

The Many Worlds of Childhood

Global Status Report #2

by Roger Neugebauer

“ . . . for nearly half of the two billion children in the real world, childhood is starkly and brutally different from the ideal we all aspire to. Poverty denies children their dignity, endangers their lives, and limits their potential. Conflict and violence rob them of a secure family life, betray their trust and their hope. HIV/AIDS kills their parents, their teachers, their doctors, and nurses. It also kills them With the childhood of so many under threat, our collective future is compromised.”

Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations

While Americans obsess over childhood concerns about obesity and the Internet, vastly greater numbers of children around the world are dealing with more basic survival issues. To put the world of childhood in some perspective, we have reviewed a bevy of demographic statistics about young children. From these we have selected a small number to display (eight of which will be presented in this report summary; the balance appear in the full report on our web site, www.ChildCareExchange.com).

Table 1:
Children Under Five
(figures in millions)

Asia	
China	91.3
India	114.9
Near East	
Turkey	5.9
Saudi Arabia	3.8
North Africa	
Egypt	8.8
Algeria	3.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	
Nigeria	22.0
Congo	10.5
Western Europe	
Germany	3.8
France	3.8
Eastern Europe	
Russia	6.6
Ukraine	2.2
Latin America	
Brazil	16.1
Mexico	11.3
North America	
United States	19.6
Canada	1.8
Oceania	
Australia	1.3
Papua New Guinea	.8

Source: US Census Bureau.

Note: There is a current tendency to focus on rankings: “America’s 20 Most Liveable Cities,” “The Ten Fastest Growing States,” “The 12 Top Burger Joints in St. Louis.” These rankings assume that absolute values can be assigned to the factors considered. However, such ranking doesn’t really work in the real world (and, in fact is a dangerous way of looking at the world of children). The following demographic tables, with a few exceptions (literacy and mortality rates, for example), should be viewed as descriptive rather than evaluative data.

Today there are 605 million children under the age of five in the world. They live in a wide range of physical environments, a wide range of cultural and religious settings, and have a wide range of opportunities to experience a full and rewarding life. In the following charts, we follow the demographics in two nations in each region of the world. From reviewing this information, we have noted the following significant trends:

Where the kids are

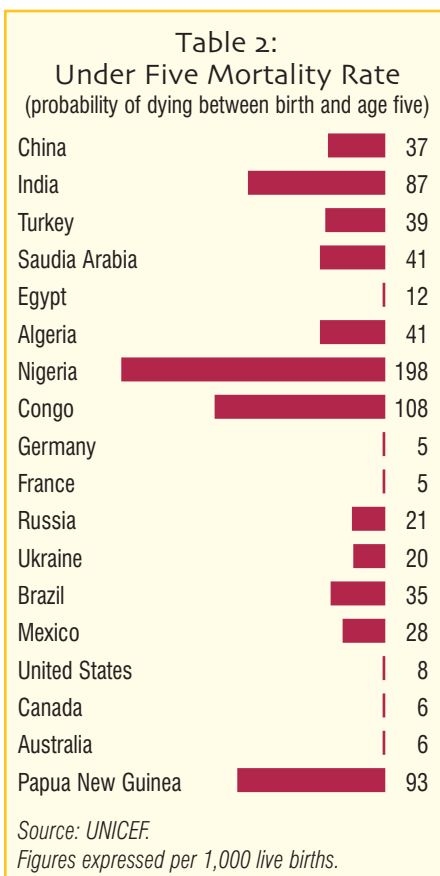
■ Over 80% of the children under five in the world now live in Asia or Africa. Less than 7% of the children of the

world reside in North America and Western Europe.

■ Populations in most African and Asian nations are dramatically younger than populations in other parts of the world. In North America and Western Europe, there are far more elders (over 64) than preschoolers (under 5) — sometimes by a factor of two or three. By contrast, in most Asian and African nations, there are dramatically more preschoolers than elders. In Africa, of course, this disparity is made more dramatic by the large numbers of early adult deaths due to HIV / AIDS.

Where the services are

■ Literacy is far from universal. In some of the nations with the largest numbers of children (such as India, Nigeria, Congo, Egypt) over a third of adults lack literacy skills. This is a sure indicator of inadequate educational systems. In today's world, where communication



skills are so vital to success, this bodes ill for the futures of large numbers of children.

■ Child mortality rates are still very high. Mortality rates for children under five have decreased dramatically — world wide they have been cut 60% — in the past 40 years. However, in over half the world's nations mortality rates are still from 7 to 20 times higher than the rates in Western Europe.

■ Income disparity makes solutions difficult. The distribution of economic resources continues to be a major roadblock to providing for safe childhoods for all children. A child in the United States has access to 70 times more income than his peer in India. A child in Nigeria has access to less than 2% of the income of his counterpart in Germany. Over 35% of all individuals in India, and 70% in Nigeria, subsist on less than \$1 per day. However, income is not the entire story as poverty exists even in wealthy nations. In addition, while the GNI of the US is 34% higher than that of France, the under five mortality rate in the USA is 60% higher than that of France.

