

Unlocking Potential – International Conference 2011

Surfing the Silver Wave – Ensuring Civic Engagement and Wellbeing in an Ageing Society

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Purpose

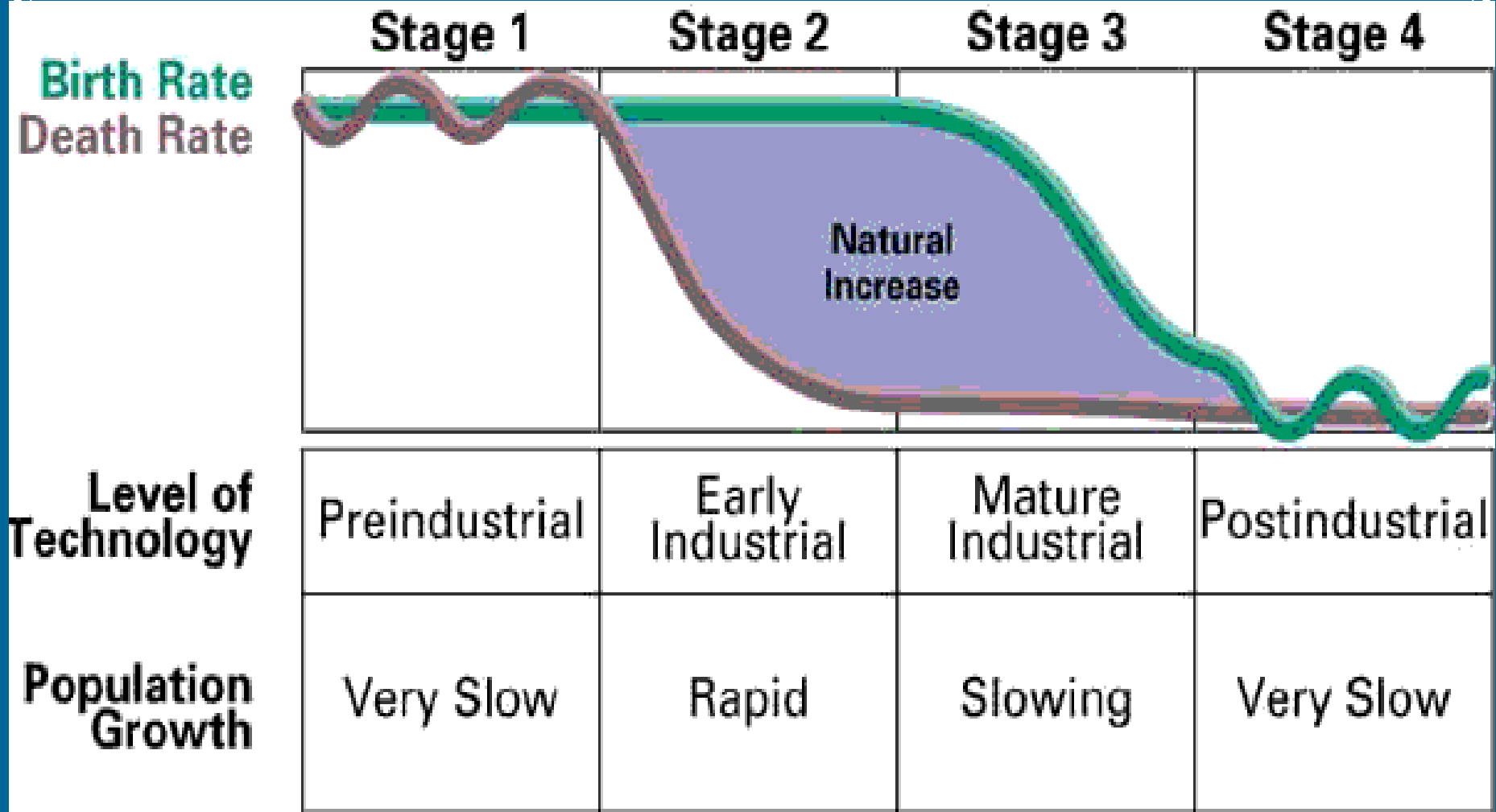
- 'give an overview of the demographic and social trends, challenges and opportunities offered by an ageing population from an all Ireland, European and International perspective'
- 'touch on some of the research that has explored impact of volunteering on health and wellbeing'

Outline

- Quick glance at those demographic projections we have all seen about 100 times...
- Why we must take social productivity, including volunteering, seriously
- Why more people must be enabled and motivated to volunteer

