

**Life expectancy at birth continues to rise in the Asia/Pacific region, averaging about 72 years in 2011 up from 61 years in 1980** (Figure 7.1, Panel A). At over 20 years on average across the population the largest increases in life expectancy since 1980 were recorded for Lao PDR, the Maldives and Sri Lanka. This rapid increase is related to a number of factors, including rising living standards, better nutrition, water and sanitation, increased education and greater access to health services. Nevertheless, despite the significant gains in the Asia/Pacific region, it still lags behind the other world regions except Africa (UN World Population Prospects data, 2010). On average in 2011, the population in OECD countries outlived the Asia/Pacific economies by eight years.

There are large **differences within the Asia/Pacific region**: at birth the life expectancy is 80 years or more in East Asia and in OECD countries, while this is 65 years or less in some South and South-East Asian economies (Cambodia, India, Myanmar and Pakistan) as well as the island nations of Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste.

**Women have a higher life expectancy than men**, and on average in the Asia/Pacific region they outlive men by almost five years (Figure 7.1, Panel B). On average, women in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Mongolia outlive men by eight years or more, while this is just over one year in Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan. Women in Hong Kong (China) and Japan have the highest life expectancy at birth at over 85 years compared to almost 83 years for men.

**Although higher national income (as measured by GNI per capita) is generally associated with higher life expectancy at birth, this does not always hold.** Viet Nam has one of the lowest income per capita in the region at about USD 3 000, but has one of the higher life expectancy rates at 75 years in comparison to Malaysia with a GNI of USD 15 000 and a life expectancy of 74 (Figure 7.2).

#### **More and more people, in Asia reach the age of 65.**

The percentage of the population reaching the age of 65 is highest in Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Japan, Hong Kong (China), the Republic of Korea; Macau (China), New Zealand and Singapore (Figure 7.3). Over 90% of women in OECD countries reach the age of 65, 10 percentage points more than in the Asia/Pacific region. Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Cambodia have the lowest percentage of people reaching 65 years of age.

#### **Definition and measurement**

Life expectancy at birth is the best known measure of a population's health status, and is often used to gauge the development of a country's health. It measures how long, on average, a new-born infant would live if the prevailing patterns of mortality at the time of birth were to stay the same throughout their lifetime. Since the factors that affect life expectancy do not change overnight, variations are best assessed over long periods of time.

Age-specific mortality rates are required to construct life tables from which life expectancies are derived. Countries calculate life expectancy according to methodologies that can vary somewhat, and these can lead to differences of fractions of a year. Some countries base their life expectancies on estimates derived from censuses and surveys, and not on the accurate registration of deaths.

#### **Figure note**

Figure 7.2: Purchasing Power Parity (PPP).

