

Demographic trends

In recent decades, the share of the population aged 65 years and over has nearly doubled on average across OECD countries, increasing from less than 9% in 1960 to more than 17% in 2019. Declining fertility rates and longer life expectancy (see indicator “Life expectancy by sex and education level” in Chapter 3) have meant that older people make up an increasing proportion of the population in OECD countries. Across the 38 OECD member countries, more than 232 million people were aged 65 and over in 2019, including more than 62 million who were at least 80 years old. As ageing represents one of the key risk factors for serious illness or death from COVID-19, the pandemic has driven home the need to ensure that health systems are prepared to adapt to the changing needs of an older population.

Across OECD member countries on average, the share of the population aged 65 and over is projected to continue increasing in the coming decades, rising from 17.3% in 2019 to 26.7% by 2050 (Figure 10.1). In five countries (Italy, Portugal, Greece, Japan and Korea), the share of the population aged 65 and over will exceed one-third by 2050. At the other end of the spectrum, the population aged 65 and over in Israel, Mexico, Australia and Colombia will represent less than 20% of the population in 2050, owing to higher fertility and migration rates.

While the rise in the population aged 65 and over has been striking across OECD countries, the increase has been particularly rapid among the oldest group – people aged 80 and over. Between 2019 and 2050, the share of the population aged 80 and over will more than double on average across OECD member countries, from 4.6% to 9.8%. At least one in ten people will be 80 and over in nearly half (18) of these countries by 2050, while in five (Portugal, Greece, Italy, Korea and Japan), more than one in eight people will be 80 and over.

While most OECD partner countries have a younger age structure than many member countries, population ageing will nonetheless occur rapidly in the coming years – sometimes at a faster pace than among member countries. In the People’s Republic of China (China), the share of the population aged 65 and over will increase much more rapidly than in OECD member countries – more than doubling from 11.5% in 2019 to 26.1% in 2050. The share of the Chinese population aged 80 and over will rise even more quickly, increasing more than three-fold from 1.8% in 2019 to 8.2% in 2050. Brazil – whose share of the population aged 65 and over was barely half the

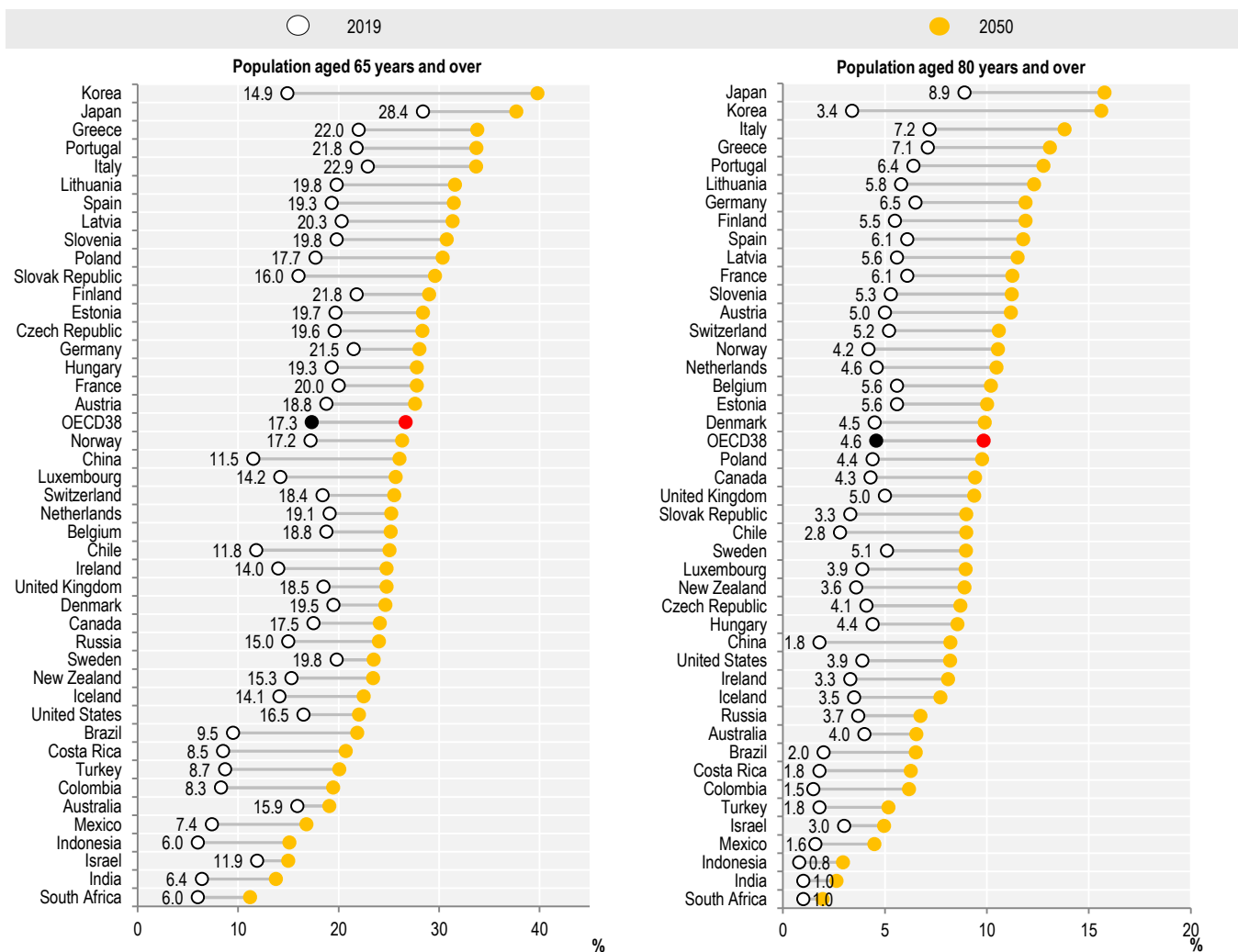
OECD average in 2019 – will see similarly rapid growth, with nearly 22% of the population projected to be aged 65 and over by 2050. The speed of population ageing has varied markedly across OECD countries, with Japan in particular experiencing rapid ageing over the past three decades (Figure 10.2). In the coming years, Korea is projected to undergo the most rapid population ageing among OECD member countries, with the share of the population aged 80 and over nearly quintupling – from well below the OECD average in 2019 (3.4% versus 4.6%) to well above it (15.6% versus 9.8%) by 2050. Among OECD partner countries, the speed of ageing has been slower than among member countries, although rapid ageing in large countries including Brazil and China will accelerate in the coming decades.

