

## Main causes of mortality

Over 10 million people died in 2015 across OECD countries, which equates to an average of 793 deaths per 100 000 population. Diseases of the circulatory system and cancer are the two leading causes of death in most countries. Across the OECD, more than one in three deaths were caused by ischaemic heart diseases, stroke or other circulatory diseases; and one in four deaths were related to cancer.

Two factors can explain certain commonalities in causes of death across OECD and partner countries. First, population ageing is important since the main causes of death change with age. Among younger adults, cancer-related deaths occur more frequently than many other causes. After age 50, deaths due to diseases of the circulatory system rise steadily, and become one of the major causes of death after age 80, along with dementia. Second is the epidemiological transition from communicable to non-communicable diseases, which has already taken place in high-income countries and is rapidly occurring in many middle-income countries (GBD, 2013).

Variation across OECD and partner countries is substantial. All-cause mortality rates (age-standardised) ranged from 583 deaths per 100 000 population in Japan to over 1 000 deaths per 100 000 in Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, the Russian Federation and the Slovak Republic in 2015 (Figure 3.6). Looking at specific causes, diseases of the circulatory system were the main cause of mortality in most OECD countries. They caused over 600 deaths per 100 000 population in Latvia and Lithuania, and 869 deaths per 100 000 in the Russian Federation. Japan and France had the lowest rates, at 152 and 164 deaths per 100 000 population respectively. Diet, smoking and alcohol consumption play important roles in these diseases, as does access to treatment.

Variations in cancer-related deaths was less substantial but still significant, ranging from 123 to 286 deaths per 100 000 in 2015. Other causes of death were particularly important in specific countries. For example, respiratory system diseases (predominantly chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases) caused over 100 deaths per 100 000 in Ireland, the United Kingdom, Brazil and Colombia. External causes (predominantly assault, accidents and intentional self-harm) accounted for over 80 deaths per 100 000 in Brazil, Latvia, Lithuania, South Africa and the Russian Federation. HIV-AIDS caused more than 50 deaths per 100 000 population in South Africa.

The main causes of death also differ by gender (Figure 3.7). For example, dementia is a more important cause of death for women than for men. In contrast, the rates of

lung cancer and accident-related deaths were higher for men than for women. A body of evidence suggests that alongside intrinsic gender differences, women are more likely to choose healthy behaviours (Gore et al., 2011).

It is also worth noting that the main causes of death diverge between socio-economic groups. Social disparities are generally larger for the most preventable diseases, as deaths are amenable to medical intervention, behaviour change and injury prevention (Mackenbach et al., 2015).

### Definition and comparability

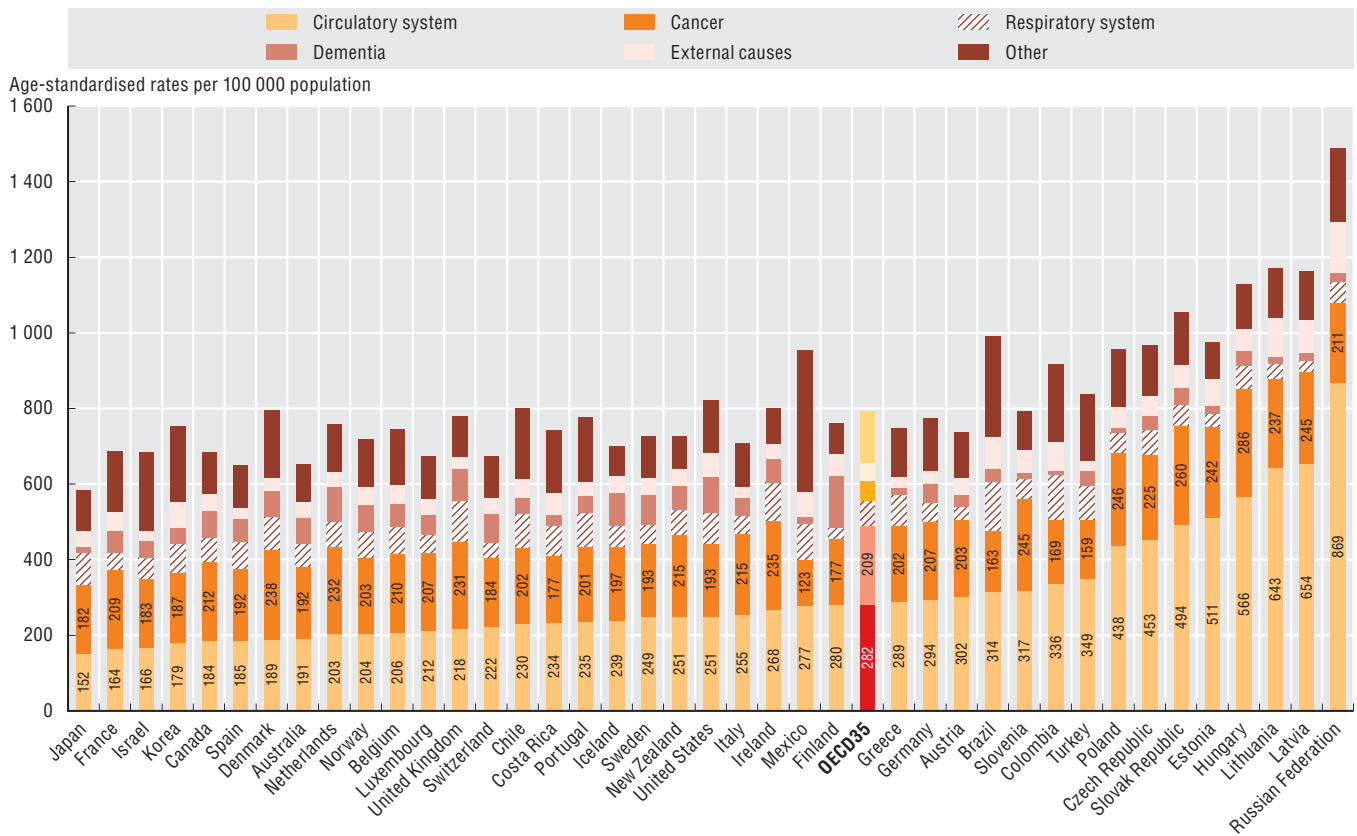
Mortality rates are based on numbers of deaths registered in a country in a year divided by the size of the corresponding population. The rates have been directly age-standardised to the 2010 OECD population (available at <http://oe.cd/mortality>) to remove variations arising from differences in age structures across countries and over time. The source is the WHO *Mortality Database*.

