

Atlas of mortality in Europe

Subnational patterns, 1980/1981 and 1990/1991

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Subnational patterns, 1980/1981 and 1990/1991



WHO EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH



UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE



STATISTICS NETHERLANDS



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Foreword

One of the primary tasks of WHO has always been to monitor health status in countries by gathering and issuing statistics on disease and death. This indicates where action is particularly needed to eliminate inequalities in health between and within countries. Eliminating these inequalities, or securing equity in health, is the central goal of the WHO policy for health for all.

This Atlas thus derives from long-standing WHO tasks and goals, as well as one of its main methods: teamwork. In creating this book, however, the four main partners – the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, and the Central Bureau of Statistics and the National Institute of Public Health and the Environment in the Netherlands – have taken new steps forward.

The Atlas does more than give national averages for all the main causes of death in the WHO European Region; it gives data on regions within countries and shows changes in mortality at this level between 1980/1981 and 1990/1991. Finally, it literally draws pictures of health in Europe, presenting the data collected in vivid and informative maps and bar charts. By showing differences in mortality from various causes in the European Region, the Atlas also indicates areas in which more study is needed to determine both the reasons for these differences and the most appropriate action to reduce them.

As well as resting on important principles of health for all, this Atlas can contribute to progress towards the goal.

J.E. Asvall
WHO Regional Director for Europe

Preface

WHO has published mortality statistics submitted by its Member States for many years. These statistics are the main source of information on the distribution of fatal diseases in populations and, until now, the most accessible and the best standardized source of data for international comparisons of health problems. The national data present average mortality rates, providing no insight into differences in health status within a country and precluding the detection of possible geographical patterns of disease distribution. Such patterns may arise from a multitude of factors, ranging from the accessibility of health services to the lifestyles prevailing in certain groups. Some of the determinants may be related to environmental conditions.

This Atlas documents geographical patterns of death in the WHO European Region, providing a basis for the analysis and evaluation of the spatial variability of health. The work leading to this publication is an important step in the development of the European health and environment geographical information system (HEGIS). One of the objectives of the system is the improvement of information on health and the environment at the subnational level, which should facilitate the monitoring of implementation of the WHO policy for health for all. Other parts of the system focus on the geographical distribution of both environmental hazards and population exposures to them; this provides the basis for health risk assessment.

One of the distinctive features of this work is the spatial resolution for which demographic and health statistics were collected. Another is the method of data presentation. The presentation of mortality data in the form of colourful maps has a strong potential for communication. It is the first step in a process that may lead to an understanding of the reasons for varying levels of health. An interpretation of the patterns requires painstaking analysis and studies to follow the description of the situation on the maps. The maps may attract the attention of public health authorities, and may direct scarce international and national resources to the limited number of areas where health status falls far below the desired levels. A detailed evaluation of the conditions in such areas, possibly followed by remedial action, may not only benefit the populations directly involved but also lessen the burden of disease in larger regions.

The Atlas summarizes a substantial, coordinated effort of several international and national organizations, but the project could not have been completed successfully without the active participation of a variety of other institutions and individuals. These include the statistical offices of the European Member States, which provided the information on population and mortality on the subnational level where possible; the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT), which shared information on vital statistics and boundaries of the member states of the European Union; and the participants in a WHO seminar, who made very constructive comments on a draft of the Atlas. Finally, the publication of the Atlas in colour would be impossible without supplementary generous support from Statistics Netherlands (NCBS) and the National Institute of Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) in the Netherlands.

The contributors and project participants believe that this coordinated effort has resulted in a product that will be useful to the international public health community, stimulate the implementation of the WHO policy for health for all, and consequently contribute to the improvement of health in the European Region.

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