

## Measuring healthy life expectancy

The World Health Organization publishes data on healthy life expectancy as well as total life expectancy in its annual *World Health Report*. Healthy life expectancy reflects years lived in full health. It is calculated by adjusting total life expectancy for years lived in less than full health as a result of diseases and injuries (Mathers and others 2001). Estimates of healthy life expectancy are based on an analysis of mortality in 191 countries and disability from 135 causes in 17 world regions and on analyses of 69 health surveys in 60 countries using new methods to improve the comparability of self-reported data. These estimates are more uncertain than those for total life expectancy, mainly because of data limitations and difficulties in producing comparable measures of disability across countries.

Healthy life expectancy at birth ranges from a low of 39 years in Sub-Saharan Africa to 66 years in developed countries, with a global average in 2000 of 56 years (see table). In Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union it declined from 62 years to 58 between 1990 and 2000, reflecting worsening adult health. In Sub-Saharan Africa it declined from 42 years to 39 in the same period, reflecting the effect of HIV/AIDS. Without HIV/AIDS, healthy life expectancy at birth in Sub-Saharan Africa would have been almost six years longer in 2000. If malaria and tuberculosis had also been eliminated, it would have been almost nine years longer.

Source: WHO 2003f.

While communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis continue to cause substantial loss of health and life in developing countries, particularly in Africa, non-communicable diseases and injuries account for more than half of all lost years of healthy life in both developing and developed countries.

### Healthy life expectancy at birth by region, 2000

Region	Years
Africa	41.4
Northern Africa	57.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	38.7
Asia <sup>a</sup>	55.5
Eastern Asia	60.9
South-Central Asia	51.8
South-Eastern Asia	55.8
Western Asia	50.8
Latin America and the Caribbean	58.0
Oceania <sup>b</sup>	49.6
Developing countries	53.6
Developed countries	66.1
World	56.0

a. Excludes Japan.

b. Excludes Australia and New Zealand.

Source: WHO 2002.