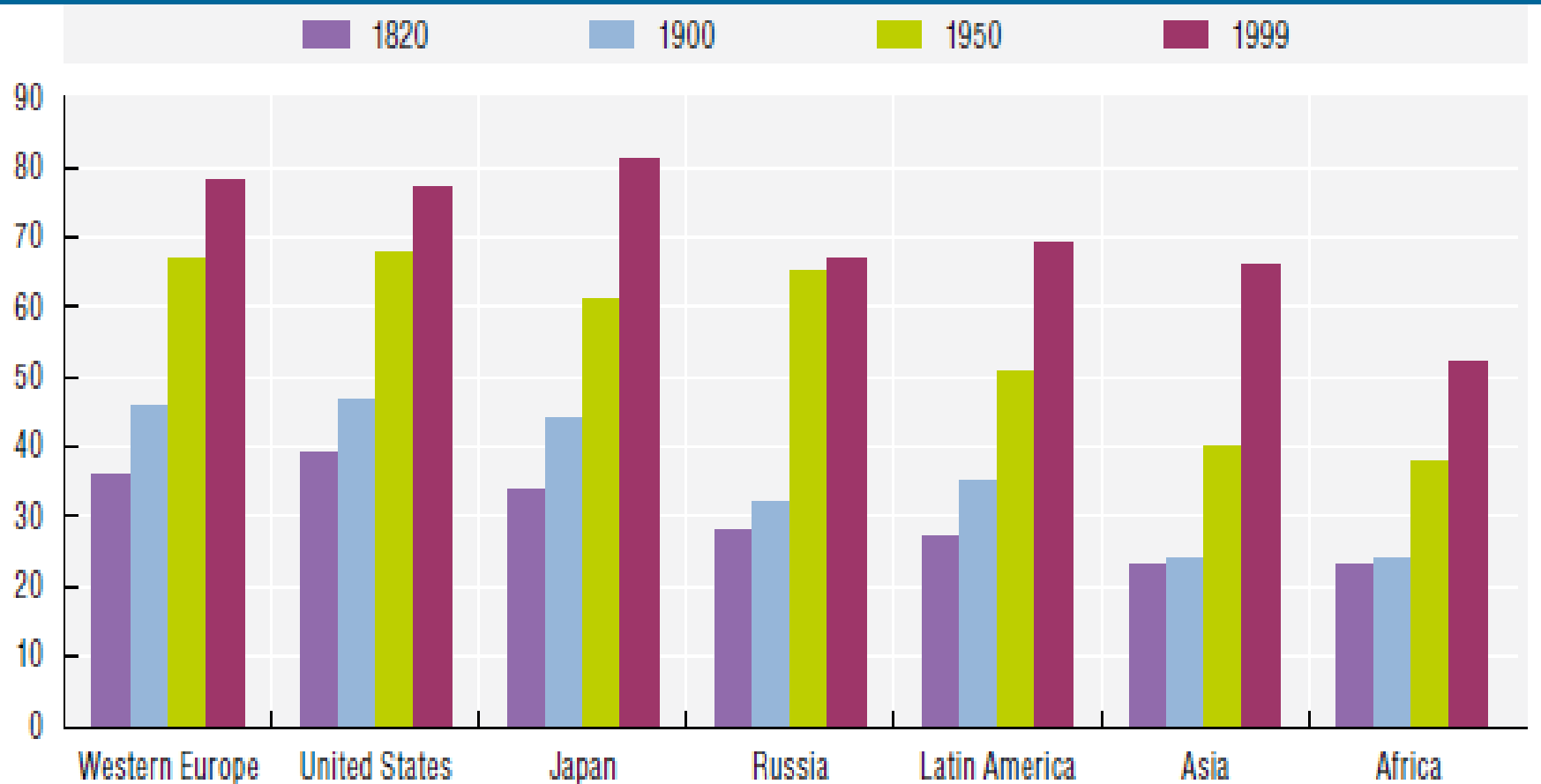
The Demographic Transition

(McCarthy 2009)



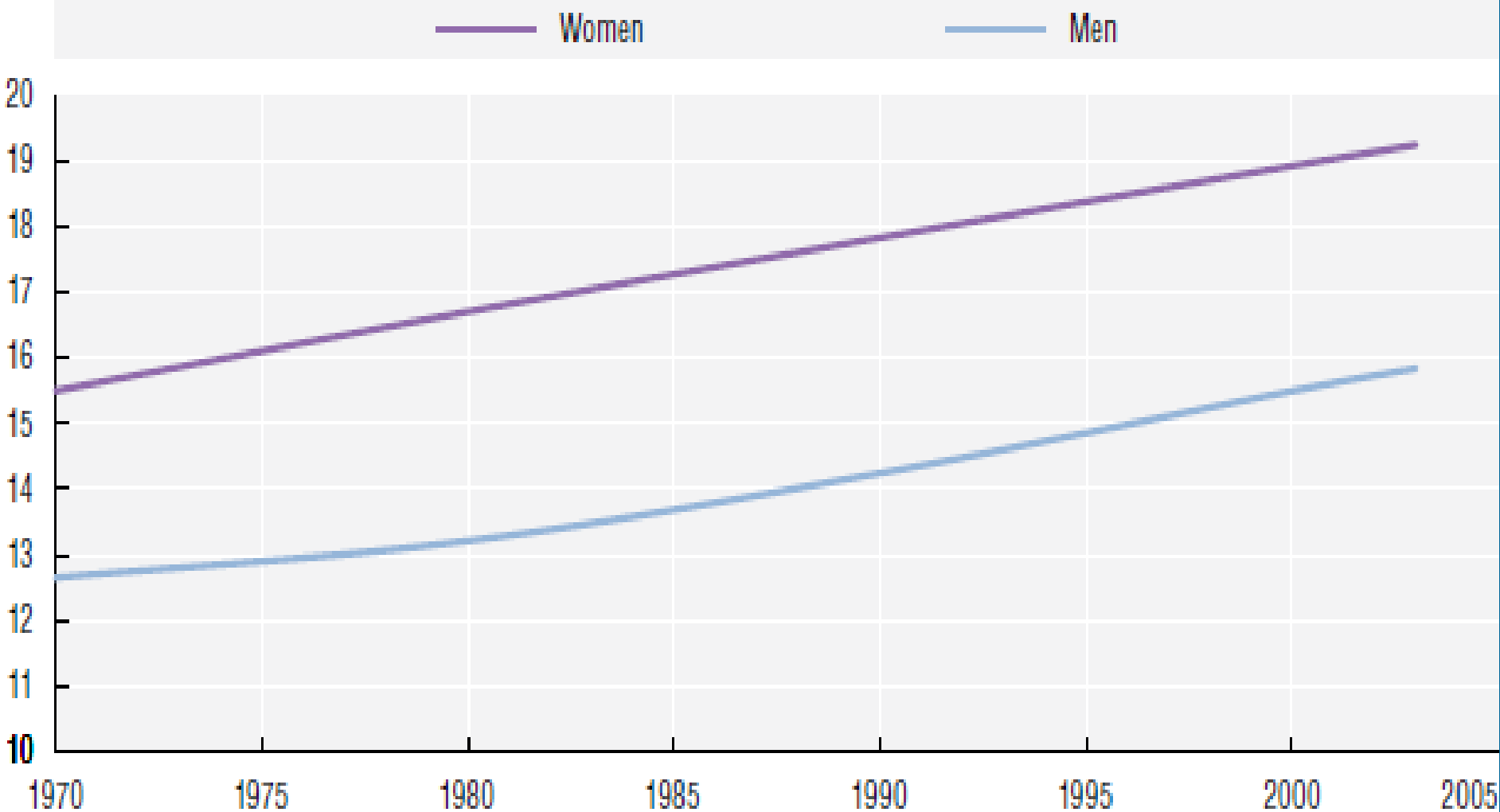
Life expectancy **at birth** – average for both sexes

