

## TRENDS IN LIFE EXPECTANCY

Life expectancy has increased in EU countries over the past decades, but this rise has slowed down since 2010 in many countries, particularly in Western Europe.

Life expectancy at birth reached 81 years across the 28 EU member states in 2016. Spain and Italy have the highest life expectancy among EU countries, with life expectancy reaching over 83 years in 2016. Life expectancy at birth now exceeds 80 years in two-thirds of EU countries, but still remains at only around 75 years in Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania (Figure 3.1).

As is the case around the world, women live longer than men in EU countries – on average nearly 5½ longer – although this gap has narrowed by one year since 2000 as life expectancy among men increased more rapidly in most countries. The current gender gap is particularly large in Latvia and Lithuania where women live more than 10 years longer than men, and is also quite large in Bulgaria and Romania. These gender gaps are partly due to greater exposure to risk factors among men, particularly greater tobacco consumption, excessive alcohol consumption and less healthy diet, resulting in higher death rates from heart diseases, various types of cancer and other diseases.

Until recently, life expectancy was rising fairly rapidly and steadily across EU countries, by about 2½ years per decade on average. However, since 2011, the gains in life expectancy have slowed down markedly, particularly in some Western European countries, with less than half a year gained between 2011 and 2016 in countries like France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Life expectancy actually decreased in 8 EU countries in 2012 and in 19 countries in 2015, including in France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, particularly among people aged over 75, before recovering in 2016 (Figure 3.2).

The marked reduction in 2015 was due at least partly to excess mortality in the winter months, especially among older people, related to a bad flu season and increased mortality from cardiovascular diseases. Excess mortality among older people has also been observed during the winter 2017-18 (EuroMOMO, 2018), which may impact negatively on

life expectancy in some countries. Another important factor that has contributed to the recent slowdown in life expectancy gains in many EU countries is the slowdown in the reduction in death rates from circulatory diseases, which was previously the main factor driving life expectancy gains.

In the United Kingdom, the recent stalling in life expectancy gains has prompted comments about the causes, including the possible effects of austerity measures on health and other public spending (Hiam et al., 2018). In Europe, some countries that have implemented more severe austerity measures, such as Greece and Spain, have continued to experience rising life expectancy since 2011, with the notable exception of 2015 when life expectancy also came down in these two countries. Further research is needed to understand better the recent slowdown in life expectancy gains in many European countries (Raleigh, 2018).

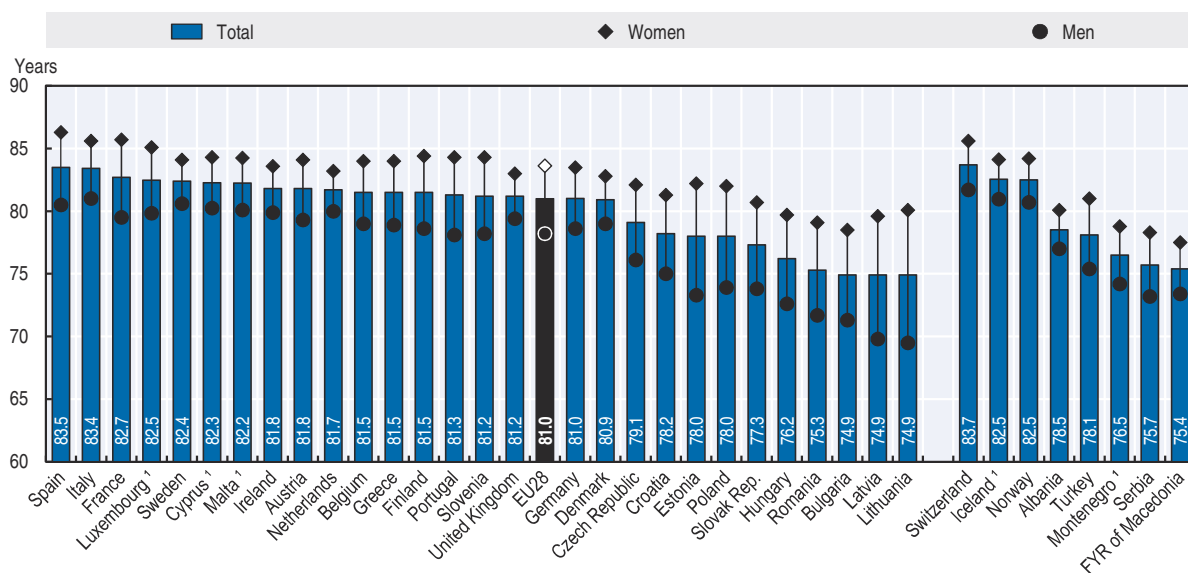
### Definition and comparability

Life expectancy at birth measures the average number of years that a person can expect to live based on current mortality rates (age-specific death rates). However, the actual age-specific death rates of any particular birth cohort cannot be known in advance. If age-specific death rates are falling, actual life spans will on average be higher than life expectancy calculated with current death rates.

### References

- EuroMOMO (European Monitoring of Excess Mortality for Public Health Action) (2018), European Mortality Bulletin, [www.euromomo.eu](http://www.euromomo.eu).
- Hiam, L., D. Harrison, M. McKee and D. Dorling (2018), Why is life expectancy in England and Wales “stalling”?, *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jech-2018-210580>.
- Raleigh, V. (2018), Stalling life expectancy in the UK, *British Medical Journal*, 362, 27 September 2018.

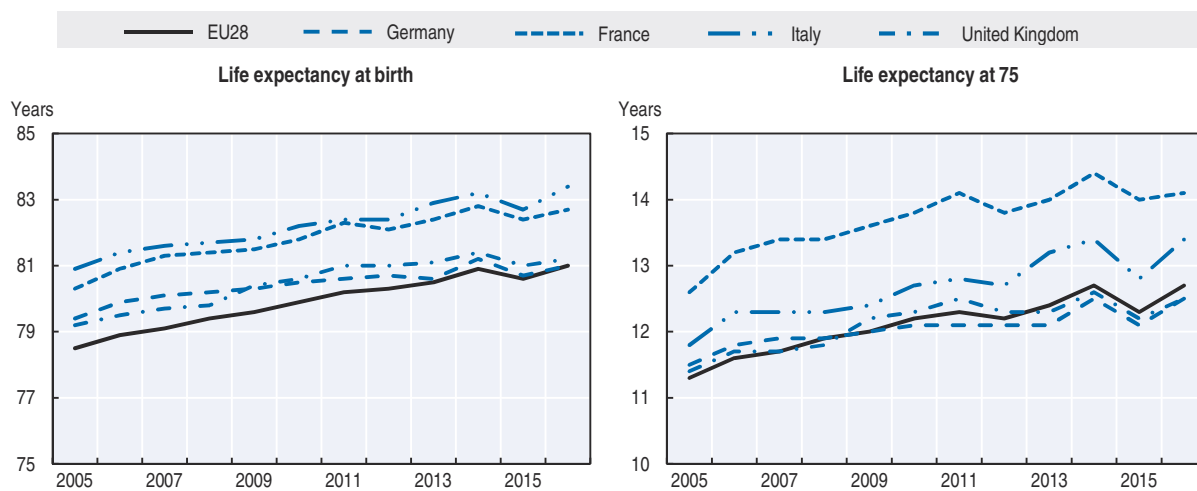
### 3.1. Life expectancy at birth, by gender, 2016



1. Three-year average (2014-16).  
Source: Eurostat Database.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933834281>

### 3.2. Trends in life expectancy, 2005-16



Source: Eurostat Database.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933834300>



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