

# World population gains more than a decade's life expectancy since 1970

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In the first Global Burden of Disease Study 2010 paper, published in *The Lancet*, the authors present new estimates of life expectancy for the last four decades in 187 different countries. While overall life expectancy is increasing globally, the gap in life expectancy between countries with the highest and lowest life expectancies has remained similar since 1970.

The new estimates show that, globally, in 2010 a man's average [life expectancy](#) at birth had increased by 11.1 years (19.7%) since 1970, from 56.4 years in 1970, to 67.5 years in 2010. For women, life expectancy increased by 12.1 years (19.8%) during the same period, from 61.2 years in 1970, to 73.3 years in 2010.

Deaths in children under five years old have declined by almost 60% since 1970, from 16.4 million deaths in 1970 to 6.8 million in 2010. However, while overall life expectancy is increasing globally, the [gap](#) in life expectancy between countries with the highest and lowest life expectancies has remained similar since 1970, at around 32 – 47 years, even when significant [mortality shocks](#) such as the 1994 Rwanda genocide are discounted.

In 2010, Japanese women had the highest life expectancy at birth in the world, at 85.9 years; for men, Iceland had the highest life expectancy, at 80.0 years. Haiti had the lowest life expectancy at birth in 2010 for both [men and women](#) (32.5 and 43.6, respectively), largely due to the disastrous earthquake in January 2010. The largest overall gain in life

expectancy since 1970 was in the [Maldives](#), which saw an increase in male life expectancy of 54.4% since 1970 (from 50.2 to 77.5) and a 57.6% increase in women's life expectancy, from 51 in 1970, to 80.4 in 2010. Other countries which experienced gains in life expectancy greater than 20 years since 1970 were Bangladesh, Bhutan, Iran, and Peru.

Some countries in Central and Eastern sub-Saharan Africa also experienced substantial gains in life expectancy since 1990, with men in Angola undergoing a 31.9% increase in life expectancy (from 43.9 in 1990 to 57.9 in 2010), and an increase of 23.6% in women's life expectancy in the same period (from 51.7 in 1990 to 63.9 in 2010). Ethiopia and Rwanda also experienced substantial gains in life expectancy during this period.

Despite these encouraging figures, some countries have experienced substantial declines in life expectancy. Overall, men's life expectancy in Southern sub-Saharan Africa decreased by 1.3 years between 1970 and 2010, and women's life expectancy decreased by 0.9 years in the same period, with the decline attributed to the catastrophic HIV / AIDS epidemic. Lesotho experienced the second-largest decline in life expectancy 1970 – 2010, with men in 2010 living for 4.6 fewer years in 2010 compared to 1970, and women living for 6.4 fewer years in the same period. Belarus and Ukraine in Eastern Europe also underwent notable declines in life expectancy, thought to be due to high rates of alcohol-related deaths in these countries.

According to Assistant Professor Haidong Wang, of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington, and one of the study authors, "Because more children are now surviving to adulthood compared to earlier decades, health policy makers globally will need to pay much more attention to preventing deaths in young adults, aged 15 – 49, in coming years."

While most developed countries, and some developing [countries](#) such as China and Argentina, have experienced declining numbers of deaths in this age group since 1970, some high-income regions – including Albania, Greece, Israel, Lithuania, and Russia – have experienced increased numbers of deaths in this age group in the same period. In Botswana, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, deaths in this age group have increased by more than 500% since 1970.

**More information:** [www.thelancet.com/themed/global-burden-of-disease](http://www.thelancet.com/themed/global-burden-of-disease)

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