(OECD 2008)

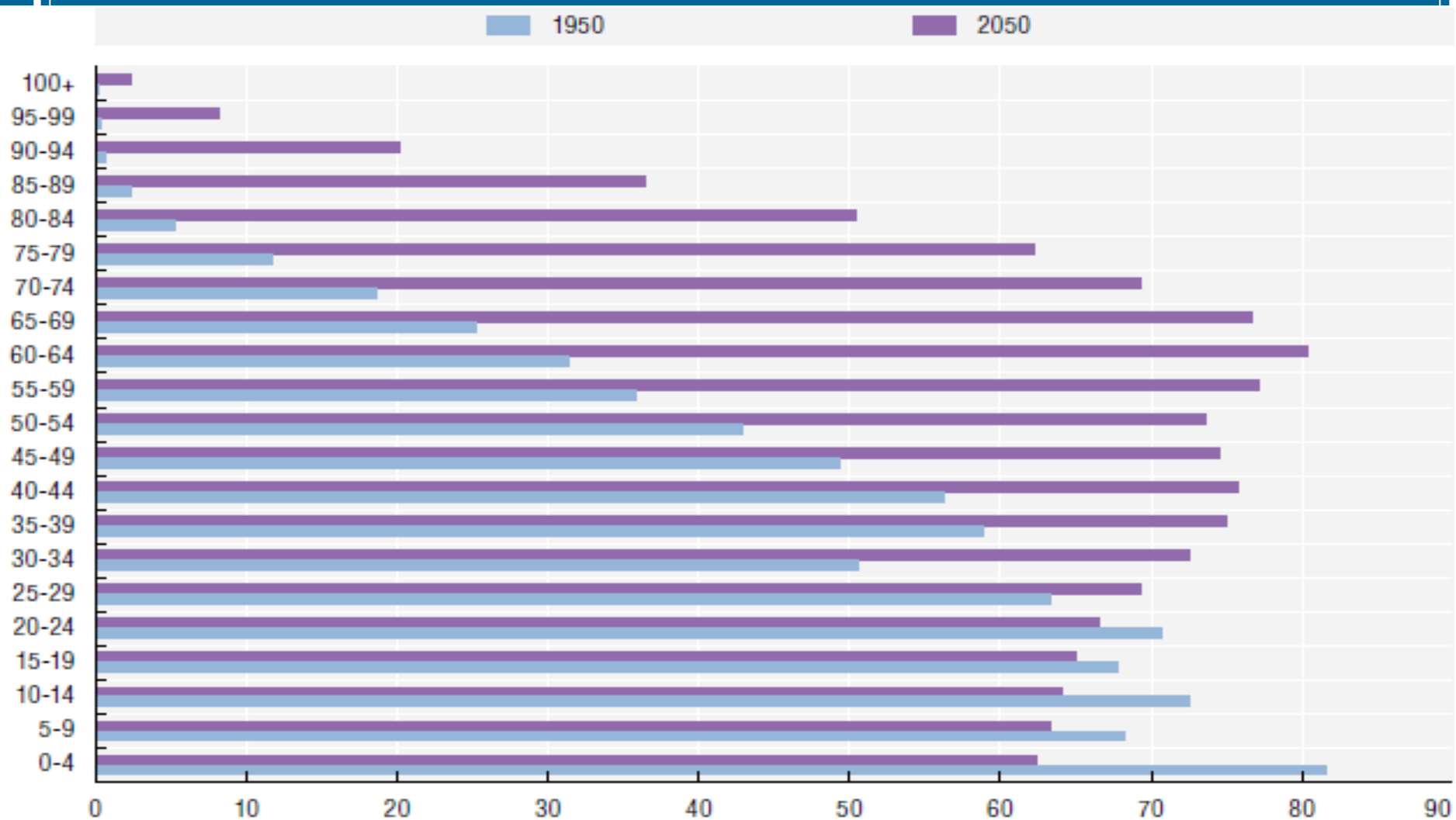


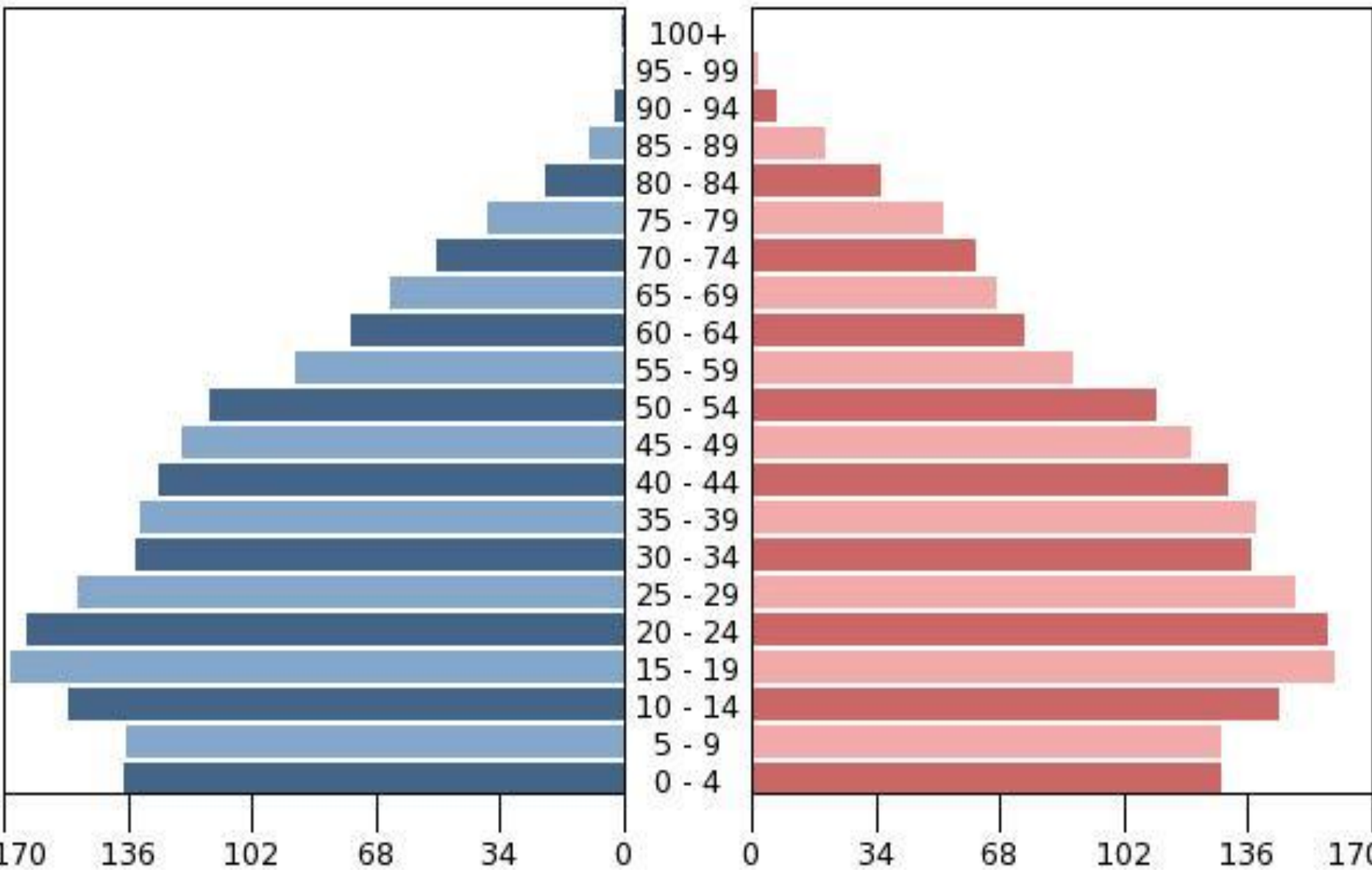
Average life expectancy **at 65** in the OECD

