

Development in an Ageing World

World Population Ageing is Inevitable



- **As a result of decreased fertility and increased longevity, the populations of most countries are ageing rapidly.** Between 2005 and 2050, it is expected that an increase in the population aged 60 years or over will account for about half of the total growth in world population.
- **Continued population ageing in future decades is expected and even inevitable,** as it will be driven mostly by changes in fertility, mortality and migration that have already occurred.
- **Different regions of the world are at different stages in the process of population ageing.** The proportion of older persons in the developed countries (21 per cent) is currently much higher than that of developing countries (8 per cent). However, even though the oldest populations are found in developed countries and countries with economies in transition, a majority of older persons globally live in developing countries (63 per cent in 2005).
- **Population ageing will occur more rapidly in developing countries in future decades than it did in developed countries and in countries with economies in transition.** As a consequence, the world's population of older persons will increasingly be concentrated in developing countries. By 2050, it is expected that 79 per cent of those aged 60 years or over will live in developing countries.
- **Unlike other developing regions, Africa is expected to retain a relatively youthful population well into the twenty-first century.** In 2005, 41 per cent of Africa's population was under age 15, whereas only 5 per cent was aged 60 or over. By 2050, the proportion of children will decrease to 29 per cent, while that of older persons will increase to 10 per cent.
- **The labour force is itself ageing.** For the world as a whole in 2005, less than one-fifth of the working age population (aged 15-64) were older workers (aged 50-64). This proportion is expected to grow to more than one-fourth by 2050. For the developed countries, those aged 50 or over are expected to make up almost one-third of the working-age population by 2050.
- **A notable aspect of population ageing is the progressive demographic ageing of the older population itself.** At the global level, the most rapidly growing age group consists of persons aged 80 or over. Although this age group now accounts for less than 1.5 per cent of the total world population, it is expected to more than quadruple over the next four decades (from less than 90 million in 2005 to almost 400 million in 2050).
- **Life expectancy at birth increased worldwide by almost 18 years between 1950 and 2005.** In most countries, reductions in mortality have been greater for females than for males. For the world as a whole, the female advantage in life expectancy at birth has increased from 2.8 years in 1950 to 4.5 years in 2005.
- **Because women live longer than men, women constitute the majority of older persons in almost all countries.** Furthermore, the female share increases markedly with age. Worldwide, women account for 55 per cent of the population aged 60 years or over and outnumber men by about 70 million. Among those aged 80 years or over, women are nearly twice as numerous as men, accounting for 65 per cent of the population in this age group.

- **At the global level, the total dependency ratio — the number of children (aged 0-14) plus older persons (aged 65 or over) per one hundred persons in the working-age population (aged 15-64) — is projected to decline slightly in the next two decades (from 55 in 2005 to 53 in 2025) and then to begin a steady increase (to 57 by 2050).** The increase in the dependency ratio after 2025 will be due entirely to an increasing population of older persons, as the population of children will stop growing.
- **In the developed countries, the total dependency ratio is projected to increase steadily in future decades (from 49 in 2005 to 72 in 2050).** In the developing countries, the total dependency ratio is expected to change only slightly over the same period (from 57 in 2005 to 55 in 2050), since the growth in the population aged 65 or over will be balanced almost exactly by a decline in the population aged 0-14.