

Global Status Report

The Diverse World of Early Childhood

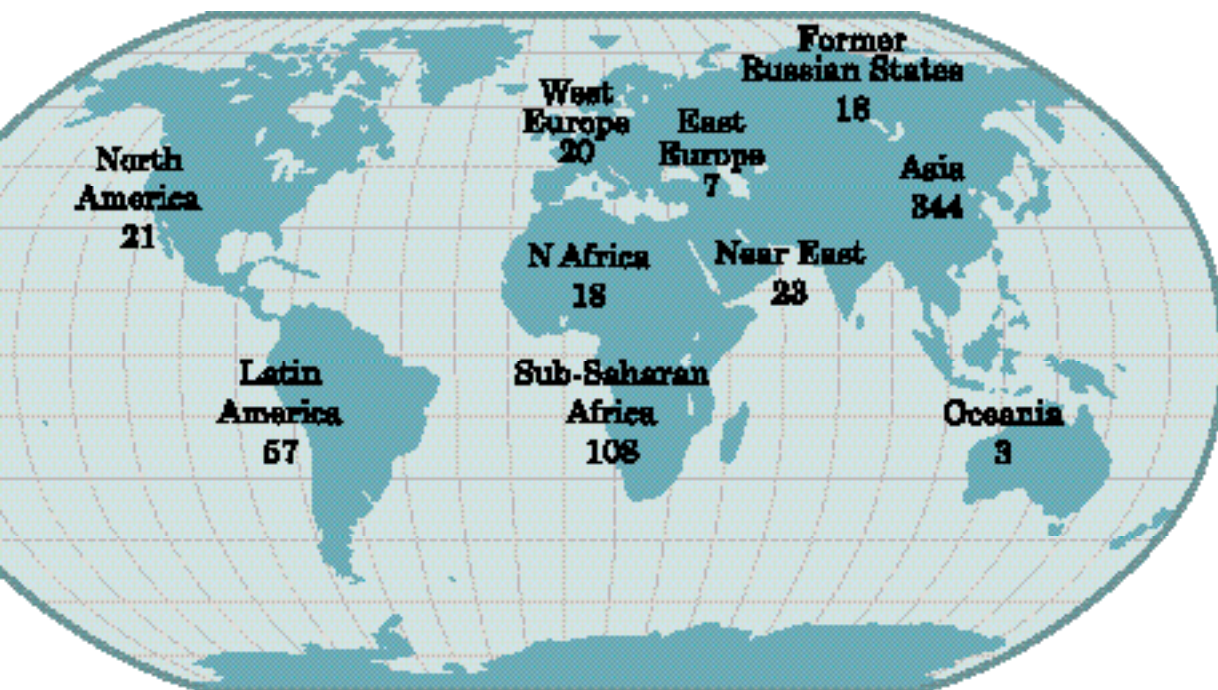
by Roger Neugebauer

For a quarter of a century, *Child Care Information Exchange* has been tracking the status of early childhood education in North America. We have kept our fingers on the pulse of trends in non profit child care, for profit child care, church-housed child care, as well as on the largest and oldest child care centers.

Table 1

Where the Children Are by Region

Millions of children under five in each region of the world (1998)



Two years ago we broadened our horizons by tracking trends in non profit child care worldwide (“Non Profit Child Care: A Powerful Worldwide Movement,” March 2000). With this issue we are taking a closer look at the global demographics of early childhood. This search was greatly assisted by our friends at UNICEF and UNESCO, as well as by the power of the worldwide web.

We set out to fill in a logical set of blanks about the status of children and found rich mines of data as well as complete voids. So, this first demographic survey will offer some intriguing insights and some frustrating gaps.

In reviewing the data at hand we came up with three specific observations:

1. The future of early childhood centers in Asia and Africa.

Today, three out of every four children under the age of five reside in Asia or Africa (Table 1). In fact two nations alone, India and China, account for one third of the world’s preschoolers.

