

Demographic trends

In recent decades, the share of the population aged 65 years or older has nearly doubled on average across OECD countries. The proportion of the population aged 65 years or over increased from less than 9% in 1960 to more than 17% in 2017. Declining fertility rates and longer life expectancies (see indicator on “Life expectancy” in Chapter 3) have meant that older people make up an increasing proportion of the population in OECD countries.

Across OECD countries on average, the share of the population aged 65 and over is projected to continue increasing in the coming decades, rising from 17.4% in 2017 to 27.1% by 2050 (Figure 11.1). In five OECD 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 and Australia will represent less than 20% of the population in 2050, due 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 – people 80 years of age and older. Between 2017 and 2050, the share of the population 80 and above will more than double on average in OECD countries, from 4.6% to 10.1%. At least one in ten people will be 80 or older in nearly half (17) of OECD countries by 2050, while in six countries (Lithuania, Portugal, Italy, Greece, Korea and Japan), more than one in eight people will be 80 or older.

While most OECD partner countries have a younger age structure than many OECD members, population ageing will nonetheless occur rapidly in the coming years – sometimes at a faster pace than among OECD countries. In China, the share of the population aged 65 and over will increase much more rapidly than in OECD countries, more than doubling from 10.6% in 2017 to 26.3% in 2050. The share of the Chinese population aged 80 and above will rise even more quickly, increasing more than three-fold from 1.8% in 2017 to 8.1% in 2050. Brazil – whose population aged 65 and over was barely half of the OECD average in 2017 – will see similarly rapid growth, with nearly 22% of the population projected to be aged 65 or 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 11.2). In the coming years, Korea is projected to undergo the most rapid population ageing among OECD members, with the share of the population 80 and above quintupling from well below the OECD average in 2017 (3% versus 4.6%), to 15.1% (well

above the OECD average of 10.1%) by 2050. Among OECD partner countries, the speed of ageing has been slower than OECD members, though 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, despite the gains in healthy life expectancy seen in recent years (see indicator on “Life expectancy and healthy life expectancy”), population ageing will likely lead to greater demand for labour-intensive long-term 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 long-term care workers, and in the coming years, more will find themselves under pressure to recruit and retain skilled long-term care staff (see indicator on “Long-term care workers”).