(OECD 2008)

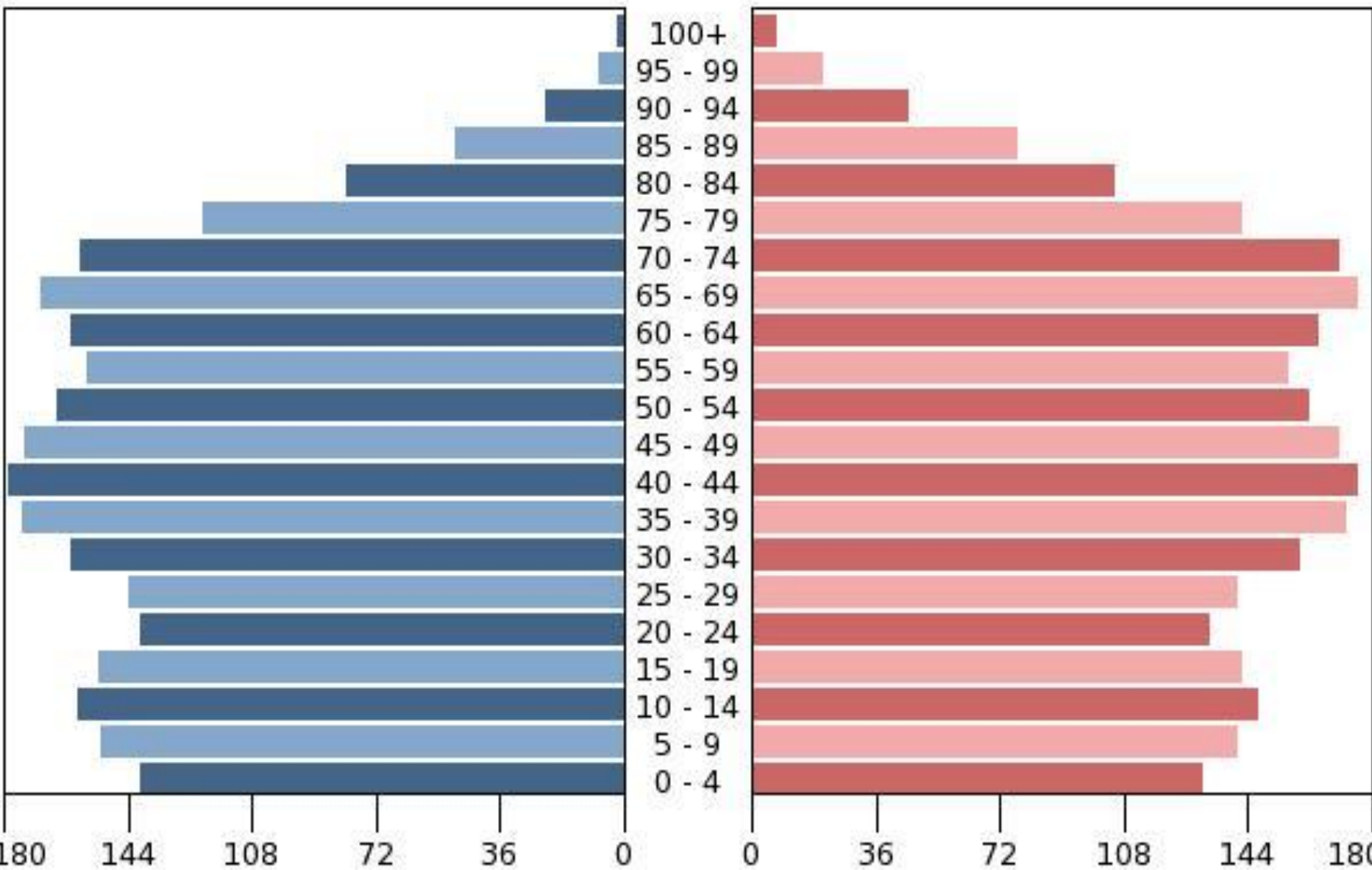


Age structure, millions of people by age bracket in Europe, N America, Japan, NZ & Australia





Population (in thousands)



Population (in thousands)

Rhetoric emphasises:

- 'active', 'positive', 'productive', 'successful' ageing (Rowe & Kahn 1997)
- Good health, active engagement with work & social participation
- (re-)engaging older people in the economic (labour market) sphere (when it suits the needs of the economy!)

