CO1.2: Life expectancy at birth

Definitions and methodology

This indicator uses two measures to capture life expectancy:

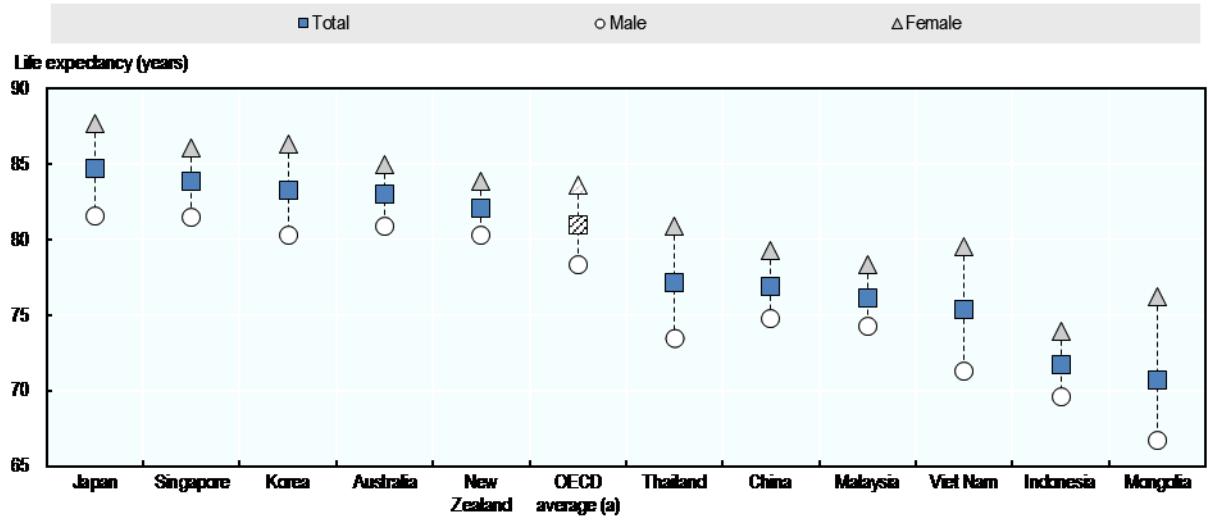
- *Life expectancy at birth*, defined as the average number of years a new-born child would live if prevailing patterns of mortality at the time of its birth were to stay the same throughout their life.
- *Health-adjusted life expectancy (HALE) at birth*, defined as the average number of years that a new-born child can expect to live in "full health" after taking into account years expected to be lived in less than full health due to disease and/or injury.

Data on life expectancy at birth come either from OECD Health Statistics or from the World Bank, while data on HALE at birth come from the World Health Organization (WHO) Global Health Observatory.

Key findings

Current life expectancies for new-born children vary considerably across the covered Asia/Pacific countries (Chart CO1.2.A). In five of the covered countries (Australia, Japan, Korea, Singapore and New Zealand), current life expectancies are relatively high. In these countries, new-born children can expect to live at least until the age of 82 – above the average for OECD countries (81). However, current life expectancies at birth are lower in China, Malaysia, Thailand and Viet Nam – in these countries, new-born children can expect to live until around age of 75-77 – and are much lower in Mongolia and Indonesia at about 70 years.

Chart CO1.2.A. **Life expectancy at birth by gender, 2019**
Average number of years a new-born infant would live if prevailing patterns of mortality at the time of its birth were to stay the same throughout its life



a) The OECD average refers to the unweighted average across OECD member countries with available and comparable data in 2019. See OECD Family Database Indicator CO1.2 (http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm) for more detail.
Sources: Australia, China, Indonesia, Korea, Japan and New Zealand: OECD Health Statistics; OECD average: OECD Family Database Indicator CO1.1; Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam: World Bank Open Data

Other relevant indicators: SF2.1 Fertility rates; CO1.1 Infant mortality; CO1.3 Low birth weight; CO1.4 Vaccination rates.