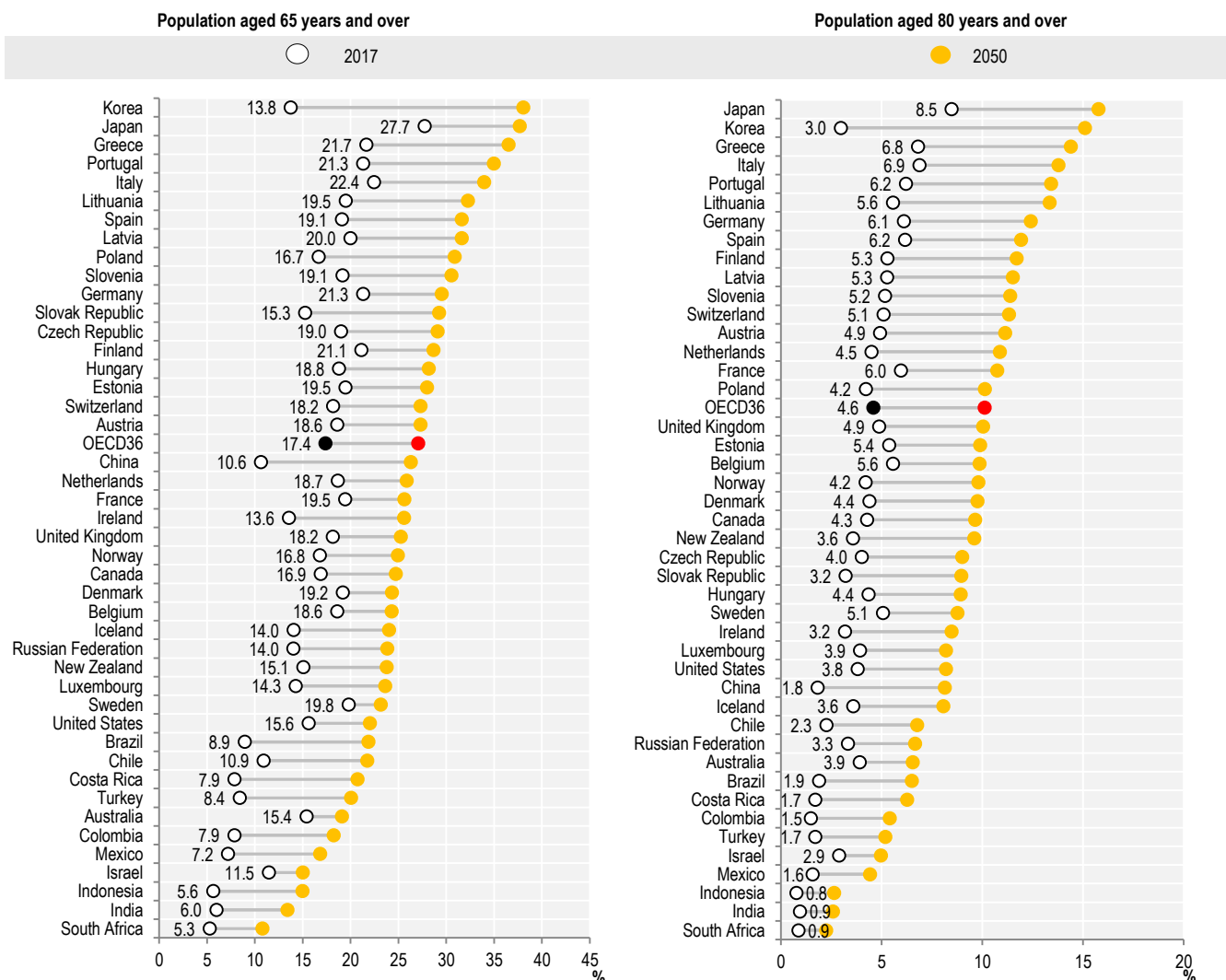
Definition and comparability

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.

References

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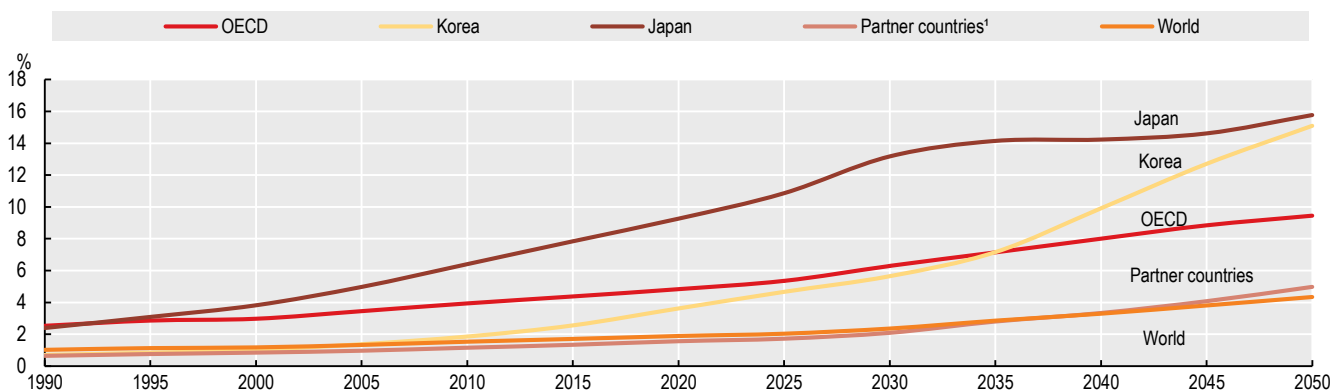
Figure 11.1. Share of the population aged over 65 and 80 years, 2017 and 2050



Source: OECD Health Statistics 2019, OECD Historical Population Data and Projections Database, 2019.

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934018260>

Figure 11.2. Trends in the share of the population aged over 80 years, 1990-2050



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

Source: OECD Historical Population Data and Projections Database, 2019.

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934018279>



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