1. Life expectancy

The increase in life expectancy in the last 25 years was accompanied by a large reduction in cross-country differences. Turkey and Korea have had the largest rises, with the United States having the smallest. A major cause was a significant convergence in infant mortality rates between countries (see HE2). But older people are also living longer. Life expectancy at older ages has increased substantially thanks to medical innovations in, for example, the treatment of heart disease. In all countries women live longer than men. However this gender gap in life expectancy generally narrowed during the past 25 years.

**Median household income growth over the period was not essential to get significant gains in life expectancy (HE1.2).** Countries which have had high household disposable income growth for the median person have not systematically seen greater gains than those with lower income growth in the last 25 years.

**Equally, rising household income inequality was not related to changes in life expectancy over the last generation at a country level (HE1.3).** Overall, countries have not been evidently constrained either by median household income growth or by income inequality rises in achieving improvements in life expectancy. Both HE1.2 and HE1.3 caution against application of a simple economic relationship between either disposable household income or inequality and the amount of years a person can expect to live.

**Further reading**


**Figure note**

Figure HE1.1: 2009 for Chile, France, Mexico, the Netherlands and Sweden; 2007 for Belgium and Canada; and 1990 for Chile, 1989 for Estonia and 1987 for Slovenia instead of 1983.

Information on data for Israel: http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602.
HE1.1. Life expectancy has increased remarkably in OECD countries

Panel A. Life expectancy at birth in 2008 or latest year (\(\omega\))

Japan 82.7
Switzerland 82.5
Australia 82.3
Italy 82.2
Sweden 82.2
Iceland 82.2
France 82.0
Spain 82.0
Israel 81.9
Canada 81.8
Luxembourg 81.8
Norway 81.6
Austria 81.5
New Zealand 81.5
Netherlands 81.5
Germany 81.4
Greece 81.3
Finland 81.2
Ireland 81.2
Korea 81.1
Belgium 81.1
Portugal 81.1
OECD 81.1

Panel B. Rise in life expectancy between 1983 and 2008 (in years)

Japan 5.0
Switzerland 4.8
Australia 4.7
Italy 4.6
Sweden 4.5
Iceland 4.5
France 4.4
Spain 4.4
Israel 4.3
Canada 4.3
Luxembourg 4.3
Norway 4.3
Austria 4.3
New Zealand 4.3
Netherlands 4.3
Germany 4.3
Greece 4.3
Finland 4.3
Ireland 4.3
Korea 4.3
Belgium 4.3
Portugal 4.3
OECD 4.3

HE1.2. No relationship between rising life expectancy and income growth

Rise in life expectancy between 1983 and 2008 (in years)

HE1.3. No relationship between rising life expectancy and income inequality changes

Rise in life expectancy between 1983 and 2008 (in years)


StatLink: http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932381969