While much that is published about early education is based upon pro-research in North America, these regions care for 7% of all young children.

2. The world is divided between youthful and aging nations.

Slightly more than 10% of the world’s population is under the age of five, and just under 7% of the population is over the age of 64. However, these figures disguise the fact that there exists a major gulf between youthful and the aging nations of

Nations in Sub-Saharan Africa consistently have twice the world average of children under the age of five (see Table 3), while nations in Europe have less than half the worldwide average. Two factors account for the concentration of preschoolers in African nations.

■ First, nations in Sub-Saharan Africa have the highest birth rates in the world (see Table 6). Birth rates range from 32 births per 1,000 population in Kenya to 53 in Niger (US Bureau of the Census).

■ Second, the AIDS epidemic is decimating adult populations in many African

nations. To demonstrate how serious this crisis is, in Zimbabwe it is estimated that if the AIDS crisis didn't exist, life expectancy would be 64.9 years, but as is today with the AIDS epidemic, life expectancy is only 39.2 years. The bottom line is that life expectancies in Sub-Saharan Africa are the shortest in the world, well below the world average of 63 years. Life expectancies in many of these nations are depressingly low: 37 years in Zambia, 41 in Ethiopia, 48 in Kenya, and 56 in South Africa (US Bureau of the Census).

Looking at the other end of the spectrum, nations in Europe (as well as Japan) have considerably older populations than the world average (see Table 4). For example, 17.5% of the population of Italy is over the age of 64, while only 4.5% is under the age of five. In Sweden, 17.4% of the population is over 64 and 5.9% under the age of five. In Japan, 15.9% of the population is over 64 and 4.8% under the age of five.

The aging of the Western European and Japanese populations is the result of two primary factors:

■ First, fewer babies are being born in these nations. The birth rates in Western Europe (ranging from 9 births per 1,000 population in Germany to 15 in Iceland) and Japan (10 births per 1,000 population) are among the lowest in the world. They are less than half of the world average birth rate of 22 births per 1,000 population (US Bureau of the Census).

■ Second, people are living longer in these nations. Life expectancies in Western Europe (with an average life expectancy of 78 years) and Japan (80 years) are among the highest in the world. They far exceed the world average (US Bureau of the Census).

Table 3
The World's Youngest Nations

Nations with the highest percentage of their total population under the age of five.

Rank	Country	% Under Five
1	Uganda	20.7
2	Niger	20.3
3	Mali	19.5
4	Congo	19.4
5	Senegal	19.1
6	Burkina	18.9
7	Togo	18.9
8	Mauritania	18.7
9	Zambi	18.6
10	Iraq	18.5
11	Sierra Leone	18.5
12	Yemen	18.3
13	Gambia	18.3
14	Ethiopia	18.1
15	Cameroon	17.9

Table 4
The World's Oldest Nations

Nations with the highest percentage of their total population over the age of 64.

