Life Expectancy

By: Saloni Dattani, Lucas Rodés-Guirao, Hannah Ritchie, Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Max Roser

Across the world, people are living longer.

In 1900, the average life expectancy of a newborn was 32 years. By 2021 this had more than doubled to 71 years.

But where, when, how, and why has this dramatic change occurred?

To understand it, we can look at data on life expectancy worldwide.

The large reduction in child mortality has played an important role in increasing life expectancy. But life expectancy has increased at all ages. Infants, children, adults, and the elderly are all less likely to die than in the past, and death is being delayed.

This remarkable shift results from advances in medicine, public health, and living standards. Along with it, many predictions of the 'limit' of life expectancy have been broken.

On this page, you will find global data and research on life expectancy and related measures of longevity: the probability of death at a given age, the sex gap in life expectancy, lifespan inequality within countries, and more.

Key Insights on Life Expectancy

Life expectancy has increased across the world

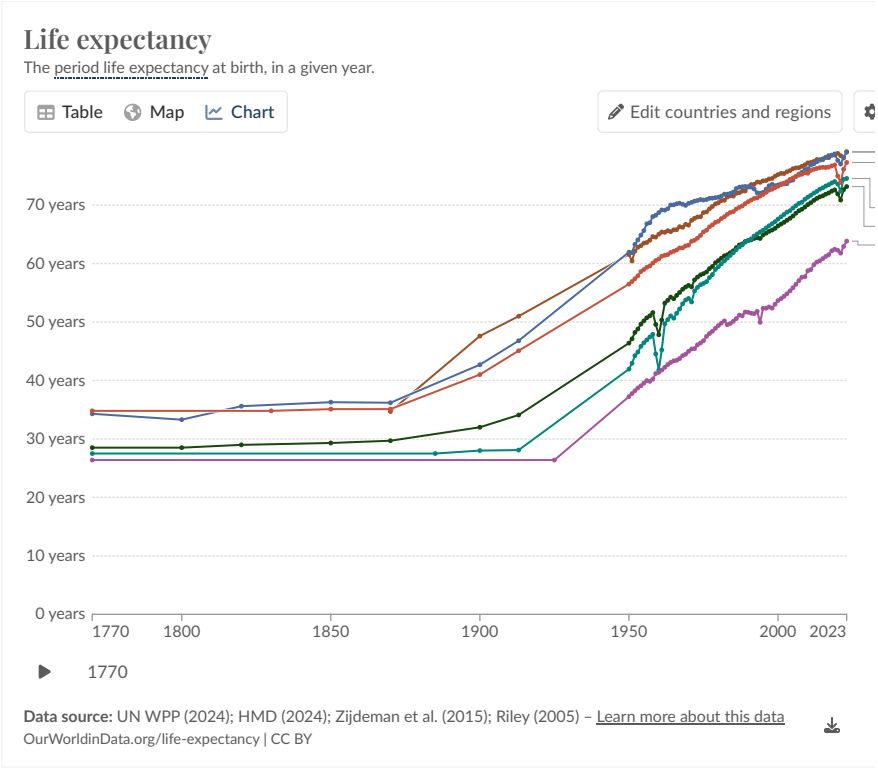
There are wide differences in life expectancy around the world

