

### Life expectancy by sex and education level

Women live longer than men in all OECD member and partner countries. This gender gap averaged 5.3 years across OECD countries in 2019 – life expectancy at birth for women was 83.6 years, compared with 78.3 years for men (Figure 3.3). The gender gap in life expectancy has narrowed by one year since 2000, however, reflecting more rapid gains in life expectancy among men in most countries.

In 2019, life expectancy at birth for men in OECD member countries ranged from around 71 years in Latvia and Lithuania to 81 years or higher in Switzerland, Japan, Iceland, Sweden, Italy, Norway, Spain and Israel. For women, life expectancy reached 87.4 years in Japan, but was less than 80 years in Mexico, Hungary and Colombia.

Gender gaps are relatively narrow in Iceland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, New Zealand, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Israel and Ireland – at less than four years. However, there are large gender differences in many central and eastern European countries – most notably in Lithuania and Latvia (over 9 years), Estonia (8.5 years) and Poland (7.8 years). In these countries, gains in longevity for men over the past few decades have been much more modest. This is partly due to greater exposure to risk factors among men – particularly greater tobacco use, excessive alcohol consumption and less healthy diets – resulting in more deaths from heart diseases, cancer and other diseases. For OECD partner countries, the gender gap stands at ten years in Russia, and around seven years in Brazil and South Africa. China (4.4 years) and India (2.5 years) have smaller gender gaps.

Socio-economic inequalities in life expectancy are also evident in all OECD countries with available data (Figure 3.4). On average among 24 OECD countries, a 30-year-old with less than an upper secondary education level can expect to live for 5.2 fewer years than a 30-year-old with tertiary education (a university degree or equivalent). These differences are higher among men, with an average gap of 6.5 years, compared with an average gap of 3.9 years among women.

Socio-economic inequalities are particularly striking among men in many central and eastern European countries (Slovak Republic, Latvia, Poland, Hungary), where the life expectancy gap between men with lower and higher education levels is over ten years. Gaps in life expectancy by education are relatively small in Italy and Sweden.

More deaths among prime-age adults (25-64 years) with lower education levels drive much of this education gap in life expectancy. Mortality rates are almost four times higher for less educated prime-age men, and about twice as high for less educated prime-age women, compared to those with tertiary

education (analysis based on data from 23 OECD countries). Differences in mortality rates among older men and women, while less marked, remain higher among the less educated, driven mainly by more deaths from circulatory diseases and cancer (Murtin et al., 2017[4]).

Higher smoking rates among disadvantaged socio-economic groups are an important contributor to gaps in life expectancy by education or other measures of socio-economic status. Other risk factors are also more prevalent among disadvantaged groups – notably excessive alcohol consumption among men and higher obesity rates for men and women (see Chapter 4 for an in-depth analysis of risk factors for health). Finally, although the data shown here are pre-pandemic, emerging evidence has shown a clear social gradient in COVID-19 deaths, which will have direct knock-on effects on inequalities in life expectancy (see Chapter 2 for further discussion and related references).

