



## **7. HEALTH INDICATORS**

1. Life expectancy
2. Perceived health status
3. Infant health
4. Obesity
5. Height
6. Mental health
7. Long-term care recipients
8. Health care expenditure

## 1. Life expectancy

**Definition and measurement**

Life expectancy is the most general and best known measure of the health status of the population. It is defined as the average number of years that a person could expect to live if he or she experienced the age-specific mortality rates prevalent in a given country in a particular year. It does not include the effect of any future decline in age-specific mortality rates. Each country calculates its life expectancy according to somewhat varying methodologies. These methodological differences can affect the exact comparability of reported estimates, as different methods can change a country's measure of life expectancy slightly.

**Life expectancy at birth has increased remarkably in OECD countries.** From 1960 average OECD female life expectancy at birth increased by 10.9 years to a level of 81.7 years in 2006. For men the increase was of 10.2 years to 76.0 years (HE1.1). In 2006, life expectancy at birth among women was highest in Japan (85.8 years), followed by France, Spain, Switzerland and Italy. For men, life expectancy was highest in Iceland (79.4 years) followed by Switzerland, Japan, Australia and Sweden.

**The increase in life expectancy was accompanied by a large reduction in cross-country differences.** In Korea and Turkey, life expectancy at birth for women and men combined increased by 26.7 and 23.3 years respectively between 1960 and 2006, while in Mexico the gain exceeded 18 years. Catch-up gains in life expectancy by these countries mainly reflect a significant convergence in infant mortality rates.

**There is little evidence that increases in life expectancy are approaching a ceiling.** Gains in life expectancy at birth for Japanese women halved after the period of catching-up, but have since continued at a rate of around 3% per year.

**The gender gap in life expectancy has widened slightly.** Since gains in life expectancy at birth since 1960 have been greater for women than for men, the average OECD gender gap in life expectancy widened from 5.0 years in 1960 to 5.7 years in 2006. However, there have been different trends between earlier and later decades. While the gender gap in life expectancy increased substantially during the 1960s and 1970s (to a peak of 6.7 years, on average, in 1980), it has narrowed during the past 25 years. This narrowing reflects, in part, the lower differences in the prevalence of risk-factor behaviours (e.g. smoking) between men and women and lower mortality rates from cardiovascular disease among men.

**Old people are living longer.** Life expectancy at older ages has also increased substantially thanks to improved access to health services and medical progress, especially in the treatment of cardiovascular diseases. In 2006, on average, women aged 65 could expect to live an additional 20.1 years, up by 5.3 years since 1960. Men of the same age could expect to live 16.7 more years, with a gain of 4.0 years since 1960 (HE1.2). Gender gaps in longevity in old age have narrowed in several OECD countries since the mid-1980s, and this trend is projected to continue in the future.

**Overall longevity gains are due to rising living standards, better nutrition, less smoking and drinking, and better education, as well as greater access to quality health services.** However, gains in life expectancy have been smaller among people from lower socioeconomic groups (OECD, 2004).