Across countries, girls tend to have higher life expectancies than boys, though the extent of the gap varies (Chart CO1.2.A). The largest current gender gaps in life expectancy are in Mongolia, Thailand and Viet Nam, where life expectancy at birth is about 7-8 years higher for girls than for boys, and especially in Mongolia, where a new-born girl can expect to live not far off 10 years longer than a new-born boy. The smallest gender gap is in New Zealand (3.6 years).

All covered Asia/Pacific countries have seen considerable gains in life expectancies at birth over the past four or five decades (Table CO1.2.A). Except Mongolia, all covered countries, current life expectancies at birth are at least 10 years longer than they were in 1960 (or in the earliest year with available data), with the largest gains made in Korea (an increase of more than 20 years since 1970), Indonesia and Thailand (25 and 22 years since 1960), and especially China (33 years since 1960).

Table CO1.2.A. **Trends in life expectancy at birth, 1960-2020**
Average number of years a new-born infant would live if prevailing patterns of mortality at the time of its birth were to stay the same throughout its life

	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
OECD-26 average (a)	67.3	68.0	69.3	70.5	71.9	73.2	74.2	75.2	76.6	77.9	79.1	80.1	80.3	80.4	80.5	80.8	
Australia	70.9	71.0	70.8	72.7	74.6	75.6	77.0	77.9	79.3	80.9	81.8	82.5	82.5	82.6	82.8	83.0	..
China	43.8	49.6	59.1	63.9	66.8	68.5	69.3	70.2	72.0	74.0	75.2	76.1	76.3	75.6	76.7	76.9	..
Indonesia	46.7	49.6	52.6	55.4	58.0	60.3	62.3	64.3	65.8	67.3	69.2	70.8	71.0	71.3	71.5	71.7	..
Japan	67.8	70.3	72.0	74.3	76.1	77.6	78.9	79.6	81.2	82.0	82.9	83.9	84.1	84.2	84.3	84.4	84.7
Korea	..	..	62.3	64.3	66.2	68.9	71.7	73.8	76.0	78.2	80.2	82.1	82.4	82.7	82.7	83.3	..
Malaysia	60.0	62.4	64.6	66.4	68.1	69.6	70.9	71.8	72.6	73.6	74.5	75.5	75.6	75.8	76.0	76.2	..
Mongolia	...	64.1	...	...	...	...	...	62.1	60.4	62.1	64.9	66.0	65.6	65.9	66.1	66.4	66.7
New Zealand	..	71.2	71.5	72.1	73.2	74	75.5	76.8	78.4	79.8	80.8	81.7	81.7	81.9	81.8	82.1	..
Singapore	65.7	67.1	68.3	70.2	72.2	73.9	75.3	76.3	78.0	80.1	81.7	82.9	83.0	83.2	83.4	83.7	83.9
Thailand	54.7	57.1	59.4	62.0	64.4	67.9	70.3	70.2	70.6	72.1	73.9	75.1	75.3	76.7	76.9	77.2	..
Viet Nam	59.0	62.0	59.6	61.4	67.5	69.0	70.6	71.9	73.0	74.1	74.8	75.1	75.2	75.2	75.3	75.4	..

a) The OECD-26 average refers to the unweighted average across the 26 OECD member countries with available and comparable data for the whole period. See OECD Family Database Indicator CO1.2 (http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm) for more detail.

