

REPORT OF THE SYMPOSIUM ON HEALTH AND MORTALITY

The United Nations Population Division in collaboration with the Population and Family Study Centre (CBGS), Flemish Scientific Institute, and with the financial support of the Government of Flanders and the Federal Government of Belgium organized a Symposium on Health and Mortality that took place in Brussels, Belgium, from 19 to 22 November 1997. The Symposium was attended by invited experts; representatives of the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund and the World Health Organization; representatives of Flanders and the Federal Government of Belgium; and scholars from Belgium and other countries as well as government officials from other countries participating as observers in their personal capacity.

Robert Cliquet, General Director of CBGS and Joseph Chamie, Director of the United Nations Population Division made opening statements emphasizing the importance of the Symposium in the substantive preparations for the thirty-first session of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development which was to be held in February 1998 and would be devoted to a discussion of issues of health and mortality. The role played by CBGS in ensuring that the inter-governmental bodies in which it participated had at their disposal the best and most up-to-date substantive and technical information on which to base their deliberations was underscored. Thus, the conclusions reached by the Symposium would be transmitted to the Commission and were expected to be highly relevant in guiding the discussion of policies and programmes directed to improve the health and lengthen the life span of the peoples of the world, efforts that were considered to be a fundamental and integral part of development programmes.

The participants of the Symposium proceeded to elect its bureau, which consisted of Robert Cliquet as Chairperson, Juan Chackiel, Samir Farid and Gigi Santow as Vice-chairpersons, and Shiro Horiuchi as Rapporteur.

The Symposium was to focus attention on issues related to the health and mortality of persons aged 15 or over. Indeed, as it was noted several times during the deliberations, significant advances had been made in reducing mortality in childhood, even in countries where the mortality of adults had declined only moderately or not at all. Furthermore, both in terms of measurement issues and in terms of its determinants, more was known about mortality in childhood than about mortality at older ages. For that reason, it was appropriate to concentrate on the latter.

The sessions of the Symposium were organized along three major issues: (a) the measurement of mortality and health status; (b) the state of current knowledge about the evolution of mortality and health in developed market-economy countries, countries with economies in transition, and developing countries; and (c) the analysis of risk factors associated with specific behaviours that account or may potentially account for large or growing proportions of deaths. During the Symposium, each session consisted of the presentation of solicited papers and a general discussion on the issues they raised. The following sections summarize the presentations and discussion made during each session. They reflect the order actually followed during the Symposium.¹ The first session, which focused on the meaning and relevance of the mortality, epidemiological and health transitions, set the framework used to address the major issues considered by the Symposium.