

Department of International Economic and Social Affairs

# Levels and Trends of Mortality since 1950

A joint study by the United Nations  
and the World Health Organization



United Nations

New York, 1982

## NOTE

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The term "country" as used in the text of this report also refers, as appropriate, to territories or areas.

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## Preface

The present study is a joint undertaking of the Population Division of the United Nations Secretariat and the World Health Organization, and is one in a series of collaborative efforts by these two bodies in recent years in the area of mortality studies. It is the first comprehensive review of international mortality levels and trends published by the United Nations since 1962.<sup>1</sup> Because of the dearth of information for the world's less developed countries at that time, the earlier study included very few data for the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. The present study attempts to redress the balance by devoting sizable chapters to each of these three major areas. Another chapter takes up mortality conditions in the more developed countries.

The quantity of information on mortality for the less developed regions, much of it based on sample surveys and analysis of census results rather than civil registration, which serves as the basis for mortality data in the more developed countries, has increased greatly, and a number of innovative techniques have been developed to deal with the special problems presented by these data. Nevertheless, there are still serious gaps in the data, and the quality of much of it is poor, particularly for Africa and large parts of Asia.

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<sup>1</sup> *Population Bulletin of the United Nations, No. 6, 1962; with Special Reference to the Situation and Recent Trends of Mortality in the World* (United Nations publication, Sales No. 62.XIII.2).

The time-frame for the study is from around 1950 to the mid 1970s, and in addition to discussions of general mortality levels and trends, the following items have been considered within the constraints imposed by the data: age and sex differentials in mortality; mortality in the particularly vulnerable periods of infancy and early childhood; differential mortality by urban/rural residence and socio-economic characteristics such as education, income, occupation and social class; and morbidity and causes of death.

Acknowledgement is due to the following consultants for their contributions: Professor George C. Myers (Duke University) for the extended discussion of mortality differentials within countries in the more developed regions (chap. II, sect. E); Professor Ladislav T. Ruzicka (Austrian National University) and Professor Alberto Palloni (University of Wisconsin) for preparing the original drafts of chapter IV (Asia) and chapter V (Latin America), respectively.

Valuable assistance in the preparation of this study was also received from the United Nations Cairo Demographic Centre, the United Nations Regional Institute for Population Studies at Legon, Ghana, the Latin American Demographic Centre, the Economic Commission for Western Asia and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

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**Explanatory notes**

The following symbols have been used in the tables throughout the report:

Three dots ( . . . ) indicate that data are not available or are not separately reported

A dash (—) indicates that the amount is nil or negligible

A blank indicates that the item is not applicable

A minus sign (—) indicates a deficit or decrease, except as indicated

Details and percentages in tables do not necessarily add to totals, because of rounding.

The following apply throughout the text and tables:

A full stop (.) is used to indicate decimals

A slash (/) indicates a crop year or financial year, e.g., 1970/71

A hyphen (-) between dates representing years, e.g., 1971-1973, signifies the full period involved, including the beginning and end years

Reference to "dollars" (\$) indicates United States dollars, unless otherwise stated

Annual rates of growth or change, unless otherwise stated, refer to annual compound rates.