Deaths from all causes are classified to ICD-10, Codes A00-Y89, excluding S00-T98. The classification of causes of death defines groups and subgroups. Groups are umbrella terms covering diseases that are related to each other; subgroups refer to specific diseases. For example, the group diseases of the respiratory system comprises 4 subgroups: influenza, pneumonia, chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases and asthma.

### References

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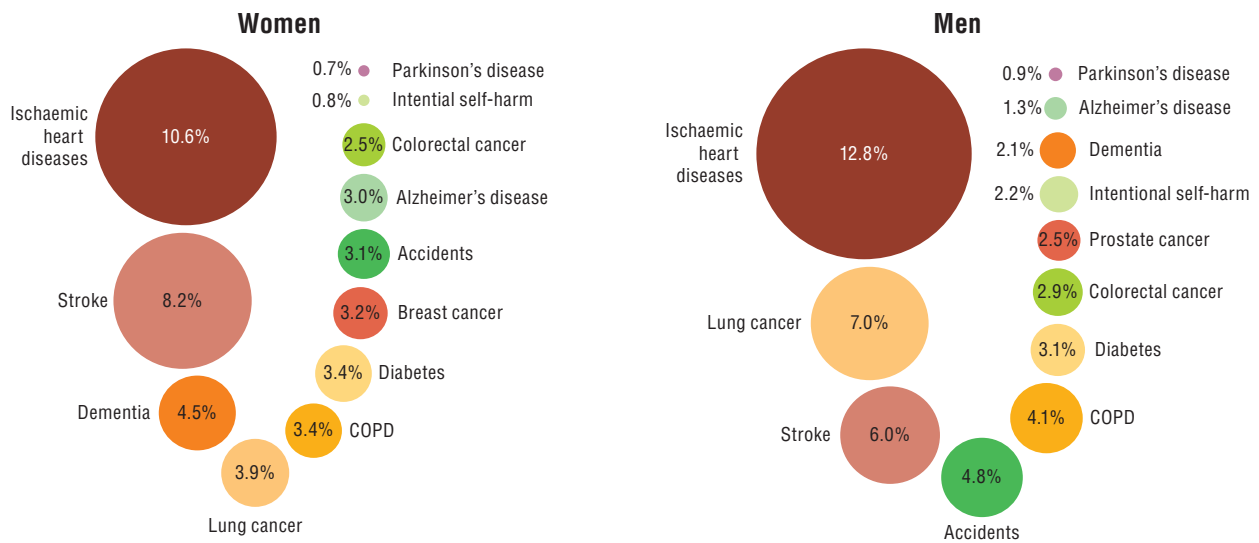
3.6. Main causes of mortality per country, 2015 (or nearest year)



Source: OECD Health Statistics 2017.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933602329>

3.7. Main causes of mortality by gender, 2015 (or nearest year)



Note: Shares of the sum of all deaths across OECD countries, by gender.  
Source: OECD Health Statistics 2017.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933602348>



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