Life expectancy has increased at all ages

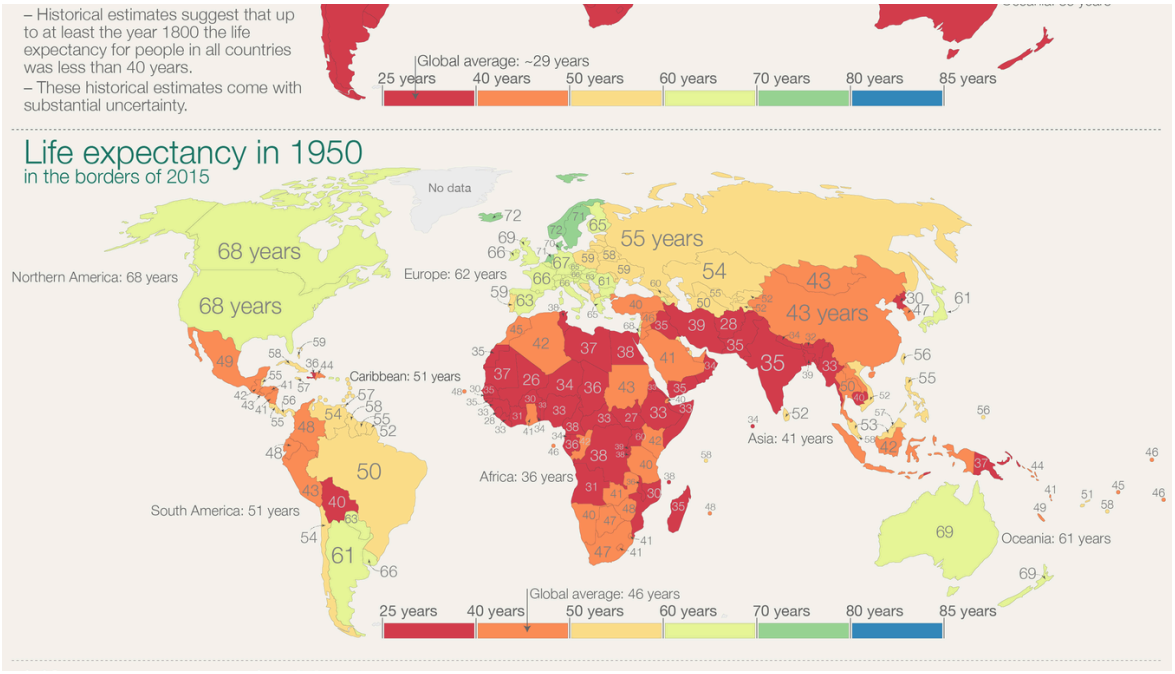
Women tend to live longer than men, but this gap has changed over time

Life
sur
and

- Period life expectancy is a metric that summarizes death rates across all age groups in one particular year.
- For a given year, it represents the average lifespan for a hypothetical group of people, if they experienced the same age-specific death rates throughout their whole lives as the age-specific death rates seen in that particular year.
- This data is compiled from three sources: the United Nations' World Population Prospects (UN WPP), Zijdeman et al. (2015)[2], and Riley (2005)[3]. For data points before 1950, we use Human Mortality Database data[4] combined with Zijdeman (2015). From 1950 onwards, we use UN WPP data. For pre-1950 data on world regions and the world as a whole, we use estimates from Riley (2005).
- Riley (2005)[3] compiles life expectancy estimates from hundreds of historical sources and calculates the average of estimates that met an acceptable quality threshold, such as having estimates for entire nations or regions. Less historical data is available from the pre-health transition period in countries – this is especially the case for Africa, Asia, Oceania,

