

Trends in life expectancy (LE) in good and bad perceived health in Austria, 1981-2014, total LE and LE by highest educational attainment based on microcensus and health interview survey (HIS) data

	Remaining life expectancy at age 65			Remaining life expectancy at age 65 by self-rated health						
	1981	2014	Change	Years in good health			Years in bad health			
				1981	2014	Change	1981	2014	Change	
Men										
Total	13.1	18.2	5.2	4.6	11.4	6.8	8.5	6.8	-1.6	
High education	15.0	20.5	5.5	7.8	15.1	7.3	7.2	5.4	-1.8	
Medium education	13.1	18.2	5.1	4.9	10.8	5.8	8.2	7.4	-0.8	
Low education	12.7	17.2	4.5	3.4	9.9	6.4	9.2	7.3	-1.9	
Women										
Total	16.4	21.5	5.1	4.3	11.3	7.1	12.2	10.2	-2.0	
High education	18.1	22.9	4.8	7.9	14.7	6.8	10.3	8.2	-2.1	
Medium education	17.4	21.8	4.5	5.4	14.1	8.7	12.0	7.8	-4.2	
Low education	16.2	21.1	4.9	3.7	8.5	4.7	12.4	12.6	0.2	

S: Statistics Austria, Micro Census 1978/1983, Health Interview Survey 2014. "In good health" comprises very good or good perceived health. "In bad health" comprises fair, bad or very bad perceived health.

Key points:

In Austria, the survival chances of the population at retirement age improved markedly in the past decades: In 1981, the remaining life expectancy for men at age 65 was 13.1 years. In 2014, it had already risen to 18.2 years, i.e. increased by 5.2 years. The remaining life expectancy for women grew by 5.1 years, from 16.4 years in 1981 to 21.5 years in 2006.

Information on the Austrian population's self-rated health status has been collected in national surveys (microcensus, HIS) for quite some time. The five survey categories (very good – good – fair – bad – very bad) were merged into two groups: 'good perceived health' (very good, good) and 'bad perceived health' (fair, bad, very bad).

According to these data, Austrian men aged 65 in 1981 spent 4.6 of their remaining 13.1 years of life in good perceived health and the other 8.5 years in bad perceived health, while women of the same age spent 4.3 of their remaining 16.4 years in good perceived health and 12.2 years in bad perceived health. Until 2014, increases in the remaining life expectancy were virtually always linked with more life-time spent in good self-rated health for both sexes: i.e. 6.8 more healthy life years (HLY) for men and 7.1 more HLY for women. As a result, the proportion of healthy life years in the remaining life expectancy at age 65 increased from 35% to 63% for men and from 26% to 53% for women in the period from 1981 to 2014.

The past years have witnessed a rising awareness of the social distribution of health. The available data facilitate an analysis of the remaining life expectancy at age 65 by highest educational attainment and self-rated health in 1981 and 2014. The results are presented for three summarised levels of education, i.e. high (higher secondary or tertiary education), medium (apprenticeship, vocational schooling) and low (compulsory) education. Education-specific life tables were obtained by linkage of death certificates with individual census records.

The increase in life expectancy at age 65 was very similar in all educational groups: In the period 1981-2014, the gains ranged from 4.5 years to 5.5 years among men and from 4.5 years to 4.9 years among women. This shows that in Austria all educational groups benefited equally from the mortality decline in the elderly population.

The picture is somewhat more differentiated when looking at the remaining years of life spent in good health. The increases are strongest for women with medium education (up by 8.7 years) and weakest for women with low education (up by 4.7 years). Among men, educational differences in change are smaller.