Emphasising these notions tends to lead to:

→ ignoring / underestimating older people's role in the 'informal' spheres of family and community, where their work is unaccounted for in economic terms and usually remains hidden and unrecognized

Social Productivity Siegrist & Wahrendorf

All types of activities generating goods and services that are **socially and economically valued by recipients**:

- Paid work
- **Volunteering**
- Help for family, friends, neighbours
- Caring for a sick / disabled person

Social Productivity

- Extent of engagement in social productivity?
- Who volunteers and why?
- Is volunteering associated with wellbeing? (Self-assessed health, depressive symptoms, quality of life)
- If yes, to what extent is the association modified by the QUALITY of engagement (defined as experienced reciprocity / non-reciprocity)?

Social Productivity in Europe

Siegrist & Wahrendorf

- 10 % in voluntary work (more prevalent among men)
- 17 % informal help (more prevalent among women)
- 5 % informal care work (more prevalent among women)

North-South gradient in volunteering

Association between engagement & well-being

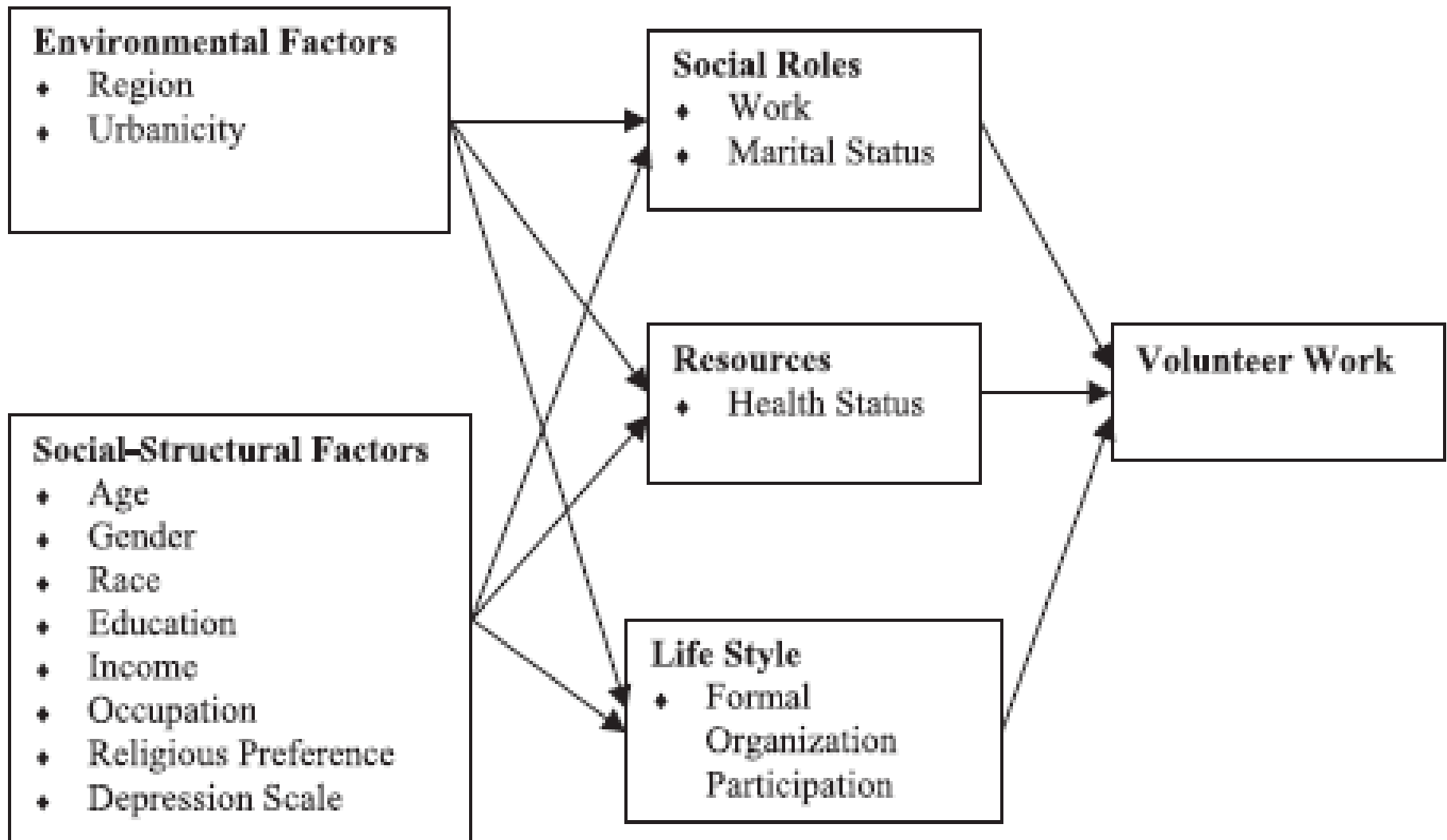
Older volunteers in Europe (Hank and Erlinghagen 2010)

- Societal context has a significant impact on prevalence of volunteering & on dynamics of volunteering
- Volunteering transitions affected by individual resources and changes in these



Both the individual life course AND context matter

Factors that affect volunteering (Choi 2003)



