

INTRODUCTION

International data bases have played a major role in population research, just as they have in all the other social sciences. It is largely through international comparisons that social statisticians have uncovered patterns of demographic structure and processes and hypothesized their causal mechanisms and potential consequences. Similarly, national deviations from international patterns have further enlightened demographic understanding, due to the necessity of explaining "outliers" and have set the backdrop for more intensive national studies where the social and cultural complexities of individual societies can play a greater role in the research endeavor.

The Population Division of the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat maintains a number of international data bases for conducting its research agenda. In this volume one of these data bases - a series of national life tables from developing countries - is made available to outside users. It is being made available because outside requests during the past few years indicate its potential value to researchers beyond the United Nations system and because the reliability of the data and the completeness of documentation reduce the risk of misuse.

The data base consists of 78 national life tables from 43 developing populations covering a period from the mid 1940s to the early 1980s. All the tables are based on recorded deaths, by age and sex, and the population at risk by age and sex. They have been evaluated to ensure their quality; data have been adjusted when appropriate; and tables of questionable reliability have been excluded. The result is, to the fullest extent feasible, a set of tables that are reliable, consistent and comparable.

These characteristics - reliability, consistency, comparability - are use-dependent concepts. Although the data base should prove acceptable for most international comparisons, its use will require caution in certain circumstances. It cannot be used, for example, to study relative completeness of death registration between the elderly and young adults, because for some life tables, completeness of adult death registration has been assumed to be invariant to age.

So that potential users of this data base can be well informed of its appropriateness for a specific study, a description of the procedure undertaken to calculate the life tables is given in chapter I. That chapter should be reviewed before the data base is used. It indicates the source of the figures, the organization or researchers that analysed the data (if not the United Nations), any adjustments that were made to the data and the basis upon which the adjustments were made.

The data base itself contains 78 life tables, in both tabular and graphic form, from 43 developing countries, arranged alphabetically within each region. They cover nine African countries, 19 American countries and 15 Asian countries (table 1), comprising 18 per cent of all African countries, 70 per cent of American developing countries and 38 per cent of Asian developing countries. Since 24 of the 43 countries have available life tables at two or more points in time, longitudinal analysis is possible for a subset of the data base. The life tables are based on analyses of data carried out by the Population Division or undertaken by national authorities, research institutions or other international organizations.

For each country, the life tables are presented for all available dates. The tables include the usual life table columns, calculated by Greville's procedure (Greville, 1943). Each set of country life tables is followed by a series of graphs of the central death rate (${}_n m_x$) column presenting comparisons between the sexes and over time.

In general, an active effort was made to estimate life tables for the post-1950 period only, but two life tables (for Trinidad and Tobago and for Sri Lanka) are included which refer to an earlier date. Of the 78 life tables, 29 refer to the 1960-1969 decade and 37 to the 1970-1979 decade; only five are for periods prior to 1960, and seven refer to 1980 or later (table 2).

The life tables refer to a broad range of life expectancies, distributed within each region in a way roughly similar to the current distribution of life expectancies in developing countries. Half of the life tables show life expectancies at birth between 60 and 69 years, about 15 per cent show life expectancies of 70 years or more, and just over a third show life expectancies under 60 years (table 3). The distributions vary among the regions, as would be expected from the differing levels of mortality they are known to have.

Table 1. Distribution of countries in the data base by region and number of life tables included

Region	1	2	3+	Total
Africa	6	2	1	9
Americas	6	9	4	19
Asia	7	5	3	15
TOTAL	19	16	8	43

Table 2. Distribution of life tables in the data base by region and reference date

Region	Before 1950	1950-59	1960-69	1970-79	1980-83	Total
Africa	0	0	6	7	0	13
Americas	1	1	17	15	3	37
Asia	1	2	6	15	4	28
TOTAL	2	3	29	37	7	78

Table 3. Distribution of life tables in the data base by region and life expectancy at birth

Region	Life expectancy at birth (in years)							Total
	Less than 45	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70+	
Africa	2	1	5	1	4	0	0	13
Americas	1	1	3	3	12	12	5	37
Asia	2	3	2	3	7	4	7	28
TOTAL	5	5	10	7	23	16	12	78

As can be noted from tables 4, 5 and 6, the life expectancies at birth presented in the data base are consistent with those of the United Nations 1984 assessment of the world population situation (United Nations, 1986).

