

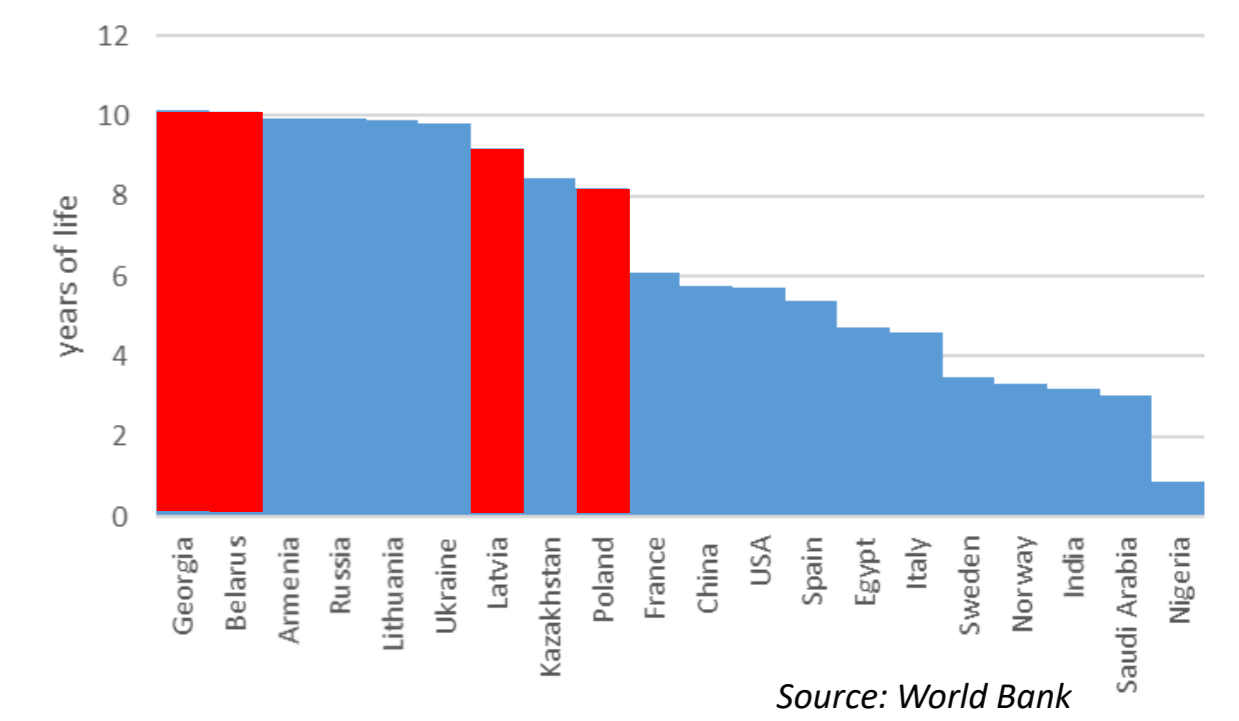
Gender Gap in Life Expectancy: Insights from Eastern Europe

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INTRODUCTION

- Today, women on average live longer than men in every country of the world. The gender gap in life expectancy (GGLE) varies a lot across countries (as well as over time) and scientists have only a limited understanding of the causes of this variation.
- This discrepancy has important implications. Abnormal male mortality makes a dent in the labor force and might contribute to divergence in male and female discount factors with impact on employment and pension savings. It translates into a higher incidence of widowhood and a longer time in which women live as widows.
- It is one of the less frequently discussed dimensions of gender inequality, and while it measures arguably the most important disadvantage with negative implications for men, lower male longevity has substantial negative consequences also for women and the society as a whole.
- GGLE appears to be a complex phenomenon with no single factor able to fully explain it. The observed high variation in the longevity gap across countries, however, points towards an important role of social and behavioral arguments.