**Further reading**

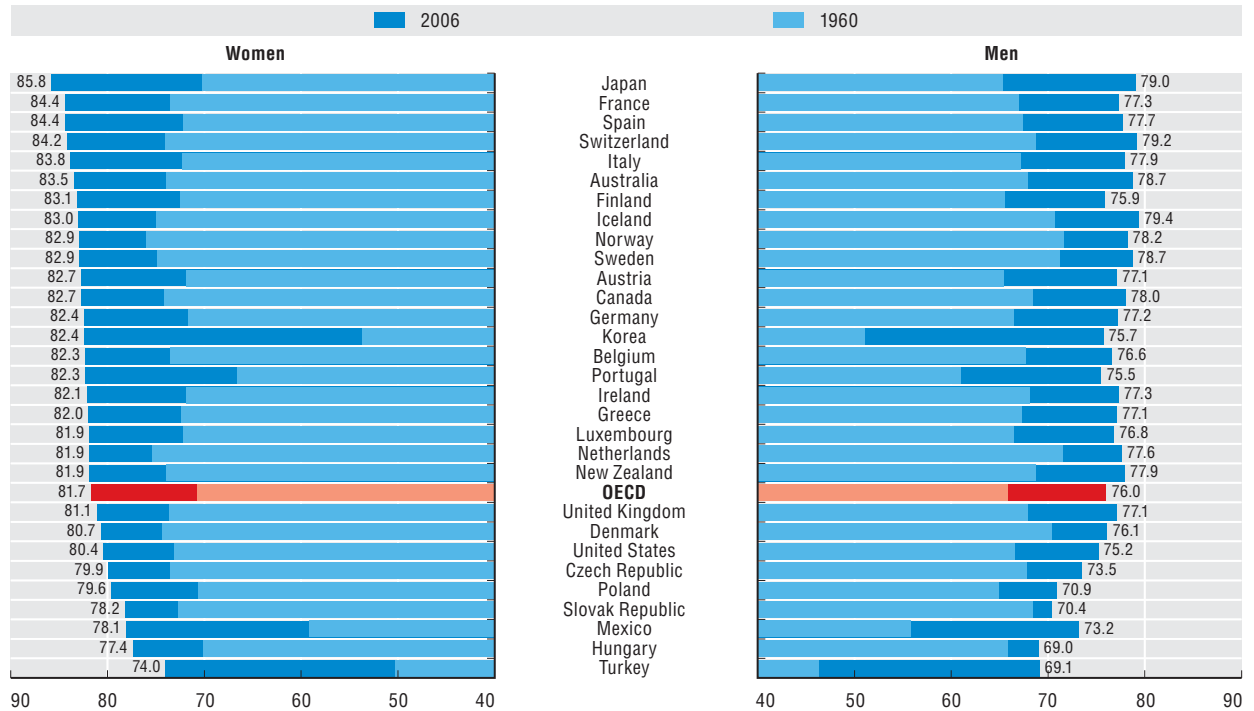
OECD (2004), *Towards High-performing Health Systems*, OECD, Paris.

**Figure note**

Figure HE1.2: 2005 for Canada, United Kingdom and United States. 2004 for Italy.

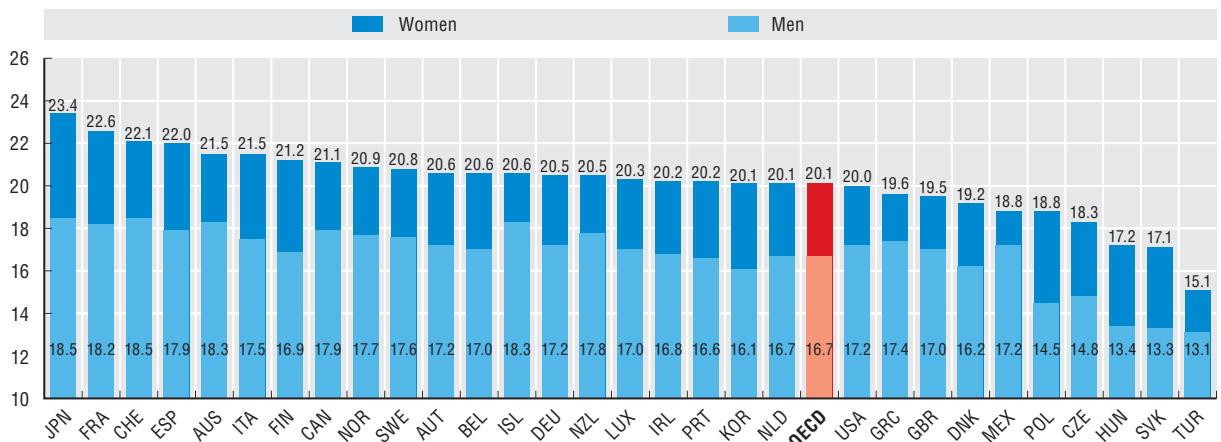
### HE1.1. Life expectancy at birth has increased remarkably in OECD countries

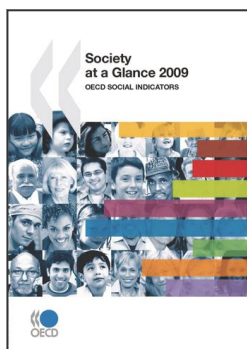
Life expectancy at birth, in years, men and women, in 1960 and 2006



### HE1.2. Older people have a considerable life expectancy

Life expectancy at 65, in years, men and women, in 2006





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