



# Demography

## Definition

The World population has almost tripled from 2.5 billion people in 1950 to 7.7 billion in 2019<sup>1</sup>. This global growth is taking place unevenly across the world. While the population of African countries is steadily increasing, many industrialized countries are seeing a decline as they fail to reach replacement rates.

## Key Insight

**Least developed countries will continue to experience rapid population growth, which will exacerbate humanitarian situations.**

Population growth, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa will lead to an increase in the number of people living in political, economic or environmental fragility.

## Changes by 2030

- **Steady global population growth, led by developing countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Global population will continue to rise at a steady pace, reaching **approximately 8.5 billion people by 2030 – an increase of 1 billion people within the next 11 years**<sup>2</sup>.

The exponential growth seen over the course of the 20th century is expected to stabilize by the beginning of the 22nd century<sup>3</sup>. Predictions for stabilization were for the year 2050, but these estimates have been revised as fertility rates in Sub-Saharan Africa did not decline as quickly as expected or as historical evidence from Asia and Latin America would have suggested<sup>4</sup>.

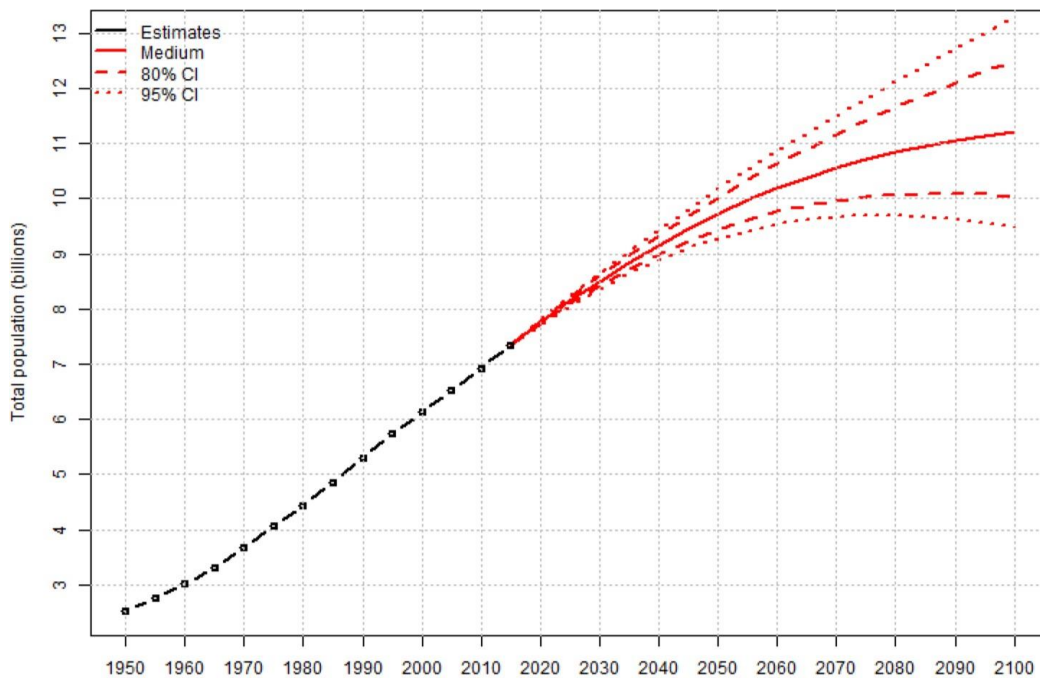
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<sup>1</sup> U.N, [Data Query](#), retrieved on 09 May 2017

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). [World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241, pg 1

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). [World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241, pg 2

<sup>4</sup> “For the second revision in a row, the world’s projected population for 2050 has been revised higher in the UN’s medium-fertility variant” see Leahy Madsen, Elizabeth (2013) [New UN Population Projections Released Fertility Drive Overall Increase](#), New Security Beat, Wilson Centre



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). *World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision*. New York: United Nations.

Population of the World: Estimates, 1950-2015, medium variant projection and 80 and 95 confidence intervals 2015-2100

Global population is expected to increase by 38% between 2010 and 2050<sup>5</sup>. Europe's population is expected to decline by 4%<sup>6</sup>, whereas Africa's population is expected to more than double, increasing by 140%<sup>7</sup>. By 2050, half of the world's population growth is expected to be concentrated in nine countries: **India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Tanzania, United States, Indonesia and Egypt**<sup>8</sup>. This concentration of population growth in fragile countries will make preserving any gains in development and further advancing towards development goals significantly more challenging. A "tremendous economic effort" will be required to just maintain per-capita levels of food consumption in Sub-Saharan Africa – especially East Africa – and an even

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). [World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241pg 2

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). [World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241 pg 4

<sup>7</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). [World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241, pg 3

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). [World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241 pg 1

