandatory\\_retirement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandatory_retirement))  
2. Retirement Age by Country 2024 - World Population Review (<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/retirement-age-by-country>)  
3. Future retirement ages - OECD Library ([https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/finance-and-investment/pensions-at-a-glance-2023\\_2406f03a-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/finance-and-investment/pensions-at-a-glance-2023_2406f03a-en))  
4. Mandatory retirement ages across Europe - Pinsent Masons (<https://www.pinsentmasons.com/out-law/guides/mandatory-retirement-ages-across-europe>)  
5. How common is it for tenured professors to retire? - Academia Stack Exchange (<https://academia.stackexchange.com/>)  
6. University Affairs (<https://universityaffairs.ca/news/news-article/statcan-report-reveals-impending-shifts-at-highest-levels-of-professoriate/>)

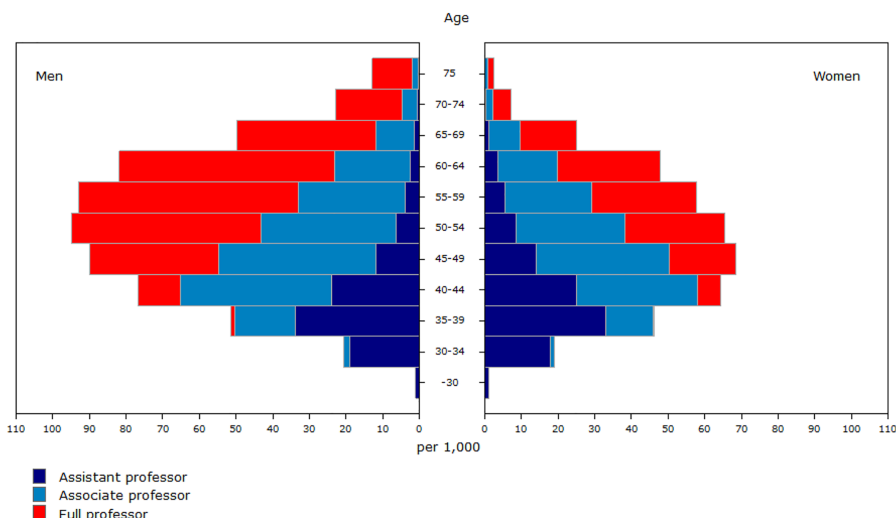
have become problematic in several countries, particularly countries that have abolished mandatory retirement.

As a case in point, [McGinn \(2023\)](#) mentioned a new Statistics Canada report on university teaching staff that reveals an aging professoriate and lagging gender parity in the upper echelons, offering a glimpse at the challenges ahead for staffing in academia and states. “Currently, more than 20 percent of working-age people in Canada are between 55 and 64 years old; among university professors, it’s 27 percent. While technically there is no mandatory retirement for most professors – about 11 percent (*of this population*) are 65 and over – many tend to retire around that age” ([McGinn, 2023](#)).

The data also revealed a generational gap in the professoriate, resulting from hiring practices in the universities which hire new entrants in cohorts. A significant number of baby boomer professors were hired around the same time, leaving younger generations below facing bottle-necked ([McGinn, 2023](#)). In 1971, more than 13 percent of the professoriate was younger than 30 years of age; today, it was less than one percent. That trend holds for professors younger than 40 years of age too, dropping from 57 percent in 1971 to 14 percent in 2022.

Howard Ramos, a sociology professor at Western University, as cited in StatCan report ([2023](#)), said that his main impression from the report is that academia will likely see a period of overworked and overburdened Gen X professors (those currently between 43 and 58 years old) ([Figure 1](#)).

The main result of this could be burnout for both groups, said Dr. Ramos, who has served as an expert for the federal Labour Force Survey. “Those who remain in the system often didn’t receive great mentorship, and if you’ve been brought into a system without that support, then you’re not necessarily equipped to offer it” ([McGinn, 2023](#)). Many of these professors, especially women, are also dealing with what Ramos called the “life-course crunch” of having both dependent children and elderly family members to look after. This may force their millennial colleagues to assume more roles and responsibilities earlier in their careers than the generations before them.



**Figure 1.** Number of full-time academics by rank, age group, and gender, 2021/2022. Source: [StatCan \(2023\)](#)

Other universities in North America and parts of Western Europe (such as UK and Ireland) where no mandatory retirement exists have to face similar challenges, such as an oversized older teaching faculty with tenureship blocking access to promotions of younger faculty members who often remain locked in assistant and associate professor roles. The likelihood of larger cohort retirements despite the absence of a forced retirement could lead to a large cohort group leaving teaching for personal preferences such as lifestyle choices creating burnout and work pressures for those who are still mostly in middle-level academic positions.