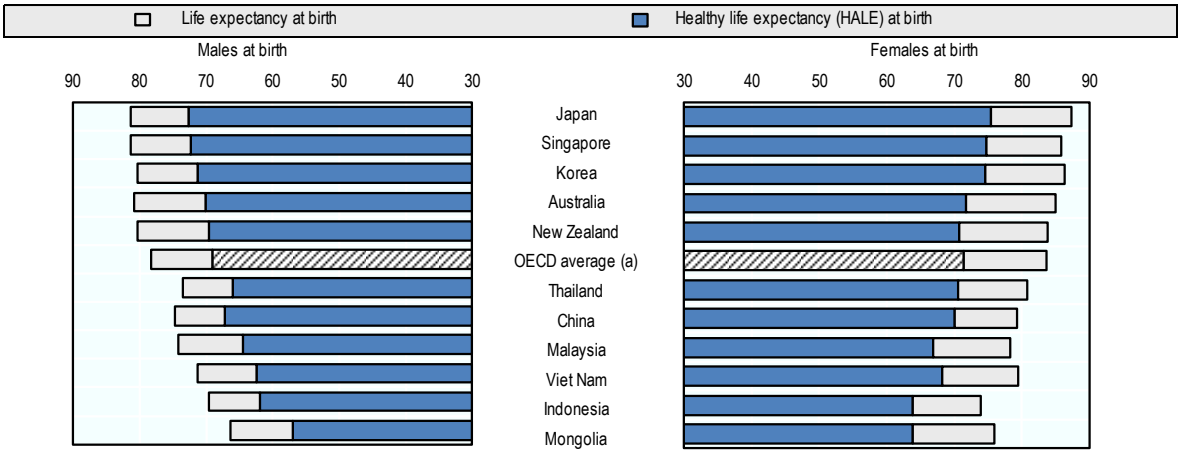
Sources: Australia, Japan and New Zealand: OECD Health Statistics; OECD average: OECD Family Database Indicator CO1.1; Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam: World Bank(2021), World Development Indicators; China, Indonesia, Korea, Singapore and Thailand: OECD Asia/Pacific Korea Policy Center .

It is still too early to measure the full impact of the current COVID-19 crisis on life expectancy, but preliminary data for 2020 suggest that life expectancy decreased in 2020 in 20 out of 30 OECD countries. (OECD 2021, Health at a Glance).

Life expectancy does not however provide a complete picture of the health status of the population, especially if extra years of life are not lived in good health. In Asia/Pacific countries as also in OECD countries, 'health-adjusted' life expectancy at birth – that is, the number of years a new-born infant can expect to leave in full health – is often much shorter than actual life expectancy, especially for new-born girls (Chart CO1.2.B). The smallest differences are in China, where 'health-adjusted' life expectancies at birth are 7.6 years shorter than actual life expectancies for boys and 9.2 years shorter for girls. The largest differences are in Australia – where the health-adjusted life expectancies at birth is 10.8 years shorter than the actual life expectancy for boys, and 13.3 years shorter for girls.

Chart CO1.2.B. **Life expectancy at birth and Health-Adjusted Life Expectancy (HALE) at birth, 2019**

Average number of years a new-born infant can expect to live if prevailing patterns of mortality at the time of its birth were to stay the same throughout its life (life expectancy at birth), and average number of years that a new-born infant can expect to live in "full health" by taking into account years lived in less than full health due to disease and/or injury (HALE)



a) The OECD average of Life expectancy refers to the unweighted average across OECD member countries with available and comparable data. See OECD Family Database Indicator CO1.2 (http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm) for more detail..

Sources: WHO Global Health Observatory, 2019

Comparability and data issues

The data on life expectancy at birth shown in Chart CO1.2.A and Table CO1.2.A are taken from three sources: OECD Health Statistics for OECD member countries except Korea, the World Bank Open Data Database for Malaysia and Viet Nam, and OECD Korea Policy Center Asia/Pacific Database for all other countries. In all cases the data are originally collected from national statistical offices or from data published by other international organisations, such as the United Nations Population Division. It is possible that some of the international variation in life expectancy at birth may be due to differences between countries in the registering of deaths or recording of mortality rates (see here for more details on the data collected and published by OECD Heath Statistics). For the data published by OECD Health Statistics, life expectancy at birth for the total population is estimated by the OECD Secretariat using the unweighted average of life expectancies for men and women.

The data on life expectancy and Healthy Life Expectancy (HALE) at birth shown in Chart CO1.2.B are taken from the WHO Global Health Observatory, which itself calculates estimates based on life tables constructed by WHO using Sullivan's method. For more information on the data and methods used in the calculation of the HALE data, see the Global Health Observatory website.

Sources and further reading: OECD Health Statistics, http://www.oecd.org/els/health-systems/health-data.htm, World Health Organization Global Health Observatory, http://www.who.int/gho/en/; World Bank Open Data Database, https://data.worldbank.org/; OECD/WHO (2020), Health at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2020: Measuring Progress Towards Universal Health Coverage, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/26b007cd-en.