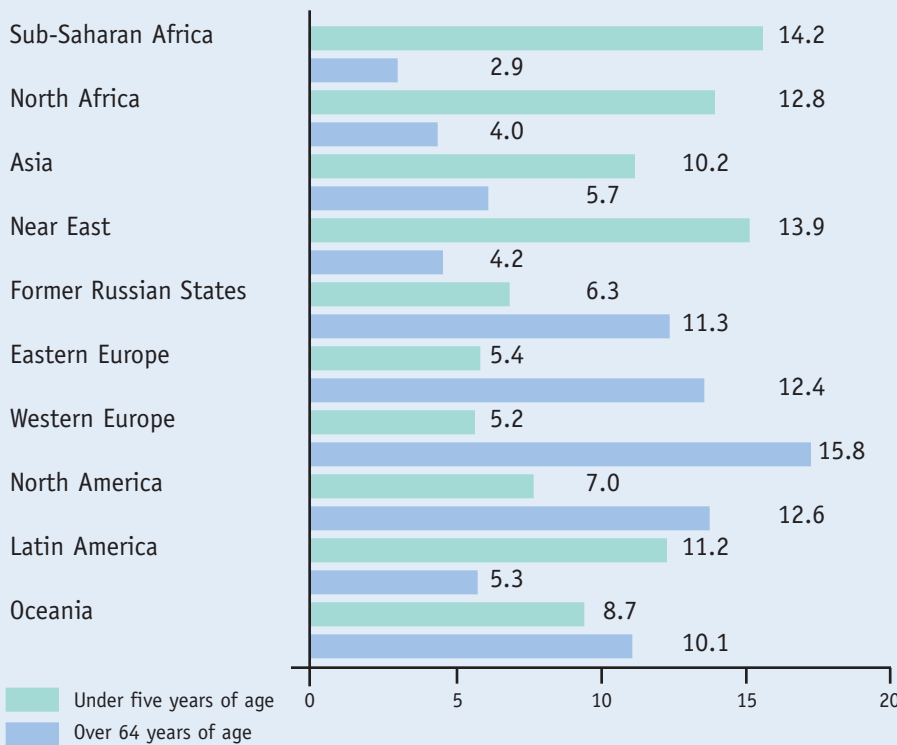
Rank	Country	% Over 64
1	Italy	17.5
2	Sweden	17.4
3	Belgium	16.7
4	Greece	16.5
5	Spain	16.3
6	Japan	15.9
7	Bulgaria	15.9
8	Germany	15.9
9	United Kingdom	15.9
10	Norway	15.7
11	France	15.6
12	Austria	15.4
13	Portugal	15.1
14	Denmark	14.9
15	Netherlands	14.8

Table 2
Where the Children Are by Nation
Millions of children under five (1998)

Rank	Country	Under Five
1	India	117
2	China	97
3	Indonesia	23
4	Pakistan	21
5	Nigeria	20
6	United States	19
7	Brazil	17
8	Bangladesh	17
9	Mexico	12
10	Ethiopia	11
11	Philippines	11
12	Iran	10
13	Congo	10
14	Vietnam	8
15	Egypt	8
16	Russia	7
17	Turkey	7
18	Myanmar	6
19	Japan	6
20	Sudan	6
21	South Africa	5
22	Tanzania	5
23	Thailand	5
24	Colombia	5
25	Uganda	5

Table 5
Young and Elder Populations by Region

Percentage of each region's total population under five and over 64 in 1998.



a broader array of data. We would certainly want to know:

- how much national governments are investing in early childhood services;
- how much is invested by charitable institutions such as UNICEF, UNESCO, Save the Children, in each nation;
- how much employers are contributing to early childhood services in each nation;
- the extent to which women are working outside the home in each nation; and,
- the percent of children in each nation enrolled in early childhood services.

While bits and pieces of these types of data are available, by and large this is uncharted territory. We will continue to work with our partners worldwide to track down this information, so that year

3. There are huge disparities in child mortality rates among nations.

Despite all the advances in medicine and ecology, there still exists a huge difference in the survival potential of children born in rich and poor nations:

■ Out of every 1,000 children born in Europe, only five will die before the age of five (see Table 7).