One solution to prevent such unfortunate generational gaps could be to offer more Emeriti professorship titles combined with a gradual decrease of teaching responsibility and more engagement to coach the younger faculty generation to step into full mentorship positions for new entrants into the university teaching posts. It is important to explore age-appropriate activities for the Emeriti Professors so that it could be a win for different parties considered, i.e., the professoriate as a whole, the university, the community and the individual.

### **Path forward: options to retire as Emeritus Professor focusing on age-appropriate new activities**

Retiring from a full-time academic career can benefit the retiree provided the retirement is well prepared, which it often is not. For a successful move to a post-retirement lifespan, research shows that three factors are important for a positive change, namely, motivation to want to remain active, good health, and adequate financial security. The latter two factors need the full attention of the retiree and might make a transition to a new activity more stressful due to death or financial considerations. The first of the three factors - motivation to stay active - requires preparation, planning, and conscious scanning of options that are available post-retirement. But it is increasingly acknowledged that organisations and society can and should also support such transitions if so chosen.

Motivation requires knowledge of the options available for the retiree, which in turn requires fitting knowledge and skills repertoires and willingness to explore new domains of activity in the sense of lifelong learning. An important first step before retirement is to scan the field of possible new activities and select those activities that show the most promise to be a good

match for the retiree. The streams of new activities can be divided by variations of academic or non-academic activities. Needless to say, structured retirement guidance service and support groups could also be beneficial when the planned retiree is weighing different options.

#### *Academic opportunities for Emeriti Professors*

Working beyond retirement age as an academic is possible in Western Europe but called by different names. Retired academic professors often have several avenues for continued engagement and employment opportunities, such as:

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##### 1. Academic post-retirement opportunities

- Adjunct professor or visiting lecturer: teach part-time at universities or colleges, often on a contract basis.
- Independent researcher: conduct research projects independently or in collaboration with other researchers.
- Author or writer: publish books, journal articles, essays, or other written works based on their research or expertise.
- Peer reviewer or editor: review and provide feedback on academic articles for publication or serving as an editor for academic journals.
- Public speaker or guest lecturer: deliver talks, lectures, or presentations at conferences, seminars, or other events.
- Policy analyst or advocate: conduct research on policy issues and advocate for change in areas related to their field.
- Mentor or advisor: provide guidance and support to junior faculty members, students, or researchers.
- Committee member or administrator: serve on academic committees or in administrative roles within universities, professional organizations, or other institutions.
- Non-profit or NGO worker: contribute expertise to non-profit organizations, NGOs, or think tanks working on issues related to their field.

All these listed post-retirement academic activities might have implications for the Emeritus Professor's tax liabilities, insurance coverage, and possibly also for adjusting salary to lower rates for equity concerns with younger faculty members.

##### 2. Non-academic opportunities for Emeriti Professors

Alternatively, retirement can also free up a retiree to do other activities that he or she might have desired to explore during midstream of academic life but simply did not have the time to pursue. To be entrepreneurial and venture into new activities could be very gratifying, especially if the pension funds provide an adequate foundation guaranteeing secure basic income. Some of the retirees might be tempted to start a business while others might want to become a social entrepreneur which offers opportunities to carry repository knowledge and skills into new domains which also offer more gratification in terms of contributing to society at large. Significantly, such entrepreneurial engagement could also provide a sense of purpose, often missing in plain retirement life.

Retired professors possess a wealth of knowledge, skills, and experience that can be valuable broadly outside of academia. Their rigor in research can also be leveraged in dealing with complex sustainability challenges. Here are some non-academic opportunities they may pursue:



- Corporate trainer or consultant: many companies value expertise in various fields and hire retired professors to conduct training sessions, workshops, or provide consultancy services related to their areas of expertise.
- Industry expert or advisor: retired professors can offer their insights and knowledge to companies in industries related to their field, such as technology, healthcare, finance, engineering or computer programming and AI. They might serve as advisors, providing guidance on research and development, product design, or strategic planning.
- Government or public sector roles: retired professors may find opportunities to work in government agencies, public sector organizations, or regulatory bodies, where their expertise can contribute to policy development, program evaluation, or advisory roles.
- Research and development: some retired professors join research institutions, laboratories, or innovation centers where they can continue to engage in research and development projects outside of academia.
- Writing and journalism: retired professors often have valuable insights to share with the public and may pursue careers in writing, journalism, media commentary or public policy debate. They might write books, articles, or columns on topics related to their field or serve as expert commentators for news outlets.
- Nonprofit and NGO work: retired professors can contribute their expertise to nonprofit organizations, NGOs, or humanitarian agencies working on issues such as education, healthcare, environmental conservation, or social justice.
- Entrepreneurship: some retired professors choose to start their own businesses or consulting firms based on their areas of expertise. They might develop products, services, or solutions that address specific challenges or needs within their field.
- Public speaking and thought leadership: retired professors may build a career as public speakers, thought leaders, or influencers, sharing their knowledge and insights through keynote speeches, TED talks, or other public appearances.
- Artistic pursuits: retired professors may explore creative outlets such as writing fiction or poetry, creating art or music, or pursuing hobbies and interests that they were not able to fully engage in during their academic careers.
- Volunteer work: many retired professors choose to volunteer their time and expertise to charitable organizations, community groups, or educational initiatives, where they can make a positive impact and continue to contribute to society in meaningful ways.

These are a few examples of the diverse range of opportunities available to retired professors within and outside of academia. The challenge is to start exploring post-retirement options before the actual retirement which entails being able to identify academic and non-academic knowledge, skills, interests, and values, and to explore how they can leverage their expertise to make a difference in traditional academic or non-academic sectors and contexts.

### **Decision-making process and human psychology**

Research on why persons reaching retirement age opt to retire or continue to work in the Netherlands showed that the principle of “human agency” is central. Human agency in this context refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and make their own free choices. This concept emphasizes that people are not merely passive recipients responding to social and structural forces but actively shape their own life paths through decisions and actions.

De Wind’s study investigates how various factors, such as health, motivation, job characteristics, and financial situations, influence the decision to work beyond retirement. The findings suggest that personal motivations and circumstances significantly impact whether

individuals choose to continue working after reaching retirement age. For example, those with high work engagement and good health are more likely to keep working, while financial necessity can also drive this decision for others (2016).

Overall, the human agency principle underscores the importance of individual autonomy in navigating the latter stages of one's career or life in general. It highlights how personal choices and actions play a crucial role in shaping life trajectories, even in the face of broader social and economic pressures. The study was conducted in the Netherlands with Dutch participants aged 45-64 years of age. Replication studies in other countries could be very useful to validate the Dutch findings.

Another study in Brazil by [Da Nobrega and Helal \(2023\)](#) concluded that studying retirement of professors is a complex and multi-dimensional process and that although relevant, the bonus for continued services is not the main determinant for professors to continue working in the university. The study found that other factors play a more significant role in influencing professors' decision to continue working beyond retirement.

The research highlighted three main factors: the financial aspect, the centrality of work in their lives, and the desire to continue contributing. These factors indicate that professors often choose to continue working not just for financial incentives but also because of their passion for teaching, their sense of identity and fulfillment derived from their work, and their wish to remain active and contribute to their academic community.

This finding underscores that the decision to keep working is multifaceted and deeply personal, shaped by financial needs, professional dedication, and personal fulfillment rather than merely by financial incentives alone. More research on the complex decision-making process of academic retirees should be done, taking into account the multi-disciplinary nature of such an important decision at both individual and societal level, and be validated internationally through multi-country research.

### **Emeriti Professors in active support of the 2030 Agenda**

The world is facing severe and mutually reinforcing shocks – the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine resulting in food and energy crises, surging inflation, increasing indebtedness of developing and least developed countries, accelerating climate emergencies, civil unrest in a growing number of countries (Haiti, Somalia, South Sudan) and now also the wars in Gaza, Sudan, DRC Congo, and Yemen.

The UN Secretary General António Guterres called for urgent public investments in education, health, digital infrastructure, new technologies and climate change mitigation and adaptation that can offer large social returns, accelerate productivity growth, and strengthen resilience to economic, social and environmental shocks ([UN Press Release, 2023](#)).

Attempting to solve some of these major problems requires a concerted effort to bring about change and improve living conditions. To face the complexity of these poly-crises, the approach needed is a multi-stakeholder change involving governments, the private sector, civil society, and academic institutions.

University professors of all ages can and should support the global effort to face and address these multiple emergencies. It is time to go beyond the comfort zone of traditional academic life and to make constructive as well as critical contributions to solving these urgent crises — as academics, as knowledge bearers, as privileged citizens of our countries. There can be market failures and government failures, but also academic failures when the academic community holds back from sharing the knowledge they acquired over the years, while benefiting from secure financial conditions — at least for most faculty members, except for adjunct faculty members, who are often young professionals struggling to meet their personal needs due to low paid and often unrecognized teaching and research work.

