

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. In 2015-20, life expectancy at birth averaged 78.3 years for men and 83.4 years for women. Among women, the figure was highest in Japan (87.2 years) and lowest in Turkey (79.3 years). For men, life expectancy at birth was highest in Iceland (81.6 years) and lowest in Latvia (69.7 years). On average across OECD countries, remaining life expectancy at age 65 is projected to increase by 4.2 years among women and 4.6 years among men during the next 45 years.

Life expectancy at older ages is especially important for wellbeing. However, it also influences the finances of retirement-income systems. In 2015-20, on average in OECD countries, women aged 65 could expect to live an additional 21.3 years, which is forecast to increase to 25.5 years by 2060-65. Men of the same age could expect to live 18.2 more years in 2015-20, with a projected increase of 4.5 years by 2060-65 to reach 22.8 years. Gender gaps in the longevity of older people are expected to decrease slightly over the next 45 years (from 3.1 to 2.7 years on average in OECD countries).

There is considerable variation between OECD countries in life expectancy at older ages. Women in Japan are predicted to live another 29.0 years on reaching age 65 in 2060-65, followed by Korea (28.1 years). In contrast, women in Hungary are expected to live an extra 22.3 years and 22.4 years in Latvia.

For men there is less variation between countries than there is for women. Israel will have the longest life expectancy at age 65 in 2060-65 (24.2 years), followed by Iceland and Switzerland (24.1 years). By contrast, Latvia and Hungary are again ranked at the bottom with men expecting to live just another 18.3 years and 19.3 years respectively.

The gender gap in life-expectancy at age 65 is predicted to be between two and four years in favour of women in nearly all OECD countries in 2060-65. Larger gender gaps of around five years are observed in both Japan and Korea. The smallest gender gap, at 1.5 years will be found in Iceland, with New Zealand and the United Kingdom at 1.6 years.

Given this trend, many OECD countries have increased or plan to increase their pension benefit withdrawal ages: see Chapter 1 on “Recent Pension Reforms”. Others have introduced elements into their retirement-income provision that will automatically adjust the level of pensions as people live longer. Overall longevity gains are due to rising living standards, but also greater access to quality health services.

Turning to the non-OECD major economies, life expectancy is generally lower. Life expectancy at birth is by

far the lowest in South Africa at 60.2 years for men and 67.2 years for women. The highest life expectancy at birth is found in Argentina for women at 80.5 years and in China at 75.0 years for men. Life expectancy at 65 is the lowest for Indonesian women (at 14.4 years) and for South African men at 11.5 years. By 2060-65 those aged 65 will live longest in Brazil at 24.4 years for women and 21.2 years for men. Conversely men will only live for 14.4 years and women for 17.7 years in South Africa.

The above numbers refer to period life expectancy, which measures life expectancy at a given time (2015-20 or 2060-65 here) based on mortality rates (current or projected) at that time for people of different ages, and hence belonging 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 2015-20 or 2060-65) that would benefit a given birth cohort. On average these cohort estimates add 1.5 years for women aged 65 in 2060-65 and 1.1 years for men.

Definition and measurement

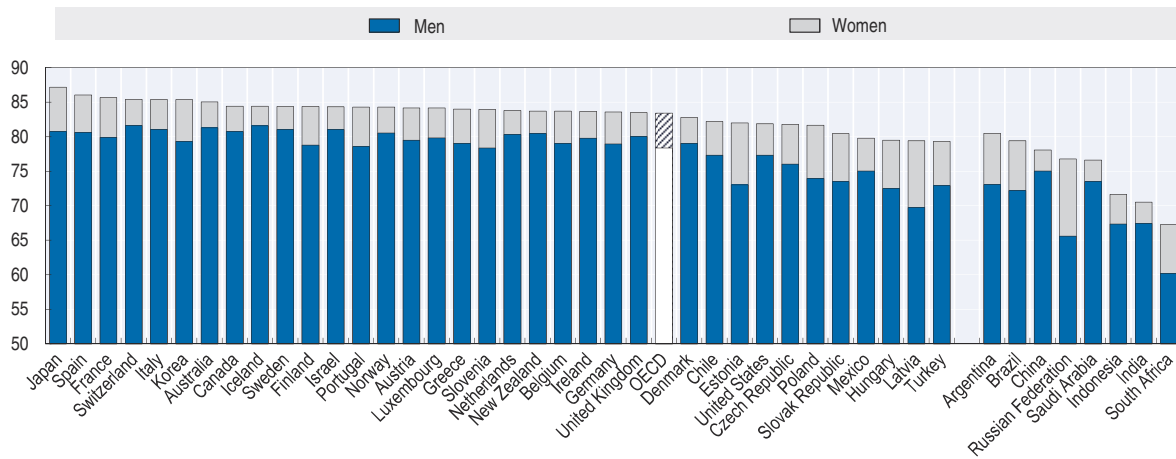
Life expectancy is defined as the average number of years that people of a particular age could expect to live if they experienced the age and sex-specific mortality rates prevalent in a given country in a particular year: in this case, 2015-20 and 2060-65. Since the determinants of longevity change 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 (2017), *Preventing Ageing Unequally*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/231747416062>.