One of the major implications of rapid population ageing is the decline in the potential supply of labour in the economy, even despite recent efforts by countries to extend working lives. Moreover, in spite of the gains in healthy life expectancy seen in recent years (see indicator “Life expectancy and healthy life expectancy at age 65”), health systems will need to adapt to meet the needs of an ageing population, which are likely to include greater demand for labour-intensive long-term care (LTC) and a greater need for integrated, person-centred care. Between 2015 and 2030, the number of older people in need of care around the world is projected to increase by 100 million (ILO and OECD, 2019[1]). Countries such as the United States are already facing shortages of LTC workers, and in the coming years more will find themselves under pressure to recruit and retain skilled LTC staff (see indicator “Long-term care workers”). In the vast majority (three-quarters) of OECD countries, the growth in the number of older people outpaced the growth in the number of LTC workers between 2011 and 2016 (OECD, 2020[2]).

Definition and comparability

Data on the population structure have been extracted from the OECD historical population data and projections (1950-2050). The projections are based on the most recent “medium-variant” population projections from the United Nations World Population Prospects – 2019 Revision.

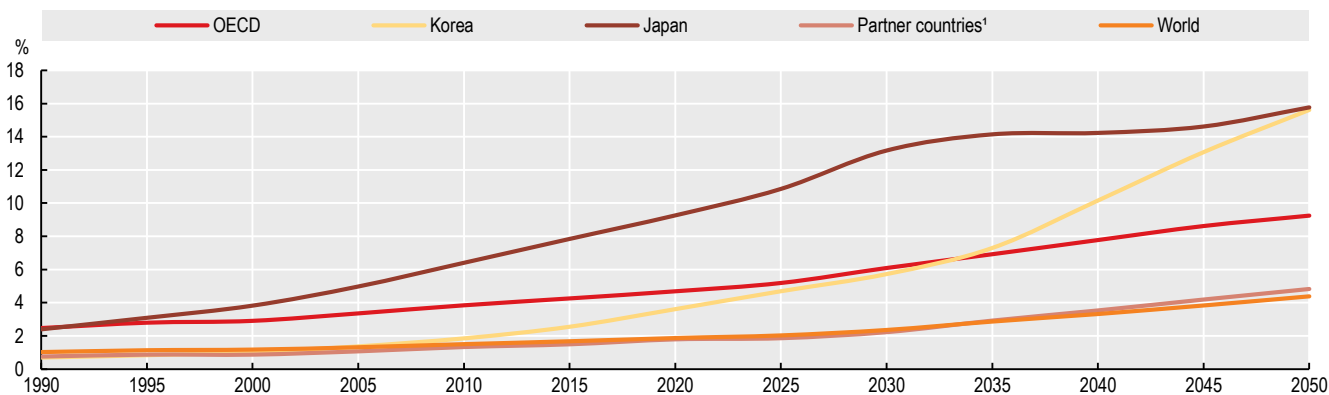
Figure 10.1. Share of the population aged 65 and over and 80 and over, 2019 and 2050



Sources: OECD Health Statistics 2021, OECD Historical Population Data and Projections Database, 2021.

StatLink <https://stat.link/wt2816>

Figure 10.2. Trends in the share of the population aged 80 and over, 1990-2050



1. Partner countries include Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, the Russian Federation and South Africa.

Source: OECD Historical Population Data and Projections Database, 2021.

StatLink <https://stat.link/lt3vr>



From:
Health at a Glance 2021
OECD Indicators

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/ae3016b9-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2021), "Demographic trends", in *Health at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9989e95c-en>

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