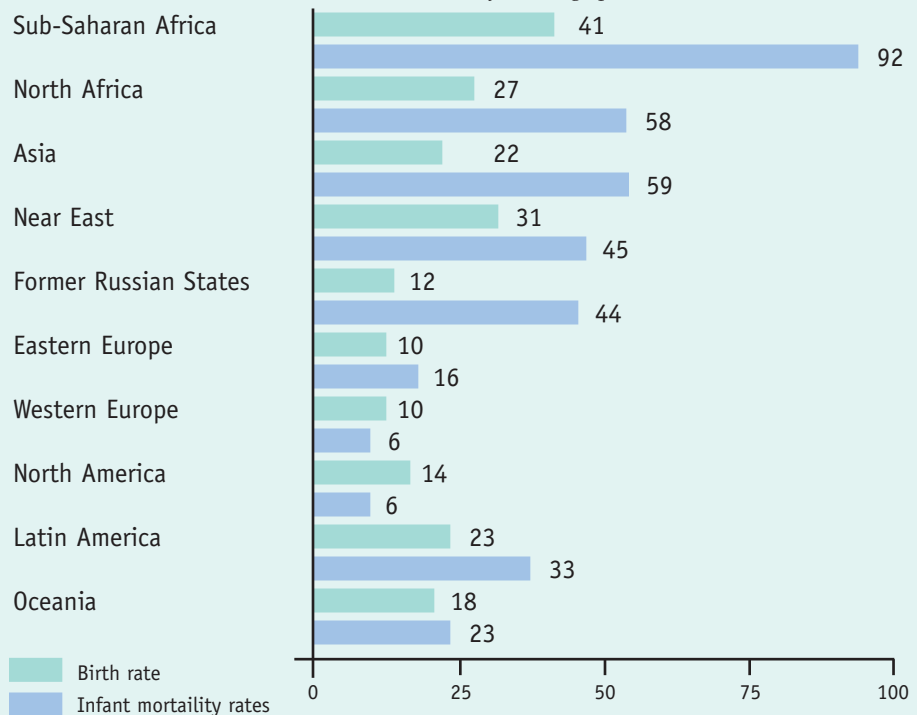
■ Out of every 1,000 children born in Sub-Saharan Africa, anywhere between 200 and 300 will die before reaching the age of five (see Table 8).

This is a staggering difference. We have at hand the technology and the resources to bring mortality rates worldwide into the low range; all we lack is the will.

To get a complete picture of early childhood trends worldwide, we would need

Table 6
Birth Rates and Infant Death Rates by Region

Average annual number of births during a year per 1,000 population and average annual number of deaths of infants under one year of age per 1,000 live births in 1998.



by year this update will be more comprehensive. For those who are especially eager for this information, we will publish it as it becomes available in our online newsbrief, *ExchangeEveryDay*.

References

The statistics in this article came from two sources:

Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 came from data in:

US Bureau of the Census (1998). "World Population Profile: 1998." Washington, DC.

Tables 7 and 8 came from data in:

"Progress since the World Summit for Children: A Statistical Review." New York: UNICEF, 2001.

Table 7

Lowest Under Five Mortality Rates

Nations with the lowest average annual number of deaths of children under five years of age per 1,000 live births in 2000.

Rank	Country	Under Five
1	Iceland	4
2	Japan	4
3	Norway	4
4	Singapore	4
5	Sweden	4
6	Switzerland	4
7	Austria	5
8	Denmark	5
9	Czech Republic	5
10	Finland	5
11	South Korea	5
12	France	5
13	Germany	5
14	Netherlands	5
15	Slovenia	5
16	Spain	5
17	Australia	6
18	Belgium	6
19	Canada	6
20	Greece	6
21	Ireland	6
22	Israel	6
23	Italy	6
24	New Zealand	6
25	Portugal	6

Table 8

Highest Under Five Mortality Rates

Nations with the highest average annual number of deaths of children under five years of age per 1,000 live births in 2000.

Rank	Country	Over 64
1	Sierra Leone	316
2	Angola	295
3	Niger	270
4	Afrhanistan	257
5	Liberia	235
6	Mali	233
7	Somalia	225
8	Congo	207
9	Zambia	202
10	Mozambique	200
11	Chad	198
12	Burkina Faso	198
13	Burundi	190
14	Malawi	188
15	Rwanda	187
16	Mauritania	183
17	Central African Rep.	180
18	Ethiopia	174
19	Tanzania	165
20	Cameroon	154
21	Togo	142
22	Swaziland	142
23	Senegal	139
24	Madagascar	140
25	Cambodia	135