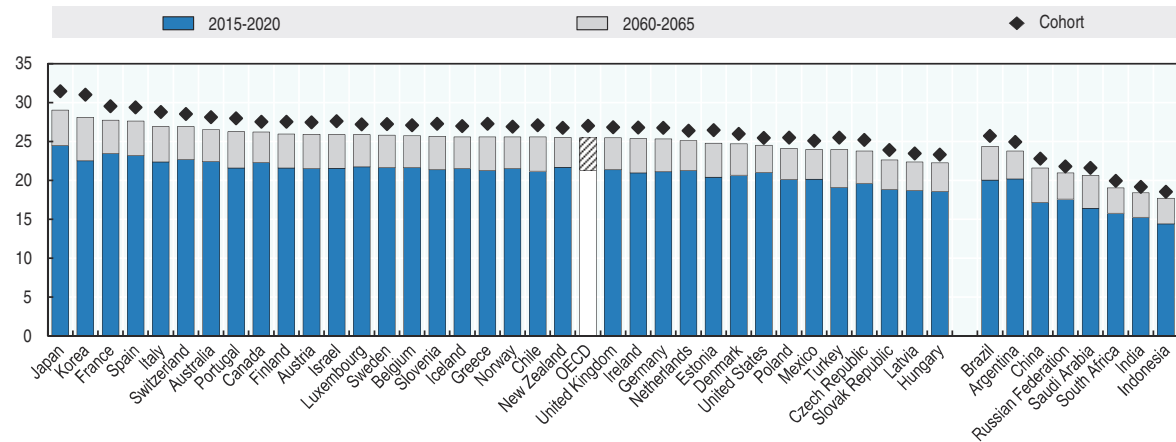
Whitehouse, E.R. (2007), “Life-expectancy Risk and Pensions: Who Bears the Burden?”, *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Paper No. 60*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/060025254440>.

5.2. Life expectancy at birth, in years, men and women, born in 2015-20



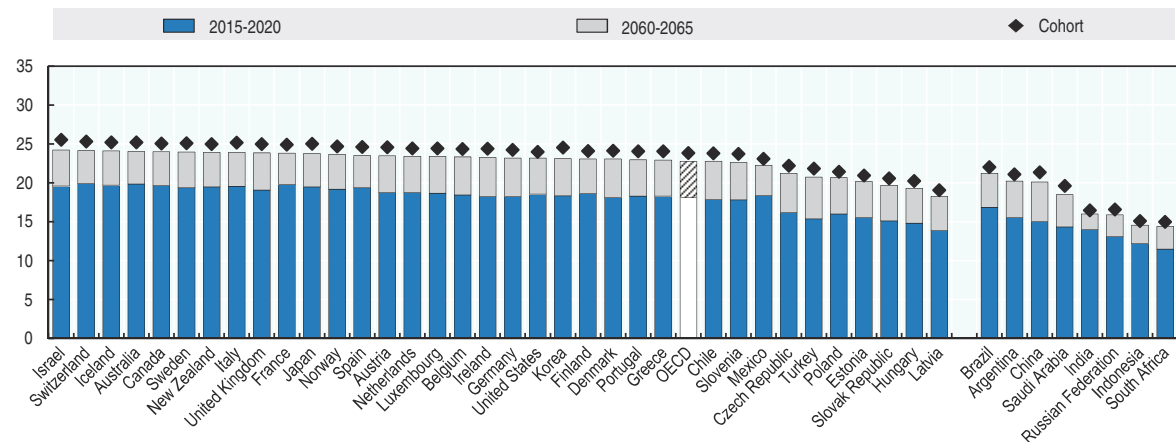
StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933634249>

5.3. Expected remaining life expectancy at age 65, in years for women in 2015-20 and 2060-65



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933634268>

5.4. Expected remaining life expectancy at age 65, in years for men in 2010-15 and 2060-65



Source: United Nations, World Population Prospects – 2017 Revision.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933634287>



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