For those researchers who wish to enter the life tables into the computer in a machine readable form the final section contains a listing of the n_{mx} values for the entire data base and a FORTRAN source listing which can be used to read the n_{mx} values and produce the life tables.

To those research institutions that send a diskette and a formal request to the Director of the Population Division, the Division will provide an IBM PC-compatible listing of the data and FORTRAN program presented in chapter III.

The Division would be pleased to receive comments from researchers on the life tables and on whether future publications of this type would be useful.

Table 4. Comparison of life expectancy at birth for countries in the data base with life expectancy at birth from the United Nations 1984 assessment: a/ Africa

Country	Reference date		Life expectancy at birth	
	Data base	Assessment	Data base	Assessment
Algeria	1969-71	1965-75	53	51-54
Burundi	1970-71	1965-75	44	44-45
Cameroon	1958-65	1955-65	38	38-41
Egypt	1965-67 1975-77	1965-70 1975-80	51 55	50 56
Liberia	1970-71	1965-75	48	43-45
Mauritius	1961-63 1971-73	1960-65 1970-75	60 63	60 63
Morocco	1972	1970-75	52	53
Réunion	1961-62 1967-68 1970	1960-65 1965-70 1965-75	57 61 62	58 61 61-64
Tunisia	1968-69	1965-70	53	52

a/ World Population Prospects: Estimates and Projections as Assessed in 1984 (United Nations publication, Sales No.: E.86.XIII.3).

Table 5. Comparison of life expectancy at birth for countries in the data base with life expectancy at birth from the United Nations 1984 assessment: a/ Americas

Country	Reference date		Life expectancy at birth	
	Data base	Assessment	Data base	Assessment
Argentina	1959-1961	1955-1965	65	65-66
	1969-1970	1965-1975	66	66-67
	1979	1975-1985	70	69-70
Chile	1959-1961	1955-1965	57	56-58
	1969-1971	1965-1975	62	61-64
Colombia	1963-1965	1960-1965	58	56
Costa Rica	1962-1964	1960-1965	62	63
	1972-1974	1970-1975	69	68
Cuba	1969-1971	1965-1975	72	69-71
El Salvador	1970-1972	1970-1975	57	59
Guadeloupe	1966-1968	1965-1970	65	66
	1981-1983	1980-1985	72	72
Guatemala	1963-1965	1960-1965	47	47
	1972-1973	1970-1975	55	54
Guyana	1959-1961	1955-1965	61	59-61
	1969-1971	1965-1975	64	63-64
Honduras	1960-1962	1960-1965	42	48
	1973-1975	1970-1975	52	54
Jamaica	1959-1961	1955-1965	64	61-64
	1969-1971	1965-1975	68	66-68
Martinique	1960-1962	1965-1970	65	65
	1966-1968	1965-1970	67	66
	1981-1983	1980-1985	73	73
Mexico	1969-1971	1965-1975	61	60-62

Table 5. (continued)

Country	Reference date		Life expectancy at birth	
	Data base	Assessment	Data base	Assessment
Panama	1960-1970	1960-1970	66	62-64
	1970-1980	1970-1980	69	66-69
Puerto Rico	1949-1951	-	60	-
	1959-1961	1955-1965	69	69-70
	1969-1971	1965-1975	72	71-73
	1979-1981	1975-1985	74	73-74
Suriname	1963-1964	1960-1965	64	62
Trinidad and Tobago	1945-1947	-	54	-
	1959-1961	1955-1965	64	62-65
	1969-1971	1965-1975	66	66-67
Uruguay	1962-1964	1960-1965	69	68
	1974-1976	1970-1980	69	69-70
Venezuela	1970-1972	1970-1975	65	66

a/ World Population Prospects: Estimates and Projections as Assessed in 1984 (United Nations publication, Sales No.: E.86.XIII.3).