Figure 7.1. Life expectancy at birth

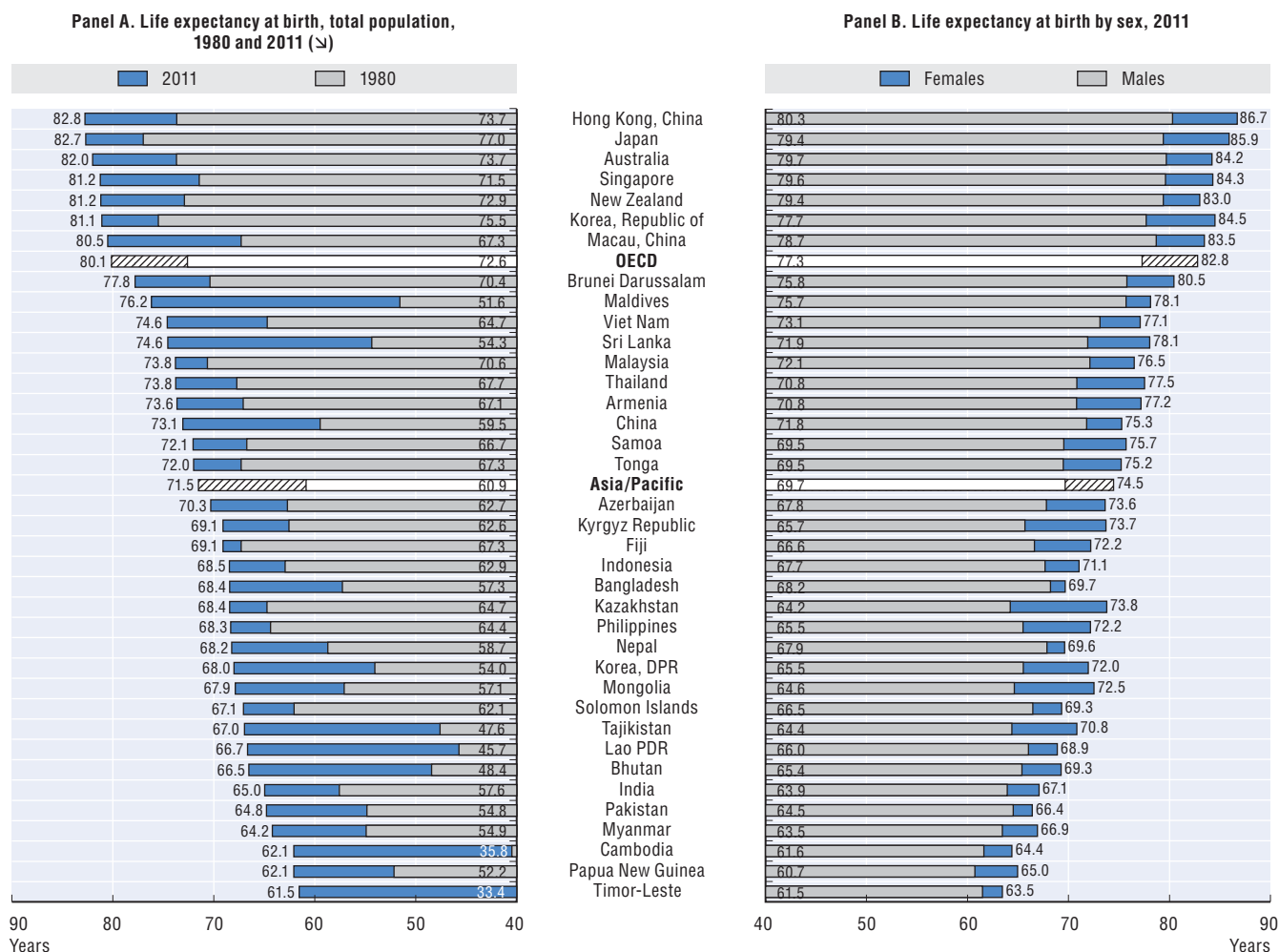


Figure 7.2. Life expectancy at birth and GNI per capita, 2011

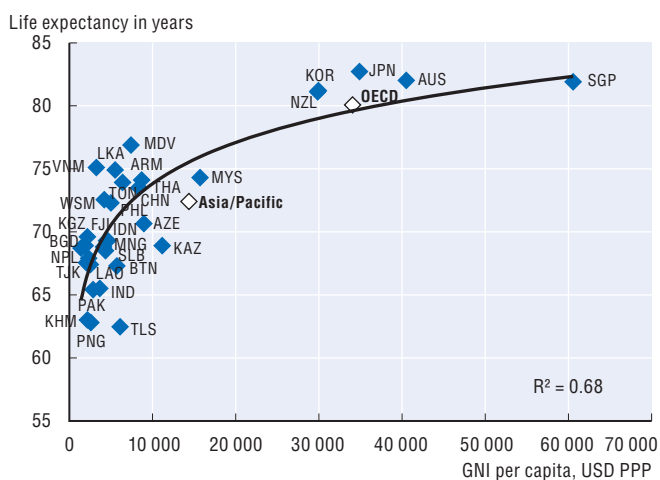
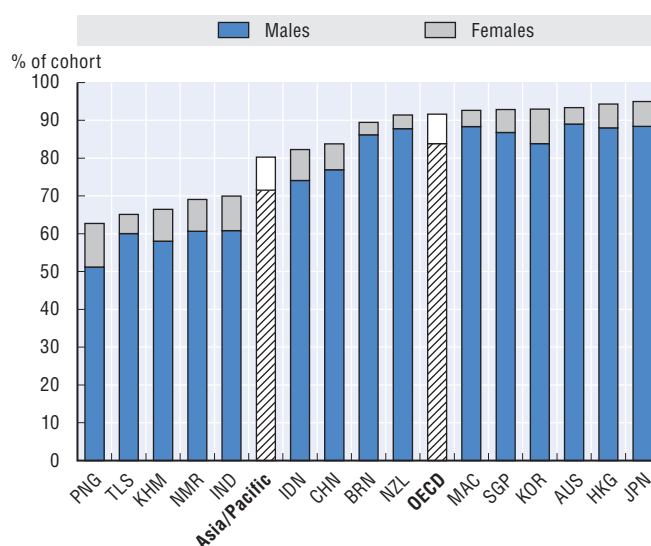
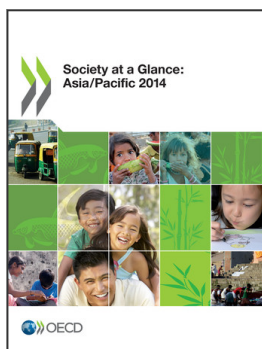


Figure 7.3. Survival rate to age 65, 2012



Source: OECD Health Data 2013, [www.oecd.org/health/healthdata](http://www.oecd.org/health/healthdata); World Bank, World Development Indicators.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933151121>



**From:**  
**Society at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2014**

**Access the complete publication at:**  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264220553-en>

**Please cite this chapter as:**

OECD (2014), "Life expectancy at birth", in *Society at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2014*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1787/soc\\_aag-2014-22-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/soc_aag-2014-22-en)

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