

Rising European life expectancy undermined by obesity: WHO

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Life expectancy in Europe continues to increase but obesity and the growing proportion of people who are overweight risks reversing this trend, the World Health Organization warned Wednesday.

In its European Health Report, covering 53 countries in a vast geographical area from the Atlantic to the Pacific, the UN agency found well-being is the highest in the world but varies widely within the [region](#).

Average life expectancy from birth has increased from 76.7 years in 2010 to 77.8 years in 2015. Women continue to live longer than men—81.1 years compared to 74.6 years for men, although the gap has slightly narrowed.

There are also major differences between countries. Men live almost 16 years longer in Iceland (81.4 years) than in Kazakhstan (65.7 years).

"Progress is uneven, both within and between countries, between sexes, and across generations," said Zsuzsanna Jakab, the WHO's director for Europe.

But she warned: "Lifestyle-related risk factors give cause for concern, as they may slow, or even reverse the great gains in [life expectancy](#) if left unchecked."

Four in 10 Turks obese

"Overweight and obesity are on an upward trend in almost all member states," said the report, which was launched in London.

In 2016, 23.3 percent of people in the region were obese, up 2.5 percentage points in six years, and 58.7 percent were overweight, up 2.8 points.

The trend is particularly marked in Turkey, where almost four in 10 women—39.2 percent—are obese.

The WHO definition of obesity is someone with a [body mass index](#)

(BMI) of more than 30, meaning more than 87 kilogrammes (192 pounds) for someone measuring 1.7 metres (5.5 feet).

Two other countries with a particular problem are Malta, where 29.8 percent of the population is obese, and Britain, where the figure is 27.8 percent.

The report also notes Europe has some of the highest rates of smoking and alcohol consumption in the world.

Some 29 percent of people over the age of 15 smoke, compared with 16.9 percent in the Americas region and 24.8 percent in southeast Asia.

The smokers' figure rises to 43.4 percent in Greece, 39.5 percent in Russia and 28.1 percent in France, according to WHO figures from 2013.

However, the proportion of daily smokers across all the countries has dropped, from 28.1 percent in 2002 to 24.4 percent in 2014.

Alcohol consumption has fallen from the highs of the 1990s and 2000s, but at 8.6 litres per person in 2014, Europeans still drink more than other regions.

"While alcohol use is declining overall, adult consumption is still the highest in the world," the report noted.

Among European Union nations in 2014, Lithuania had the highest average [alcohol consumption](#) at 15.2 litres per person, followed by the Czech Republic (12.7) and Belgium (12.6).

Cancer deaths fall

Premature deaths from cancer, diabetes, respiratory and cardio-vascular illnesses are falling, and the region is on course to reach its objective of a 1.5 percent annual reduction up to 2020.

Such deaths fell by nine percent between 2010 and 2015, down to 715 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants.

This is despite a growing number of cases—in the EU, new cancer diagnoses increased by five percent between 2010 and 2014, to 569 cases per 100,000 people.

Total average health spending across the region meanwhile remained "almost unchanged" at 8.2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2014 compared with 2010.

But there are wide variations in health coverage.

In 2014, private household payments represented 16.7 percent of total health spending in the EU, compared with 45.8 percent in Russia and 9.7 percent in Britain.

The report noted the growth in countries with strategies in place to reduce inequality, which have helped reduce infant mortality and vaccine coverage.

However, the WHO warned there was more to do on measles vaccinations in certain countries, including Ukraine and Montenegro.

In the UN health agency's report, which is published every three years, it added a subjective factor—life satisfaction.

Asked how satisfied people were with life these days, the average across the region reported 5.9 out of 10.

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