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Life expectancy and healthy life expectancy at age 65

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8.2. Life expectancy and healthy life expectancy at age 65

Life expectancy at age 65 has increased significantly for both men and women during the past 50 years across both OECD countries and emerging economies. Some of the factors explaining these gains in life expectancy at age 65 include advances in medical care combined with greater access to health care, healthier lifestyles and improved living conditions before and after people reach age 65.

In 2011, women at age 65 could expect to live for another 20.9 years on average across OECD countries, while men could expect to live 17.6 years (Figure 8.2.1). Life expectancy at age 65 was the highest in France for both women (23.8 years) and men (19.3 years), followed by Japan. It was lower in Turkey (16.1 years for women and 14.1 years for men), where life expectancy at age 65 is similar to that of other major emerging countries such as South Africa.

On average across OECD countries, life expectancy at age 65 has increased by six years for women and 4.8 years for men since 1960. While the gender gap in life expectancy at age 65 widened in many countries in the 1960s and the 1970s, it has slightly narrowed over the past 30 years. In some countries such as Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom and the United States, the overall gains in life expectancy at age 65 since 1960 have been greater for men than for women. Japan has achieved the highest gains in life expectancy at age 65 since 1960, with an increase of almost ten years for women and over seven years for men, although the increase has slowed down over the past few years. The gains in life expectancy have been more modest in some central and eastern European countries, such as the Slovak Republic and Hungary, especially for men, and in Mexico.

Countries relative position with respect to life expectancy at age 65 mirrors closely their relative position with regard to life expectancy at age 80. Life expectancy at age 80 is the highest in France (11.8 for women, 9.2 for men), followed by Japan (11.4 for women, 8.4 for men) and Italy (10.7 for women, 8.5 for men). Turkey has the lowest life expectancy at age 80 among OECD countries (6.7 for women and 6.2 for men). While life expectancy at age 65 in the United Kingdom is around the OECD average, it is much higher than the OECD average at age 80 (10.2 for women, 8.8 for men).

Increased life expectancy at age 65 does not necessarily mean that the extra years lived are in good health. In

Europe, an indicator of disability-free life expectancy known as “healthy life years” is calculated regularly, based on a general question about disability in the European Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). Given that this indicator has only recently been developed, long-time series are not yet available and efforts continue to improve its comparability.

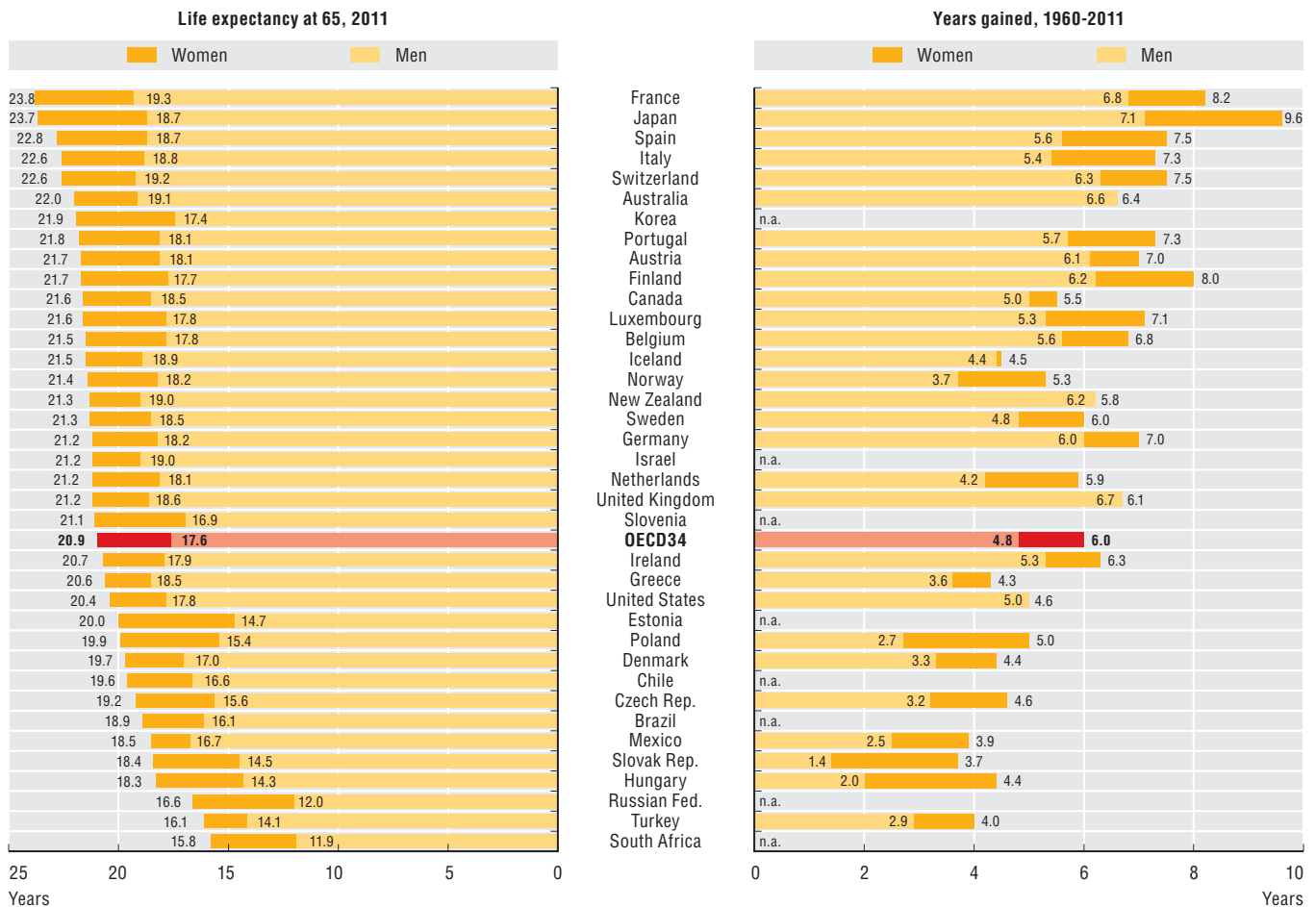
Among European countries participating in the survey, the average number of healthy life years at age 65 was almost the same for women and men, at 9.5 years for women and 9.4 years for men in 2011 (Figure 8.2.2). The absence of any significant gender gap in healthy life years means that women are more likely to live with some type of activity limitation after age 65 than men. Norway and Sweden had the highest number of healthy life years at age 65 in 2011, with over 15 years free of disability for women and about 14 years for men.

