

Mortality rates are one of the most common measures of population health. Statistics on deaths remain one of the most widely available and comparable sources of information on health. Registering deaths is compulsory in all European Union countries, and the data collected through the process of registration can be used by statistical and health authorities to monitor diseases and health status, and to plan health services. In order to compare levels of mortality across countries and over time, the data need to be aggregated in suitable ways and standardised for differences in age-structure.

In 2008 there were large variations in age-standardised total mortality rates for all causes of death across European Union countries. Death rates were lowest in Switzerland, Italy, Iceland and Spain, at 520 deaths per 100 000 population or less (Figure 1.3.1). Rates in northern, western and southern European countries were lower than the EU average rate of 696. They were highest in central and eastern European countries – Lithuania and Latvia, for instance, had age-standardised rates twice those of the lowest countries at over 1 000 deaths per 100 000 population. Rates in Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and a number of other central and eastern European countries were above 800. Among these countries, only Slovenia had a mortality rate that was lower than the EU average.

Male mortality rates were lowest in Iceland, Switzerland and Sweden, and high in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Female rates were low in France, Spain and Switzerland, and high in Bulgaria, Romania and Lithuania. A significant gender gap exists in mortality rates (Figure 1.3.1). Across all EU countries, the male mortality rate was, on average, 70% higher than the female rate in 2008. But large differences exist among countries – in Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, male rates were more than twice those of females, whereas in Iceland, the United Kingdom and Greece they were around 40% higher.

Lower mortality rates translate into higher life expectancies. In 2005-07, average life expectancy across all EU countries was approximately 81 years for females and 74 years for males (see Indicator 1.1). However, the differences in life expectancy among countries with the lowest and highest mortality rates

are in the order of eight years for females and 12 years for males. Some important causes of mortality below the age of 65 years that may be avoided through effective evidence-based public health measures include ischemic heart disease, lung cancer, alcohol-related mortality, suicide, transport accidents, cervical cancer and AIDS (Cayotte and Buchow, 2009).

Although mortality rates in Central and Eastern Europe are still comparatively high, significant declines have occurred in a number of these countries since 1994 (Figures 1.3.2 and 1.3.3). Mortality rates in Estonia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland have fallen by more than 30%, a decline that is greater than the EU average. Ireland has also seen a fall in mortality rates of over 50%. In contrast, declines in the Slovak Republic and Lithuania have been small. Declines in a number of Nordic countries (Sweden, Iceland) have also been modest, although these countries began the period with rates that were already low.

The leading causes of death in EU countries include cardiovascular diseases (such as heart attack and stroke), and cancer. Deaths from these diseases, plus selected external causes of death (transport accidents and suicide), are examined more closely in the following four indicators.

