

 Mortality and Longevity

 Aging and Retirement

# Demographic Perspectives on the Rise of Longevity





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## Abstract

This article summarizes the findings of the most significant demographic publications on human longevity and explores possible future trends in life expectancy at birth. Demographic data on age-specific mortality are used to estimate life expectancy, and validated data on exceptional lifespans are used to study the maximum length of life. In the countries doing best each year, life expectancy started to increase around 1840 at a pace of almost 2.5 years per decade. This trend has continued until the present. Contrary to classical evolutionary theories of senescence and contrary to the predictions of many experts, the frontier of survival is advancing to higher ages. Furthermore, individual lifespans are becoming more equal, reducing inequalities, with octogenarians and nonagenarians accounting for most deaths in countries with high life expectancy. If the current pace of progress in life expectancy continues, most children born this millennium will celebrate their 100<sup>th</sup> birthdays. Considerable uncertainty, however, clouds forecasts of life expectancy and maximum lifespans: life expectancy and maximum lifespan might increase very little if at all or longevity might rise much faster than in the past. Substantial progress has been made over the past three decades in deepening understanding of how long humans have lived and how long they might live. The social, economic, health, cultural and political consequences of further increases in longevity are so significant that the development of more powerful methods of forecasting is a priority.

**Key words:** Forecasts, Life expectancy, Lifespan equality, Maximum lifespan, Mortality

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