

# Risk Transfer and the Growing Importance of Financial Literacy

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# The IMF's Perspective

- Macroeconomic and financial stability
- Surveillance: multilateral and bilateral; policy recommendations
- Monetary and Capital Markets Department's *Global Financial Stability Report* ('risk transfer' series)

# Key Points

- Risk transfer through the financial system— increasingly shifted to households
- Surveys show lack of household knowledge of even basic financial issues
- Financial education shortcomings are not new, but increasingly urgent to address
- Governments have a major role in raising awareness and financial literacy of individuals
- The private sector has a key role in providing targeted, quality advice and products

# The Changing Risk Profile of Households

- Risk flow: banks, insurance companies, pension funds, households
- Changing risk profile—more *direct* risk exposures
- Prospective changes in healthcare benefits
- Bottom line:
  - Household sector more of a “shock absorber of last resort”?
  - Household risk management capacity part of financial stability

# Households' Capacity to Manage New Risks

- Need for basic education about risks and alternatives. Households:
  - Often do not take a comprehensive approach
  - Are slow to adjust their asset allocation as needed
  - Underestimate required level of savings and risks
- Experience of previous generations not a good guide
- Some population segments most at risk? (data/identification issue)

# Some Survey Results...

Surveys frequently show a substantial lack of knowledge of households' own arrangements for retirement savings:

- Netherlands: 65% of households are unable to provide an estimate of their pension income upon retirement
- U.K.: 44% of the population reported a basic knowledge of pensions in 2004, down from 53% in 2000
- U.S.: 47% of workers who have not saved at all are confident that they will have enough for retirement. Many count on employer-provided benefits that are increasingly unavailable
- France: a majority of households consider themselves ill-equipped to choose an investment strategy, and do not compare investment products

# Government Communication on Priorities and Challenges

- Important for public awareness and success of pension (and health care) reforms
- Public debate and awareness often still nascent—need for further initiatives
- Develop broad and forward-looking measures of the impact of changes in pension and welfare systems on households' wealth (including distribution of risks across subgroups)

# Raising Awareness—Examples

- U. K.: Pensions Commission Report  
*"Pensioners will become poorer relative to the rest of society"* unless taxes or social security contributions devoted to pensions rise, individuals save more, or employees accept longer working lives
- Sweden—new public pension system  
Following a broad information campaign, surveys have shown that the share of participants who say they do not understand the system has fallen from about 30% in 1998 to 13% in 2003

# The U.S. National Retirement Risk Index

*A good example of how complex risks associated with retirement saving can be presented relatively simply*

- Measures share of working age households who are “at risk” of being unable to maintain their pre-retirement standard of living in retirement
- Assuming individuals retire at age 65 and annuitize all their wealth, 43% will be “at risk”
- Good news: changing retirement and savings behavior can substantially improve the outlook (e.g., retiring at 67 reduces share to 32%)

# Percent of Households "At Risk"

(at Age 65, by Birth Cohort and Income Group)

Income group	All	Early Boomers 1946-1954	Late Boomers 1955-1964	Generation Xers 1965-1972
All	43%	35%	44%	49%
Top third	36	33	35	42
Middle third	40	28	44	46
Bottom third	53	45	54	60

Source: Munnell, Webb, and Delorme, *A New National Retirement Risk Index*, Center for Retirement Research, Boston College, June 2006

# Household “Financial Margin” (Sweden)

- The Sveriges Riksbank has sought to assess households’ financial margin relative to anticipated future obligation (e.g., after interest expenditure and regular living costs)
- Distribution across income categories
- Takes into account potential benefit adjustments or economic shocks (e.g., a rise in interest costs and/or a decline in income)

*(Sveriges Riksbank, Financial Stability Report, 2004:2)*

# Information vs. Education

*Information cannot substitute for greater household financial literacy*

- Financial information may be accessible, but households often make limited use of it
- U.S.: increased financial information for consumers may not result in improved financial management in areas such as mortgages and investment (behavioral economics and finance)
- Disclosure vs transparency

# A Key Role for Governments in Financial Education

- Governments may come under growing public pressure to intervene in support of the household sector, for example:
  - in the form of added public expenditure pressures
  - in the form of re-regulation of certain products or services
  - in order to deal with waves of litigation
- A key objective for governments may be to strengthen basic financial education programs at school and at the workplace—indeed, such efforts are underway in some countries

# Financial Education and Long-Term Saving Challenges

- Saving for retirement: uncertainty over returns and costs of systematic errors
- Uncertainty/risks affecting ageing-related liabilities (e.g., longevity risk)
- Complexity/variety of products available (greater for savings/investment products)
- Purpose of financial education (not a single approach; equip individuals to ask informed questions and understand potential outcomes)

# Challenges in Financial Education Program Design

*Define strategies to strengthen  
financial education programs*

- Focus (e.g., home ownership; savings accumulation vs. debt reduction; etc.)
- Target audiences – need to reach different population groups and levels of sophistication:
  - Basic financial education in schools
  - Long-term planning for the middle aged
  - Consideration of payout strategies during later working life
  - Need to identify the most vulnerable population categories (requires detailed cohort data)

# Challenges in Financial Education Program Design (cont.)

- Delivery channels (e.g., public/private, different media, new technologies)
- Coordinate efforts to strengthen financial education (e.g., U.K.'s FSA, U.S.' Office of Financial Education)
- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing efforts

# OECD Financial Education Project

- Leading international efforts toward strengthening financial education programs
- Provides an inventory of education initiatives and a list of good practices for financial education programs
- Allows to build on cross-country experience in the design of financial education programs

# Government Policies and Household Savings Strategies

- Governments can help households implement the new approaches to savings and investment that they increasingly need
- Savings
  - Taxation
  - Opt-in/opt-out schemes
  - Mandatory savings?
- Investment
  - Lifecycle products
  - Annuity products
  - Equity release products

# Public/Private Complementarity

- Governments and private industry have comparative advantages in addressing household financial needs
- Employers and financial institutions are well positioned to deliver targeted financial education and advice
- Examples:
  - Japan: role of banks
  - U. S.: employer-supported seminars

# Role of Financial Institutions

- The finance industry is well placed to provide tailored advice on saving and investment products, and financial management/strategies
- The provision of quality financial advice should progress with that of financial education
- A number of financial institutions have already started to improve the way they operate in relation to households

# Incentives for Financial Advice

*There may be a need to strengthen the incentives for financial advisers to better support the needs of households*

- Availability and appropriateness of advice may be an issue
- Household reluctance to pay for advice
- Policy considerations:
  - Simple and stable tax and regulatory regime
  - Educational standards for advisers
  - More transparent commission/fee structures