References

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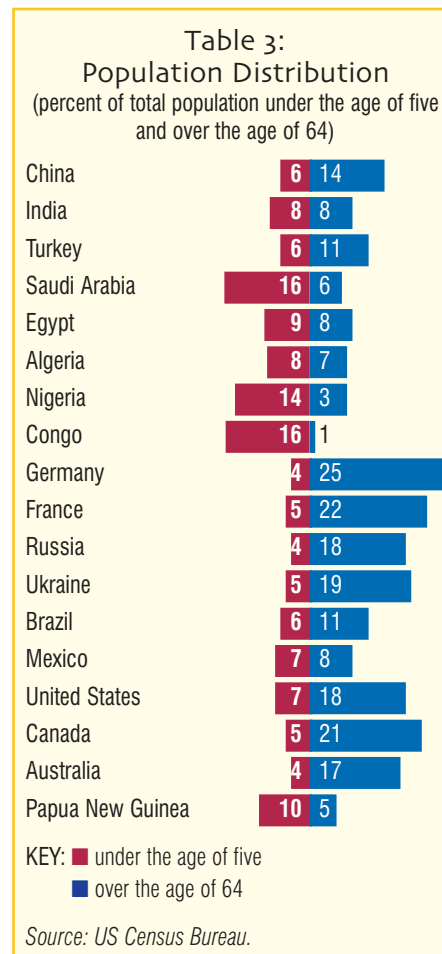
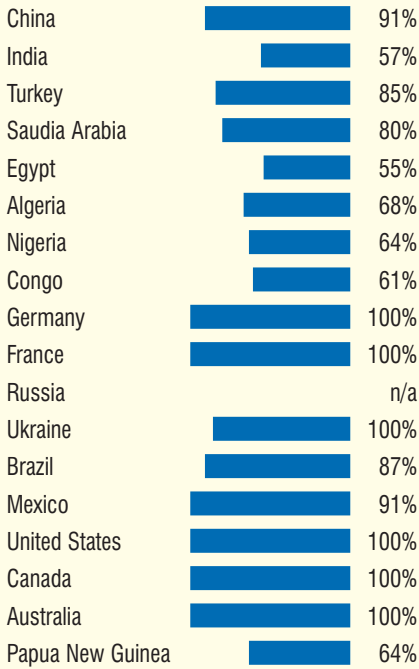


Table 4: Literacy
(percent of population possessing basic literacy skills)



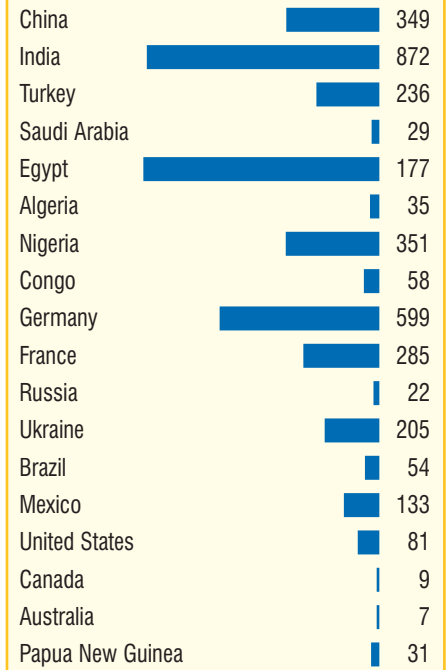
Source: Encyclopedia Britannica

Table 5: Income Per Person
(gross national income divided by nation's population; expressed in US\$)



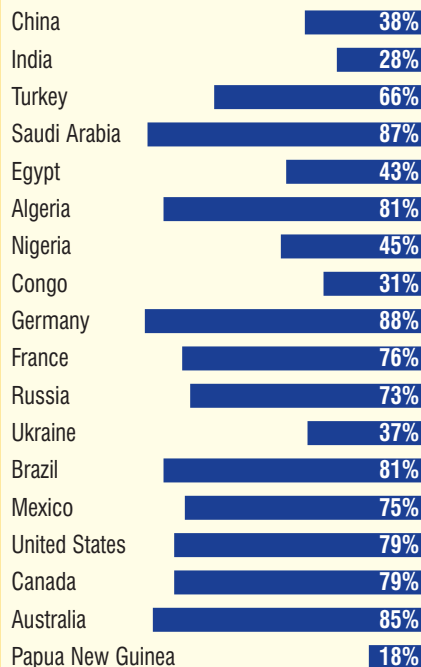
Source: UNICEF

Table 6: Population Density
(population per square mile)



Source: Encyclopedia Britannica

Table 7: Urbanization
(percentage of population living in urban areas)



Source: Encyclopedia Britannica

Table 8: Daily Caloric Intake
(daily per capita caloric intake)



Source: Encyclopedia Britannica.

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