Life expectancy

Key Results

The remarkable increase in life expectancy is one of the greatest achievements of the last century. Lives continue to get longer, and this trend is predicted to continue although the pace of improvement in old age has slowed recently, and particularly given COVID-19. In 2022, life expectancy at age 65 averaged 83.0 years for men and 86.2 years for women. The figure was highest for women in Japan (89.9 years) and men in Australia, New Zealand and Switzerland (at 85.3 years or more) and lowest for women in Colombia, Hungary and the Slovak Republic (below 83.0 years) and men in Lithuania (78.1 years). On average across OECD countries, remaining life expectancy at age 65 is projected to increase by 4.4 years among women and 4.9 years among men by 2065.

Prior to COVID-19 life expectancy at age 65 for the period 2015-20 was 83.1 years for men and 86.3 years for women, on average (OECD, 2021). These are virtually the same levels that apply in 2022, as men were at 83.0 years and women at 86.2 years for the OECD average (Figure 6.2). The highest levels are found in Japan for women, at 89.9 years, with France, Italy, Korea and Spain also above 88 years. For men Australia, Canada, France, Italy, Japan, New Zealand and Switzerland are all at 85.0 years or above. The lowest levels for women are in Colombia (82.8 years), Hungary (82.5 years) and the Slovak Republic (82.5 years) with Hungary (78.5 years), Lithuania (78.1 years) and the Slovak Republic (78.6 years) being lowest for men.

There is considerable variation between OECD countries in life expectancy at older ages. Women in Japan are predicted to live another 29.1 years on reaching age 65 in 2065, followed by Korea (28.1 years). In contrast, remaining life expectancy at 65 in 2065 for women in both Latvia and Mexico is equal to 22.5 years (Figure 6.3). For men there is less variation between countries than there is for women. Switzerland will have the longest life expectancy at age 65 in 2065 (24.5 years), followed by Australia and New Zealand (24.4 years). By contrast, Latvia (19.3 years) and Mexico (20.0 years) are ranked at the bottom.

The gender gap in life expectancy at age 65 is predicted to be between almost two and four years in favour of women in nearly all OECD countries in 2065. Larger gender gaps of 5 years are observed in both Japan and Korea. The smallest forecasted gender gap of 1.7 years is in Iceland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The above numbers refer to period life expectancy, which measures life expectancy (current or projected) based on mortality rates for people of different ages at a given time (2022 or 2065 here) that hence belong to different birth cohorts. By contrast, cohort life expectancy is based on the projected mortality rates that would apply to the same birth cohort at different ages. It thus takes account of continuing improvements (after 2022 or 2065) that would benefit a given birth cohort. On average, these cohort estimates add 1.3 years for women aged 65 in 2065 and 1.0 years for men (Figure 6.3).

Between 2019 and 2020 life expectancy at age 65 decreased for men from 20.7 years to 19.9 years and for women from 24.6 years to 24.0 years, though both recovered their 2019 levels again by 2022.

Improvements in remaining life expectancy at age 65 has recently slowed from a period of fast longevity gains. The trend in the pace of old-age life-expectancy peaked in the mid-2000s (Figure 6.4) for both men and women. This slowdown leads to a structural break in the series in 2012-13 in the OECD on average. Between the mid-1990s and 2012 for women and 2013 for men the increasing trend in life expectancy at age 65 was fast at around 1.5 years for men per decade and 1.4 years for women, an acceleration from 0.8 and 1.0 years per decade before, respectively. Since 2012-13, the estimated structural trend equals 1.0 and 0.8 years, respectively, with the break in the series being magnified by COVID-19. However, these estimates should be treated cautiously as they are based on a statistical filtering method which can lead to significant revisions down the road even though this problem has been reduced by using projected life expectancy to compute (current) estimated values (Box 1.1 in (OECD, 2021)).

Definition and measurement

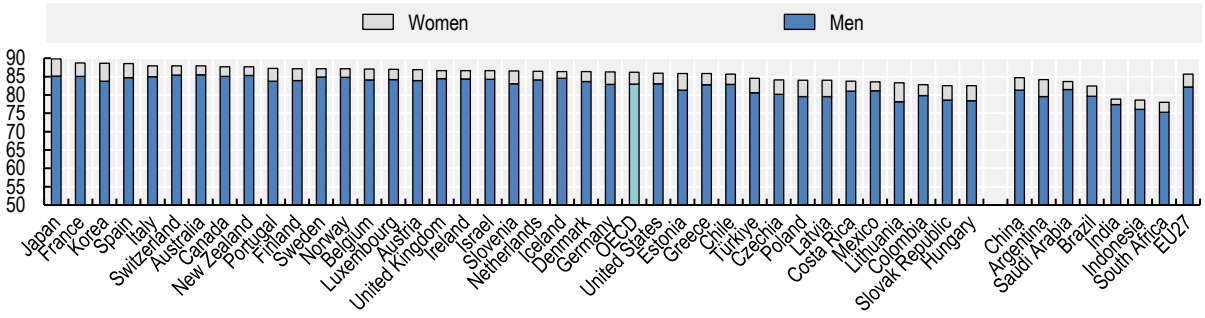
Life expectancy is defined as the average number of years that people of a particular age could expect to live if they experienced the age- and sex-specific mortality rates prevalent in a given country in a particular year: in this case, 2022 and 2065. Since the determinants of longevity change slowly, life expectancy is best analysed over a long-time horizon. Cohort life expectancy takes account of the projected changes in mortality estimates for a given cohort.