Gender gap in life expectancy (GGLE) in selected countries



Source: World Bank

INSIGHTS FROM SELECTED COUNTRIES

BELARUS

Life expectancy in Belarus

	Men, years	Women, years
Life expectancy at birth (2021)	67.3	77.7
Healthy life expectancy at birth (2019)	62.3	69.4

Source: World Health Organization, Belta

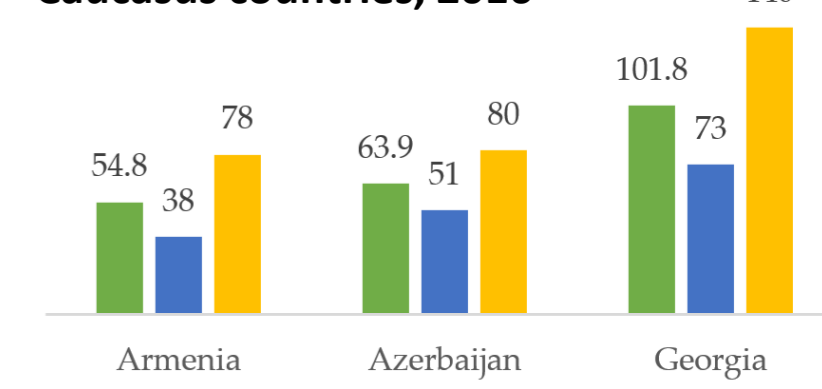
- Biological differences between men and women play a role in GGLE: while women become sick more often, their probability of contracting fatal diseases is lower.

- Belarusian women live more years than men in poorer health, but the average male life ends at an age when women only begin to experience significant health issues.
- Social and behavioral factors also contribute to GGLE: men more often take up addictions or engage in unhealthy lifestyle.
- Levels of alcohol and cigarette consumption among Belarusians heavily surpass the European average. 47.4% of Belarusian men smoke, while only 29.3% of men smoke on average in Europe.
- 35% of men and only 7% of women in Belarus reported heavy episodic drinking.

GEORGIA

- Georgia has the highest gender gap in mortality among the South Caucasus countries attributed to household and ambient air pollution.
- It is also much higher than the world average. Polluted environment is, undoubtedly, a significant contributor to life expectancy.
- Approx. 82% of Georgia's total particulate matter (PM) emissions originate from the industry and energy sectors.
- Agriculture accounted for 86% of ammonia emissions, while industry contributed to 95% of sulfur oxide emissions.
- These sectors are primarily dominated by men who constituted 63% of employed in agriculture, 70% of employed in industry, and 96% of employed in the construction sector.

Mortality rate attributed to household and ambient air pollution in South Caucasus countries, 2016

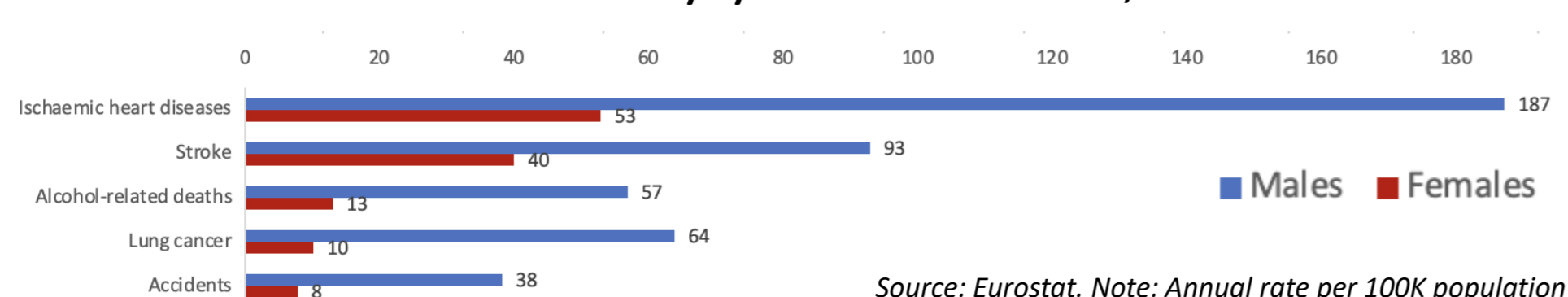


Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators
Notes: Age-standardized, per 100K population

LATVIA

- As opposed to non-preventable deaths that occur due to natural causes, avoidable mortality can be affected by health system interventions and human behaviour.
- Latvian men stand out by having more than two times higher avoidable death rate as compared to the EU average (761 compared to 333 persons per 100k).
- Gender differences in causes of avoidable mortality point toward important differences in behaviour. Male mortality is:
 - four times higher for deaths from ischemic heart diseases or alcohol-related ones;
 - six times higher from lung cancer;
 - five times higher for deaths in accidents.

