People are now living longer than ever: on average, a girl born in Germany in 2014 can expect to live to 83.11 years longer than a girl born in 1960. With many older people also opting for earlier retirement, in many developed nations the demographic is tipping away from active wage-earners. As retirees need to be supported by the working population, economists worry about the effect that this imbalance will have on living standards.

Researchers at the Max Planck Institute for Social Law and Social Policy find less cause for alarm, however. They have sifted through the evidence and have found that societies do not necessarily get poorer as they age. They also question the idea that older workers are less productive. Contrary to commonly held beliefs, ageing populations are not necessarily ailing ones — most elderly workers today remain healthy well beyond statutory retirement age.

Ageing populations represent uncharted demographic territory, and there are as many myths about ageing as there are established facts. To make the right decisions, policymakers need reliable data on how interventions affect a variety of different individuals. After all, society is never too old to learn.

Legal scholars have always studied existing laws, but increasingly, they are proposing new ones. National laws or EU-wide legislation.

Laws drafted by private organizations represent another recent feature in the modern legal landscape. Corporations, stock exchanges or industry associations can make their own rules and regulations, which are not enforced in a strict legal sense but establish a layer of ‘soft’ law.

New legal models will need to unite these new players with the old to ensure that everyone wins.