

### 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 2005-10, life expectancy at birth averaged 76.1 years for men and 81.8 years for women. Among women, the figure was highest in Japan (86.2 years), followed by France, Switzerland, Italy and Spain. For men, life expectancy at birth was highest in Iceland (80.2 years) followed by Switzerland, Australia, Japan and Sweden.

Life expectancy at older ages is especially important for the finances of retirement-income systems. And older people are living ever longer. In 2005-10, on average in OECD countries, women aged 65 could expect to live an additional 19.9 years, which is forecast to increase to 23.5 years by 2045-50. Men of the same age could expect to live 16.4 more years in 2005-10, with a projected increase of 3.1 years by 2045-50 to reach 19.5 years. Gender gaps in the longevity of older people are expected to remain broadly constant in relative terms but increase in absolute terms (from 3.5 to 4.0 years on average in OECD countries). Paying a pension from age 65 will become around 20% more expensive under these forecasts.

There is considerable variation between OECD countries in life expectancy at older ages. Women in Japan are predicted to live another 27.3 years on reaching age 65 in 2045-50. In contrast, women in Turkey are expected to live an extra 19.2 years from age 65 in 2045-50. The figure for Japan is considerably higher than any other country, with France being the next highest at 25.5 years.

For men there is less variation between countries than there is for women. Switzerland has the longest life expectancy at age 65 of 22.0 years in 2045-50, followed by Iceland at 21.4 years. Again, Turkey has the shortest life expectancy for a 65-year-old: 15.4 years.

The gender life-expectancy gap at age 65 is predicted to be between three and five years in favour of women for virtually every OECD country in 2045-50. The main exception to this is Japan, with a differential of over six years, a result of the particularly long female life expectancy.

Given this trend, many OECD countries have increased or plan to increase their pension ages: see Chapter 1 on "Pensionable age and life expectancy, 1950-2050" in Part I. Others have introduced elements into their retirement-income provision that will automatically adjust the level of pensions as people live longer: see Chapter 5 on "Linking pensions to life expectancy" in Part I.

Unsurprisingly, life expectancy at birth is also highest in Japan, for women, at 86.2 years, compared to the OECD average of 81.8 years in 2005-10. For men, Japan records one of the highest values. But, at 79.0 years, it lies behind Iceland (80.2), Switzerland (79.3) and Australia (79.1).

Overall longevity gains are due to rising living standards, but also greater access to quality health services. However, gains in life expectancy have been smaller among people from lower socio-economic groups. Socio-economic differences in mortality rates are lower at pension age (above 65) than they are for people of working age.

Turning to the non-OECD major economies, life expectancy is generally lower. Life expectancy at birth is 53.2 years for women and 49.9 years for men in South Africa. Both figures are at least ten years below those of any of the other countries covered, thus reflecting the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. The Russian Federation is also an outlier in having much the greatest gender gap in life expectancy at birth of 12.9 years, compared with an OECD average of 6.7 years.