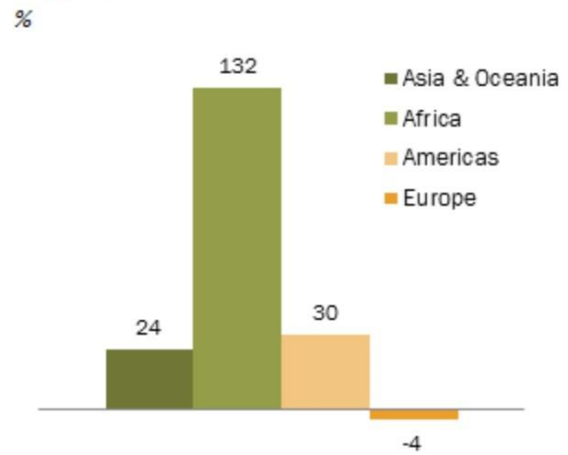


higher level of economic growth is necessary if countries expect to be able to make measurable progress in reducing poverty and undernutrition<sup>9</sup>.

The population of the least developing countries, 1.057 billion people in 2019, is projected to increase by 24% by 2030, and to double by 2050 reaching 1.9 billion<sup>10</sup>.

**Africa has 34 of the 54 least developed countries and this continent's population is projected to grow from 1.3 billion to 2.4 billion by 2050, accounting for half the global population growth<sup>11</sup>.** 28 African countries are projected to see their population more than double by 2050<sup>12</sup>. In 2050 the population of Nigeria will surpass that of the United States and Nigeria will be the world's third most populous country after India and China<sup>13</sup>. Post-2050, Africa is expected to be the only region experiencing substantial population growth<sup>14</sup>. Population pressure is likely to be a significant driver of sociopolitical disturbances in already fragile areas<sup>15</sup>.

### Estimated Change in Population, by Region, 2010 to 2050



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects: 2012 Revision*, June 2013, <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/index.htm>

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: pew research center, attitudes about aging a global perspective, chapter 3. Aging in major regions of the world, 2010 to 2050, January 30, 2014

<sup>9</sup> Zinkina, J. and Korotayev, A. (2014) Explosive Population Growth in Tropical Africa: Crucial Omission in Development Forecasts – Emerging Risks and Way Out, *World Futures* 70, Routledge pp 120-139, pg 125

<sup>10</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). [World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241,

<sup>11</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). [World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241,

<sup>12</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). [World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241, pg 9

<sup>13</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). [World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241, pg 4

<sup>14</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). [World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241, pg 3

<sup>15</sup> PRB, [Human Population: Urbanization: Q and A](#), retrieved on 30 September 2019



### ➤ **Demographic dividend**

The demographic dividend refers to the economic growth experienced by a country as the population evolves, when fertility rates fall and there are fewer dependent people compared to the number of people active in the workforce<sup>16</sup>. The simultaneous occurrence of favorable demographic shifts and targeted interventions including the reduction of fertility and mortality rates, the implementation of favorable economic policies, investments in children's health and education and women's empowerment can create a favorable climate for fast economic growth<sup>17</sup>.

Although a large labor pool often presents an economic opportunity in terms of demographic dividend, an inability to manage demographic changes can be a significant liability for countries unable to exploit it. Countries with limited ability to integrate entrants into the labor force can be left with a significant, idle youth population which can increase the risk of social or political disruption<sup>18</sup>. Whether states in transition to a demographic dividend will be able to leverage their burgeoning workforces or if large youthful populations will become a vulnerability in 2030 will be determined by the investments in infrastructure and basic services that have been made in the preceding decade.

### ➤ **A global aging population**

**In all major regions of the world, the older cohort of the population is growing faster than other age ranges** and as a result, the median age is on the rise<sup>19</sup>. **By 2050 in all regions except Africa, a quarter of the population will be aged 60 or over<sup>20</sup>**. This will be the fastest growing age range worldwide. By 2050, the proportion of people aged 60 or over will reach 34% in Europe and 25% in Asia, Caribbean and Latin America. The median age is projected to increase from 28 to 37 years between 2010 and 2050<sup>21</sup>. In the least developed countries, the aging population process will also accelerate despite sustained high fertility rates putting additional pressure on the working age population. **Globally, life**

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<sup>16</sup> Population Reference Bureau (2012) [Fact Sheet: Attaining the Demographic Dividend](#)

<sup>17</sup> Population Reference Bureau (2012) [Fact Sheet: Attaining the Demographic Dividend](#)

<sup>18</sup> World Bank Live, [Realizing the Demographic Dividend: Challenges and Opportunities for Ministers of Finance and Development](#), retrieved 11 May 2017

<sup>19</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). [World Population Prospects: The 2019 Highlights](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241, pg 2

<sup>20</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). [World Population Prospects: The 2019 Highlights](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241, pg 2