Further reading

OECD (2021), *Pensions at a Glance 2021: OECD and G20 Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/ca401ebd-en.

Whitehouse, E. (2007), "Life-Expectancy Risk and Pensions: Who Bears the Burden?", *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*, No. 60, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/060025254440.

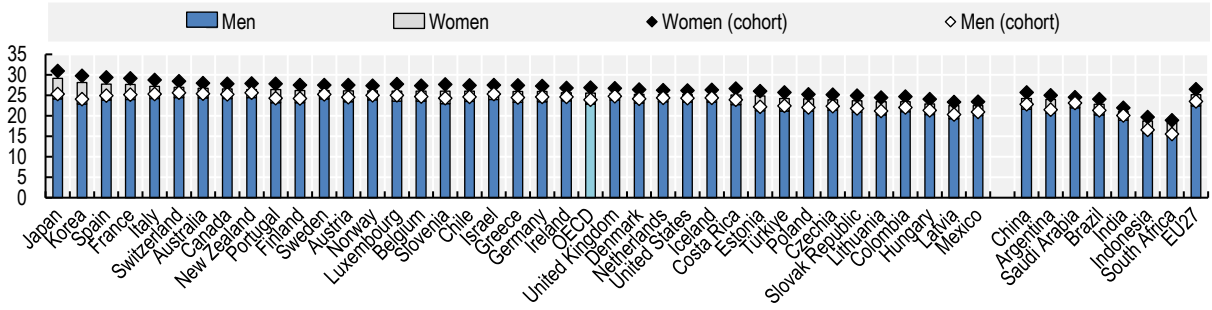
Figure 6.2. Current life expectancy at age 65 for men and women, in years, 2022



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, (2022). World Population Prospects 2022, Online Edition.

StatLink https://stat.link/xnylmo

Figure 6.3. Projected remaining life expectancy at age 65, 2065, in years

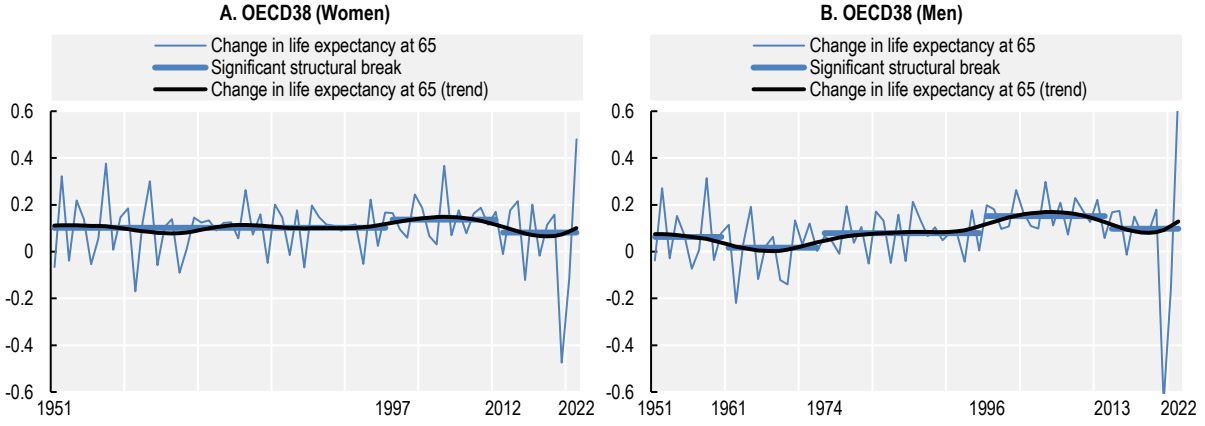


Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, (2022). World Population Prospects 2022, Online Edition.

StatLink https://stat.link/43l2hj

Figure 6.4. Structural breaks in life-expectancy gains

Annual change in remaining life expectancy at age 65, in years



Note: The breaks are significant at the 99% confidence level. To limit interferences from short-term fluctuations in change in period life expectancy, the breaks are estimated on the Hodrick-Prescott filtered trend series (lambda=100). For visual purposes, the range of the vertical axis has been limited from -0.6 to +0.6, but recent changes for men were larger in absolute terms: -0.64 in 2020 and +0.72 in 2022.
Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, (2022). World Population Prospects 2022, Online Edition.

StatLink https://stat.link/kqwb6l