10. The Latest Mortality Forecasts in the European Union

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Abstract

Chapter 10 reviews the outcomes, methods and assumptions in the latest\textsuperscript{7} mortality forecasts for the European Union countries. Section 10.1 introduces the topic, then Section 10.2 highlights general features of national forecasts such as, for instance, their timing, type (i.e. forecasts, projections, or scenarios), uncertainty variants, length of forecast horizons, and disaggregation of the population. Section 10.3 gives the values of life expectancy, predicted increases and sex differences by the year 2020. National forecasts are discussed within the context of an international perspective. Three comparisons of national forecasts are made here: comparisons with the previous national results, with the life expectancies from the United Nations 1996-based population projections, and finally with the 1995-based Eurostat long-term mortality scenarios. Section 10.4 discusses the age-related assumptions used by the various countries and gives more in-depth explanations of the rationale underlying the outcomes of national forecasts. Sections 10.5 to 10.7 review the methods applied in the most recent national forecasts, the justification of assumptions and the use of variants. Section 10.8 comprises the principal conclusions.

\textsuperscript{7} Forecasts compiled during the period 1992-1997.
10.1 The Growing Importance of Mortality in Ageing Populations

Mortality is slowly but steadily gaining importance among both forecasters and users of demographic population forecasts. The continuing increase in life expectancy to levels considered more or less impossible a few decades ago and the growing awareness of the fact that the magnitude and speed of population ageing is increasingly determined by survival rates among the elderly, have shifted mortality issues up several notches on the demographic research agenda. Various statistical agencies suggest that more time and effort should be devoted to the methods and outcomes of mortality prediction. International comparisons of methods and predicted trends could be used in the justification of assumptions used in national forecasts.

Whatever methods and assumptions are used, prediction cannot be separated from the trends in recent mortality. In our part of the world mortality trends are quite smooth except in the event of an extremely cold winter, a hot summer or for instance widespread unforeseen influenza. Significant fluctuations are only observed in such exceptional years. However relatively bad years are often followed by relatively good ones, resulting in quite stable changes in mortality over five-year periods. All this implies that the key question for mortality forecasters in more developed countries is generally not “What will happen to mortality in the near future?” but “What trends and patterns will be observed over the next two to three decades?”

This paper reviews the latest answers to this question collected from forecasters working at the national statistical agencies in the European Union (EU) countries. Of the 15 EU Member States, 13 countries compiled their latest mortality forecasts during 1992-97. These forecasts were made as part of the latest official population projections. Initially for these 13 countries, an overall impression is given of the content and nature of the latest national forecasts of mortality (Section 10.2). Section 10.3 examines the official mortality forecasts made ten years ago and those recently prepared by international organisations. Section 10.4 investigates future differences in mortality by age. Sections 10.5 to 10.7 contain discussions of the use of variants by the countries, of their justifications for the national mortality assumptions and of the forecasting methodologies. Section 10.8 summarises this review.