

Average lifespan in EU tops 80: study

November 23 2016



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The average lifespan of people in the EU has topped 80 for the first time, but preventable illnesses caused by smoking, alcohol and obesity are taking a huge toll, a study said Wednesday.

Gains were uneven as people in western European Union countries lived

more than eight years longer on average than people in central and eastern countries, said the report by the European Commission and the OECD.

"More needs to be done to reduce inequalities," said Angel Gurría, head of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development as he launched the report in Brussels.

The study said life expectancy across the 28-nation bloc has risen from 74.2 years in 1990 to 80.9 years in 2014—the last year for which data were available—topping 80 for the first time.

But it warned that chronic diseases and related risk factors—including obesity, smoking, and heavy drinking—were taking a heavy toll on European societies.

More than 550,000 people of working age died prematurely across the bloc each year from heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, cancer and respiratory diseases.

"This represents a loss of about 3.4 million potential productive life years," the report said.

Meanwhile 16 percent of adults are obese, up from 11 percent in 2000, while one in five people still smoked and heavy alcohol drinkers were more likely not to have a job than light to moderate drinkers.

In total, around 50 million EU citizens suffer from two or more chronic illnesses, most over 65.

"It shows that in the EU many [people](#) die every year from potentially avoidable diseases linked to risk factors such as smoking or obesity," said European health commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis.

These diseases are a drain on the struggling European economy too, the report says, with sick leave and disability benefits accounting for 1.7 percent of GDP in EU countries—more than the amount spent on unemployment benefits.

People aged 50-59 who are suffering from severe depression were more than twice as likely to leave the labour market early, it added.

Europe is also ageing fast, the [report](#) says. The over-65s have risen from less than 10 percent of the population in 1980 to nearly 20 percent in 2015 and could reach nearly 30 percent in 2060.

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Citation: Average lifespan in EU tops 80: study (2016, November 23) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-11-average-lifespan-eu-tops.html>

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