

Life expectancy at birth

Did you know?

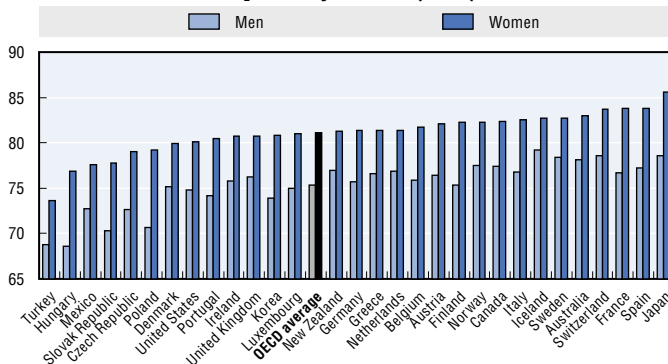
Japan, Iceland, Spain and Switzerland have the highest life expectancies in the World – just over 80 years. Botswana, Malawi, Zimbabwe and Zambia have the lowest – all under 40 years. The lowest regions are all Sub-Sahara Africa at 47 years and the Indian sub-continent at 64 years.

In virtually all countries life expectancies at birth are higher for women than for men. For the world as a whole female life expectancy is currently about 6% higher than for men.

For the OECD total, the life expectancy gender gap in favour of women is now just under six years; it is eight years or more in Hungary, the Slovak Republic and Poland and is lowest in the United Kingdom, Iceland and Sweden.

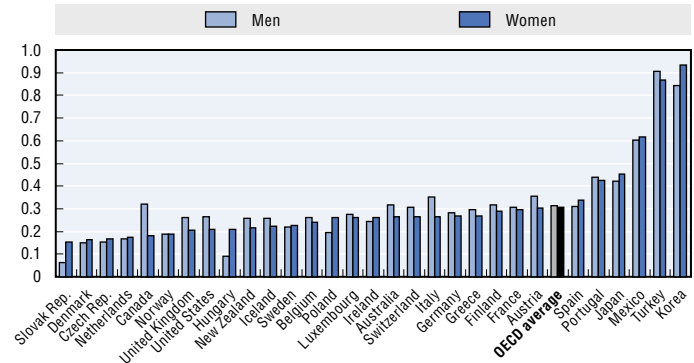
Why do women live longer than men? Differences in longevity can in part be explained by their different behavioural, lifestyle and working patterns. Women are also thought to have a possible genetic advantage which makes them more resistant to a range of conditions.

Life expectancy at birth (2004)



Since 1960 life expectancies at birth have been rising in all countries. The chart below shows that the increase has been most marked in Korea, Turkey, Mexico, Japan and Portugal where life expectancies were low at the beginning of the period. In recent years men have been raising their life expectancies faster than women in most countries. This seems to be due to a reduction in “risk factor behaviour” by men – notably smoking and alcohol consumption – and an increase in these risk factors for women.

Average annual percentage growth in life expectancy
1960-2004 or nearest years available



Source: OECD (2005), *Health at a Glance – OECD Indicators* 2005, OECD, Paris; OECD (2006), *OECD Health Data* 2006, OECD, Paris; OECD Development Centre, Gender, Institutions, and Development database (GID), www.oecd.org/dev/institutions/GIDdatabase; Measures of Australia’s progress 2004, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004, p. 32.

Further reading:

OECD (2004), *The OECD Health Project: Towards High-Performing Health Systems*, OECD, Paris.