

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 2010-15, life expectancy at birth averaged 77.2 years for men and 82.7 years for women. Among women, the figure was highest in Japan (86.9 years), followed by Spain, France, Italy and Switzerland. For men, life expectancy at birth was highest in Iceland (80.2 years) followed by Australia, Switzerland, Japan and Israel.

Life expectancy at older ages is especially important for the finances of retirement-income systems. In 2010-15, on average in OECD countries, women aged 65 could expect to live an additional 20.8 years, which is forecast to increase to 25.8 years by 2060-65. Men of the same age could expect to live 17.4 more years in 2010-15, with a projected increase of 4.5 years by 2060-65 to reach 21.9 years. Gender gaps in the longevity of older people are expected to remain broadly constant in relative terms but increase in absolute terms (from 3.4 to 3.9 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 29.7 years on reaching age 65 in 2060-65. In contrast, women in the Slovak Republic are expected to live an extra 21.9 years at age 65. The figures for Japan and Korea (29.5) are the highest. France displays the third highest life expectancy at age 65 amounting at 28.3 years.

For men there is less variation between countries than there is for women. Japan would again have the longest life expectancy at age 65 in 2060-65 (24.1 years), followed by Korea (23.8 years). By contrast, men in Estonia could expect to live just another 17.5 years at the age of 65.

The gender gap in life-expectancy at age 65 is predicted to be between three and five years in favour of women in nearly all OECD countries in 2060-65. Larger gender gaps of nearly six years are observed in France, Japan and Korea. The smallest gender gaps (close to 2 years) are instead observed in Mexico and the United Kingdom.

Given this trend, many OECD countries have increased or plan to increase their pension ages: see Chapter 1 on "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 55 years for men and 59 years for women. The highest life expectancy at birth is found in Argentina for women at 80 years and in China for men at 74 years. Life expectancy at 65 is the lowest for Indian women (at 14.5) and it is lowest among men in South Africa at 10.9 years.

Definition and measurement

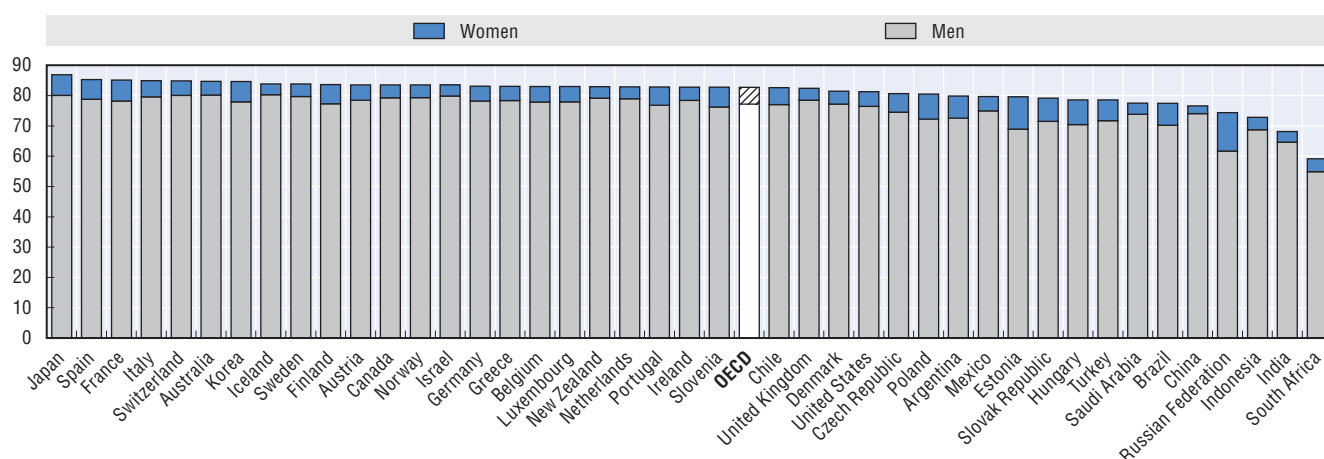
Life expectancy is defined as the average number of years that people of a particular age could expect to live if they experienced the age- and sex-specific mortality rates prevalent in a given country in a particular year: in this case, 2010-15 and 2060-65. Since the determinants of longevity change slowly, life expectancy is best analysed over a long time horizon.

Further reading

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>.

Whitehouse, E.R. and A. Zaidi (2008), "Socio-Economic Differences in Mortality: Implications for Pension Policy", *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Paper*, No. 71, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/231747416062>.