Each academic discipline has the potential to contribute to the much-needed implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals at home as well as in other countries in need of technical assistance and act as social entrepreneurs

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(Diaz-Sarachaga and Ariza-Montes, 2022). Having the good luck of benefiting from a long-life bonus as university professors are in general well paid and allowed to spend many years learning and deepening their knowledge base, it seems appropriate to share knowledge with students and with society at large to tackle the environment, social and governance problems the world is facing today rather than remain captive, albeit protected, in their respective academic silos.

To solve some of the aging-related problems, some countries now established ministries that focus on the aging population (Australia, Canada, Malta, and Ireland). In addition, countries have created government institutions and agencies which attend to the needs of the growing ageing population (Australia, Canada, Ireland, Denmark, Finland, New Zealand and USA) (<https://eregion.eu/slovenia-professors-emeriti/>).

Emeriti Professors are part of the ageing population, but many are in good health, are financially secure, and could contribute to solving these larger environmental and social problems, provided they are supported in venturing out of their academic silos. University and government ministries in charge of education need to assess how the confining professional pre- and post-retirement lives of knowledge bearers could be supported in reaching out to the societal reality of their countries. While research and services are considered core elements of academic contributions, these responsibilities need to be better focused on impactful projects, rather than only on meeting general goals.

Emeriti Professors should be supported to reach out through university programmes that support outreach and the same holds for ministries of education and science. This is not only relevant at home but also abroad. Following the example of retired business executives who give some of their retirement time to help companies in developing countries, the same is done by some Emeriti Professors who are willing to teach and do research in other countries or providing mentoring support to the younger academicians of the developing countries. Such international outreach can, however, be stifled if the host countries have protectionist barriers which disable retiree professors from working in their countries. These technical barriers are part of the labour market and educational institution conditions of trade in services as negotiated in the WTO. Home and host countries ready to facilitate the presence of Emeriti Professors in foreign countries should find multilateral solutions to reduce barriers to technical cooperation (Saner, 2015).

### **Higher inspiration: solidarity and Emeriti Professors**

Faced with the multiple crises discussed, the world needs to be reminded that most of what humans consume and use are called public goods that are used collectively. Public goods are indispensable elements of social interaction, and many of these goods play a central role in the ongoing discussion about sustainable development: clean air, pollution-free drinking water, accessible landscapes, public safety, wild life and many others. Providing and maintaining them is primarily a task for the state, but private actors and civil society can be involved as well. On the one hand, there are interest groups geared towards the common good and other private third-sector organizations that support or complement the state's efforts, especially when the state appears blind and deaf or too weak to carry out its mission. On the other hand, there are private individuals or private companies who use public goods to achieve their own goals and do so in an opportunistic and often ruthless manner, which the state and non-profit organizations, in turn, try to restrict such abuses and maintain constructive, reflective, and open social systems.

Excellent examples of international networks that foster and share social innovations is the initiative taken by the ISSC (International Social Science Council) to conduct transdisciplinary research through knowledge networks on how global change could be fostered to ensure implementation of the triple sustainability bottom lines (how to implement the SDGs). Another initiative could be the search for cross-sector social partnerships bringing together state and non-state actors to create common projects between private sector

companies and civil society organizations. Such initiatives create and safeguard a sense of solidarity which is unfortunately missing to a large extent in the profit maximization approach to economic participation. Emeriti Professors could help bridge the commons between citizens by sharing their knowledge and know-how with a wider public rather than only keeping to the narrow confines of academic silos and the privileged few.

Emeriti Professors could greatly contribute to creating inclusive, multi-stakeholder partnerships that can generate solutions at local and regional levels, thereby creating an effect of solidarity that is needed to create a safer future for all. Academics are supposed to push the boundary, to contribute to new “discovery” and knowledge, not to withhold what they learned from their research, and hence not to obfuscate reality. A few excellent examples of academics who reached out to society and contributed to solving complex problems are for instance:

1. Dr. Muhammad Yunus: Known as the “father of microfinance”, he is a retired professor of economics who founded Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. He pioneered the concept of providing small loans to impoverished individuals as a means of poverty alleviation. After retiring from academia, he has continued to advocate for social entrepreneurship and has supported numerous community development projects globally. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad\\_Yunus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_Yunus))
2. Dr. Elinor Ostrom: She was a political economist and the first woman to win the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences. Her research focused on the governance of common pool resources and the management of collective action problems. After retiring from academia, she continued to be involved in community development initiatives, particularly those related to sustainable resource management and governance. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elinor\\_Ostrom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elinor_Ostrom))
3. Dr. Robert Putnam: He is a retired professor of public policy at Harvard University, known for his research on social capital and civic engagement. His work has highlighted the importance of community connections and social networks for fostering economic development and social cohesion. After retiring, he has remained active in promoting community development efforts and has supported initiatives aimed at revitalizing local communities. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_D.\\_Putnam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_D._Putnam))
4. Dr. William Julius Wilson: He is a retired professor of sociology at Harvard University, known for his research on urban poverty and race relations. His work has focused on understanding the structural factors that contribute to economic inequality and social exclusion. After retiring, he has been involved in efforts to address urban poverty and promote community development through advocacy and mentorship. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Julius\\_Wilson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Julius_Wilson))
5. Dr. Amartya Sen: Although primarily known for his work in development economics and social welfare theory, he has also been involved in community development initiatives. As a retired professor of economics and philosophy at Harvard University and Trinity College, Cambridge, he has used his expertise to support projects aimed at improving education, healthcare, and social inclusion in Europe and beyond. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amartya\\_Sen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amartya_Sen))
6. Dr. John McKnight: He is a retired professor and community organizer known for his work on asset-based community development. He has emphasized the importance of recognizing and mobilizing the strengths and resources within communities to address social challenges. After retiring, he has continued to be involved in supporting community development initiatives and mentoring community leaders. (Dr. John McKnight ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_McKnight](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_McKnight)))
7. Professor Lesley McAra: She is a criminologist and Emeritus Professor of Penology at the University of Edinburgh. She has conducted extensive research on youth justice and

criminal justice policies. After retiring from academia, she has been involved in mentoring and supporting community-based organizations in Scotland that work with at-risk youth and marginalized communities. (<https://www.law.ed.ac.uk/people/lesley-mcara>)

8. Professor Peter Taylor-Gooby: He is a sociologist and Emeritus Professor of Social Policy at the University of Kent. He has researched and written extensively on welfare state reform and social policy. After retiring, he has been involved in supporting community development initiatives in the UK, particularly those focused on addressing poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. (<https://www.kent.ac.uk/social-policy-sociology-social-research/people/1456/taylor-gooby-peter>)
9. Professor Annette Gough: She is Professor Emerita of Science and Environmental Education in the School of Education, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. She has made environmental education as a life-time engagement and was president of the Australian Association for Environmental Education from 1984 to 1986 and has been active in developing a national disaster risk reduction and resilience strategy. (<https://www.rmit.edu.au/profiles/g/annette-gough>)

These individuals, some Emeriti Professors others retired or non-retired professors of post-retirement age who have transitioned into roles as investors and mentors for community development, have used their knowledge, experience and influence to support local initiatives and empower communities while continuing to add to their knowledge and professional reputation.

## Conclusion

The entrepreneurial activities of Emeriti Professors are supported by various academic and research institutions, as well as professional associations like the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the European Association of Professors Emeriti. These organizations provide platforms for retired academics to share their expertise, engage in lifelong learning, and contribute to community and economic development.

Research highlights that the decision to continue working post-retirement is multifaceted, influenced by factors such as financial necessity, professional dedication, and the desire to contribute to the academic community and broader society. Studies in different regions, including the Netherlands and Brazil, emphasize the importance of personal motivations and societal roles in shaping the post-retirement activities of professors.

Emeriti Professors can play a significant role in supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by leveraging their knowledge and experience to address global challenges. Examples of Emeriti Professors who have made substantial contributions include Dr. Muhammad Yunus in microfinance, Dr. Elinor Ostrom in sustainable resource management, and Dr. Amartya Sen in development economics.

To maximize the potential of Emeriti Professors, it is crucial to provide institutional support that encourages their engagement in entrepreneurial and community-focused activities. This involves creating opportunities for continued involvement in research, teaching, and advisory roles, both within academia and in broader societal contexts. By doing so, Emeriti Professors can continue to drive innovation, mentor future generations, and contribute to solving pressing global issues.

From an international relations perspective, Emeriti Professors could provide valuable human capital, if supported, in countries suffering from low human development and facing chronic knowledge and skill deficiencies. Without calling for the engagement of the Emeriti Professors directly, the SDG 17 calls for Partnerships to implement the Goals of the 2030 Agenda stating “strengthening the science, technology and innovation capacity for least-developed countries” (Target 17.8), “knowledge sharing and cooperation for access to science,

technology and innovation” (Target 17.6) and “enhanced SDG capacity in developing countries” (Target 17.9). As social entrepreneurs with the effective use of internet and communication technology, Emeriti Professors could contribute to the realization of these targets.

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