

HEALTH STATUS

Improvements in health status have not been equally shared by all. Inequalities in health status within each country exist along many dimensions including age, gender, race or ethnic group, geographic area and socioeconomic status.

Definition

Inequalities in health status are defined as differences in mortality and in perceived health status between different socio-economic groups. Mortality is measured as numbers of deaths per 100 000 resident population. Perceived health status is measured based on people's perception of their health as determined through surveys. Socioeconomic status refers to an individual's position in society, and is measured in terms of income, education, occupation, or by combining these and other measures.

Inequalities in mortality rates by education are measured by the ratio of the mortality rate of less educated people to that of better educated ones (higher values denoting greater inequalities). Inequalities in perceived health status are measured by the difference in the share of respondents reporting poor health among people with lower socioeconomic status compared with those with higher status. The data, limited to European countries, refer to people rating their health as "bad or very bad" classified by income quintiles.

Overview

People with lower education or income, or from a less prestigious occupational group tend to have a higher prevalence of health problems and also die at younger ages. This pattern is confirmed by both inequalities in mortality rates and in perceived health.

Death rates among less educated European men are around 50% higher than those of more educated men; the gap is around 30% among women. Smaller-than-average inequalities are found in Italy and Spain, and larger inequalities in Poland and Hungary. Similar mortality inequalities are reported by studies undertaken in Korea and the United States.

People's perception of their own health also varies by socioeconomic status, with people with lower income or less education reporting poorer health. In European countries, inequalities between low and high income groups are high in Belgium, Iceland, Ireland and the United Kingdom, although in the latter three countries, the proportion of persons reporting poorer health is low.

The situation is similar in non-European countries. National data, reviewed in de Looper and Lafortune (2009), highlight a consistent pattern of poorer self-rated health among people with lower education (Canada, Japan and Korea), lower income (United States) and greater disadvantage (Australia and New Zealand).

Comparability

Good comparative measures of inequalities in health status do not currently exist, and the indicators presented here are based on information collected by the OECD from national sources and comparative studies. Estimates of mortality rates by education are based on studies undertaken in different years and covering people whose age and educational attainment may differ across countries. Estimates of inequalities in perceived health status may reflect the use of different survey questions and response categories, as well as cultural variations in interpreting "bad health".

Mortality rates for the United Kingdom refer to England and Wales. Data refer to 1991-1996 for England and Wales, and Italy; 1992-1996 for Spain; 1991-1995 for Belgium, Denmark, Finland and Switzerland; 1990-1994 for France; 1990-1995 for Norway; 1991-1992 for Austria; 1991-1997 for the Netherlands; 1988-1989 for Poland; 2002 for Hungary; and end-of-1990s for the Czech Republic.

Sources

- European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC).
- De Looper, M. and G. Lafortune (2009), *Measuring disparities in health status and in health care access and use*, OECD Health Working Papers No. 43, OECD, Paris.

Further information

Analytical publications

- CSDH (2008), "Closing the gap: health action through the social determinants of health", *Final Report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health*, World Health Organisation, Geneva.
- Mackenbach, J.P. et al. (2008), "Socioeconomic inequalities in health in 22 European countries", *New England Journal of Medicine* 358: 2468-81.

