

## Living to old age: A new world norm

*1. Old-age deaths accounted for half of all deaths worldwide in 2005-2010, marking a significant milestone of socioeconomic development.*

Everyone aspires to live to old age but until recently fewer than half of all people born in the world survived to their 65th birthday. However, the most recent revision of World Population Prospects<sup>1</sup> reveals that the world recently passed a significant milestone: due to improvements in life-expectancy over the last fifty years, the percentage of deaths occurring in old-age, defined as the number of deaths at age 65 and older per 100 total deaths at all ages, increased 28 percentage points: from 22 per cent in 1950-1955 to fifty per cent in 2005-2010 worldwide.

*2. The increase in the percentage of old-age deaths reflects significant progress in both more and less developed regions*

The biggest increase in the percentage of old-age deaths occurred in the less developed regions, and the smallest in the least developed countries (Figure 1). Nevertheless all regions experienced significant increases, and the largest and smallest increases were about 30 and 10 percentage points, respectively.

*3. Worldwide the increase in the percentage of old-age deaths was due mainly to the reduction of child-age deaths.*

Dividing ages into child-age (0-4 years), mid-age (5-64), and old-age (65+), it shows that the percentage of mid-age deaths changed only 2 percentage points: from 38 per cent in 1950-1955 to 36 per cent in 2005-2010 (Figure 2). In other words, among the 28 percentage point increase in Figure 1, 26 was attributed to the decline of child-age deaths. The main cause of child-age death is communicable diseases; and reducing child mortality is the fourth target of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

Figure 1. Increase of the percentage of old-age death by development group, 1950-2010

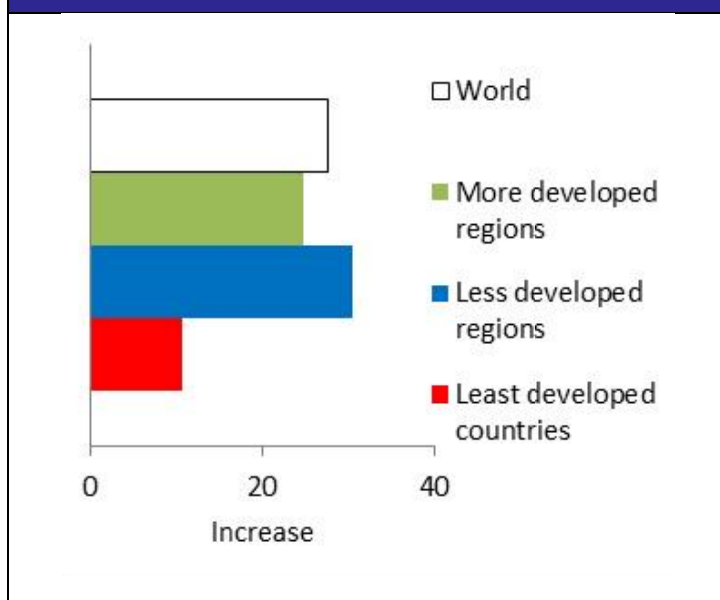
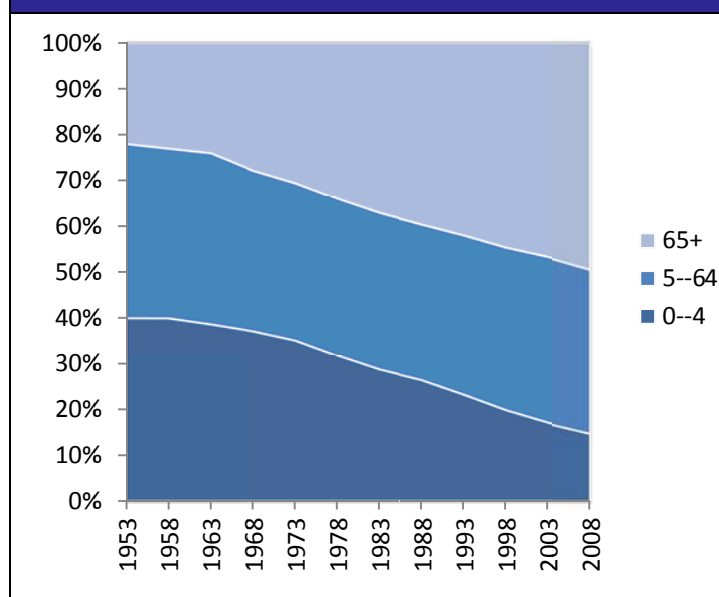
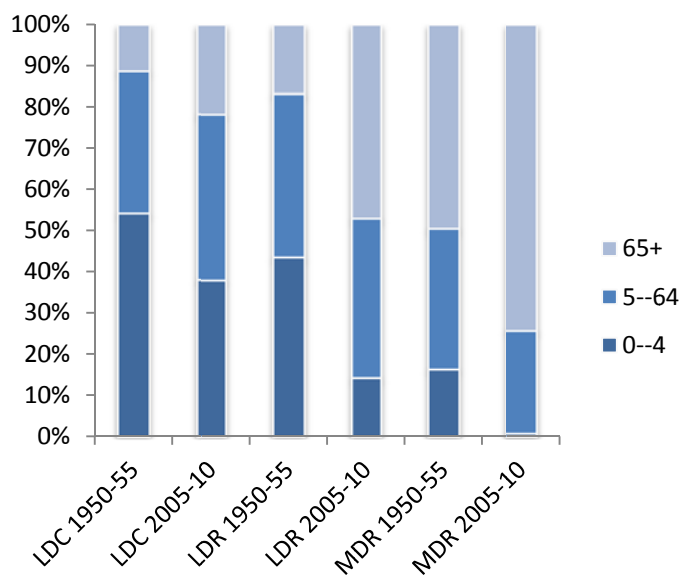


