

**Press briefing for the publication of
*World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision***

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful for the opportunity to address you here today.

In less than two months, world leaders will meet at the UN to adopt a new development agenda for the post-2015 era. In this context we are pleased to release the *2015 Revision of World Population Prospects*, the United Nations' biennial assessment of past, current and future population trends. The *2015 Revision* provides updated estimates of the size and characteristics of the world's population for the period from 1950 to the present, as well as our latest assessment of the demographic changes that are likely to unfold over the coming years, with projections until the year 2100.

The *2015 Revision* builds on the previous revision by incorporating additional results from the 2010 round of national population censuses, as well as findings from recent specialized demographic and health surveys that have been carried out around the world. The findings of this analysis highlight both the challenges and the opportunities presented by population trends as the world seeks to find a pathway toward sustainable development.

Today, we are presenting a first report based on these new data, entitled *World Population Prospects, the 2015 Revision: Key Findings and Advance Tables*. As the name implies, this first report provides a summary of the key demographic changes that are occurring around the world. The complete dataset includes information for 233 countries and areas of the world and is far richer than what can be summarized in one report or one presentation.

Continued growth of the world's population

In 2015, the world has around 7.3 billion inhabitants. We have added one billion people since 2003 and two billion since 1990. By 2030, we expect that the world will have around 8.5 billion people, and around 9.7 billion by 2050. Projections farther into the future are increasingly uncertain, but our medium-variant projection foresees a world population of around 11.2 billion people in 2100.

Population growth will not occur evenly around the world, but rather will be concentrated in certain regions. The population of Africa, in particular, is growing rapidly, and it is anticipated that over half of global population growth between now and 2050 will occur in that part of the world. At the other extreme, it is expected that the population of Europe as a whole will decline somewhat over the same time period.

Considerable diversity of population trends worldwide, especially fertility

It is important to recall the considerable diversity of population trends worldwide, both with respect to the current size and structure of populations and with respect to the changes that are projected to occur in coming years. Future population trends will be affected by trajectories in the three major components of change — fertility, mortality, and migration — but especially by the future course of fertility.

For the world as a whole, fertility has fallen steadily since the 1960s. Currently, the average woman is having around 2.5 children over her lifetime. But this number varies widely around the world. Africa has the highest fertility level, with around 4.7 children per women. Even assuming a continued decline in fertility, given this high starting point, we should anticipate a continued rapid growth of the African population, which will roughly double in size between now and 2050.

At the other end of the spectrum, 46 per cent of the world's population now lives in 83 countries with low levels of fertility, where women are having fewer than 2.1 children, on average, over the life course. When fertility falls below the threshold of 2.1 children per woman, the number of babies that arrive from year to year is not enough even to replace the parents' generation, creating a situation known as "below-replacement" fertility. Such low levels of fertility have been present in countries of Europe and North America for several decades, but now below-replacement fertility is also being observed in 20 countries of Asia, 17 in Latin America and the Caribbean, three in Oceania and one in Africa.

Our medium-variant projection assumes that fertility will continue to decline in countries where fertility is above the replacement level, and to increase slightly in countries where it is very low. However, such changes will not happen automatically. In effect, we are assuming that countries will continue to respond to the challenges presented by relatively high or low levels of fertility by adopting policies that help to enable couples, both men and women, to control the number, the timing and the spacing of their children.

Shifts in the population age distribution: Part I, the demographic dividend

Populations with high levels of fertility, and even those where fertility has fallen to intermediate levels, are still relatively young in terms of their age distribution. In Africa, for example, children under the age of 15 account for 41 per cent of the total

population in 2015, and young persons at ages 15 to 24 account for an additional 19 per cent. In Latin America and the Caribbean and in Asia, where the historical decline of fertility has been more substantial, there are smaller percentages of children (26 and 24 per cent, respectively) and similar percentages of youth (17 and 16 per cent, respectively) as compared to Africa.

In total, these three regions in 2015 are home to 1.7 billion children (ages 0-14) and 1.1 billion young persons (ages 15-24). Providing these younger generations with health care, education, and employment opportunities, including in the poorest countries and least advantaged social groups, is critical to the achievement of sustainable development.

In fact, if a country can achieve a sustained reduction in fertility while educating its current youth cohort, protecting the health of the younger generation and empowering it through opportunities for decent work, there is the prospect of a demographic dividend in future decades. As the current generation of young people transforms into a productive and relatively large population in the working age range, there is a prospect for rapid economic growth that can help to lift populations out of poverty and into a more prosperous future.

Shifts in the population age distribution: Part II, population ageing

In the long run, the decline of mortality and fertility leads inevitably to population ageing. Indeed, for the world as a whole, the population at ages 60 and above is now growing faster than any other age group. In countries that have experienced low fertility for several decades, the proportion of the population aged 60 or over is now growing very rapidly.

Population ageing is, on the one hand, an enormous accomplishment, reflecting our success in nearly eliminating death at younger ages. On the other hand, the upward shift in the age distribution challenges the sustainability of social protection systems, in particular old-age pension and health care systems. For many countries today, and probably for most countries in the long run, the major concern about their demographic situation will be in relation to population ageing, not growth.

Further gains in life expectancy

Estimates of life expectancy and other measures of mortality are important indicators of the health and well-being of populations. The *2015 Revision* confirms that significant gains in life expectancy have been achieved in recent years. Globally, life expectancy at birth rose by three years between 2000-2005 and 2010-2015, or from 67 to 70 years. All major areas shared in the life expectancy gains over this period, but the greatest increase was for Africa, where life expectancy at birth rose by six years over the same time period after rising by only two years in the previous decade.

Overall, these latest estimates confirm that considerable success has been achieved, particularly in reducing child mortality: the under-5 mortality rate fell by 30 per cent globally between 2000-2005 and 2010-2015. Nevertheless, large inequalities between poorer and richer areas of the world persist. Life expectancy for Africa stood at 60 years in 2010-2015, compared to 79 years for Northern America. Life expectancy at birth now exceeds 83 years in Hong Kong and Japan, while for several African countries it is around 50 years.

Growing significance of international migration

International migration is the third component of demographic change, along with fertility and mortality. Over the past 15 years, we estimate that there has been an average annual net flow of 4.1 million migrants moving from low- or middle-income countries to high-income countries. Trends in individual countries tend to fluctuate, but we anticipate that substantial levels of international migration will continue in the future, and that migration will continue to be the leading force of population change for some countries in future decades.

Let me finish by mentioning our website, unpopulation.org, where you can find a wealth of detailed information for your country or region of interest. Please note also that selected indicators for all countries, including population figures, the total fertility rate, life expectancy at birth, and infant and under-five mortality rates, have been included in the back of the *Key findings and advance tables* of the *2015 Revision*, which is available in hard copy at the back of the room as well as online at the Population Division's website.

Finally, I would like to close by acknowledging the contribution of the large number of staff members of the Population Division who have produced the data and other materials being released today. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the skilled leadership of Mr. François Pelletier, Chief of the Population Estimates and Projections Section, who has joined me at the podium this afternoon. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this point.