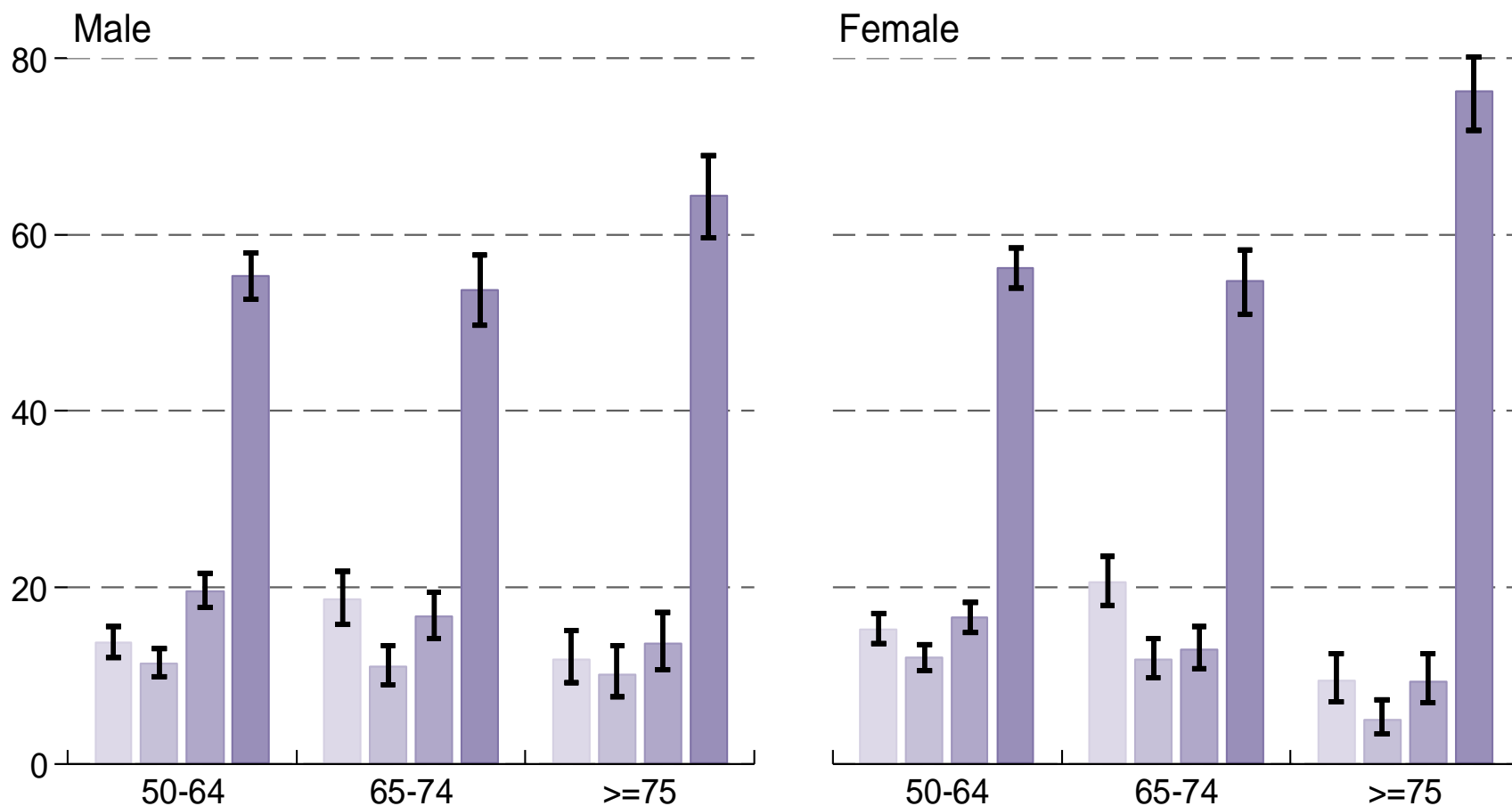
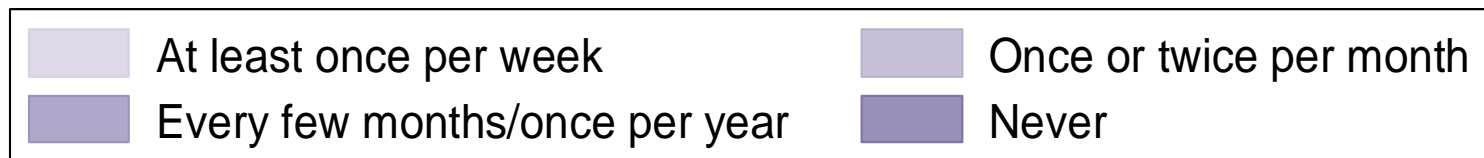
And what does volunteering 'do' to volunteers?

- Several studies have shown positive associations with wellbeing, life satisfaction, mental health, self-reported physical health (e.g. Wisconsin Longitudinal Study)

Hot off the press...

Information on volunteering in the Republic of Ireland from the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA)