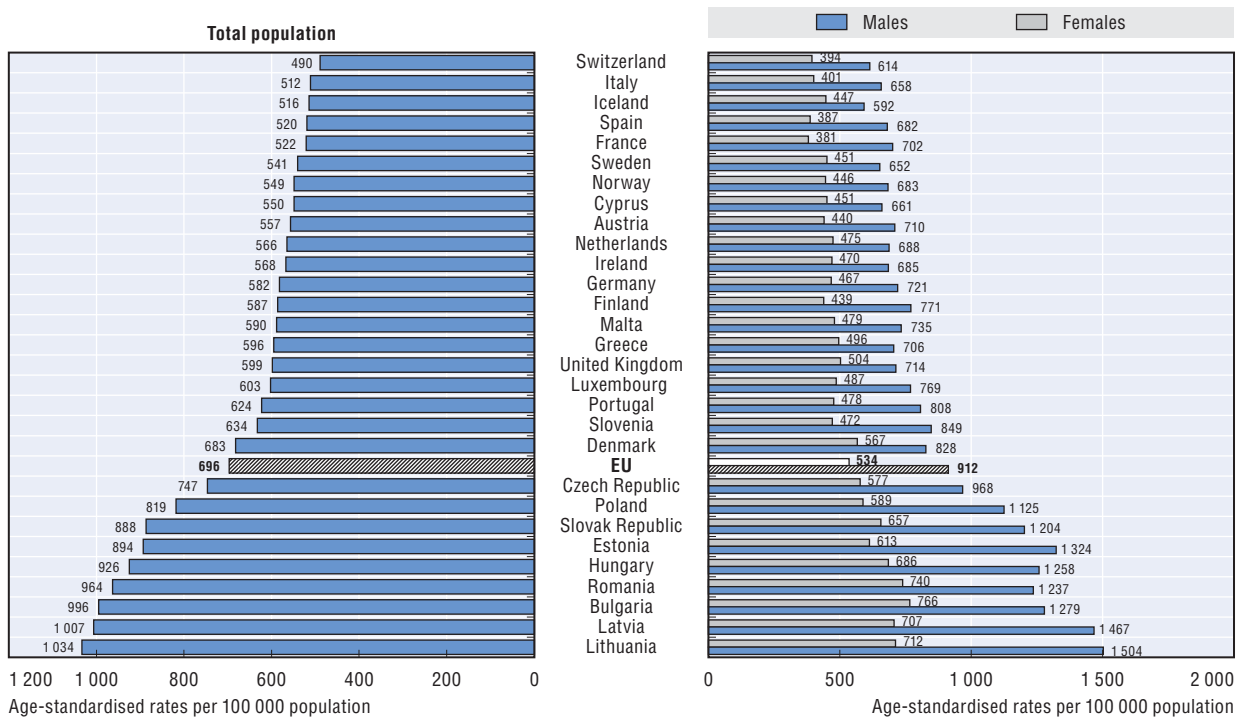
Definition and deviations

Mortality rates are based on numbers of deaths registered in a country in a year divided by the size of the corresponding population. The rates have been directly age-standardised to the WHO European standard population to remove variations arising from differences in age structures across countries and over time. The source is the *Eurostat Statistics Database*.

Mathers *et al.* (2005) have provided a general assessment of the coverage, completeness and reliability of data on causes of death.

Deaths from all causes are classified to ICD-10 codes A00-Y89, excluding S00-T98.

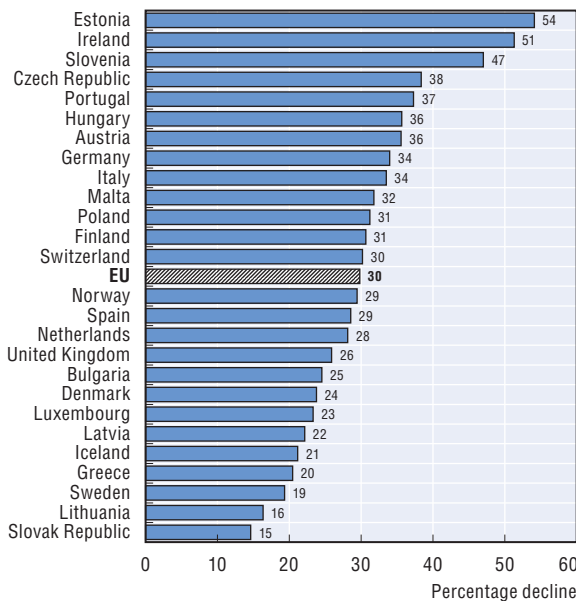
1.3.1. Mortality rates from all causes of death, 2008 (or nearest year available)



Source: Eurostat Statistics Database. Data are age-standardised to the WHO European standard population.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932335495>

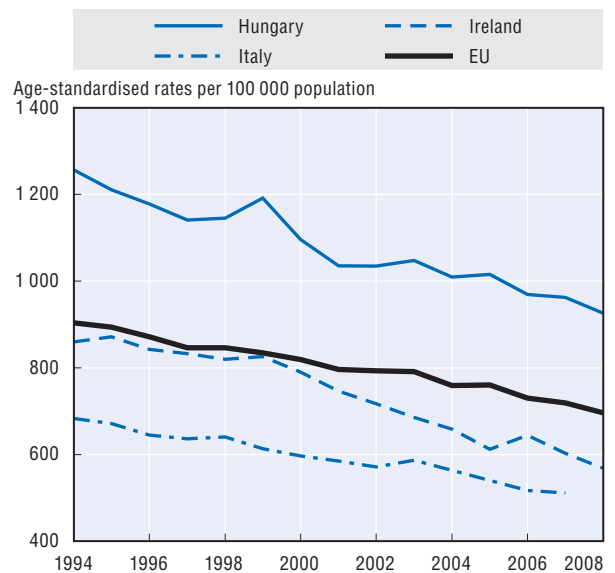
1.3.2. Decline in all cause mortality rates, 1994-2008 (or nearest year available)



Source: Eurostat Statistics Database. Data are age-standardised to the WHO European standard population.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932335514>

1.3.3. Trends in all cause mortality rates, selected EU countries, 1994-2008



Source: Eurostat Statistics Database. Data are age-standardised to the WHO European standard population.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932335533>



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