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Many Malaysians choose or are forced to work after retirement, survey finds

By **S. Birruntha** January 29, 2026 @ 12:38pm



KUALA LUMPUR: Retirement in Malaysia is increasingly shaped by choice for some and financial necessity for others.

This is according to Sun Life's latest regional retirement survey, which reveals a growing divide in how older adults approach their golden years.

The survey found that two thirds of respondents (64 per cent) expect to continue working beyond retirement age, with most citing further income to support daily living and long-term financial security (63 per cent), while others continue working for purpose, maintaining social connection and mental stimulation.

At the same time, 79 per cent believe retirement should be a personal choice, highlighting a growing divide between those with financial flexibility and those without as Malaysia moves rapidly towards an ageing society.

Sun Life Malaysia president and country head Ho Teck Seng said the survey findings show that retirement in Malaysia is no longer a fixed milestone.

"We see a growing divide between those working for fulfillment and those working for financial necessity.

"This pressure is most visible in the sandwich generation, who are balancing the needs of multiple generations at once," he said in a statement.

The survey also revealed two distinct retirement paths across Asia: Gold Star Planners, who are financially prepared and able to choose when and how they step back from work, and Stalled Starters, who delay retirement because they cannot afford to stop working.

For Gold Star Planners, continuing to work is a choice driven by purpose, identity, and wellbeing, with 68 per cent citing these factors, compared to 46 per cent of Stalled Starters.

By contrast, 16 per cent of Stalled Starters are unsure whether they will work beyond retirement, compared to 74 per cent of Gold Star Planners who expect to do so.

Among Stalled Starters who plan to retire later than expected or have already delayed retirement, financial necessity is the most common reason.

More than half, 67 per cent, say they postponed retirement to save more.

For Gold Star Planners, delayed retirement is more often a choice than a financial necessity. Many point to staying physically or mentally active as a motivating factor, while the same percentage cite enjoying the social aspects of work, both at 44 per cent.

The survey also showed that the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) for financial decisions is rising, with ChatGPT and Google Gemini use nearly doubling from 10 per cent to 21 per cent.

Meanwhile, reliance on traditional advice has declined, with 29 per cent consulting banks and 31 per cent seeking independent financial advisors, down from 35 per cent and 37 per cent in 2024.

The survey also noted that financial security drives retirement optimism.

Among non-retirees looking forward to retirement, 47 per cent cite financial security, 40 per cent stability and 39 per cent greater freedom.

In contrast, 56 per cent of those not looking forward to retirement cite financial insecurity, and 47 per cent worry about supporting their family.

Retirement planning remains limited, with 30 per cent making no plans, 26 per cent preparing only within two years of retirement and just 15 per cent feeling very confident in their plans.

The survey said many in Asia also face the 'sandwich generation' burden, caring for older and younger family members, leading 43 per cent to downsize their lifestyle and 35 per cent to postpone retirement.

Control over retirement is increasingly valued, with 79 per cent saying it should be a personal choice, 73 per cent supporting working beyond the official retirement age, and 36 per cent of Gen Z expressing strong agreement, slightly higher than 34 per cent of Baby Boomers.