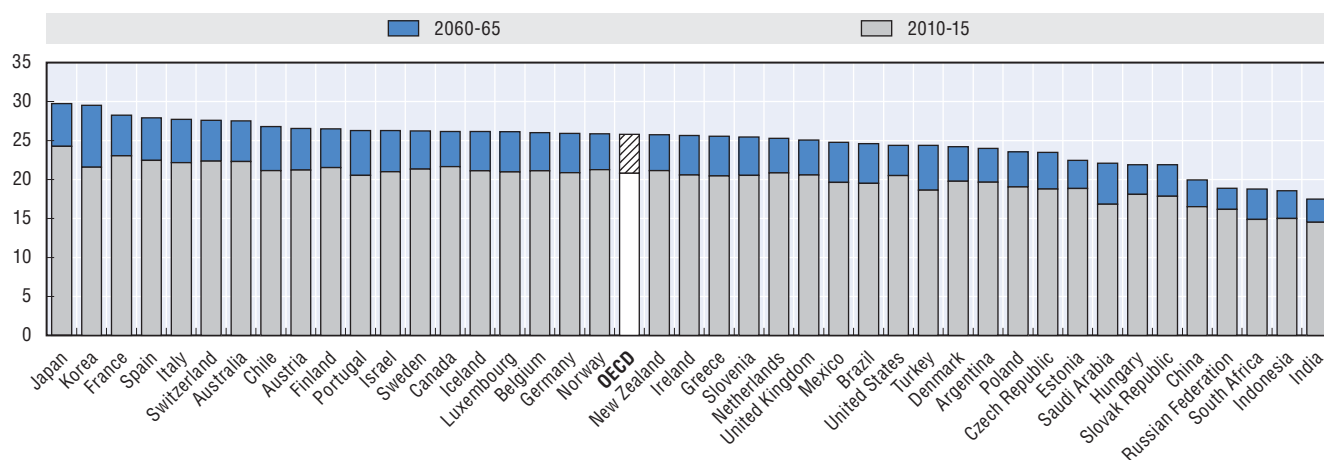
7.2. Life expectancy at birth, in years, men and women, born in 2010-15



Source: United Nations, World Population Prospects – 2012 Revision.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933300764>

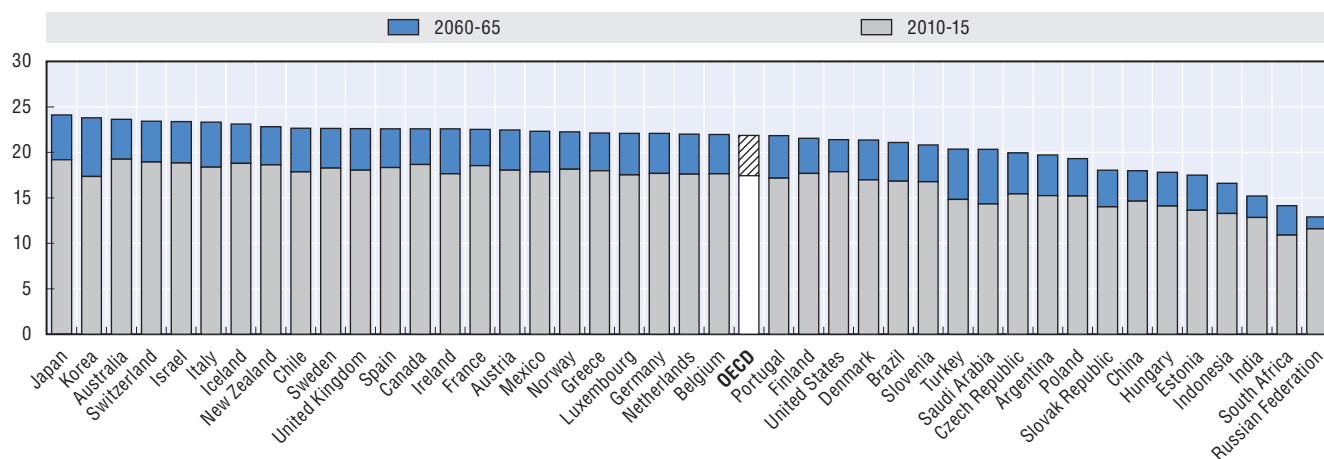
7.3. Expected remaining life expectancy at age 65, in years for women in 2010-15 and 2060-65



Source: United Nations, World Population Prospects – 2012 Revision.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933300779>

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



Source: United Nations, World Population Prospects – 2012 Revision.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933300780>



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