Definition and comparability

Life expectancy measures how long on average a person of a given age can expect to live, if current death rates do not change. However, the actual age-specific death rate of any particular birth cohort cannot be known in advance. If rates are falling, as has been the case over the past decades in OECD countries, actual life spans will be higher than life expectancy calculated using current death rates. The methodology used to calculate life expectancy can vary slightly between countries. This can change a country's estimates by a fraction of a year.

Disability-free life expectancy (or “healthy life years”) is defined as the number of years spent free of activity limitation. In Europe, this indicator is calculated annually by Eurostat for EU countries and some EFTA countries using the Sullivan method (Sullivan, 1971). The disability measure is the Global Activity Limitation Indicator (GALI) which comes from the EU-SILC survey. The GALI measures limitation in usual activities due to health problems.

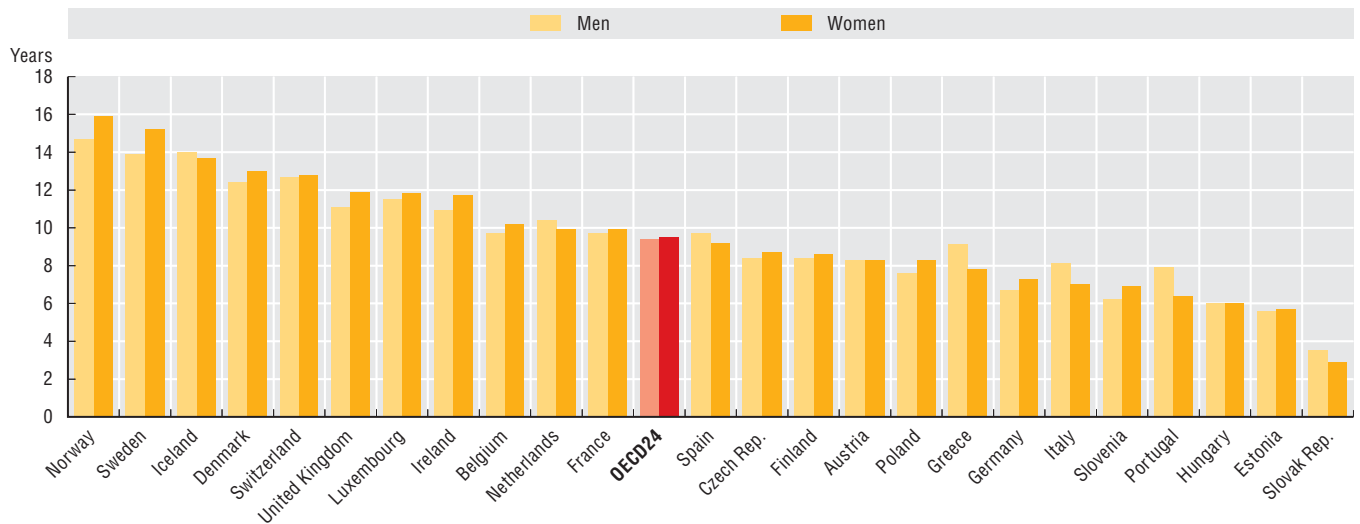
8.2.1. Life expectancy at age 65, 2011 and years gained since 1960 (or nearest year)



Source: OECD Health Statistics 2013, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/health-data-en>; national sources for non-OECD countries.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932919194>

8.2.2. Healthy life years at age 65, European countries, 2011



Source: Eurostat Statistics Database 2013.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932919213>