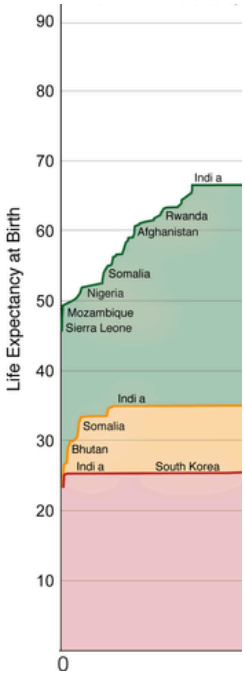


Research & Writing



Twice as long – life expectancy around the world

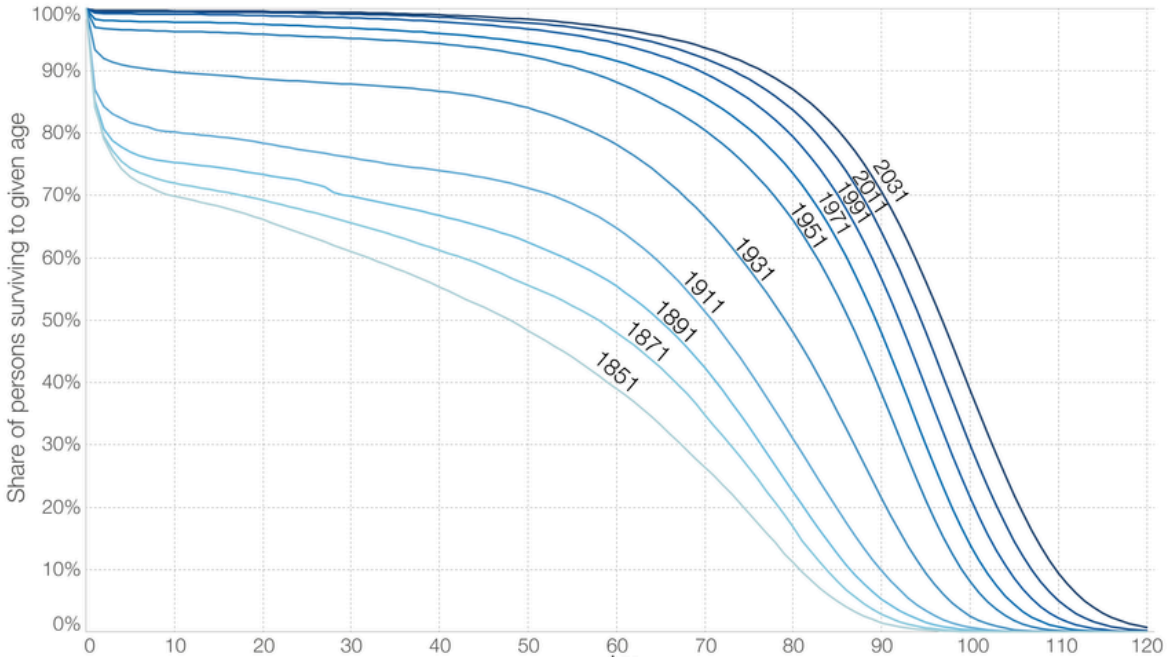
Max Roser



Life expectancy increase

Max Roser

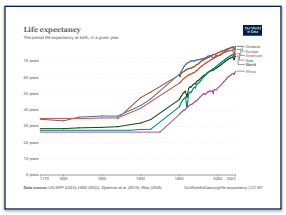
More articles on life expectancy



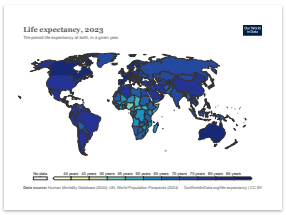
"Life Expectancy" – What does this actually mean?
Esteban Ortiz-Ospina

The rise of maximum life
Max Roser

Interactive Charts on Life Expectancy



Life expectancy over the long-run



Life expectancy HMD, UN WPP

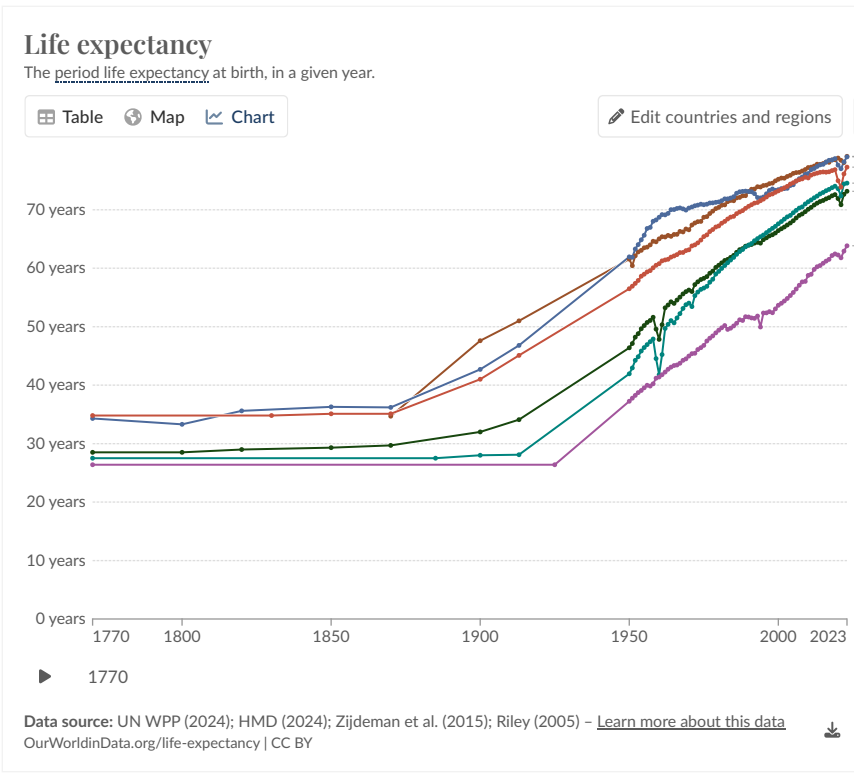


Chart 1 of 44

ENDNOTES

1. As you can see, the chart also shows that the rise has not been completely constant. Major events – the World Wars, the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and the COVID-19 pandemic – have had a major impact on mortality rates and left a visible mark on life expectancy.

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