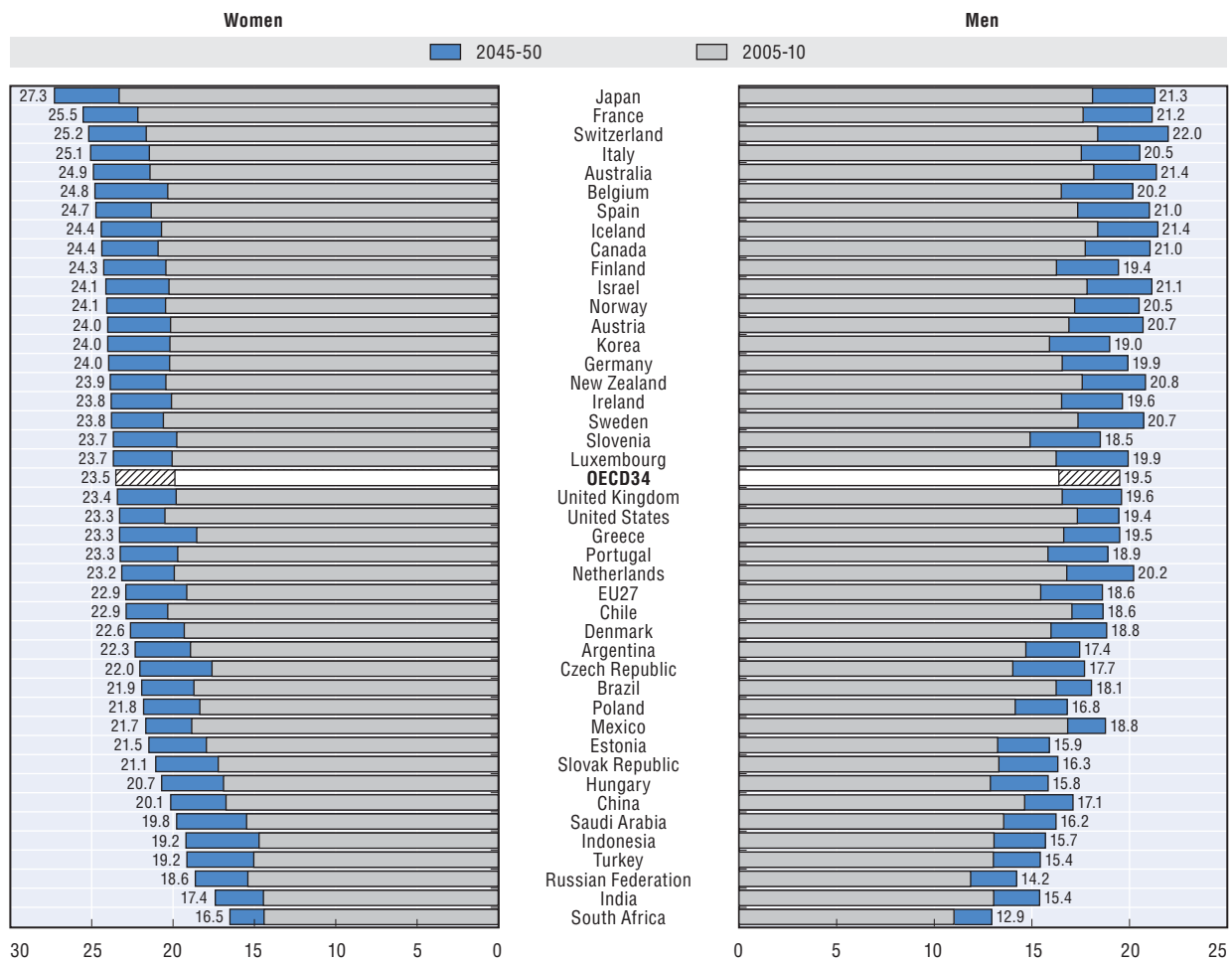
### Definition and measurement

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, 2005-10 and 2045-50. Since the determinants of longevity change slowly, life expectancy is best analysed over a long time horizon.

### References

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- Whitehouse, E.R. and A. Zaidi (2008), "Socio-Economic Differences in Mortality: Implications for Pension Policy", *Social, Employment and Migration Working Paper*, No. 71, OECD Publishing, Paris.

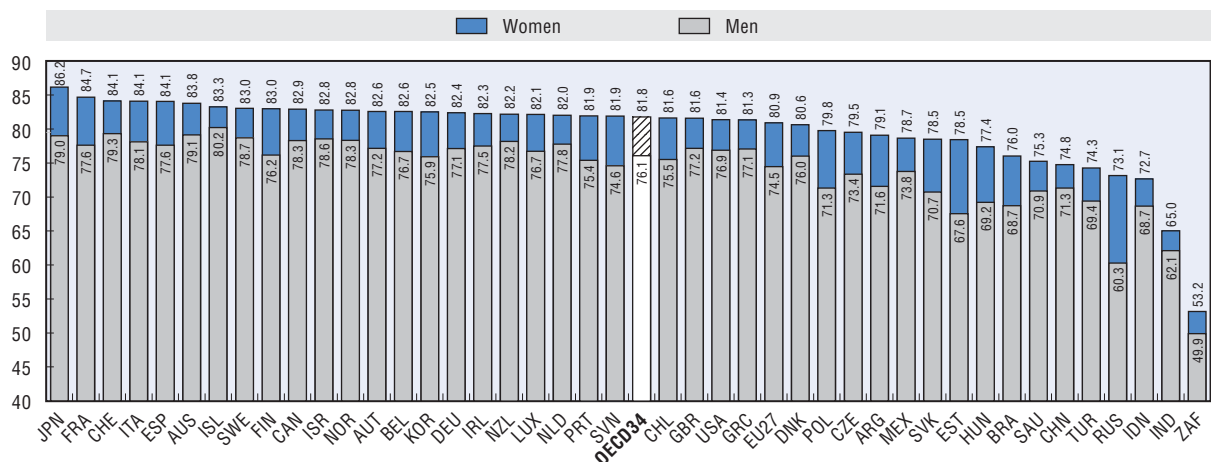
Additional life expectancy at age 65, in years, men and women, 2005-10 and 2045-50



Source: United Nations, World Population Prospects – The 2008 Revision.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932371120>

Life expectancy at birth, in years, men and women, 2005-10



Source: United Nations, World Population Prospects – The 2008 Revision.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932371120>



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