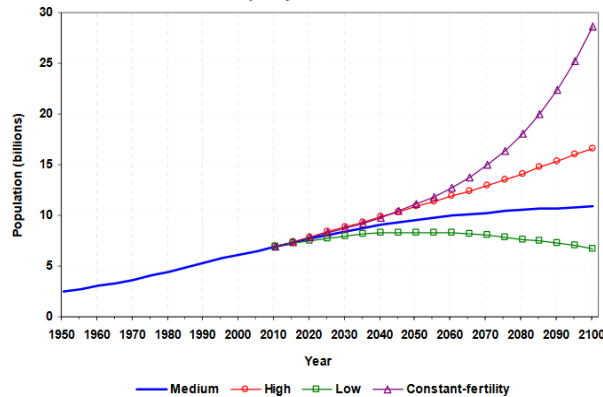
<sup>21</sup> Pew Research Center (2015) [Median Age of World Population 1950-2050](#) retrieved September 2019



**expectancy at birth is projected to rise from 70 years in the 2010-2015 periods to reach 77 years in 2045-2050<sup>22</sup>.**

Africa will experience the strongest gain with approximately 19 years more by 2100<sup>23</sup> against an average of 10 to 14 years for other areas<sup>24</sup>. Differences between male and female life expectancies are expected to remain consistent<sup>25</sup>. The consequences of an aging population could require health systems in developing countries to reorient towards an increased burden of non-communicable diseases (such as cancer and heart disease) and long-term healthcare<sup>26</sup> while concurrently managing high rates of fertility and population growth. Significant investments in healthcare structures will be needed to manage this higher burden at both ends of the age scale.

Population of the world 1950-2100, according to different projections and variants



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2013). World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision, Highlights and Advance Tables

## Controversies and debates

### ➤ Longevity estimates

While an aging population can be seen to create benefits such as 'silver economies', there are also major uncertainties regarding the investments needed for a top-heavy demography to succeed economically. Indeed, this is being questioned already in aging societies, where the labor force cannot offset the number of people in retirement<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). [World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241, pg 10

<sup>23</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). [World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241, pg 6

<sup>24</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). [World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241, pg 6

<sup>25</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). [World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241, pg 6

<sup>26</sup> Bloom, D. et al (2015) Macroeconomic implications of population ageing and selected policy responses, The Lancet, Volume 385, Issue 9968, pp. 649 - 657

<sup>27</sup> Parant Alain, '[Mortalité : des vies plus longues](#)' [Mortality : longer lives], *vigie report 2016, Population chapter*, Futuribles International, January 2016



The investment that was made in healthcare and education in developed nations will not necessarily be replicated in developing countries. As a result, this lack of investment in developing countries may slow the rate of increase in life expectancy<sup>28</sup>. In addition, pandemics such as HIV/AIDS may also hinder the prolongation of life reducing certainty in life expectancy projections.<sup>29</sup>

➤ **Strong variations of fertility decrease according to regions**

Global fertility rates have significantly decreased since the 1950s from 3.8 to 2.4 children per woman<sup>30</sup>. 9% of the world population live in high fertility countries (more than 5 children per women) mostly in Africa, while the rest of the world population is divided almost equally between low fertility countries (less than 2.1 children per women) and intermediate fertility countries (2.1 to 5 children per women) <sup>31</sup>.

Globally, **total fertility is expected to fall from 2.5 children per woman in 2010-2015 to 2.38 in 2045-2050**<sup>32</sup>. However, there will be great geographic disparities. In Europe and Northern America, the fertility rate is projected to increase to reach 1.7-1.8 children per woman by 2045-2050 while in Africa and Asia it is expected to fall. Thus, no worldwide convergence of fertility rate is likely before 2100<sup>33</sup>.

This projection is debated by experts who highlight the importance of government and international actors in family planning and women's empowerment<sup>34</sup>. Low levels of female education for women, especially in Africa, make changes in fertility rates difficult to predict<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Parant Alain, '[Mortalité : des vies plus longues](#)' [Mortality : longer lives], *vigie report 2016, Population chapter*, Futuribles International, January 2016

<sup>29</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). [World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241, pg 6

<sup>30</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). [World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241,

<sup>31</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). [World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241, pg 9

<sup>32</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). [World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241,

<sup>33</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). [World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision](#), Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241, pg 8

<sup>34</sup> Parant Alain, '[Mortalité : des vies plus longues](#)' [Mortality : longer lives], *vigie report 2016, Population chapter*, Futuribles International, January 2016

<sup>35</sup> Norville, C., Gomez, R. and Brown, R. L. (2003) [Some Causes of Fertility Rates Movements](#), IIPR Insurance and Pension Reports No.2003-02, Institute of Insurance and Pension Research, University of Waterloo, pg 3