

Explaining differences in the projected populations between the 2012 and 2010 Revisions of World Population Prospects: The role of fertility in Africa

1. Every two years, the United Nations Population Division revises its population estimates and projections for all countries and areas of the World

Known as World Population Prospects, the data included in these publications are based on the latest empirical evidence gathered and estimated from available survey and census operations as well as from vital registration systems. The incorporation of new data in the 2012 Revision enabled demographers in the Population Division to revise the estimate of the current population of all countries of the world as well as the levels and trends in each population component (i.e. fertility, mortality and migration).

2. The 2012 Revision of World Population Prospects drew on new empirical evidence on fertility levels and trends that became available since the 2010 Revision¹

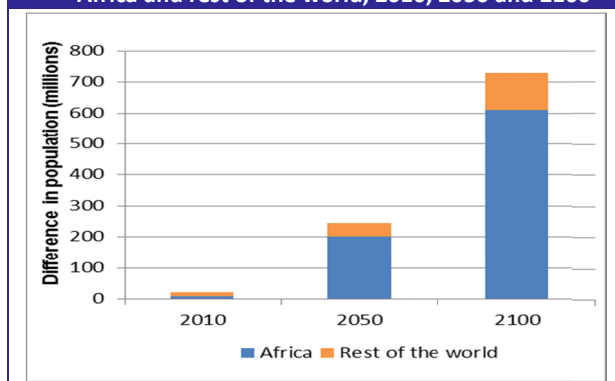
The empirical evidence from available surveys and the 2010 round of population censuses, as well as the application of new estimation methods to existing datasets, provided a basis for a reassessment of national fertility levels and recent trends. This indicated slower declines than previously expected in several countries and even some stalling or stagnation in others. These findings have important implications for the size of projected future populations.

3. According to the 2012 Revision of the World Population Prospects, the current population of the World is 7.2 billion and will increase to 9.6 billion by 2050 and 10.9 billion by 2100

Compared to the 2010 Revision, the new projections of future population have been revised upwardly. According to the medium-variant projection in the 2012 Revision, world population will be 0.3 billion larger in 2050 (9.6 billion versus the earlier projection of 9.3 billion) and 723 million larger in 2100 (10.9 billion versus 10.1 billion). Over 80 per cent of the increase in the projected overall population size, whether by 2050 or 2100, will be absorbed by Africa (figure 1). The higher

projections for future global population are due in large part to the adjustments made in the estimates of current fertility levels, mainly in Africa, which have resulted from the incorporation of new data. The fertility level of Africa as a whole in 2005-2010 was increased by 5.2 percent between the two revisions or by 0.24 children per woman.

Figure 1. Differences in the estimated and projected populations between the 2012 and 2010 Revisions, Africa and rest of the world, 2010, 2050 and 2100



4. The estimated level of fertility was adjusted upward by more than 5 per cent in 15 African countries with total fertility rates of 5 children per woman or more

In Burundi, the country with the largest increase, the average number of children per woman was adjusted by 40 per cent, while an increase of just over 5 per cent was estimated in both Mali and Niger. In Nigeria, the country with the largest contribution to the future population of Africa, the adjustment made to the average number of children per woman was the by-product of the availability of new data sources (2010 Malaria Indicator Survey, 2010-2011 General Household Survey (GHS), 2011 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)) and the application of new estimation methods to existing data sets (see figure 2). As seen in the figure, the new data sets labelled in red and orange, which were also used to revise the estimate of the baseline population, are responsible for the upward adjustment of the time-series on total fertility.