- Survey data collected in 2009 - 2010
- Report forthcoming May 2011

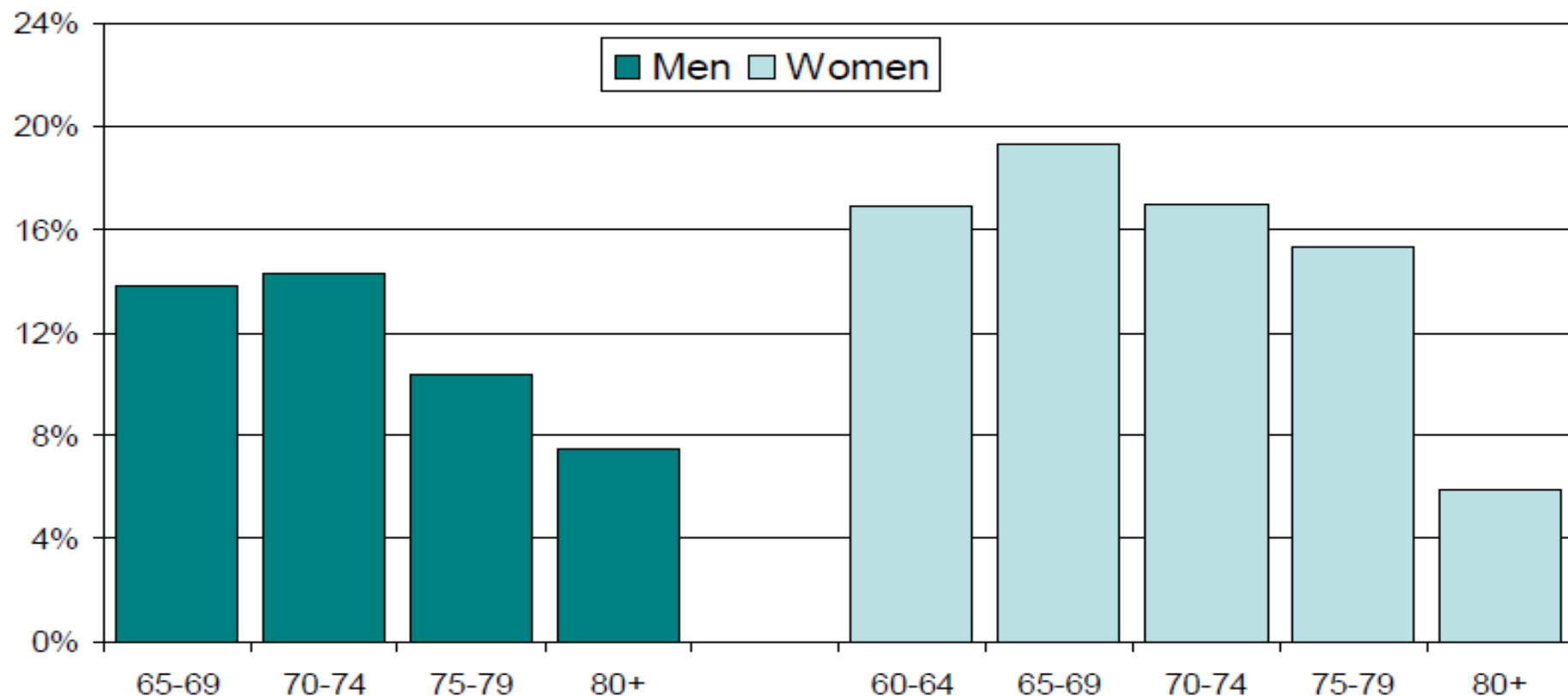


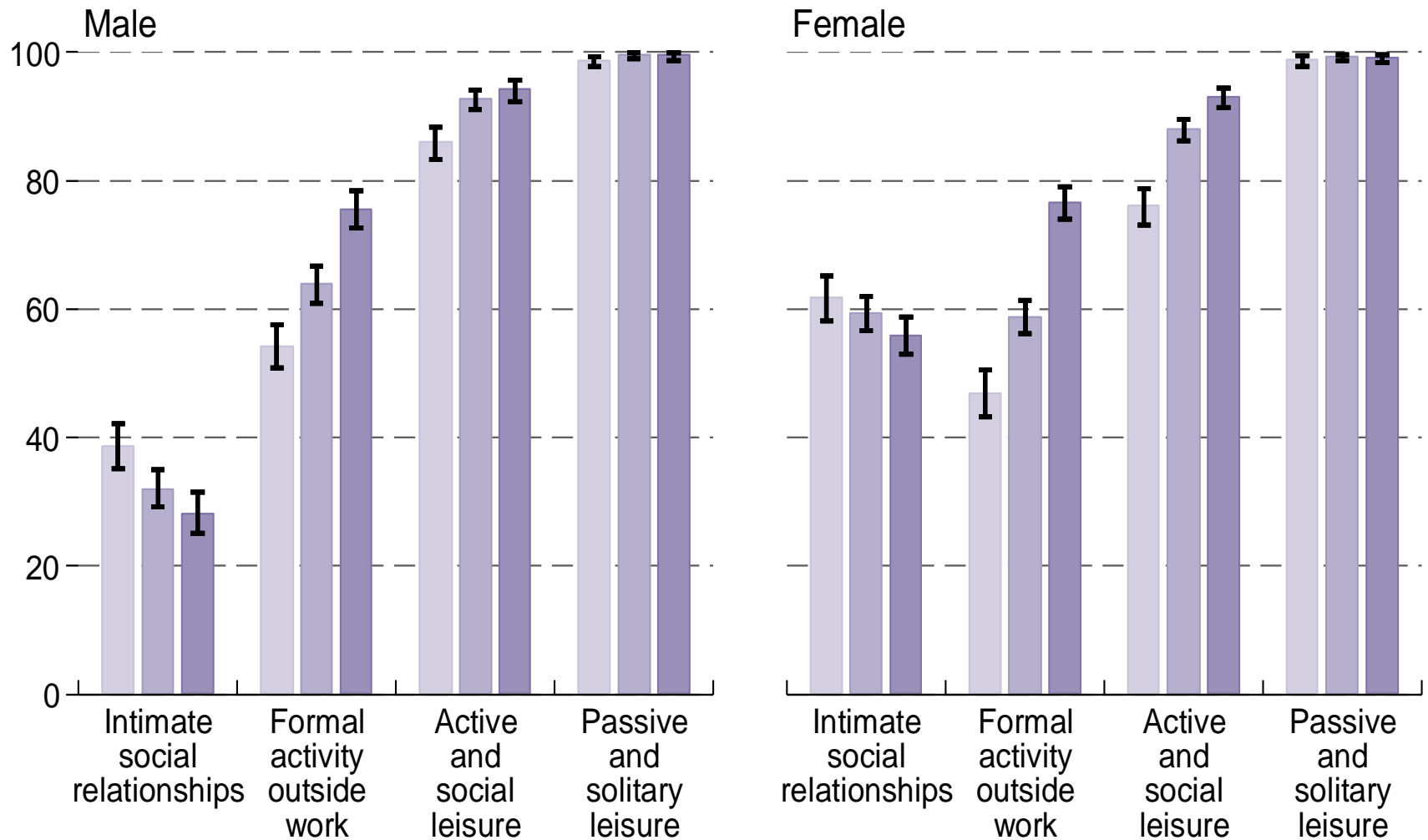
Note. N = 5995; Missing obs = 267; Error bars correspond to 95% confidence intervals

Findings from ELSA

(Nazroo 2010)