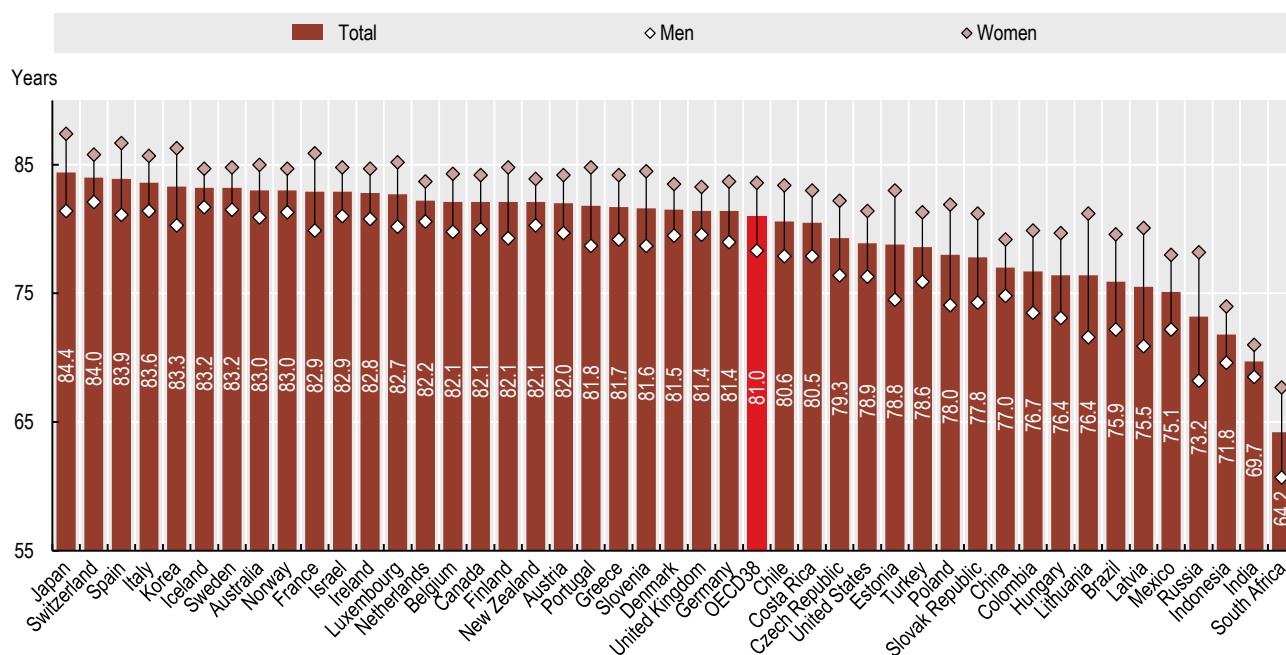
#### Definition and comparability

Life expectancy at birth measures how long, on average, people would live based on a given set of age-specific death rates. Data on life expectancy by sex come from Eurostat for EU countries, and from national sources elsewhere.

For life expectancy by education level, data were provided directly to the OECD for Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, France, Iceland, Israel, Latvia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Data for the remaining European countries were extracted from the Eurostat database. The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011 is the basis for defining education levels. The lowest education level – ISCED 0-2 – refers to people who have not completed their secondary education. The highest education level – ISCED 6-8 – refers to people who have completed a tertiary education (a university degree or equivalent).

Not all countries have information on education as part of their mortality statistics. In such cases, data linkage to another source (such as a census) containing information on education is required. Data disaggregated by education are only available for a subset of the population for Belgium, the Czech Republic and Norway. In these countries, the large share of the deceased population with missing information about their education level can affect the accuracy of the data.

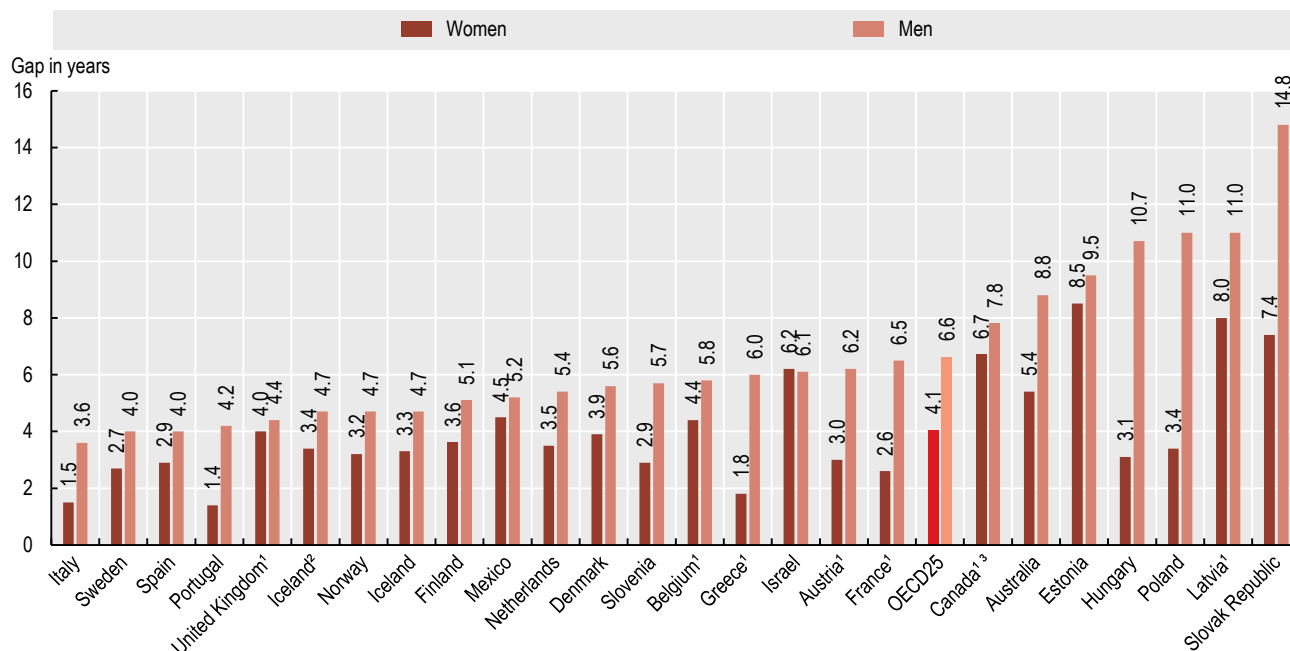
Figure 3.3. Life expectancy at birth by sex, 2019 (or nearest year)



Source: OECD Health Statistics 2021.

StatLink <https://stat.link/9i5vuf>

Figure 3.4. Gap in life expectancy at age 30 between people with the highest and lowest education levels, 2019 (or nearest year)



1. 2010-13 data. All other data are from 2016-19. 2. Three-year average (2017-19). 3. Data at age 25.

Source: OECD Health Statistics 2021, Eurostat.

StatLink <https://stat.link/ow5sam>



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