VAST MAJORITY OF PREMATURE BABIES BORN IN AFRICA AND ASIA

GENEVA – Striking inequalities exist between developing and developed countries in the survival chances of preterm babies.

Approximately 13 million premature babies are born every year worldwide, according to the first global overview of preterm births published today in the international public health journal, the *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*.

“Almost 11 million of these premature babies are born in Africa and Asia, where many do not have access to effective care,” says lead author Dr Lale Say, from the Department of Reproductive Health and Research at the World Health Organization.

“A baby weighing less than 2000g (born at approximately 32 weeks of gestation) has little chance of survival if born in a developing country,” says Say. “On the other hand, a baby born at 32 weeks in a developed country has similar survival chances as one born at full term.”

An average of 10% of births worldwide occur before 37 weeks gestation, in other words are premature, although this rate ranges between 3.8% for countries in central Asia and 17.5% in southern Africa. When comparing high-income regions, North America has a much higher rate (10.6%) of premature birth than Europe (6.2%).

“Considering the dramatic rise in preterm births over the past 20 years shown in countries with accurate data, preterm birth continues to represent a significant health problem. Improving access to effective care, in particular in developing countries, must remain a priority,” says Dr Say.

Read the paper here: [http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/88/1/08-062554.pdf](http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/88/1/08-062554.pdf)

The *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* is one of the world’s leading public health journals. It is the flagship periodical of the World Health Organization (WHO), with a special focus on developing countries. Articles are peer-reviewed and are independent of WHO guidelines.

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Hydatid disease in Spain costs millions
Vietnamese research shows link between childhood maltreatment and mental health problems in adolescents
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For further information please contact:

Alice Ghent
Bulletin of the World Health Organization
Geneva, Switzerland
Office: +41 22 791 1498
E-mail : ghenta@who.int

Dr Lale Say
Department of Reproductive Health and Research
World Health Organization
Geneva, Switzerland
Office: +41 22 791 4816
E-mail : sayl@who.int