Avoidable mortality by cause and sex in Latvia, 2019

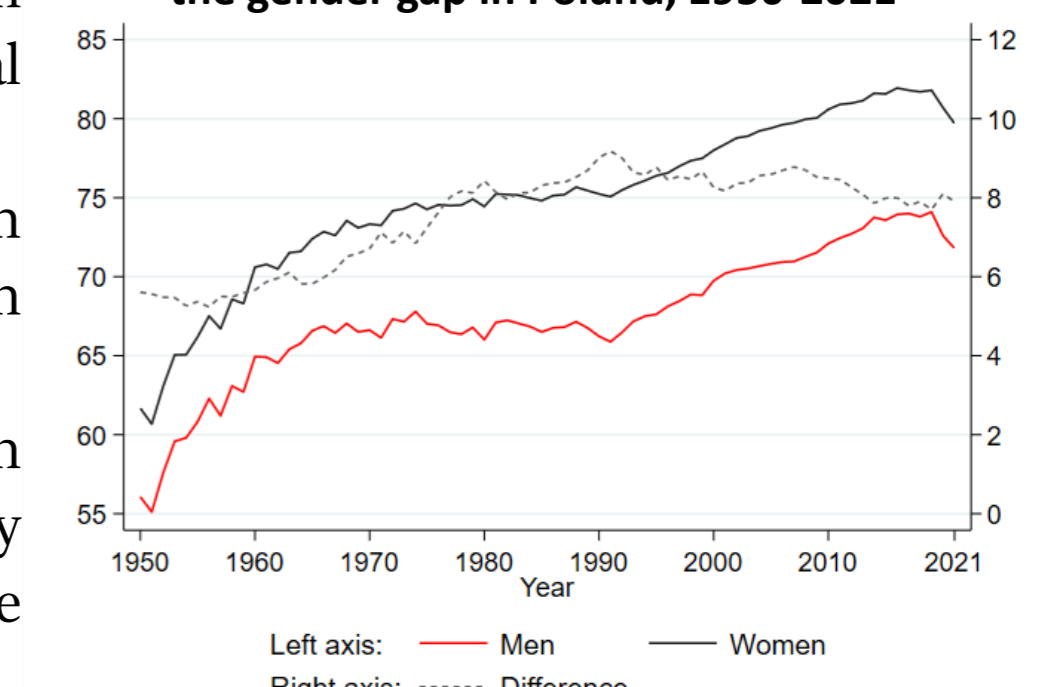


Source: Eurostat. Note: Annual rate per 100K population

POLAND

- The long-term time trend in longevity in Poland is related to historical developments.
- Since the 1950s both men and women experienced important improvements in life duration.
- The dynamic of increases flattened in the 1960s. For men life expectancy stayed flat until the very end of the communist era.
- Women's advantage over men grew to over 8 years.
- The years of the transformation contributed to further growth of the gap.
- The GGLE in Poland is not only wider than the EU average (equal to 5.5 years), but also other countries with the communist past (6 years in Czech Republic).

Female and male life expectancy at birth and the gender gap in Poland, 1950-2021



Source: Central Statistical Office Poland

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Considerable gains in life expectancy could be achieved with policies to promote healthy behaviours: reduction of alcohol and tobacco use, encouragement of physical activity and healthy eating habits.
- Substantial country differences in the contribution of smoking and excessive alcohol consumption to GGLE might indicate that gender differences may be amplified by gender roles accepted in a given society. A broader societal change away from the traditional gender norms and stereotypes is needed.
- Awareness campaigns should be targeted at the gender gap in healthcare utilization and at consequences of risk-taking activities or addictions. The Internet opened up new possibilities for inexpensive, more cost-efficient, better designed intervention programs.
- Compulsory regular occupational health screenings for employees (followed by extensive medical tests and required visits with specialists) could be an effective way to at least fill in the awareness gap in terms of the state of health between men and women.