Volunteering post-retirement by age



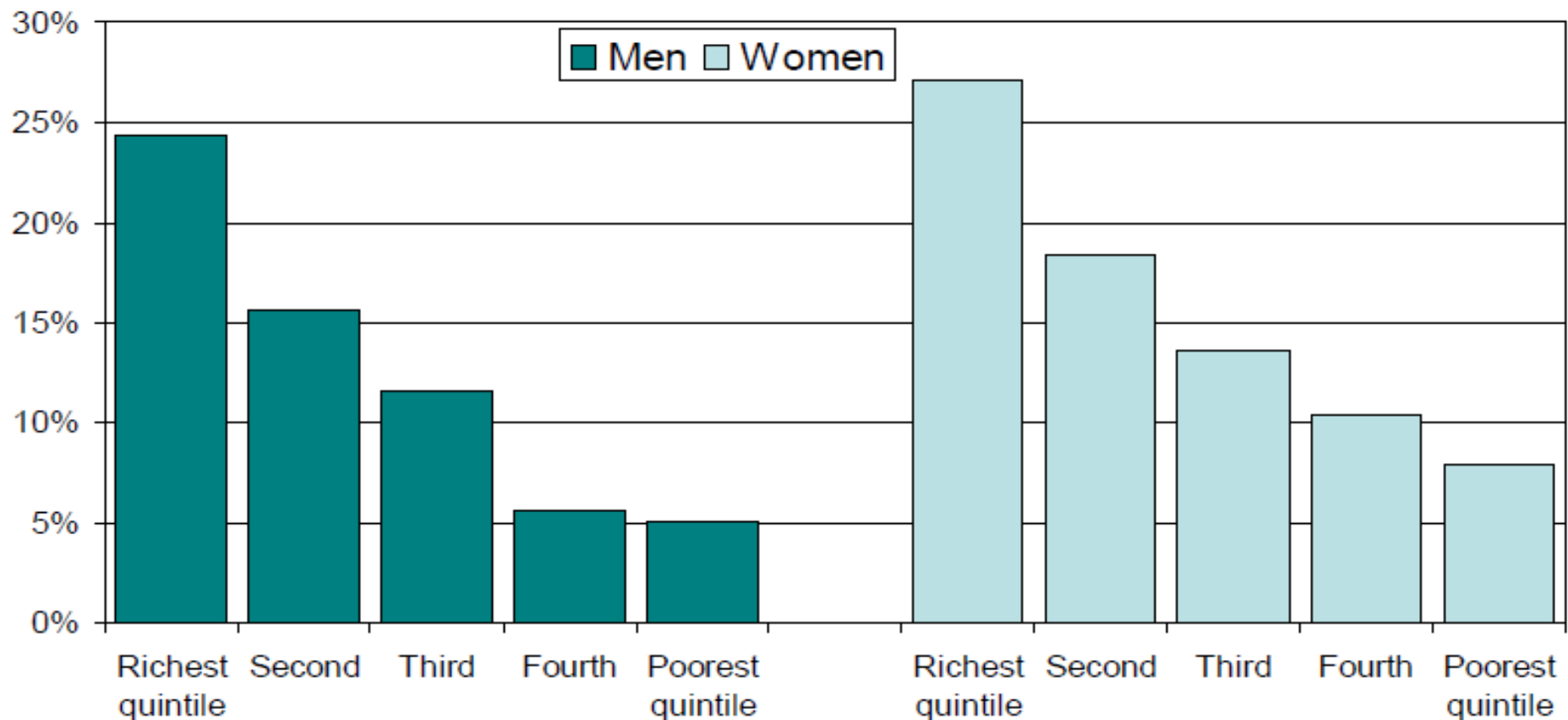


Note. N = 6168; Missing obs = 94; Error bars correspond to 95% confidence intervals

Again compare TILDA with ELSA and
note the similarity of pattern...

(Nazroo 2010)

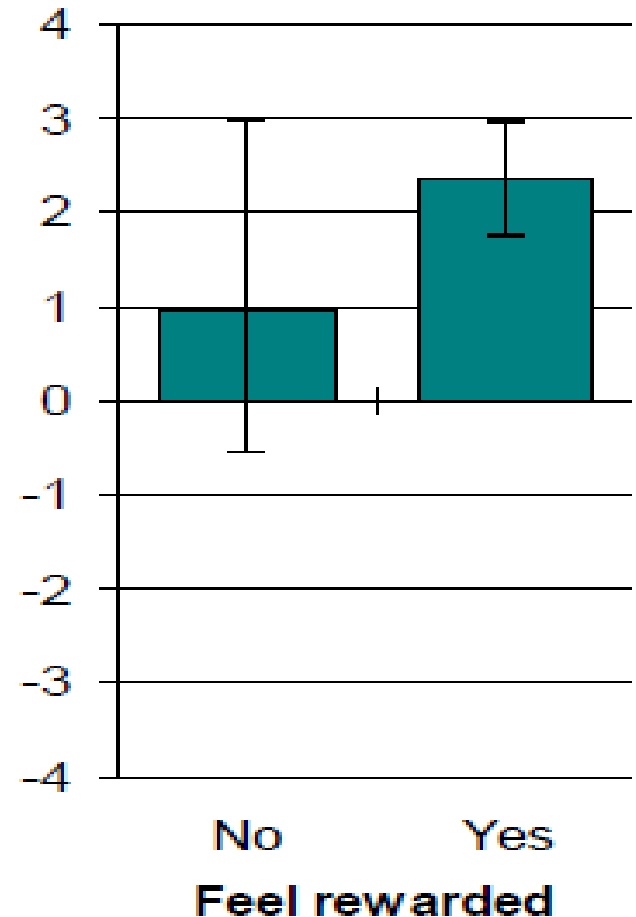
Volunteering post-retirement age by wealth



Volunteering and Quality of Life

Volunteering DOES improve quality of life – but this effect disappears when we control for (take into account) the effect of wealth

BUT when the volunteer feels rewarded, their quality of life improves regardless of other factors!



This does not have to be complicated!

‘What we do is twice a year we bring all the drivers out for a meal... **Just to say thank you.** We usually go just after Christmas and around about July, we bring them all out for a meal and you have a night out and they appreciate it... we couldn't operate without them. They're worth that and more.’

(Meals-on-wheels co-ordinator in O'Dwyer and Timonen 2009)

It's a win-win situation but...

- Volunteering at older ages is a win-win situation: everyone benefits
- BUT: benefits of volunteering flow currently disproportionately to those who are advantaged in other ways
- Involvement in some voluntary activities declining and seriously under threat

Quality and opportunities

Need for more opportunities for engagement in socially productive activities

QUALITY of such activities must be high enough to motivate and encourage participation

→ tailored to capabilities and motivations of (older) people

To Conclude: To-Do List:

- **Do not take volunteering for granted!**
- **Increase the rewards** older volunteers derive from their involvement and efforts
- **Improve the quality** of volunteering opportunities (feedback opportunities, good management)
- **Raise awareness** of and combat inequalities in access to volunteering