Number of persons aged 60 years or over
The number of persons aged 60 years or over is expected to grow from 522 million in 2006 to 2,019 million in 2050, a more than fourfold increase. This is due primarily to the aging of the baby-boom generation. However, in low-income countries the growth in the number of persons aged 60 years or over is expected to be even faster due to lower fertility rates. In 2006, the number of persons aged 60 years or over in Africa was 97 million, which is expected to reach 264 million by 2050, more than doubling the current number. Europe has the oldest-ageing share (21 per cent).

Population aged 60 years or over as a percentage of total population
As the number of persons aged 60 years or over increases, so does the percentage of older persons in the population. In 2006, 8.8 per cent of the world’s population was aged 60 years or over. This percentage is expected to increase to 15.6 per cent in 2050. A similar increase is expected in all regions, but the pace of ageing developing economies will vary. For example, in 2006, 6.9 per cent of population in Africa was aged 60 or over, this proportion is expected to reach 17.7 per cent by 2050, while in Central and South America, the percentage of older persons increased from 15.1 per cent to 19.0 per cent.

Life expectancy at age 60
Life expectancy at age 60 shows the additional years of life a person aged 60 can expect to live. In 2006, life expectancy at age 60 was 20.9 years for men and 22.4 years for women in the world. The 54-year-old population of the aged 60 years or over is expected to increase by 6 months every year for women to age 62 by 2009. The life expectancy at age 60 in 2006 was 12.3 years for men and 13.5 years for women in sub-Saharan Africa, 5.6 years for men and 7.4 years for women in North Africa and the Middle East, 14.3 years for men and 16.3 years for women in Europe, and 19.0 years for men and 20.8 years for women in Asia and the Pacific. The life expectancy at age 60 in 2006 was 10.5 years for men and 11.7 years for women in Latin America and the Caribbean, 10.2 years for men and 11.4 years for women in Northern America, and 19.0 years for men and 20.8 for women in Oceania.

Percentage of older persons currently married
The percentage of older persons currently married shows that in 2006, 43.4 per cent of all older persons were married in the world. The percentage of older persons currently married increased from 40.7 per cent to 45.1 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, from 30.0 per cent to 37.1 per cent in North Africa and the Middle East, from 48.8 per cent to 56.1 per cent in Europe, from 46.5 per cent to 54.4 per cent in Asia and the Pacific, from 30.9 per cent to 37.1 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean, from 43.1 per cent to 49.8 per cent in Northern America, and from 45.5 per cent to 51.7 per cent in Oceania.

Percentage of older persons being single
The percentage of older persons being single shows that in 2006, 18.5 per cent of all older persons were single in the world. The percentage of older persons being single increased from 14.0 per cent to 14.4 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, from 9.3 per cent to 9.6 per cent in North Africa and the Middle East, from 16.3 per cent to 16.6 per cent in Europe, from 9.5 per cent to 9.7 per cent in Asia and the Pacific, from 17.0 per cent to 17.3 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean, from 21.1 per cent to 21.4 per cent in Northern America, and from 21.0 per cent to 21.3 per cent in Oceania.

Potential support ratio
The potential support ratio is the number of persons aged 20 to 64 years that is available to support one person aged 60 years or over. It is calculated as the number of persons aged 20 to 64 years divided by the number of persons aged 60 years or over. In 2006, the potential support ratio was 5.8 in the world, which is expected to decrease to 4.9 in 2050. The potential support ratio decreased from 6.5 in sub-Saharan Africa to 6.0 in 2050, from 7.0 to 5.7 in North Africa and the Middle East, from 6.6 to 5.9 in Europe, from 7.1 to 5.8 in Asia and the Pacific, from 6.7 to 5.9 in Latin America and the Caribbean, from 6.5 to 5.7 in Northern America, and from 6.6 to 5.9 in Oceania.

Percentage of the older population by sex
The percentage of the older population by sex shows the distribution of older persons by sex in 2006 and 2050. In 2006, 51.6 per cent of all older persons were males in the world, which is expected to decrease to 50.7 per cent in 2050. The percentage of males increased from 53.0 per cent to 53.3 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, from 50.0 per cent to 49.3 per cent in North Africa and the Middle East, from 43.9 per cent to 43.2 per cent in Europe, from 47.4 per cent to 46.7 per cent in Asia and the Pacific, from 53.6 per cent to 53.3 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean, from 52.3 per cent to 51.6 per cent in Northern America, and from 52.9 per cent to 52.6 per cent in Oceania.

World fertility rate
The world fertility rate shows the number of live births per woman aged 15 to 49 years in 2002. In 2006, the world fertility rate was 56.8 births per woman, which is expected to decrease to 45.8 births per woman in 2050. The world fertility rate decreased from 59.3 births per woman in sub-Saharan Africa to 48.5 births per woman in 2050, from 67.9 births per woman in North Africa and the Middle East to 54.6 births per woman in 2050, from 53.1 births per woman in Europe to 41.5 births per woman in 2050, from 66.0 births per woman in Asia and the Pacific to 55.0 births per woman in 2050, from 66.0 births per woman in Latin America and the Caribbean to 55.0 births per woman in 2050, from 66.0 births per woman in Northern America to 55.0 births per woman in 2050, and from 66.0 births per woman in Oceania to 55.0 births per woman in 2050.

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Population ageing was once a concern mainly of developed countries, but now the process is gaining momentum in developing countries, too. Today it is clear that this demographic transformation has profound consequences for all individuals, families, communities and nations. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Political Declaration adopted at the Second World Assembly on Ageing in April 2002 marked a turning point in how the world addresses the key challenge of building a society for all ages.

The Madrid Plan of Action offers a bold agenda for confronting the challenges of ageing in the twenty-first century. The Plan focuses on three priority areas: older persons and development; advancing health and well-being into old age; and ensuring enabling and supportive environments. It represents the first time Governments have adopted a comprehensive approach linking questions of ageing to other frameworks for social and economic development and human rights, most notably those agreed to at the United Nations conferences and summits of the 1990s.

The key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development also highlighted the continuing need to examine the economic and social implications of demographic change, and how these relate to development planning concerns and the needs of individuals. In 2007, “The changing age structures of populations and their implications for development” will be the special theme of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development.

The United Nations Commission on Social Development has decided to conduct every five years a review and appraisal of progress made in implementing the Madrid Plan. In this regard, the General Assembly has also stressed the need for population data that are disaggregated by age and sex. The present wallchart presents updated comparable information about population ageing around the world. It shows absolute and relative numbers of older persons aged 60 years or over; the proportion of older men and women who are currently married, living alone and in the labour force; the sex ratio of populations aged 60 years or over and 80 years or over; the potential support ratio; the statutory retirement age for men and women; and life expectancy at age 60 for men and women.

Population Ageing 2006

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