Figure 2. Percentage of deaths at child-age (0-4), mid-age (5-64) and old-age (65+) of the world



4. The main reason of the increase in the percentage of old-age deaths, for the less developed regions (LDR), was also the decline of child-age deaths, which is similar to that of the world. But the main reason was different for the least developed countries (LDC) and the more developed regions (MDR) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Percentage of deaths of the least developed countries (LDC), less developed regions (LDR), and more developed regions (MDR)



For the least developed countries (LDC), the percentage of mid-age deaths increased notably: from 34 per cent in 1950-1955 to 40 per cent in 2005-2010. The main cause of the increase was the prevalence of HIV/AIDS.

For the more developed regions (MDR), the percentage of mid-age deaths declined notably: from 34 per cent in 1950-1955 to 25 per cent in 2005-2010. The main cause of the decrease of the percentage of mid-age deaths was the reduction of non-communicable diseases. Moreover, the percentage of child-age deaths reached the level of lower than 1 per cent in 2005-2010.

5. Although the percentage of old-age deaths reached 50 per cent in 2005-2010 worldwide, it differs remarkably between countries (Figure 4).

In 2005-2010, the three countries with the highest percentages were Italy (86%), Sweden (86%), and Greece (85%); while the three nations with the lowest percentages were the Democratic Republic of the Congo (13%), Chad (12%), and Angola (11%).

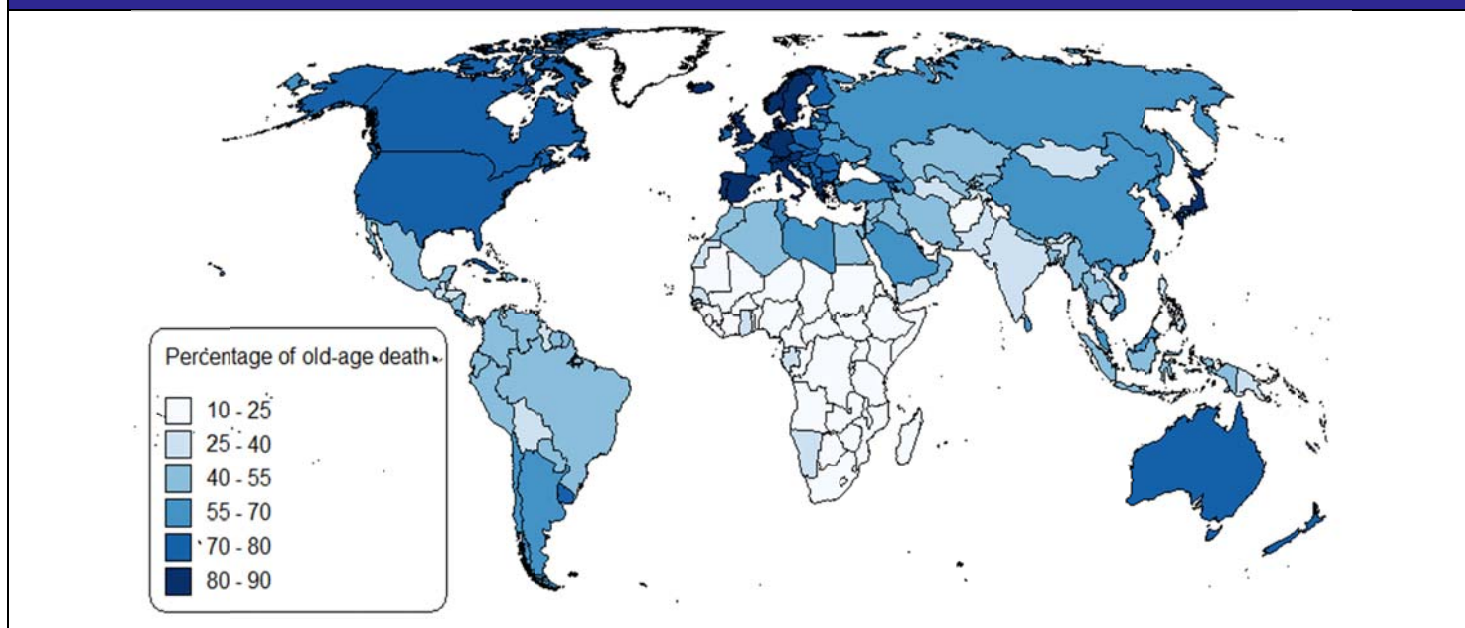
6. Although old-age deaths reached half of all deaths worldwide, their estimates are less accurate than the estimates of deaths at other ages.

More specifically, reliable old-age death rates are annually available only for more developed nations and some developing countries with accurate vital registration and census. For some developing countries, old-age death rates may be obtained in scattered years when reliable censuses were conducted. For the rest of the world, only infant and child death rates, and sometimes adult death rates as well, could be estimated from sample surveys; and old-age death rates are then inferred using model life tables.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Source of data: United Nations (2013). *World Population Prospects 2012 revision* (available from [www.unpopulation.org](http://www.unpopulation.org)).

Figure 4. Percentage of old-age deaths by country, 2005-2010



Note: The boundaries on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.