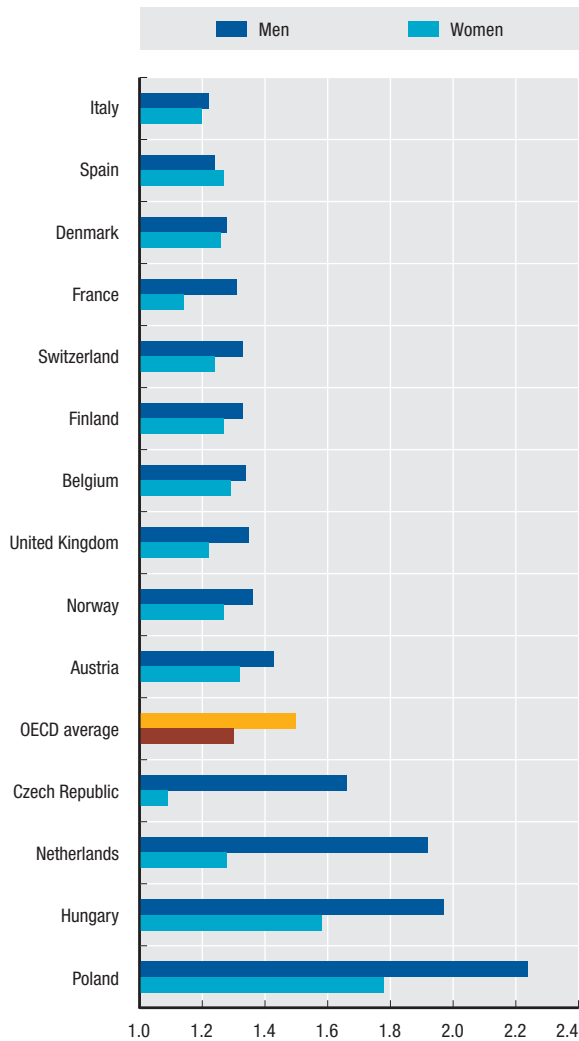
Websites

- Commission on the Social Determinants of Health, www.who.int/social_determinants.
- DETERMINE, European Portal for Action on Health Equity, www.health-inequalities.eu.



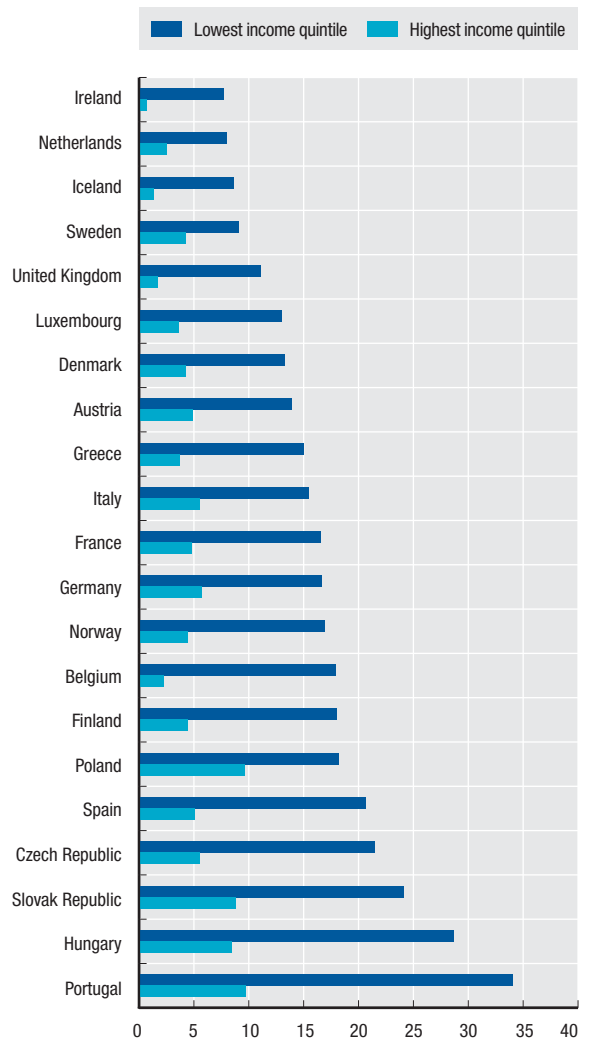
Total mortality rates of less educated people relative to more educated people

Ratio of the mortality rates between less and more educated people, 1995 or latest available year

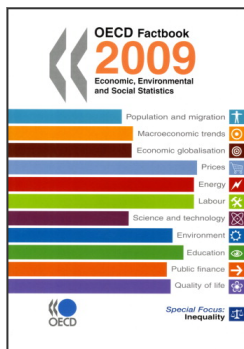


Persons rating their health as "bad or very bad" by income

As a percentage of adults, 2006



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/540255836046>



From:
OECD Factbook 2009
Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/factbook-2009-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2009), "Health status", in *OECD Factbook 2009: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/factbook-2009-107-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to rights@oecd.org. Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at info@copyright.com or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at contact@cfcopies.com.